

# FOCUS MEDIA JOURNAL

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# Letter from Editors

To channel our inner film & media critic/theorist (read: movie buff) mindset, we will be introducing you to the theme of this year's edition of *Focus Media Journal* with the three words that Don LaFontaine popularized in his iconic movie trailer voice-overs: "In a world..."

In a world where film has been replaced by digital and television has been derailed by online streaming, where books are converted to NOOKs and socializing is reduced to "poking" friends on Facebook—a world where all of life's inconveniences can seemingly be answered with the phrase, "There's an app for that"—it is clear that the media landscape is changing rapidly, and that we are changing with it. The innovation of the smart phone catapulted our culture into a new era, one where almost everything we need can be found in the palms of our iPhone-holding hands. In this era, we've seen a simultaneous explosion of content (via the internet) and implosion of the vehicles necessary to access said content. No longer do we need to purchase CDs, DVDs, or books, nor is it necessary to watch live television or read newspapers. Those are a thing of the past. As Richard Kelly wrote in his critical and commercial flop, *Southland Tales* (2006), "the internet is the future" and the future is now.

In a world where six conglomerates own 90% of the media we *consume*, where a telephone's worth is defined by its ability to access the internet rather than its ability to make a call, and where the plotline of Spike Jonze's *Her* doesn't seem like too distant a future (let's face it, we all know someone who takes their relationship with Siri a bit too seriously), it is clear that we live in a convergence culture. Or so it seems. But as we, at the *Focus Media Journal* staff, meditated on an engaging theme for this edition, we kept circling back to one idea: if the "space" of discourse is converging via the internet, isn't the discourse itself converging, as well? And though we initially agreed it must, this convergence seemed increasingly illusive. Though technology and media platforms may be converging and synergizing, our culture is, in many way, doing just the opposite—giving rise to diverging thoughts and discourses in the face of technological unification.

We have broken down this edition in terms of the various "illusions" we frequently encounter in film- and media-related discourse. The first section, "Finding the 'Me' in Social Media: The Illusion of Self," explores how the "selves" converging on social media are actually carefully constructed identities; the second section, "Creative Nonfiction in a Consumer Culture: The Illusion of Truth\*," investigates the effects of convergences of media news sources on truth telling; the third section, "Piracy in the Digital Age: The Illusion of Freedom," considers the entitlements of media "owners" in a world where the terms "consumer" and "producer" are increasingly convergent; the fourth section,

“Representations of Feminism and Sexuality: The Illusion of Diversity,” deconstructs the roles women play in a landscape of representational “convergence”; the fifth section, “The Import and Export of Culture: Illusion of the National,” examines the negotiations that seem to converge audiences of different nationalities but actually further separate them; and finally, the sixth section, “Convergence: The Illusion of Divergence,” acts as an addendum that contemplates whether there might yet be spaces of discursive convergence.

The Focus Media Journal editorial team would like to give a HUGE thank you to everyone who helped us—academically, financially, and emotionally—bring this book to print, and an EVEN HUGER shout out to our academic advisor, Chuck Wolfe, and our layout and cover designer, Bill Hornung. We couldn’t have done it without your support. We are so grateful for the amazing submissions this year and proud to be publishing a wide range of meaningful and complex studies of today’s media industries. We hope you enjoy!

Yours truly,

Nick Hornung, Julia Petuhova, Carlos Sanchez  
The Editors-in-Chief

**\*Editor’s note:** In light of the recent tragedy occurring in Isla Vista, the *Focus Media Journal* staff would like to acknowledge the sensitive subject matter that will be found in the second chapter of this journal. The article entitled “Lost Priorities and Lower Standards: The Unfortunate Evolution of Reporting Domestic Mass Shootings” analyzes a topic that the UCSB community is now, unfortunately, far too familiar with. It is with the greatest respect, love, and honor for those who were injured and lost their lives, as well as the friends and families affected by the tragedy, that we publish this piece, in hopes of continuing a thoughtful discourse on a difficult, but important subject, and maintaining the rapport of a unified community ready for a change.

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## **PART 1**

# Finding the 'Me' in Social Media

The Illusion of Self





# Mapping the Map: Social Media, Vines, Convergence, and the Hyperreal

By **Alberto Lopez**

*In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. – “On Exactitude in Science” by Jorge Luis Borges*

*The map is not the territory. – Alfred Korzybski*

The map has not yet superseded the empire, but it is only a matter of time. Borges borrows the map-territory relation from Alfred Korzybski who employed it when speaking of language. In simple terms what is meant by this is that a representation of reality does not constitute reality itself. Jean Baudrillard begins his book *Simulacra and Simulation* by writing about Borges' rendering of the map-territory relation. For Baudrillard Borges' "allegory of simulation" does not go far enough in describing how simulation operates in our post-modern world (1). The map no longer requires a territory as a reference point, the map is its own reference point, its own reality. Simulation is no longer about mirroring that which is being simulated, instead "it is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard 1). Simulation becomes simulacra: a signifier

that has no signified or is its own signified. Baudrillard identified the mediascape as one of the places where the "precession of simulacra" takes place. It is therefore apt to apply Baudrillard's concepts to social media. However, social media seems to be caught between simulation and simulacra.

The map-territory relation can be applied to social networks, in particular Facebook. When applied to Facebook the social-networking site emerges as the "map" in the allegory and life itself as the "territory." Facebook, and social media in general, has ushered in a tendency towards oversharing facilitated by strides made in technology which have allowed individuals to remain "connected" at all times from nearly anywhere they go. This idea of remaining "connected" to one another is the supposed draw and function of Facebook and other social media. Yet these "connections" play out over social

networking sites where physical contact is lost, where the nuances of body language, vocal cues and facial expressions give way to imprecise icons ill-equipped to fully express the range of human emotions.

Not only do our social interactions take place over Facebook and other social media, but the myriad experiences that constitute life itself are displaced onto numerous daily updates so that our News Feeds serve as a historical record of our lives. The entire continuum of our temporal existences can be found there: what we have done, what we are doing, and what we plan to do. Yet this is not mere simulation; the self we present to the world is mediated, as is the record of our lives we provide. It is this mediation that moves the simulation into the realm of simulacra. As soon as what we present of ourselves and our lives to the mediascape becomes mediated, the social media we use so do this stop being simulations and become simulacrum: models without a reference point in reality, or in other words pure fabrication.

Studies have been done which assess the reliability of social media in predicting personality. As a result two hypotheses have emerged. The first, the *idealized virtual-identity hypothesis*, proposes that virtual-identities are idealized identities that do not reflect the user's true personality (Back, et al. 372-374). The second, the *extended real-life hypothesis*, proposes that the identities and personalities presented on social media serve as extensions of individuals' real-life identities and personalities (Back, et al.

372-374). Different studies support different hypotheses, though a more recent study suggests that self-idealization is not as prevalent as once thought. It seems that the mediascape is not a *hyperreality of fabrication* but a *hyperreality of omission*. Of course omission is necessary lest we, like the fictional Tristram Shandy who in writing his autobiography took a year to write about a day, become engaged in a supertask. However the convergence of social media is allowing the map to become ever more detailed as the various hyperrealities created by each individual social networking site (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Vines, etc.) coalesce into one collective hyperreality, each site a different facet of it.

The implications of what this means are still more alarming when you consider the medium through which this is happening in relation to media theory, more specifically Marshall McLuhan's work. McLuhan is the originator of the phrase "the medium is the message" (and a number of variations), which captures the underlying guiding principle of his theories. For McLuhan the medium through which content is conveyed is just as important if not more so than the content it conveys. In large part this is because of the way that media influences human development. For example he claims that the advent of print "created individualism and nationalism in the sixteenth century" (McLuhan). He also credits motion pictures with the transition "from the world of sequence and connections" (which he identifies as a result of mechanization)

“into the world of creative configuration and structure” (McLuhan). So the question that arises when viewing social media through the lens of media theory is, in what way has social media altered human development?

To answer that question it is pertinent to ask the larger question, in what way has the Internet altered human development? In fact this question has been given much thought already. In an article for *The Atlantic* Nicholas Carr identifies the changes which he sees in himself and others as a result of the ubiquity of the Internet, namely that the way information is accessed, in “a swiftly moving stream of particles” that is brief and associative in nature, is changing the way we process information. He is no longer able to engage in deep reading as easily as before the Internet became the most common avenue for accessing information. He provides historical examples of other technologies which have affected human development (the clock, the printing press, and the typewriter), establishing a precedent (like McLuhan), wherein emerging technologies influence human development, of which The Internet and its effects on the way we process information is only the latest manifestation (Carr).

Carr identifies a move towards brevity, which manifests itself not just in our shortened attention spans but in the very social media which plays an active role in shaping our attention spans. Twitter and Tumbler are at the forefront of microblogging, with Twitter specifically restricting users to 140 characters.

YouTube has been used for a variety of uses the most common being the broadcasting of short skits, short opinion pieces and vlogging or video blogging. The site is also used to host music videos, videos of live performances by any number of artists ranging in popularity, interviews, reviews, television programs and movies. However, content of longer duration is usually fragmented, divided into multipart videos: delivering our favorite artists, programs and films in short parcels suited for our wandering minds and shortened attention spans. Sites like Instagram, Keek and Vine take YouTube’s reductionist approach to video content and reduce it further: in the case of Instagram to 15 second videos, and in the case of Vine to less than half that time with roughly a 6 second time limit.

When we consider these sites through the lens of medium theory as framed by the question of their relationship to reality (both reality independent of social media, and the hyperreality this social media creates) it becomes apparent that social media not only affects us as users, but also the physical and social and cultural structures we move through and which constitute what we consider reality. The way in which social media affects reality is as much related to the medium as the message. The principal structural characteristic of social media which affects reality is brevity, which Carr has already identified as a structural characteristic of the Internet itself.

This new social media operates at the level of collective experience and thought

in terms of the way it contextualizes the content it provides as a result of its brief nature. Let us examine Vines and how they operate. The brevity imposed by the medium precludes anything even resembling context or background information; instead the creators of these works rely on the viewer supplying the context from his or her own experiences. In many cases these Vines appeal directly to these experiences. Ultimately, the Vine only provides the punch line while the viewer supplies the joke. Similarly, microblogging favors collective thought, society's platitudes. You can say very little that is of intellectual value or substance in 140 characters, much less elaborate on complex concepts or ideas. Furthermore, the expression of new concepts or ideas is curtailed by the fact that necessary elaboration is not possible in 140 characters. Noam Chomsky states, "The beauty of concision is that you can only repeat conventional thought" (*Manufacturing Consent*). He calls concision a "structural constraint" (*Manufacturing Consent*). The structural constraint which operates in Twitter also operates in Vine, and in much of social media though in some cases the constraint is not so much an imposed structural constraint as a result of the move towards brevity which participants of social media have been conditioned towards.

Social media has tapped into the meritocratic mechanisms of the Internet and reduced them to system of up-voting: content which garners the most "likes" achieves greater visibility and popularity.

In an effort to garner the most "likes" and "shares" content creators must appeal to the largest amount of users possible. Even if more "likes" did not manifest themselves in greater visibility and popularity, the perception that this causal relation between "likes" and popularity exists is enough ensure that the generation of content is motivated by appealing to the largest amount of users. This mass appeal can only be done by exploiting collective experience and conventional thoughts: an appeal must be made to those experiences and ideas widely held, and not to individual experience or ideas.

So returning to the joke allegory (imperfect as most allegories but particularly suitable considering that many of the most popular Vines are comedic in nature), the punch line must therefore be one that appeals to the lowest common denominator of experience so as to achieve necessary contextualization of the joke *and* popularity.

In a Vine titled "being on the phone w/ girls" by jasonmendezhoe a visibly bored Jason can be seen reacting to an off-screen female voice complaining about another woman wearing "sparkly boots." As Jason appears to be falling asleep the off-screen voice asks him if he is listening, to which he unenthusiastically responds, "Yeah, fuck that bitch." The Vine is attempting to make a joke out of the act of speaking to women on the phone by depicting the experience as tiresome. The stereotype of female conversation consisting predominantly of superficial, petty and often vitriolic observations concerning

other members of their gender, especially in relation to themselves, is being exploited here. The Vine is simultaneously appealing to and perpetuating this stereotype. The title of the Vine does not differentiate between individual females, instead referring to the act of speaking to one woman as indicative of “being on the phone [with all] girls.” The title also does not establish a relation between Jason in the Vine and the off-screen female voice (is it his girlfriend or sister) thereby excluding the possibility that this experience is unique to himself and his female counterpart: the lack of a specific relational title identifying the off-screen female in the title of the Vine makes the off-screen female a proxy for all of womankind.



The popularity of the Vine (over 36,000 “likes” and almost 25,000 “revines” thus far) both depends on this appeal to the collective experience of others and perpetuates this collective experience. While many (if not all of us) have at some point engaged in a phone conversation with a woman we have not all experienced that act the way it is depicted here, yet the Vine ignores that fact and indeed must ignore that fact if it is to appeal to a wide audience.

Thus the Vine must simultaneously appeal to collective experience and

suppress individual experience, must fabricate and perpetuate collective experience thereby engaging in a form of mythmaking (or following the Baudrillardian thread established, thereby engaging in a form of simulacrum construction): in this very specific case the myth that talking to women is tiresome because their only preoccupations are petty and superficial.

The Vine also assumes a male gaze. The title is simply “being on the phone w/ girls,” making no reference to who is on the phone with girls, the implication being that it is men, for whom Jason is a proxy. The title exnominates the category of the male experience by literally excluding the subject engaged in “being on the phone.”

In other words the title assumes that the subject is male by virtue of the fact that it is a man who is the engaged in a phone conversation with a woman within the Vine, and therefore does not include the male subject linked to the present participle “being” of the title.

Some may think that a six second Vine does not warrant this amount of analytical attention because it is nothing more than a sophomoric audiovisual gag. Yet in that six second gag the male perspective was favored, generalizations were made and gender stereotypes were upheld and

perpetuated. The last outcome identified is perhaps the most harmful way in which Vines can be used. Many Vines are not necessarily about or appeal to collective experience as such but instead uphold and appeal to stereotypes.

There are a number of Vines that rely on stereotypes as the source of their humor. Some of the more popular ones include one from a series titled “Latino commercials” by Rudy Mancuso in which the stereotype of the Latino as a cheap laborer is used in the context of a Lowe’s commercial. As mentioned this is only one of a number of Vines titled “Latino commercials” which depict Latinos in stereotypical fashion. Other Vines by Mancuso that are not part of this series often employ Latino stereotypes as well. There are also Vines which employ Black stereotypes, such as one titled “For just 1 bottle of lotion a day you can help ashy African American children” by KingBach, the title of which summarizes the content of the Vine quite succinctly.

In the case of this Vine it is the comments which prove more enlightening, in particular those aimed at viewers who voice their displeasure. User Jose Pruneda opined, “How is this racist if African Americans did the vine with him! Ya’ll are so fucking ignorant. Stupidd ass people [sic].” This sentiment was echoed by other commenters. This point of view itself displays an ignorance of how the normalization of racist stereotypes operates, denies the agency of the viewer in decoding the message of the Vine by assuming that the means of production and

those involved dictate the range of meaning which can be decoded (i.e. because African Americans were involved in the production of the Vine the meaning decoded by the viewer must necessarily ignore racist subtext or otherwise be wrong) and advances a line of reasoning that if applied in retrospect would lead us to believe that past representations of African Americans such as those found in *Amos ‘n’ Andy* are not racist simply by virtue of the Black cast involved. That these videos employ stereotypes, especially racial ones, says as much about those producing them as those watching them. Ultimately stereotypes are ideal material for use in a medium like this one which imposes time constraints as stereotypes, the impressions and associations which make up group schema or prototypes, are “part of the social fabric of society, shared by the people within that culture.” Vines appeal to stereotypes because they require no explanation or contextual background information, and in employing them they uphold and perpetuate them. His comment reveals a dominant-hegemonic reading of the Vine (Hall 41-49). There are also negotiated readings in which some viewers voice their displeasure yet reluctantly admit they found the Vine humorous (Hall 41-49). Finally, there are oppositional readings of the Vine which are much less numerous and illicit responses of a similar nature as that of Jose Pruneda (Hall 41-49).

There are a number of other trends that have cropped up in terms of the content of Vines all of which rely on references to some aspects of pop culture. These include

Vines which reenact scenes from popular films, Vines of amateur performers covering popular songs, the use of popular songs to create meaning in relation to the visual dimension of the Vine, or the use of clips from existing films as visual punch lines. Another interesting trend is the reference to other popular Vines creating meta-Vines. Like collective experiences and stereotypes, elements of pop culture need no contextualization as they are omnipresent within the collective psyche of mainstream society. This particular quality of pop culture (which I admit is dependent on how one defines pop culture) means that those not in the know are marginalized in much the same way that those who do not share the collective experiences of society or accept unresistingly its stereotypes are marginalized.

The medium has also lent itself to more than comedic gags. Many Vines, though less numerous, are artistic in nature. However, due to the temporal constraint these Vines are merely novel at worst and exercises in style and aesthetics at best. The art of Vines is of the *ars gratia artis* tradition and not a *theater of ideas*.

The medium has also been used as a tool of activism, but again to limited efficacy. A look at the content being generated in relation to the socio-political situation in Venezuela is insightful in this regard. These Vines tend to play out in one of two ways: as a rapid succession of violent images depicting the violent clashes between protesters and the state, or as talking heads in which individuals declare their desire for peace in the country. The

six second duration of the Vines transforms the otherwise powerful juxtaposition of images into an assault on the senses, the rapid succession rendering them meaningless because sense cannot be made of them. Similarly, the time constraint of the medium affects those Vines in which individuals voice their support of or desire for peace in Venezuela because little else can be said: essentially these Vines are little more than quasi-advertisements of a slogan. None of these Vines exploit the unique structural quality of the medium: the repetition. Interestingly enough the one video that did use that quality of the medium to its advantage was one whose message would have been just as suited for the medium of the still image as much as the moving image: in which a quote attributed to Martin Luther King Jr. (“The hottest place in hell is reserved for those who remain neutral in times of great moral crisis.”) written on a cue card is displayed over a female wearing a Venezuelan jersey with her mouth covered over. (Parisi). The looping quality of the Vine allows the cue card to be read at any pace, but beyond that the looping transforms the six second Vine into an accusation *ad infinitum*.

One final notable trend is the use of Vines as advertisements. As part of a larger trend which includes most social media, retailers like Urban Outfitters and brands like Honda are horizontally integrating Vines into larger ad campaigns. Some companies, like Ford Motor Company and T-Mobile, have collaborated with well-known Viners: for example Ford and T-Mobile have collaborated with Rudy

Mancuso. If these Vines function as ads it is by virtue of our familiarity as consumers with the brand being advertised. For example, the majority of Vines produced by Urban Outfitters follow a similar progression in which items either pop into the frame through the use of jump cuts creating a decorative arrangement of objects or their practical use is demonstrated using jump cuts. It is only if the viewer is familiar with the fact that Urban Outfitters is a retailer and with the niche they have carved for themselves that these Vines make sense, as the viewer with this prior knowledge will realize that the items in the Vines are the products sold by the retailer.

Familiarity with the brand being advertised is especially necessary if the content of the Vine does not display or allude to the commodity being sold as is the case with a series of Vines Done by T-Mobile Latino (in collaboration with Rudy Mancuso and other Viners) to promote its sponsorship of the music awards show Premios Lo Nuestro. This series of Vines features the Viners in various situations, from getting ready for the awards show to their antics at the awards show, that provide no contextual information as to why they are there, what they have to do with T-Mobile or why T-Mobile is at the awards show. The viewer would need to be familiar with the brand T-Mobile as well as be aware of their sponsorship of the award show for the Vines to make sense or have any meaning or value to them, but that still would not answer the question of why that particular group of Viners is there. The

answer of course is who better to collaborate with in creating Vines than the greatest (read most popular) practitioners of the medium.

Perhaps this is the epitome of commodity fetishism. Consider a Vine ad by Urban Outfitters titled “Black + White = #BetterTogether” in which items from their new Black and White line are arranged in a square configuration that changes as the products themselves change, appearing and disappearing with each consecutive jump cut. The six second ad is neither informational nor transcendental, just pure fetish. As Sut Jhally has identified, the ad is itself a fetishistic construct meant to fill with meaning “the hollow husk of the commodity-form[,] however superficial” (217-229). Yet what meaning can be constructed within a six second clip? Instead of suffusing the commodity with meaning through the relationships formed between the consumer and the commodity, the commodity is its own meaning. In other words the commodity is meaningful because it is a commodity, or as Debord puts it “that’s which appears is good, that which is good appears.” What better medium to express this circular logic than the looping Vine? The formal structure of the Vine itself frames the commodities as magical, as the commodities appear and disappear within the frame with each jump cut seemingly without human intervention. Of course this is not exactly what Jhally means when referring to magic in relation to advertising, but we can see how this could constitute a visual metaphor for the



separation between the commodity and the process which produces it, and the loss of meaning that results which advertising attempts to provide or (re)create. As Jhally puts it, advertising is “the real [...] hidden by the imaginary” (217-229).

This assertion takes us into Baudrillardian territory. If advertising is the construction of meaning at the service of the commodity-fetish whereby the real is hidden by the imaginary, then advertising is engaged in the creation of simulacrum and this meaning is simulacral in essence: it is meaning out of imagination and therefore out of nothing as its origins are outside of any reality and therefore has no relation to any reality, it is the creation of meaning where it does not naturally exist. Even in advertising, or perhaps especially in advertising, the Vine is but a representation of that which does not exist (as well as the ultimate fetishizing of the commodity).

The advertising of familiar brands is only one way in which Vines have been used, and therefore only one example of Vines as simulacrum. Collective experience and stereotypes (especially) are themselves simulacral in essence, as they are fabrications of that which does not actually exist, they are representations of nothing except the individual biases, prejudices, and gaps in knowledge of the individual who employs them and which create them. In this way the Vines discussed above are themselves simulacrums: the collective experiences they depict seem to originate from actual

experiences, and the stereotypes they depict from the actual demographics they stereotype, but upon closer inspection their imaginary foundations crumble.

As Baudrillard said, Borges’ Map-Territory relation is no longer usable because it is inadequate in describing the way in which simulacrum map a territory which does not exist (2). Furthermore the complexity of the hyperreality created can no longer be contained within the two-dimensionality of the map; instead what is required is a three-dimensional model. The convergence of social media has created an ecosystem through which movement is no longer the linear progression from A to B of the map, but instead the sporadic movement of a body moving within a model which envelops it completely. The ecosystem created by the convergence of social media pretends to reflect reality, but in fact is a hyperreality which exists only through the use of or appeal to stereotypes, collective experiences, conventional thought and anything familiar to society taken from pop culture and consumer culture (in some definitions one and the same, and certainly themselves convergent or overlapping at times).

That this distinction can be made is perhaps evidence that “the jig is up,” but given the apparent tendency of technology to mold reality into its own image, as identified by McLuhan and Carr among others, it may be too late. It seems pessimistic, and maybe not a little paranoid, to think that the hyperreality which social media has created will replace reality itself. Debord identified that in a

society such as ours, “where modern conditions of production prevail,” “everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation.” What I propose is only the next stage in which representation moves into life, in much the same way for example that Hollywood’s representation of romance becomes the standard for real life romance, and though perhaps initially Hollywood’s representations of romance came from life itself now our conceptions of romance come from Hollywood. Or to use an example from Baudrillard, our memories of Main Street U.S.A. in Disneyland inform our conception of what that time and place was actually like.

So the structural constraint of brevity imposed by a sizeable proportion of social media favors the familiar, altering our social and cultural reality so that it is only made up of the familiar and anything unfamiliar is marginalized or ignored outright. But what of the way in which the social-mediascape alters our physical reality? In writing about the mobile phone Leopoldina Fortunati claims that it [the mobile phone] gives us “the possibility of choosing more easily between the physical space which you physically go through and the psychological space of the intimacy of your networks of relationships” (513-528). Fortunati’s observations are quite pertinent considering the ubiquity of the mobile phone in our present society, especially as a means of access into the complex ecosystem of social media. Fortunati identifies that many choose psychological space over physical space, and as a result

“physical space in fact is emptied of significance, becomes less dense as thickness, as the dimension of virtual space is grafted onto it” (513-528). Physical spaces become secondary and as such so do our physical bodies, so that even though we are physically present within a physical space our minds are elsewhere (Fortunati 513-528). This echoes something which I allude to earlier in the essay and which I will reiterate here: physical life is displaced onto the immaterial space of social networks, and the preoccupation is not so much with physical experiences but the mere appearance of having physical experiences. Furthermore, another consequence identified by Fortunati is one that complements Chomsky’s observations on concision and conventional thought, namely that “always speaking over the mobile phone with one’s intimate circle of persons [...] implies remaining closed inside a rigid and inert kind of discourse, because one tends to say the same things, to repeat the same procedures in conversation” (513-528).

That advances in communication and mass media technologies has reshaped society goes without saying. Similarly, social media has reshaped the way we communicate and interact with others, as well as the social and physical spaces in which these interactions take place. As McLuhan has identified, new technologies bring about changes in the way humans develop, and social media is no exception. Without meaning to stereotype social media itself, and especially and specifically Vines as they form the crux of this essay,

we can begin identifying the ways in which broadly speaking social media has altered our existence. While new communications technology, in particular the emergence of the mobile phone and its transformation into the smart phone, has altered the way which we navigate and situate ourselves within physical and social space, social media has altered our social/cultural realities in ways that go beyond the technology used to access them. In particular the move towards brevity favors the familiar, the collective, the widely shared, displacing the truly individual to the margins in favor of the collective. If this will result in the homogenizing of experience and discourse by a culture or society itself largely homogenized remains to be seen, and in truth is not the diagnosis I aim to give. We must remember that the faces in the screen are not ourselves, no matter how striking the resemblance may be.

The body of this essay concentrates almost exclusively on Vines, but this is only as a way of focusing and refining much larger and broader claims that I believe are applicable or at least relevant to all of social media. Those trends and mechanisms operating within the Vine are applicable to varying degrees to other social media, and as a result so are the conclusions derived. In other words in

attempting to make a larger point involving social media and its relation to our social and physical realities, the Vine emerged as a way of practically illustrating this relation. In a way the Vine is used as a synecdoche representative of the social-media ecosystem it is a part of. That is not to say that the Vine is not worthy of serious scholarly consideration on its own. This essay only touches the tip of the iceberg.

Each unique use of Vines (as audio-visual gags, as art, as tools of activism, and as advertisements) deserves its own volume, providing rich and unexplored material for scholarly consideration. In turn each area of interest can be approached from multiple academic angles. Indeed if we hope to fully understand the medium of the Vine, its applications, and its effects, as well as if we hope to situate it within the larger technological, artistic, political, and sociological picture, further extensive study is necessary. In particular quantification of content trends might give us a better understanding of the medium in a broader sense, and would be beneficial in supporting or disproving claims made here or elsewhere. Additionally the subject of celebrity and how it operates within the Vine community, and its manifestations or implications outside of it, is one I did not touch upon but which itself deserves consideration and discussion.

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# Instagram as Advertisement of the Social-Media Self

By **Suzanne Cimolino**

By definition, “social networking” means the connection of people through social methods, whether that be in-person or online. When social media comes into the picture, certain dynamics of networking and interaction start to change. For example, when social media applications like Instagram become popular, the idea of connecting people becomes commoditized in a way. With Instagram, people are no longer exchanging conversations as they would in person or via email; rather they are sharing fragments of data in the form of small, square photos. Of course, sharing photos is intrinsically a connection, but the *content* that Instagram users post is what gives the impression that the application is more about self-advertising than communicating with friends. Instagram gave rise to the “selfie,” pictures glorifying food, and “geotagging” elite locations, all of which are generally used to boost one’s social standing. In fact, social media applications and websites like Instagram or Facebook create more of an arena for competition than they do create a level playing field in terms of social status. A Facebook user conceivably aims for his status to catch the attention of his “friends” (a mutual connection) and an Instagram user uploads a photo that may convey

affluence, success, happiness— or usually any kind of enviable trait— to his “followers” (not always a mutual connection). Instagram users can only upload snippets of information about themselves, so they (for the most part) carefully calculate the select photos that will make the cut in order to show off the best versions of themselves, as the unpopular photos usually get deleted. In the social media world where users can manipulate their personal profiles and thus show off the best version of themselves to network and connect with more people, Instagram is the optimum tool for advertising one’s online self because it quite literally *shows off* the user in the most visual way, without the clutter of status updates or timelines; Instagrammers capitalize on the app’s features such as trendy geotags and enhancing filters in order to present their most attractive selves and thus build their best profile for social networking. In a world where people are almost always social networking and self-promoting, Instagram is the tool they use to compete. Today’s Millennials— Instagram’s primary egocentrics— are diluted down to the 612 x 612 pixel-versions of themselves. My paper explores how the people who use Instagram are both

the advertisers and the product they are advertising, through examples from Sut Jhally, Marshall McLuhan, and James Carey, among others.

But, “blaming” Instagram for producing conceited users is inaccurate and incorrect. In this case, media determinism cannot apply to social media specifically because social media applications are constantly adapting to the ways people already interact — just as people adapt to the latest technologies. Contrary to the medium theorists’ “billiard ball approach” (Seigel), Instagram did not cause people to suddenly grab their phones and start taking pictures, as camera phones preceded the application and photography has been around since the early 19th century. The app is rather an amalgamation of several technologies (phone, camera, etc.) and several ways of social media interaction (commenting, liking, following, etc.). Instagram was created as recently as 2010, which means that social media itself had already been well established at the time. Additionally, Instagram is not static; people are always changing the way they interact with technology, just as technology is ever changing—so Instagram will have software updates periodically to keep the app up to date. Moreover, Instagram users’ interactions with the application have changed drastically since it was launched. When the app was launched it had nominal consumers. When more people joined, users had a larger audience with which to share their photos.

Sut Jhally’s “Advertising as Religion” abstractly applies to my argument that

Instagram is used as self-advertising. Jhally breaks down four key stages of advertising since the 1890s... and Instagram certainly represents a coalescence of these four types of advertising.

The first stage Jhally explains, *Idolatry*, applies to Instagram users’ pictures glorifying products, especially food. While Jhally refers to advertisers’ aim to make ads appeal to consumers in a faith-based way, appealing to the “nostalgia for the world that was passing...religious, family, and community life...to transform the product...producing those life-enhancing feelings” (Jhally 223), the idea of idolatry pertains somewhat differently to Instagram. In 2014, these ‘advertisers’ are really any Instagram user, the product is food or some kind of consumable treat (e.g. Sprinkles cupcakes or Starbucks), and the consumers are the followers. With the hashtag function, users can quickly isolate any kind of photo they want to see, and #foodporn especially has grown into a hugely popular tag. Food on Instagram becomes stylized, unreal and fetishized. Instagram filters and well thought-out lighting turn food into almost arousing, mouth-watering commodities. An article from the *Huffington Post* article offers an interesting hypothesis: that “Instagramming your food may make it taste better.” Not only does Instagram seem to advertise products and idolize them, it is *successful* at this advertising. *Huff Post*’s Rachel Tepper writes, “Researchers from the University of Minnesota and Harvard Business School found that ‘rituals enhance the enjoyment of consumption

because of the greater involvement in the experience they prompt.” (Tepper) Foodstagram, as they are sometimes referred, enhance the look of food and thus elicit “ritualistic behaviors” (Tepper) in commenters in the form of one-liners like “OMG” “Wow” and “I die.” Commenters seem to dramatize these beautiful snapshots of food.

Jhally’s article goes on to explain the advertising age of *Iconology* in the 1920s (and I argue, the 2010s)... in which “icons are symbols” (Jhally 223) and Instagram users no doubt use symbols of all kinds to enhance their photos. In this stage, “advertising moves from the worship of commodities”— in the Instagram world: food and other commodities— “to their meaning within a social context” (223). In context, it becomes not what type of commodity, but rather the status of the commodity, and what the commodity connotes. Jhally’s article has a similar idea: “Goods became powerful not only through what they could do but through what they could mean” (223). For example, an Instagram of a plate of truffle risotto from Los Angeles’ Madeo Restaurant is encoded with many meanings: it means that the Instagrammer is wealthy enough to afford a \$70 plate of pasta, that the Instagrammer is skinny enough to indulge in carbs, that the

Instagrammer has enough free time to enjoy a leisurely lunch, and that the Instagrammer is hip enough to know that Madeo has the best pasta in the city. All of these elements elevate the social standing of the photographer/pasta eater in one small photo. Of course, iconology does not refer only to food, it also refers to clothing, scenery, cars, etc. — anything visually tangible can become a desirable commodity on Instagram. Additionally, literal symbols in the form of emojis are

used as the captions or comments on Instagram photos. Among the top 20 most popular emojis right now, are the praying hands emoji, the smiley face emoji with hearts for eyes, and the a-ok emoji, all of which imply approval, acceptance, desire, and infatuation



(iEmoji). Physical emotions are applied to inanimate objects on Instagram.

When Instagram users turn the camera around (literally, there is a button to switch to a front-facing camera like on the iPhone) idolatry and iconology become the stage of Narcissism— where “advertising completes the shift towards the consumer” in the 1940s and 1960s, according to Jhally (Jhally 225). At this point, advertising has gone from all about the product to all about the consumer or the individual. The “selfie” (modern-day self portrait) has become a very popular and “self-

objectifying” (Arkin) way to express oneself on Instagram. The interesting part of the selfie is that people may disguise them as natural or #nomakeup, when really they are quite contrived, like the foodstagrams; a user has endless attempts to take the perfect selfie before posting it, including being in the best lighting, using creative camera angles that can highlight ones ‘good side,’ and especially using the most flattering photo filters like black and white or “Walden,” a filter which softens the light and gives the photo a nice glow. In Jhally’s words, “the power of the product can be manifested... through the strategy of ‘black magic’ where persons undergo sudden physical transformations or where the commodity can be used to entrance and enrapture other people” (Jhally 225). Just as professional advertisers can publish their products exactly the way they want, Instagram users can manipulate and control the exact image of themselves they want others to see. And, the Instagram user eventually becomes the commodity fetishized for the gaze of his followers. Oxford University Press’ article “Scholarly Reflections on the ‘Selfie’” also determines that Instagram selfies are especially faux: “On Instagram, you don’t portray yourself; you paint a desirable persona” (Van Dijck). Instagram profiles can be just as misleading as professional ads.

Jhally’s idea of the era of Totemism since the 1960s refers to the group culture that advertising appeals to and encourages, and I argue that Instagram, though filled with individual selfies and separate profiles, also fosters the group or the

“global village” (McLuhan) through hashtags and the “Popular Page,” where users can, in a sense, join together and see the most liked and most commented-on photos. The hashtag feature allows users to quickly and efficiently codify and categorize their own photos, and to easily find thousands of photos of whatever they want to see by searching #SantaBarbara, for example, a hashtag which currently has 474,552 photos to its name. Just as each hashtag is identifiable with individual group, geotagging is a way for users to show membership or belonging to a specific group or place. One can geotag a location to their photos only if they are near that location at the time (for example: Santa Barbara Museum of Art), or now one can create his own location (for example: Suzanne’s Pool), which others can retag as if to join that group. Instagram allows for users to “participate in a very specific consumption community” (Jhally 226) as they are in control of their own product, profile, likes, and follows.

For McLuhan, the content Instagram users post would not be as significant as the form or the layout of the application. He writes, “Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication” (McLuhan). The fact that the vast majority of Instagram pictures can fit in with any of the aforementioned eras of advertising, points to the idea that Instagram’s *form* cultivates egoism. Whereas Facebook is more about communicating with and connecting friends through comprehensive profiles,



Instagram is simple and brief. On Instagram, a user posts one photo at a time (not an entire album) with a concise caption that usually elicits comments about that particular photo (unlike timeline comments, which are used to post about whatever). An individual's Instagram profile itself is condensed because there is no designated place to fill in personal information like relationship status, birthday, or hometown. Instead, users can write in a couple words or emojis about themselves on their profiles, or they can obviously post photos that will convey their personal information without words. Also, Instagram's form is different from Facebook on the micro level (Siegel) in that Instagram photos are not specifically meant for one person, as a Facebook comment is written for one person's timeline. Instagram photos are posted candidly, at will, and are subject to anyone's judgment—in fact, if a user's profile is public, he will often get many random comments and likes (even from spam accounts). Maybe the reason Instagram is so appealing to Millennials today is that it is so pithy, so users can immediately see and post whatever they want, and to their exact liking.

Furthermore, James Carey's "A Cultural Approach to Communication" would advocate for a form-not-content method of analyzing Instagram. Carey articulates the two main views of communication, which appear distinct from each other, but are really linked and thus both apply to an analysis of Instagram. Both the transmission model and the ritual

model help to explain how and why Instagram acts as advertising for the social-media self. For example, the transmission model demonstrates that Instagram's condensed layout "gives information to others" (Carey 15) about the user in a straightforward way. The ritual model points to Instagram's group aesthetic and the encouragement of "sharing, participation...and fellowship" (18). Basically, Instagram is not an altogether new medium of communication—it is merely a combination of technology and social networking in a fairly new package. Instagram still transmits and shares information among users, but it does so in its own particular, mainly visual, way. One reason Instagram may stand apart from Facebook—other than for its unique form—is that some Instagrammers' self-advertising turns into *real* business, and they become successful, or rather, Instafamous.

Instafamous users like Carin Olsson (@parisinfourmonths) and Leandra Medine (@ManRepeller), who are known primarily from their Instagram accounts, are some of the many that have gained hundreds-of-thousands of followers... and the fame, money, and careers that apparently come with having a pretty, stylish Instagram profile. Actually, both users had blogs and websites before joining Instagram, but Instagram is what really launched their careers. This phenomenon is similar of course to YouTube fame, which came first. But Instagram is different in that people use the app to get recognized, and A-list celebrities use the app to get... even more famous (whereas already well-known celebrities do not generally post personal videos on YouTube for fans, with the

exception of Joseph-Gordon Levitt). Dozens of celebrities from the entire Kardashian clan to Zoë Deschanel have *millions* of followers on Instagram, and use it to reach out to their fans in ways that were previously impossible. Instagram makes the idea of the celebrity more tangible. Plus, getting a lot of likes and followers on Instagram is easy enough that anyone can do it, and most people try. A Google search for “Instafamous” returns with pages and pages of articles on “How to Get Instafamous” rather than pages of research on the dynamics of Instafame. Businesses also recognize that Instagram can be utilized as advertising, and they often post pictures of their products with exclusive sales offers to attract customers. Instagram followers are thought of as similar to the way Internet website hits are thought of; the larger quantity of followers reflects the better quality Instagram account.

The most interesting part of Instagram is the fact that while other social media are on the decline, Instagram continues to grow

and change. Jeffrey Cole of PR Newswire writes that: “The growth [of Instagram] shows that users are eager to get their voices out there in a quick and engaging way.” He lists Millennials, especially, as those users “craving to be heard” (Cole). But of course, this is not all bad news for Facebook, as Facebook recently purchased Instagram for \$1 billion.

Facebook even capitalizes on this social media conglomeration in that the two function rather in unison. Cole argues: “Facebook will become the site where [they] search for someone... then users will move that relationship to a smaller online community, such as a microblog” (Cole). Instagram is strong, and as a Facebook conglomerate, arguably even stronger. Instagram is “hot property” (Van Grove) and as more people join, it becomes an even better platform for self-advertising. The more users on Instagram, the bigger the audience for self-advertising selfies, foodstagrams, and enviable vacation photos.

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**PART 2**

# Creative Nonfiction in a Consumer Culture

The Illusion of Truth



# Lost Priorities and Lower Standards: The Unfortunate Evolution of Reporting Domestic Mass Shootings

By **Jess McKillop**

Over the past twenty years, few events have captured the national media's attention more than domestic mass shootings. The shootings at Columbine High School, Fort Hood Military Base, Virginia Tech, the Aurora Movie Theater, and Sandy Hook Elementary School are permanently engrained into the nation's memory due both to their horrific nature, and the overwhelming amount of national media coverage they received. Virtually every major news outlet intensely covered each of these events as they unfolded and for days and sometimes weeks afterwards. However, while the intense coverage of mass shootings has remained consistent, the nature of the coverage has changed considerably. This essay aims to explore what exactly about the coverage has changed, particularly which aspects of the shootings the media has decided to highlight, and then identify why these changes have occurred. In the interest of concision, this essay only compares the CNN's and The Associated Press' coverage of the 1999 Columbine High School shootings to the coverage of the

2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings. While the Columbine Shooting and the Sandy Hook shooting are very distinct events in certain ways—the Columbine shooting occurred at a high school, the Sandy Hook shooting occurred at an elementary school; the Columbine shooting occurred on an otherwise average day in April, the Sandy Hook shooting occurred in December just weeks before the full swing of the holiday season—these two specific shootings serve as a good comparison because of the over a decade gap between the two shootings and the distinction that the victims in both cases were school children, which added to the horrific nature of these events and subsequently garnered more media attention. The sources analyzed are the respective news outlets' initial coverage of the shootings published online within hours of the conclusion of each shooting. In the thirteen years that passed between Columbine and Sandy Hook, CNN and the Associated Press dramatically altered their approach to reporting the events of mass school shootings, specifically in their

increased focus on the shooter(s) as opposed to the victims, and in their lowered standards for citing sources used in their reports. The impetus for this change is difficult to exactly pinpoint from an outsiders perspective, but the development of high speed internet and the consequent developments to the multimedia news platform as well as the rise of “infotainment” have undoubtedly contributed to determining the nature of the changes over the past thirteen years.

The most blatant difference in CNN’s and the AP’s coverage of Sandy Hook and Columbine is the amount of attention focused on Adam Lanza, the Sandy Hook shooter, compared to the amount of attention focused on Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the Columbine shooters. In CNN’s initial report on the Columbine shooting CNN only refers to Harris and Klebold as “gunmen” or “shooters” (“Gunmen”). At the time the article was posted, Klebold’s and Harris identities had not been officially confirmed as those of the shooters, but the article makes no speculation at all about who the shooters could have possibly been, or what their motives were. The article does not even make significant note of the fact that the shooters were Columbine students, an eyewitness interviewed in the article said he “saw two students in black trench coats with weapons” (“Gunmen”). The CNN article focuses mainly on providing a synopsis of events. The article provides eyewitness accounts of what happened inside the school, information about the number of victims, and their current

condition. Conversely, there is barely any information regarding the shooters. CNN’s hesitance to discuss the shooters combined with the details they provide about the victims reveal they were more concerned with reporting about the victims as opposed to the shooters.

The Associated Press Article puts more emphasis on the shooters than did CNN, but still fails to publish any speculation of their identities or motives. The article does mention that the police were looking for two suspects, but does not elaborate on their condition or whereabouts (Weller). In the text of the article Harris and Klebold are referred to as “gunmen” and more specifically as “as young men, dressed in long black trench coats” (Weller). The AP article also cites a student at the school that claims there is a group of students at the school known as the Trench Coat Mafia, including a quote from the student saying “they’re into guns and stuff like that” (Weller). However, the article noticeably does not directly report that the gunmen were students at the school, even though there seemed to be enough information via eyewitness accounts to validate that claim. Similar to the CNN article, the focus of the AP article is on the condition of the victims and provides minuscule information about the shooters. The amount of information regarding the victims compared to the lesser amount of information regarding the shooters reveals that the AP placed more focus on the victims than they did the shooters.

CNN and the AP were similar in their approach to covering the Columbine

shootings. Both articles indirectly reference the gunmen as students at the school, but do not confirm that they were students at Columbine High school, both articles do not speculate on the shooters motives or identities, both articles do not focus on the condition or whereabouts of the suspects, and both articles do cite hospital spokespeople to provide updates on the conditions of the victims. These similarities give insight to the priorities of the news outlets coverage. Both news outlets had leads on the shooters identities from eyewitness accounts, but either chose not to follow up on these leads, or made a deliberate decision to not publish information about the gunmen. The relatively abundant information in the article about the condition of the victims reveals that both the AP and CNN prioritized reporting on the victims over the shooters in their coverage of the Columbine shootings. However, the two news outlets priorities shifted in the thirteen years between Columbine and Sandy Hook

In CNN's initial report of the Sandy Hook shooting, it becomes immediately clear the focus of the article is on Adam Lanza. To the left of the main text of the article, there is a "story highlights" section that consists of four bullet points, three of which pertain directly to Lanza, and one that vaguely states "The nation and the world react with shock" (Candiotti). The actual article begins with "Dressed in black fatigues and a military vest, a heavily armed man..." "Heavily armed man" is highlighted in blue, indicating it is a

hyperlink, and when the reader clicks on this link, it immediately takes him or her to a full-page profile of Adam Lanza (Candiotti). Then, after a brief paragraph detailing the exact death toll, the third paragraph once again identifies the shooter as Adam Lanza. The article continues with a synopsis of what transpired in the elementary school, but then the focus of the article again shifts to Lanza, his motives, and his personality traits. The article cites a former classmate of Lanza's who described him as "quiet and reserved," and then quotes his former classmate again, this time saying, "You could definitely tell he was a genius" (Candiotti). The "story highlights," inclusion of the link to the full page profile of Lanza, and description of his personality traits all reveal that CNN focused more on Lanza than the victims. Obviously, it is important to note that the victims of the Sandy Hook shooting, apart from the teachers, were mostly six or seven years old, and therefore would be handled differently by the media. However, any argument that could be made that would justify CNN's lack of coverage of the Sandy Hook victims goes right out the window due to CNN's repeated use of some of the surviving children as eyewitness accounts (Greenfield). If CNN was willing to exploit traumatized seven year old children on live national television for their eyewitness accounts of the shooting, it does not seem unreasonable to expect that they should give an equal amount of attention to the condition and backgrounds of the young victims as well. Unfortunately, in the initial coverage of the

Sandy Hook shooting, CNN only cared to dig into the past of the one person who deserves no recognition or attention at all: Adam Lanza.

The Associated Press also heavily focused on Adam Lanza in their coverage of the Sandy Hook shootings. The AP article is titled “Police, world wonder about Conn. Shooting motive,” which immediately puts the attention on Lanza by questioning what drove him to commit the horrible act (Christoffersen). The AP article does actually focus on the victims in the beginning of the article quoting a community member who said, “These 20 Children lit up this community better than all these Christmas lights we have...” and continued to describe the beauty of the children killed (Christoffersen). However, this quote is immediately followed by a paragraph stating that Lanza “suffered from a personality disorder,” and then later details when his parents divorced, his participation in Newtown High School clubs, his recurring presence on the school honor roll, the type of upbringing he experienced and where his father works (Christoffersen). All of this detailed information about Lanza illustrates the large and disproportionate amount of attention the AP placed on the shooter.

CNN and the AP were similar in their approach to covering the Sandy Hook shooting, just as they were in their approach to covering the Columbine shooting. Both CNN and the AP deliberately draw attention to Lanza before the article even begins, both articles

provide significant amounts of background information on Adam Lanza and his family, both articles quote previous acquaintances of Lanza, and both articles highlight his positive qualities and personality traits and portray a picture of innocence. It is incredibly obvious that both CNN and the AP devoted significantly more journalistic resources to learning about Adam Lanza than they did to learning about the victims. After reading the two articles, the reader is aware of Lanza’s personality, hobbies, intelligence, family history, and economic standing. Meanwhile, all the information the reader has about the children, comes from a few heartfelt, but uninformative and vague, quotations from Newtown community members. However, not only do the news outlets devote their resources to researching Lanza, they also disturbingly highlight only his positive personality traits. They paint a picture of Lanza as having been a smart, reserved, harmless young man. They even say he “suffered” from a personality disorder, furthering the innocent image of Lanza. If a reader only read the descriptions of Lanza out of context from the rest of the article, he or she would most likely assume Lanza was a victim, not the gunman responsible for the deaths of twenty innocent children and six innocent adults. Clearly, both CNN and the AP were making a concerted effort to focus more on the shooter than the victims in their coverage of the Sandy Hook shootings.

Comparing CNN’s and the AP’s coverage of Columbine and Sandy Hook



also reveals that the two news outlets considerably lowered their standards for the sources they cited in their reports during the thirteen year gap between the two shootings. In their coverage of Columbine, the two news outlets clearly identify every source they cite, whereas in their coverage of Sandy Hook they rely heavily on “officials speaking on the condition of anonymity,” and use vague phrasing to attempt to portray speculation as fact.

In CNN’s coverage of Columbine, they cite seven separate sources in their initial report. The sources

cited in the article are, “a police spokeswoman,” “Authorities,” “Police,” a hospital “spokeswoman,” and three student-eyewitnesses, all of whom are named (“Gunmen”). More significant than the sources they include are the sources they

leave out. CNN cites no anonymous sources, and avoids repeatedly using vague phrasing, such as the passive voice, to describe where their information came from. The “authorities” and “police” sources are somewhat vague, but they are used in the two paragraphs immediately following the paragraph that cites “a police spokeswoman,” which makes the source of the information more clear. The CNN article utilizes specific sources and makes

it clear where exactly they are getting their information from. Overall, there is little confusion of the origin of the facts reported, no anonymous sources, and no vague phrasing to describe sources, which reveals CNN had high standards for the sources of the facts they reported in their coverage of Columbine.

In the AP’s initial report on Columbine, the author cites eleven distinct sources. The sources cited in the article are “Steve Davis, spokesman for the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office,” “The Colorado Bureau of Investigation,” “Kari

Mackecher, spokesman for Health One,” “five other hospitals,” six student eyewitnesses, and one parent of a Columbine student (“Two People”). The article also includes the phrases “Police had no immediate comment” and “there was no confirmation...”

(“Two People”). There is also no vague phrasing when referring to sources. The AP was remarkably vigilant in citing their sources in their initial coverage of the Columbine shootings, going one step further than CNN by actually naming the spokespeople, leaving no doubt regarding the source of the facts reported.

Once again, CNN and the AP were consistent in their approach to reporting the events of the same shooting. Both articles



**Police arrive at Columbine High School**

utilize police spokespeople, both articles utilize hospital spokespeople, and both articles utilize eyewitness accounts, and cite them by name. The vigilance and clarity that CNN and the AP exhibit in their initial reports reveal the news outlets' adherence to basic, but essential, principles of journalistic integrity in their coverage of the Columbine shootings. Both CNN and the AP strictly report facts in their coverage of Columbine, making it clear where the facts came from, and do not include any speculation in their reports. The lack of speculation gives significance to the phrases "Police had no immediate comment" and "there was no confirmation..." that the AP includes in their report. These phrases reveal that the AP refused to publish any facts that the appropriate authorities had not already confirmed. CNN's and the AP's reports of Columbine focus on reporting the information efficiently and along the guidelines of journalistic integrity. They appear to have held themselves to strict standards of what a reputable source entailed, and as a result only reported indisputable facts, while leaving out their individual opinions on what they think happened, as well as leaving out any reports that had not been confirmed by a legitimate authoritative source. However, these vital principles of journalistic integrity were ignored in CNN's and the AP's coverage of the 2012 Sandy Hook shootings.

CNN cites eleven separate sources in their initial report of the Sandy Hook shootings. The sources cited are "Renee

Burn, a local teacher at another school," "young students," "third-grader Alexis Wasik," "one parent who was in the school at the time of the shooting," "police," "Alex Israel, a former classmate of Lanza's," "a law enforcement official familiar with the investigation," "Lt. J. Paul Vance of the Connecticut State Police," "a law enforcement source with detailed knowledge of the investigation," "Janet Volmer, a kindergarten teacher at Sandy Hook," "law enforcement sources," and "Newtown Police Lt. George Stinko" ("Police: 20 Children"). The CNN article utilizes mostly reputable and identifiable sources as they are expected to do, but more significant is their inclusion of the cleverly worded sources such as "a law enforcement official familiar with the investigation," and "a law enforcement source with detailed knowledge of the investigation." While the author of the article is not saying it outright, these sources are speaking on the condition of anonymity. The author uses names of police sources earlier in the article, so there is no reason to not do the same for the other sources. The inclusion of these vague and anonymous sources reveal a lowered standard of what CNN considered reportable sources.

The AP's article cites nine separate sources in their initial report of the Sandy Hook shootings. The sources cited are, "a teacher," "at least one parent," "Catherine Urso, of Newtown," "Joshua Milas, who graduated from Newtown High in 2009," and five "officials speaking on the condition of anonymity." The author of the

AP article also uses vague and uncertain phrasing (highlighted with italics) such as “Lanza is believed to...,” “a high-powered rifle *that he apparently left...*,” “Lanza attended the school several years ago *but appeared to have* no recent connection...,” “guns used in the attack *may have belonged* to Lanza’s family” (“Police, World Wonder”). In some cases, these unbelievably vague statements are then sourced to an anonymous source, making the claims even less valid. Between the five officials speaking on the condition of anonymity and the repeated vague phrasing, it is overwhelmingly clear that the AP has relaxed their standards of what they consider acceptable reporting since the Columbine shooting.

Again, the AP and CNN were consistent in their approach to covering the same shooting. Both articles cite anonymous sources and both articles utilize vague phrasing to disguise the anonymity of their sources or to pass off speculation as fact. These tactics make it clear that journalistic integrity was no longer a top priority of the news outlets, but instead they prioritized having the most recent, groundbreaking information, even if they couldn’t officially confirm the validity of what they reported. The issue with anonymous sources is that they have no accountability. If the information that an anonymous source gives to a reporter ends up being false, the source cannot be criticized because no one would know who divulged the misleading information besides the reporter. This unaccountability causes information to be leaked to the

media before it is actually confirmed. It is also important to note the critical difference between a “police official” and a “police spokesperson.” A police spokesperson’s job is to provide news outlets and other media with credible, confirmed information. A police official may have knowledge of a situation, but that does not mean the claims he or she makes are valid. The claims are only valid once the appropriate official, such as a police or hospital spokesperson, has confirmed them to be true. The statement a spokesperson makes may attempt to spin the information in a certain way, but at least the information can be traced directly back to its source. The difference between a police spokesperson and police official may seem minuscule, but the bottom line is that a police official is a completely anonymous source, while a police spokesperson is not. If a police spokesperson makes a claim that ends up being false or misleading, the department has no choice but to publicly address the issue because it can directly be traced back to them. However, if a “police official” makes a false claim the department has much less of an obligation to acknowledge the issue. What would stop the police department from simply denying the information came from them? If the reporter is not willing to reveal the source then there is no real proof that the source even exists. Once the news outlets skirt around the agreed upon protocols for delivering information to the public, it compromises the integrity of the entire report. No better example of the issues that

accompany the use of anonymous sources come from the misreporting of the Sandy Hook shooter's identity. The shooter was initially identified as Ryan Lanza, Adam's older brother ("Police, World Wonder"). This obviously caused large amounts of confusion for anyone following the story; especially for Ryan Lanza himself, who had to make repeated Facebook statuses making it clear he was not the shooter ("Police, World Wonder"). Not only did the CNN and the AP violate basic principles of journalistic integrity in their reporting of the Sandy Hook shootings, but their reckless reporting was also morally questionable and unacceptable. The major news outlets in the United States have a duty to objectively and responsibly report news to the public. The objectivity and legitimacy of what news media outlets report is vital to the democratic health of the country and therefore upholding the standards of journalistic integrity should be of the utmost importance (Jones).

While this essay only focuses on CNN and the AP, the fact that they consistently made the same changes in their reporting techniques suggests that these changes are not unique to just these two news outlets, but instead indicative of a general shift in all news media protocol. This apparent industry-wide shift in news media practices evokes these questions: why have news media outlets become much more likely to intentionally blur the line between speculation and fact? And, in their coverage of mass shootings, why has news media focused more attention on the

shooters than the victims? Both of these developments can be explained at least in part by the emergence of high-speed internet and the rise of infotainment.

Beginning in the early 2000's, broadband internet emerged as a much faster way to connect to the internet than the previous dial-up connections. As more and more people started using broadband connections, the internet as we know it today began to take shape—social media sites, video sharing platforms, overwhelming amounts of advertisements, and most relevant to this essay, the emergence of the news outlet website. High-speed internet allowed the major news outlets to publish both videos and text reports all in the same place. These websites became a one-stop source for all the news content that was previously spread across various different media. News outlets now had the ability to instantly publish the news via multiple media to a worldwide audience in one single location. All of this contributed to audiences having much higher expectations for how fast they received their information. Instead of waiting for the evening news or the morning paper, the news audience now wanted to know about an event as it was unfolding, not later that night or the next morning. This need for current information created an arms race of sorts between news companies to have the newest, most up-to-date information on a developing story. Now, news outlets have to have the latest information to garner the most attention from viewers, whereas

previously news outlets focused on quality reporting to gain and maintain their viewership. In other words, speed replaced quality.

These developments help explain why CNN's and the AP's lowered standards for sources in recent mass shootings. It takes time to confirm sources and facts, so if one news outlet decides not to wait for confirmed facts from one of the traditional sources, such as a police spokesperson, they would gain a competitive advantage in doing so by catering to the audiences need for speed. It is difficult to tell which news outlet started this practice of publishing unconfirmed sources, but once the trend took hold it began a domino effect with every news outlet following suit, as evidenced by the current state of unreliable news media (Jones). This process leads to news outlets seeking out unorthodox and illegitimate sources and publishing their reports as fact while not addressing the possibility that what they are reporting is false. This practice is the equivalent of a student citing a blog post in a research paper, but asserting the validity of the source as if it came from an academic journal. In the case of news outlets using anonymous sources, it is the equivalent of a student making a claim, citing it, but then refusing to indicate to the teacher where the facts came from, and instead just assuring the teacher that it is legitimate. Any respectable teacher would immediately discount the validity of the source, and question the legitimacy of the entire argument. Yet, virtually every major news outlet participates in this sort of

journalism today and no one seems to question it. This analogy is not perfect because major news outlets such as CNN and the AP carry a degree of a prestige and credibility that a student does not.

However, the prestige and credibility these news sources have does not excuse the use of anonymous sources in reporting mass shootings. The public does not have a pressing need to know the identity of the shooter, and therefore there is no legitimate reason not to wait for an official statement from the proper authorities before publishing a report with the identity of the shooter. However, the outlets place speed over accuracy in order to better serve their own monetary interests

The rise of the high-speed internet news platform was accompanied by the rise of "infotainment." Infotainment is a way of presenting news in a manner that not only delivers information to the viewers, but also provides a compelling and entertaining story. The rise of infotainment helps to explain why news outlets have recently devoted so much more attention to the shooters than the victims. As mentioned earlier, both news outlets portrayed the background of Adam Lanza as the exact opposite of what one would expect from a mass shooter. By creating this contradictory profile of Lanza they create a more compelling story; one that reads like a tragic hero falling from grace or a promising child that somewhere along the way turned into a violent monster. These stories are ones that are more likely to be found in Hollywood than on the evening news, and that is exactly

what these news outlets seem to be trying to accomplish. The more compelling the story, the more people will want to tune in, and the more money the news companies can make.

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The rise of high-speed internet also gave birth to internet advertising as a revenue source. Internet advertising functions in a similar way to the cable television advertising model—the more views a web page receives, the more valuable the advertisement space is to

potential advertisers—sans the convoluted Nielsen system. The ability to profit from internet advertising also contributed to the manner in which news outlets covered mass shootings. However, this does not apply to the AP because they are a not-for-profit company. The best example of how potential internet advertising profit affects the coverage of mass shootings comes from CNN’s initial report of the Sandy Hook shootings. Interspersed between paragraph breaks in the online article are various hyperlinks that lead to other CNN articles regarding the shooting. The titles of the four hyperlinks in the article are as follows: “How do we stop the violence?” “I hope my mom is okay: tweets from the shooting,” “It doesn’t seem possible,” and “Slain principle worked to keep students safe” (“Police: 20 Children”). The nature of the language used in these hyperlinks is purposely vague, dramatic, and implores the reader to click on the link to find out more information. The more views each of these pages receives ultimately contribute to CNN being able to sell their advertisements at a more expensive rate. They seem to be purposely structuring the format of their initial report around maximizing viewership across multiple articles, and in turn maximizing the profit potential of their advertisement space. CNN has published multiple reports since the shooting that discuss how gun stores and companies are substantially profiting from the Sandy Hook shootings (Cratty; Rooney). However, they fail to mention that they too appear to be profiting from the same shootings as a result of how they structure the presentation of their reports.

Still, it is impossible to actually confirm that CNN is making deliberate decisions in order to profit from the Sandy Hook shooting without inside knowledge of the decision making process of CNN executives. Therefore, this conclusive claim is simply educated speculation. However, what is not speculative is that

CNN and the Associated Press have made deliberate decisions to lower the standards for the sources they publish, and rearranged their priorities concerning whether the shooter or the victims receive more attention. This shift over the last thirteen years is disturbing and hopefully a trend that will not continue.

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# Fast News is False News: Media's War on Terrorism

By **Alexandra Goldstein**

In today's era of a media's ability to forcefully decide which "news" is presented and consumed, how can readers filter through the fluff to decipher real events? The War on Terrorism has been developing for many years, and the advancement of media has greatly enhanced how the world stays informed.

By examining the Boston Marathon Bombings, and the coverage of its aftermath, I will show how — with the advent of more widely accessible and instant media access — the public expects news coverage to be delivered faster. This causes news organizations to have an increasing number of inaccuracies and fluff pieces, and for narratives' "credibility" to rest only on the extent of their mass media representation. I shall examine Martin Kaplan's piece "Welcome to the Infotainment Freak Show" and consider how the media fed the public an abundance of information regarding this terrorist event, making it difficult to separate right from wrong in this new age of hyperreality. I will also tie this together with Stuart Hall's piece "Encoding/Decoding" to show the challenge that ensues as individuals grapple with how to decode the media's message.

On April 15, 2013, news reports of a bombing at the crowded Boston Marathon struck fear in the hearts of Americans everywhere. Since 9/11, there have only been a few failed acts of terror on American soil. This event became the first time in 12 years that terrorism again spawned national devastation, with three people killed and more than 200 others injured. This devastation caused media mayhem, not only from television networks such as CNN, CBS, ABC, and Fox, but also from concerned citizens recording, blogging, tweeting, and posting about it. Reddit, an online social networking service and "news" website, exemplified how ordinary people could encode their own messages onto distinct media platforms. Through the use of a "subreddit," a tool that organizes content according to specific areas of interest, groups of people attempted to help find the Boston bomber. In particular, users posted on the subreddit thread "FindBostonBombers" to hypothesize the identity of the bomber. This eventually led to the false accusations of two plausible suspects. "According to general manager Erik Martin, 272,000 users were reading Reddit at the time of Dzhokhar's arrest, 85,000 of them in a single post on the

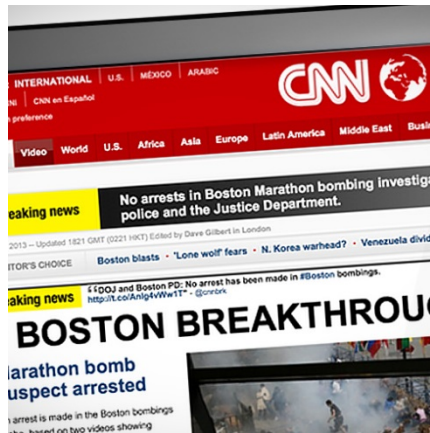


manhunt. That puts the site in direct competition with the largest U.S. news organizations” (Pickert). As a result, some of these large news publications, like the *New York Post*, decoded rumors from Reddit and other social media sites, and subsequently legitimized them by encoding them into their news publications instead of seeking credible information themselves.

So what happened here? When did the job of the encoder — the person who puts information out on a media forum — go to the public, and the job of the decoder — the person who attempts to understand the message the encoder provided — go to the news outlets? Tom Mornig expands on this scenario in his piece, “Terrorism, Media and the State: An Incestuous Spiral.” “The real-time transmission of evolving events risks losing the audience, whilst it is required to secure a more reflective and contextualized reporting. Going with the flow of events may secure an audience but gives those actors that are outside the media the privilege of staging the scene according to their (obscure) agendas” (Mornig 75). Essentially, the news outlets are trying to keep up with their fast and up-to-date audience members. But besides that, there seems to be what Stuart Hall refers to as

“lack of equivalence” — namely, there is a distortion between the two sides of the communicative exchange (Hall 44). The ill-informed subreddit contributors began to encode images they saw of people at the marathon with the classification of potential terrorists. And though they confidently pointed out who, supposedly objectively, looked like “suspicious” characters, they had no evidence that these accused boys were the actual bombers (Henn and Cornish). Twitter users began to participate in the manhunt as well, claiming to have overheard police

speculations of the identity of the suspects. A tweet from the username @YourAnonNews blatantly put the names of supposed suspects on blast, saying: “Police on scanner identify the names of #BostonMarathon suspects in gunfight,



Suspect 1: Mike Mulugeta. Suspect 2: Sunil Tripathi” (Madrigal). Because of the authority such posts feigned, the *New York Post* then began to decode the public’s comments and opinions as sources of real evidence rather than unproven assumptions. Hall would say news organizations were operating within the dominant code (e.g. adopting the dominant-hegemonic position), and decoding the message seen from social media in terms of the reference code

through which it had been encoded (47). In a sense, the *New York Post* was operating in the sub-division of this dominant code, the “professional code,” that broadcasters often use when they “assume that the message they encode has already been signified in a hegemonic manner” (Hall 47). Here, Hall refers to the fact that the broadcasters must operate under their specific dominant political/social context while also reproducing the information at hand. Postmodernist Jean Baudrillard predicted such a scenario, where individuals face a new hyperreality in which the images literally replace the “real” (Croteau and Hoynes 230). In fact, the public often finds it difficult to distinguish between the image and reality. If the news stations are presenting readers with misleading information gathered from the public, how can the reader tell whether news stations are conveying credible truths?

Through Richard Lane’s “Jean Baudrillard,” we can more closely examine this concept of hyperreality in relation to terrorism. Lane describes how acts of terrorism should impact society in a seemingly straightforward manner, as they become a “preprogrammed event” to be analyzed and presented by the media as the events unfold based on “expected sequences” (123). However, as Baudrillard points out, when hyperreality is involved, the terrorist act is anything but neutral and is, rather, even more frightening. “Terrorist activity tests the limits of society, of its institutions of power and the way in which such institutions are located conceptually”

(Lane 123). Due to this media-focused world, the individual’s fear of the terrorist act is augmented by its depiction in media. Acts of terrorism occur frequently around the globe, and the American public seems to placidly accept them... until similar acts start occurring directly on American soil. So, though media has created a world in which audiences have almost grown accustomed to the horror of terrorism, audiences have also become excessively afraid of terror because of media’s portrayal of stories and bombardment of false images of reality.

Interestingly, this isn’t a recent trend; it has, in fact, been going on for decades. Lane describes an event during the Gulf War when CNN’s news channel asked a group of reporters “live” in the Gulf what was happening. The reporters revealed that they were watching CNN to find out themselves (Lane 95). He goes on to say, “This absurd moment reveals the detachment from the real, and the production of ‘reality’ with third-order simulation: news is generated by news, or the source of the news is also the news... News is producing the ‘reality’ of the war, not only for viewers, but also for those involved” (95). This statement was made in the context of the Gulf War as more of a fabricated news event, though it could also be true with respect to the War on Terrorism. Terrorism is a real thing, but has this hyperreality started to create more of a war than actually exists? The War on Terrorism has been exaggerated by media coverage, and the audience is taught to believe the messages they see because the

messages are coming from journalists whose job it is to search for and present the public with the “truth.” But as one news source copies another news source, how can one vet the information to verify its accuracy?

Many argue that if news organizations derive their information from public blogging or from another news channel, they are not practicing proper journalism. Martin Kaplan extended this critique: “cable news is not so good at: insight, context, depth, reflection, proportion, perspective, relevance, humility, information, analysis, *news*.” If Kaplan is right, then cable news has dwindled down to nothing but fluff pieces and chaotic news coverage. In fact, in the case of the Boston Marathon Bombing, Reddit users weren’t the only ones jumping to conclusions. The news station “CNN” prematurely supplied live coverage that resulted in haphazard reporting. Again, Twitter became a mass media outlet to inform people of transpiring events. As CNN’s “facts” were proven false — they prematurely reported false arrests — Twitter users started satirizing and mocking the station for its inability to set facts straight. For example:

- David A. Graham tweeted, “BREAKING: Fragile strands of CNN credibility.”
- Jonah Goldberg joked, “CNN: We have been assured the Millennium Falcon’s hyperdrive has been disabled.”
- Awful Announcing cynically quoted a CNN reporter as having said “the person

will be hopefully found because the United States isn’t that big.”

In an effort to relay news to their information-hungry audience as quickly as possible, news organizations don’t always get all the facts straight. And social networking has created a way for the public to openly identify these discrepancies. As a result, the public is able to operate through an oppositional code (Hall 49). Before the existence of Twitter and social networking, inaccurate news coverage by eager reporters had a better chance of being decoded in a negotiated manner. The audience could choose to take some of the information with a grain of salt, yet there was no public forum for people to instantly express disagreement. Today, readers and viewers are more able to discuss, negotiate and critique news through a public space that is, essentially, timeless. As a result, they can read unfolding events through a more oppositional code, discrediting news sources and lowering the credibility of broadcast organizations (Hall 49). CNN faced an abundant amount of ridicule and scrutiny over its inability to convey news properly and truthfully not only from viewers, but also from other reporters, such as conservative pundit Bill O’Reilly and comedian reporter John Stewart (Mass Tea Party). People’s opinion of CNN dropped, and, in a poll conducted by HuffPost/YouGov, it was voted the Least Believable News Station in response to the coverage during the Boston Bombing (Swanson). When viewers were asked whether the news on CNN was believable or not

believable, 36% chose not believable. This is significantly higher than the 22% who said ABC's coverage was not believable and the 23% who felt coverage on the conservative Fox network was not believable.

Although the public decodes these messages in an oppositional manner, it is still influenced by the ideas the media presents. Some people argue that media operates under a "hypodermic" model, in the sense that media is "injecting" a message into the public (Siegel 18 Feb. 2014). News surrounding the Boston Marathon Bombing was constantly thrust in the public eye and framed in such a way as to economically benefit those reporting, rather than to maintain a high reporting standard. Kaplan writes:

*"Journalism, especially television journalism, has tremendous ability to control the tone of what it covers... When it comes to holding audiences' attention, the only thing better than suspense is suspense about carnage, and the only thing better than suspense about carnage is suspense about the apocalypse. Terrorists, especially stateless terrorists, depend on the media's addiction to fear and crisis (143)."*

Sometimes, the coverage of events preceding the bombing didn't even pertain to the investigation of the bombing. News organizations took only a piece of this horrific event and created fluff pieces. For instance, ABC News produced a segment focusing on the negative feedback that *Rolling Stone* magazine generated for depicting the suspected bomber, Dzhokhar

Tsarnaev, in a relaxed manner on the cover of an issue. In effect, ABC engendered a buzz that focused on a minor debate relative to the bombing event as a whole. Kaplan describes this as an example of how "think tanks *manufacture* debates..." (141), referring to television news organizations' tendency to create the illusion of controversy around a subject, thereby neglecting to present all the evidence. This ABC news segment claimed that placement on the cover of *Rolling Stone* is "An honor reserved for people with one name; Elvis, Madonna, Bono, and now a 19-year-old alleged terrorist" (ABC News). However, that is quite a narrow statement. In fact, *Rolling Stone* has published a variety of covers exhibiting people who aren't musicians, some of them quite controversial, as well: American Revolution 1969, Charles Manson, Narc Agent Gerrit Van Raam, Cast of Beverly Hills 90210, and Marilyn Manson, to name a few ("Rolling Stone Covers"). ABC pointed out that two major drugstore chains wouldn't sell the magazine and showed live footage of people appalled by the cover. It also claimed that *Rolling Stone* was treating the suspected terrorist as a "star" and glorifying him. The news segment barely noted *Rolling Stone's* argument that it was only trying to appeal to its audience and further examine the complexities of this event and subsequent trial (ABC News). It also neglected to mention the focus of the article on Tsarnaev, which was to demonstrate that "there are no warning signs for terrorism" and "that even nice, polite, sweet-looking

young kids” could perform an act of terror (Taibbi). In fact, many other reporters praised the piece. Reporter Matt Taibbi, said, “The story Janet wrote about the modern terrorist is that you can’t see him coming.”

The comments on the uploaded YouTube version of this segment clearly showed the many ways the audience decoded this reporting. Some were of the opinion that it was wrong for *Rolling Stone* to print such a cover photo:

- Liquidmen commented: “Bottom line. This kid killed, maimed and took limbs from people. This kid ran from the police, ran over his brother and shot a policeman. This person confessed to performing the act of the bombs and then later re-canted his statement. This kid is a coward and an idiot. Why do we glorify morons in this country and then expect our school system to generate intelligent young adults?”
- Lee Sir said, “If I were mayor of Boston I would ban Rolling Stone magazine.”

Other viewers noted that the debate about the appropriateness of placing the alleged terrorist on the cover was somewhat insignificant in the larger scheme of things:

- TheRockyCrowe wrote, “As I ALREADY SAID: Hollywood glamorizes such things ALL THE

TIME, ie; The Fast and Furious franchise encourages the idea illegal street racing = awesome life. Even old school movies like Bonnie & Clyde you could say encourage the ‘exciting lifestyle’ of being a national criminal. This cover isn’t that big of a deal – and honestly, if your mind is that EASILY affected by the media/glamour to the point everything they do affects how YOU want to live/think – than [sic] you need help.”

- Normster1000 asked, “How many covers have you seen with Osama Bin Laden on them? ...exactly, this is meaningless. Now, if it had been Home and Garden or Dog Fancy, you bet!”

Clearly, the public’s eagerness and appetite for instant news is creating a dilemma for news channels in general. News organizations are exploiting terrorist events for the ease with which they lend themselves to quick coverage. Although there is a correlation between news delivered to the public quickly and credibly, it is often an inverse one. As one can see by considering the Boston Marathon Bombings, what comes fast isn’t necessarily true. Although audiences have the ability to decode these messages with an objective eye, or at least a negotiated one, they instead fall into the trap of listening to the dominant hegemonic code until others point out its flaws.

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## **PART 3**

# Piracy in the Digital Age

The Illusion of Freedom





# The Impact of Internet Policy On Human Rights

By **Cynthia Chin**

A right is defined as a moral or legal entitlement to have or obtain something or to act in a certain way. According to Tom Campbell, “rights affirm equal human worth...and are seen as providing protection against the abuses of the powers” (2006, p. 4). The relatively recent rise of the Internet and cyber space has given rise to a whole new set of rights specific to the Internet. On the Internet, rights regarding freedom of expression, copyright and access to knowledge, access, privacy and data protection, and security and computer misuse have been central issues of debate.

## **Freedom of Expression**

According to Eric Barendt (2007), a professor at University College London, freedom of speech is crucial to discovering truths, encourages citizen participation in democratic processes, is central to individual freedom, and is important for expression any suspicion of the government. Most will agree that freedom of expression is an important right for every human to have. Specifically, freedom of speech has been regarded as a right in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in

Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Amongst other rights, freedom of expression is one of the most ubiquitously fundamental rights, though the respect for this right may differ across different countries. However, when this right is applied to the Internet, the definition changes and the lines are blurred between what is considered freedom of speech and what is not. For example, Douglas Vick (2005) argues that it is important to collectively control the dissemination of hate speech on the Internet, while others, like the United States, believe that hate speech still falls within the definition of freedom of expression and will not create any legislation that violates the First Amendment. Regarding policies and regulation to protect freedom of speech, we can refer to Lawrence Lessig’s four modalities of regulation, which maintains that the Internet can be regulated either by law, norms, the market, or code (Murray). Through law, the government would only have a negative obligation to respect freedom of speech on the Internet, only taking action when necessary (in, for example, hate speech cases), following the

United Kingdom’s current “notice and takedown” policy (Freedman, 2012). As freedom of speech has been so engrained in us for the past hundreds of years, community norms, for the most part, regulate freedom of speech on the Internet. If, however, this right is being abused (by, for example, hate activists and child pornographers), filtering can be used to block harmful material. In the United Kingdom, a program exists called Cleanfeed that automatically blocks child pornography websites without positive action (Mcintyre, 2008). These filtering programs can be controlled by intermediaries (such as Internet Service Providers), without human intervention required as filtering programs would block websites automatically.

### **Copyright and Access to Knowledge**

Copyright is defined as an “exclusive right granted to producers of new creative works” (Moss, 2012). Copyright infringement, then, is unauthorized usage of copyrighted material. This has become an issue because piracy, the reproduction and redistribution of copyrighted material, has become easier and easier to commit. In addition, copyrighting material is in conflict with both freedom of speech and access to knowledge. Neil Netanel argues that copyright burdens speech as we often “copy or build upon another’s words, images, or music to convey our own ideas effectively...we cannot do that if a copyright holder withholds permissions” (2008, p. 2). Copyright is also in conflict with Article 27 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights regarding

access to knowledge, which states: “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits” (Human Rights, 2008).

In regulating copyright, we can refer back to Lessig’s four modalities, all of which can be used for regulation of copyright laws. Through law, though it has been ineffective thus far, the copyright law in the United Kingdom holds “producers and distributors of parody, pistache and caricature potentially liable for copyright infringement” (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 4). In addition, individual users can also be fined for copyright infringement. Similarly, patents, which protect new inventions, are protected by law and are therefore protected from free open-source software developers. Efforts have also been made to teach copyright in classrooms and campaigns against piracy targeting youth have been shown in order to prevent future copyright infringement (Edwards et al., 2012). More successfully, there have been efforts to regulate copyright through market with promotions of legal platforms of getting the same material (such as Netflix and iTunes). Lastly, specific code and computer programming have been used to regulate, though unsuccessfully, by engineering files so that they cannot be shared (Edwards et al., 2012).

### **Access**

When discussing access regarding the Internet, it is important to understand that “access” does not simply refer to entry or ability to go online. It also refers to

having the knowledge necessary to navigate the Internet, having the physical capabilities, and even owning a device to connect. The ultimate goal is digital inclusion, but this cannot be achieved without access and infrastructure (Helsper, 2011). In attempt at digital inclusion, it was thought that developing faster Internet

would make slower connections more affordable, thus allowing more people to connect to the Internet. But, as Helsper argues, “universal roll

out high speed broadband does not automatically lead to increased use for all” (2011, p. 15). In addition, there is also a digital divide between developed and developing countries. Net neutrality is also an issue of access. Linked to freedom of expression, net neutrality is a “concept that suggests ISPs or other user access networks should not advocate restrictions or regulations on content, specific Internet site, or Internet platforms” (Stover, 2010, p. 75).

While those against net neutrality argue that discrimination would help to offer a better quality and wider range of service, those in favour of net neutrality argue that discrimination will have more incentive to make deals with ISPs rather than to make better quality services (Stover, 2010). Legislation has already

been introduced in several countries, in favour of net neutrality.

Lastly there is the issue of access regarding people with disabilities. According to the Web Accessibility Initiative, their goal is to “achieve accessibility for the broadest possible range of users that is compatible with any

A study by Edwards and Brown found that Facebook profiles contain “almost every category of data deemed especially ‘sensitive’ by EU law”

assistive technologies they might use” (WAI, 2012). In discussing access, we must take into account those who may not physically be able to access the Internet, such as

people with disabilities. According to the Employers’ Forum on Disability (2008) over 10% of the United Kingdom is considered to have a disability. With such a large population of disabled people, government regulation is needed to create a standard for all websites to ensure that disabled people will be able to access it. Although some may argue that the Internet is for the most part self-regulated, and self-regulated access for disabled people has been working for some services thus far, a standard will allow disabled people to visit any site an able person could.

### **Privacy and Data Protection**

Privacy on the Internet has recently become a prevalent issue as users continue to increasingly input more and more personal data on the Internet. Many online companies that deal with a large

database of personal information, such as social networking websites (Facebook for example), online banking, and email have been central to the issue of privacy.

Facebook in particular has been popular for study regarding privacy, with the website hosting users who post a great deal of sensitive information about themselves. A study by Edwards and Brown found that Facebook profiles contain “almost every category of data deemed especially ‘sensitive’ by EU law” (2009, p. 4). In addition, there has been controversy over the usage of the data—in particular, Facebook can sell information to advertising networks and intermediaries in order to advertise effectively or to employers in search of information about potential employees (Bermejo, 2011).

Although it can be argued that users input data themselves, Internet users should have the right to privacy. With third parties collecting information about users through click streams and cookies, in addition data shared publicly, the Internet has become a place that is no longer safe for users.

Legislation has been created, however, to protect users’ privacy. In the United Kingdom, the Data Protection Act of 1998 was created to protect personal data, data relating to a living individual, and sensitive data with the key principle being that “personal data shall be processed fairly and lawfully” (Murray, 2010). Code and computer programming can also be used to regulate privacy on the Internet—settings could explain more to users about privacy with default settings being more private (as Facebook is currently less private by

default) and data could have expiration dates, being deleted automatically after expiry and preventing outdated information from remaining in databases for an extended period of time (Edwards and Brown, 2009).

### **Security and Computer Misuse**

In recent years, as Internet security has advanced, so have malware (viruses, worms, and Trojans) and botnets (which is a created “network of infected computers”) (Moss, 2012). These viruses, worms, and Trojans “exploit weaknesses in installed software to gain control of an Internet-connected machine and access data entered by and available to users” (Brown et al, p. 2). Malware is not the only security issue. According to Milton Mueller, “governments can and do get access to just about any information they way...on the Internet, the limits on their data surveillance capacity are governed more by technical limitations than by law” (2010, p. 176). So, with so many potential dangers on the Internet, how can we regulate security of the Internet? Referring back to Lessig’s four modalities, it is possible to create legislation to make the Internet a safer space, but, as Zittrain (2009) argues, it could threaten the Internet’s unique quality of generativity. On the contrary, the House of Lords, Science and Technology Committee (2007) compared Security Policy to the process of purifying water in California, implying that intermediaries should be responsible for security and not individual users. Most importantly, however, it is imperative and more effective than assigning responsibility

to intermediaries for Internet users to be educated about security and how they can protect themselves on the Internet.

### Conclusion

As more and more of us are moving online as technology advances, Internet rights have become an important topic of debate. In the words of the Internet Rights and Principles Coalition, the Internet “present[s] tremendous opportunities to enable individuals, communities, and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life” (2010, p. 1). With the Internet being such an

extensive source of knowledge, access to it has become the most important issue. Without the right of access to the Internet, none of the other rights apply. In addition, it has become an increasingly significant issue with the digital divide between developing and developed countries getting bigger. However, with the Charter of Human Rights and Principles for the Internet and the Association of Progressive Communication’s Internet Rights Charter, we are beginning to move towards a cyber space that is safe, welcomes all opinions, inspires innovation, and facilitates idea exchange.

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# Digital Piracy should be Exploited, not Abolished

By Christopher Risdén

Every Sunday night at 10 pm—immediately after *Game of Thrones*—people begin scouring the Internet for a free method to watch the latest episode. Just last weekend, the *Game of Thrones* Season 4 premiere shattered piracy records; over 1,000,000 people illegally downloaded the episode in just half a day (Schwartz).

The only legitimate way to tune into HBO weekly is a premium cable subscription bundle which costs over \$80/month — which is too much to pay for some. HBO does not provide any viable viewing options for people without a premium cable subscription so pirating the show is the only option for many fans.

Nick Schlies, a 20 year old *Game of Thrones* fan from Pleasanton, says, "I love [*Game of Thrones*], but I can't afford to pay for HBO in college. I torrent the show illegally because I have no choice" (Schlies).

A major problem for creative industries, torrenting is a popular form of peer to peer file sharing which allows for large amounts of data to be transferred over the Internet. Torrents download small bits of files simultaneously from separate online sources, meaning it only takes a few minutes to download a full-length movie.

Torrents aren't inherently illegal, but the use of the technology to distribute copyrighted materials is.

Today, internet piracy is at an all time high. Eighty percent of the 16 billion videos downloaded last year were illegally distributed, with an estimated loss to the industry at \$250 billion per year. A June 2013 study by Columbia revealed that 45% of U.S. citizens actively pirate media; that figure skyrockets to 70% when examining the younger-than-30 demographic (Karaganis).

Alan Horn, chairman of Walt Disney Studios and producer of the successful Harry Potter and Dark Knight series, says, "piracy is killing our industry because it takes money out of the hands of the workers." Hollywood studies estimate the cost of digital piracy to the industry at \$250 billion per year. Other estimates from independent reports paint a less extreme picture, estimating the loss to be between \$6 to \$20.5 billion annually.

Advocates of internet piracy argue that the \$250 billion figure is highly inflated. Studio executives assume that each illegal download or view amounts to a purchase, but pirates dispute the logistics of doing that. They point out that digital pirating is significantly different from physical theft

because there isn't always a lost sale since digital piracy doesn't actually cause a physical copy of a DVD to go missing. In some cases, piracy can substitute for a legitimate transaction. It is a lost sale when someone who would have spent money on media chooses instead to download it on BitTorrent. However in other cases, the person pirating the movie or song may have never purchased the item, and the studio doesn't lose any profits.

"Despite the Motion Picture Association of America's claim that online piracy is devastating the movie industry, Hollywood achieved record-breaking global box office revenues of \$35 billion in 2012, a 6% increase over 2011," reports the London School of Economics (LSE) in its recent media policy brief about piracy. It can be argued that the 6% increase in revenue is a direct result of inflation and rising ticket prices, but there has also been an increase in number attending and not just revenue.

This impressive growth hasn't stopped the major film studios from pushing hard for stronger intellectual property enforcement such as the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) that was pushed for in 2011. The core function of SOPA was to incentivize the production of creative works, because the argument is that filesharing has caused declining output. However, this is hard to prove. Looking at the new release statistics, compiled by the industry statistics site Box Office Mojo, the numbers show an average of 558 releases per year over the past decade, and 578 in just the past five years. The average for the

previous decade is 472 releases per year. It seems both profits and productivity are steadily increasing.

It is worth noting that the LSE did not find a significant correlation between enforcing a three strikes policy in France for digital piracy offenders and increased spending on media. "It showed that digital piracy did not displace legal purchases in digital format and that the majority of [media] consumed illegally would not have been consumed if not freely available," reports the LSE.

There's a reason *Game of Thrones* is the most widely pirated show in the world. It is incredibly difficult for many to subscribe to HBO. If the rapidly growing user base of Netflix means one thing, it's that consumers want a streamlined service without the bells and whistles a premium cable package comes with. Jeff Bewkes, CEO of Time Warner (the parent company of HBO), says that "*Game of Thrones* [being] the most pirated show in the world... is better than an Emmy. Our experience is that it leads to more paying subscribers."

Columbia University corroborates this opinion in their report. They write, "[pirates] buy as many legal DVDs, CDs, and subscription media services as their non-file-sharing, Internet-using counterparts. They also display marginally higher willingness to pay." *Game of Thrones* is an example of this. Despite being the most illegally downloaded show in the world, it has also broken many DVD sales records - moving 244,000 units on the very first day of sales for last season's



collection, making *Game of Thrones* the fastest moving release ever.

Because of the digital nature of these goods, they are infinitely reproducible at no cost. If someone was never going to buy the good anyway, they cannot represent lost value to the producer's revenues, but add value by talking to others about product experience. Karen Coxson, an Oxford researcher, claims that, "consumer 'buzz' is hugely important for sales success, studies have shown, and piracy drives up buzz without the need for extra marketing."

Not only does piracy create hype, there is also clear evidence that pirates will pay money for products that they believe are worth the money. The problem the entertainment industry is facing with digital piracy is not the piracy itself, but what it signifies—that customers place less value on the goods they download than the studios do. This creates a deadweight loss in the market, because the firms are not supplying their product (DVDs and movies) at the competitive equilibrium price. Because firms are trying to charge above the equilibrium price, the price at which value is maximized for both consumer and producer, value is being left on the table and equilibrium has not been reached in the market.



The Internet, by way of torrents, has provided the means for consumers to circumvent the media sold by the entertainment industry. The widespread use of torrents has demonstrated that consumers are unhappy with prices. They are voting with their dollars, and the fact that their dollars aren't being spent on this media should be a sign to studios that their business model is faulty. Going back to

France's three strike policy, the LSE found that after its implementation people began switching to more convenient platforms that stream movies and music.

Certain American companies have already proven that this paradigm of distribution works.

Companies such as Netflix and Spotify are the future of the entertainment industry. Netflix charges a low monthly fee for users to view the vast library of movies that it offers, while Spotify streams a large library of music to users for free -- offering a premium subscription for users who don't want to listen to advertisements. This has proven to be a very successful model, and Netflix has experienced a 1465% growth in its stock over the past 5 years, while Spotify has doubled revenues for two years straight now.

The problem is that Hollywood studios are notorious for having an archaic stance on new technology. One does not need to go far back to find studios fighting the

advent of VHS recording because it would impact their bottom line. In the Audio Home Recording Act of 1992 ("The Betamax Case"), the Supreme Court ruled, much to Universal City Studio's dismay, that recording individual copies of complete television shows is fair use and legal.

Maybe this time around, film studios can learn from their mistakes and try to embrace the new technology as it comes. Digital piracy is a sign that the times are changing, and instead of fighting the winds of change, studios should learn to harness it, as Netflix has done.

As the London School of Economics' put it, "when both [the creative industries and citizens] can exploit the full potential of the Internet, this will maximize innovative content creation for the benefit of all stakeholders." The entertainment industry is experiencing record highs, but it is still in position to profit even more. When the unmet demand in the market is finally met, these businesses will thrive more than ever. Digital piracy has been around since the beginning of the Internet, it's time for industries to exploit internet culture and adapt to the times.

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**PART 4**

**Representations of  
Feminism and Sexuality**

**The Illusion of Diversity**



# They Went To There: *30 Rock*, the Human Bra, and the Struggles of Women in the Workplace

By **Pailin Srukhsit**

*"I have a suspicion that the definition of 'crazy' in show business is a woman who keeps talking even after no one wants to fuck her anymore."*

-Tina Fey, *Bossypants*

*"This is what I tell young women who ask me for career advice. People are going to try and trick you. To make you feel that you are in competition with one another. 'You're up for a promotion. If they go with a woman, it'll be between you and Barbara.' Don't be fooled. You're not in competition with other women. You're in competition with everyone."*

-Tina Fey, *Bossypants*

Rich, complex, nuanced, and interesting representations of women in the workplace have flooded-- excuse me, trickled into our media landscape since the inception of film and television. Granted that the allowance of women's entry into the capitalist workforce has been relatively recent, explorations into the subjective subtleties of the female experience in the professional setting have been sparse and simple, leaving much room for growth within the existing collection of characterizations. Tina Fey, through both her published writing and *30 Rock* (2006 – 2013), the show that Fey created, executive produced, co-wrote, and starred in, actively works to intelligently insert layers of complexity into this milieu of representations. By continuously working

to subvert her own position as a powerful, influential player in the entertainment industry through the characterization of her on-screen avatar, Liz Lemon, Fey creates opportunities to critically comment upon not only the way in which women are represented in the media in accordance to today's hegemonic ideologies, but she also works to challenge and subvert these stereotypes through the narrative devices of parody, self-reflexivity, and representations of hyper-reality. Furthermore, both through the text of her show and *Bossypants* (2011), her autobiography, she actively engages in discourse concerning the complex systems of power through and within which women must negotiate their place in the work-sphere. While critics praise the show's progressive efforts and

intelligent, rich content, they also mediate the dissonance between Liz Lemon's characterization and the reality of Tina Fey's professional stature.

*30 Rock* operates within the United States' current socio-historical context of an ideologically neoliberal capitalist society within which hegemony may be defined as white patriarchy. Modern capitalism arose out of the European 14th century ideological shift that Silvia Federici calls the sexual division of labour. Reproductive work, labour that involved domestic work such as cooking and caring for the family, becomes devalued and feminized in the emerging profit-based society. On the other hand, productive work – labour that is directed towards producing commodities to sell for money – becomes prioritized and masculinized. As such, modern capitalism descends from this long tradition of men dominating the work-for-monetary-gain sphere while women have not been regarded as valued labourers in the capitalist economy. In modern American society, it has become more common and culturally acceptable for women to participate in the formal workforce... yet patriarchal structures are still very much at work (pun intended) and a woman in a position of professional leadership is still a rarity. The characterization of Liz Lemon as a head writer on her own network television show not only provides a progressive representation of a woman in the workplace, but that the field of comedy serves as the context of Liz's power is significant – comedy as a profession has

traditionally been defined and delegated as a boy's club.<sup>3</sup> (The question of "are women funny?" and its implicit assumptions are only now beginning to be refuted as preposterously groundless and biting sexist.) However, the show must also navigate within our era of post-feminism, defined by Eleanor Patterson as "the neoliberal assumption that patriarchal structures have been superseded (Brooks, 1997)," and women have now achieved equality in all spheres of life, including the workplace. This notion is challenged metaphorically via storylines and representations on *30 Rock* and directly by Fey herself through her autobiography/memoir, *Bossypants* (2011).

Through the depictions of female protagonists on the show, *30 Rock* engages in discourse about the struggles that women face in the workplace and, more specifically, the entertainment industry; the text allows for a negotiation of meanings on the level of reception as the show's characters often challenge hegemony and authority but also sometimes align themselves with the dominant structures of patriarchy and capitalism. *30 Rock* descends from a short line of female-created and/or starred network television sitcoms, from *The Goldbergs* ((CBS, 1949 - 1951, NBC 1952 - 1954) also written by Gertrude Berg) and *I Love Lucy* (CBS, 1951 - 1957) to the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970 - 1977), *Roseanne* (ABC, 1988 - 1997), and *Ellen* (ABC, 1994 - 1998). Fey carves out her own space within this lineage of female media- and ideology-producers, creating, writing, and

executive producing her own show. But, she does this with a twist – not only does she provide a representation of working women, but they are representations of women that *parody* the conditions and circumstances of Fey’s own line of work: the entertainment industry. By centering Liz Lemon as the head writer of her own network television sketch comedy show, Fey artistically explores the nuances of her past experiences as a head writer at SNL as well as critically engages in questions of workplace inequality – all while literally running the show as the head of *30 Rock*.

The show satirizes the rarity of a woman’s position of leadership in the field of comedy and on network television most notably in the episode, “Lee Marvin vs. Derek Jeter” (Season 4, Episode 17). In the episode, Toofer (Keith Powell) quits his job as a writer for *TGS* when he discovers that his employment is simply a product of affirmative action. Liz refuses Pete’s (Scott Adsit) plea to convince Toofer to return, stating that she respects his decision; she goes on to soapbox that “as a woman in this business,” to the animated groans of her coworkers, “and in this world, I have never received special treatment in work or in love. So why should anybody else!” Liz is humbly proved wrong when Pete reveals to Liz at the end of the episode that *TGS* was only picked up by NBC because of the negative backlash they got after airing the show, *Bitch Hunter*, in which a white man (Will Ferrell) run around hunting women with a rifle. Upon realizing that her job as head writer for her own comedy show has also been a product of

affirmative action, Liz woefully concludes, “I shouldn’t be here,” to which Pete replies, “This is America. None of us are supposed to be here.” The instance calls into question Liz’s legitimacy and merit as a writer, but more importantly it draws attention to the fact that her profession is so strongly dominated by the structure of white patriarchy that the network must actively seek out minorities to hire to bring diversity into the production process. If Liz feels like she isn’t supposed to be there, who’s to say that her employers are? Fey also directly engages with the absurdity of the inequality within the field of comedy in her autobiography, *Bossypants*: “only in comedy...does an obedient white girl from the suburbs count as diversity.”

While Fey and her onscreen avatar, Liz Lemon, occupy this privileged, powerful position as a producers of culture in the field of television, both use their stature in different ways to critique the entertainment industry and the representation of women within it; in the episode “*TGS Hates Women*” (Season 5, Episode 16), Joan of Snark, a feminist website, posts an article entitled “Why Does *TGS* Hate Women?” The article lambasts Liz’s show for her regressive representations of women in their various sketches. Cut to Jenna Maroney (Jane Krakowski) playing various powerful women - Hillary Clinton, Amelia Earheart - rendered crazy and unable to perform their jobs the second they get their period. These depictions draw upon the stereotype that women are incapable of rationality and especially vulnerable to the negative effects of bodily hormones. In

attempted defense, Liz begins to explain that they are “an ironic re-appropriation...” before giving up her explanation. *TGS* then, represents a media text that perpetuates hegemonic notions about women. Fey, though, utilizes comedy much more effectively: in the middle of expressing to her fellow writers and Jenna that “this started as a show for women starring women. At the very least we should be elevating the way women are perceived in society and—AOUUL MY PERIOD! YOU’RE ALL FIRED!” Liz theatrically collapses to the ground. Here, Fey conducts an *actual* re-appropriation of laughter – she invites us to laugh not in agreement with this patriarchal image of women, but to find humour in the absurdity of the stereotype.

As the episode progresses, Liz decides to hire another woman to her staff as a guest writer, opening the plot up to further

explorations of female workplace stereotypes and struggles. Abby Flynn (Cristin Milioti), the self-infantilizing, hypersexual, male-attention-seeking writer that Liz hires, creates tension in the *TGS* workspace as a jealous Jenna perceives her presence as a threat to her own narcissistic greed for attention (Jenna herself embodying a comically caricatured stereotype of the celebrity woman). “No,

Jenna, that’s exactly the problem,” says Liz, trying to discourage the actress from her plans to “destroy” Abby. “Men infantilize women and women tear each other down.” Fey elaborates in *Bossypants* as she reflects upon her career experiences that often times in the workplace women are encouraged to believe the manipulative notion that they are in competition with other women, encouraged to fight amongst one another; Fey reveals the social practices that work to maintain the stagnation of female progress in the labour force.



Tina Fey as Liz Lemon of *30 Rock*

Furthermore, Abby’s exaggerated hypersexualization (dressing in tight-fitting tank tops that expose much of her cleavage, giddily volunteering to sit on Frank’s (Judah Friedlander) lap during her first writer’s meeting, trying to get Liz to

make out with her to get the attention of a homeless man) highlight the current pressures on women working in comedy today. As Alessandra Stanley examines in her article for *Vanity Fair*: “now a female comedian has to be pretty - even sexy - to get a laugh.” Liz assumes that it is “pressure from society,” and the desire to have her talents recognized (as Flynn had only gained internet attention on Joan of



Snark when she became a “sexy baby” comedienne) that has influenced Abby’s behavior. Rebecca Traister observes about the popular reception of female comediennes, “those women who don’t make their sexuality the most salient part of their personae get ignored or dismissed,” elucidating the real-life parallels to Abby’s perceived motivation. However the jig is up by the episode’s end as a good-intentioned Liz forces Abby to reveal the true reason behind her performance of femininity; Liz is proven disastrously wrong when Flynn angrily confesses that her need to impersonate a new identity constitutes her survival method for escaping an abusive ex-husband. The reveal suggests that such social struggles are often more complicated than people may think and illuminates that structures of patriarchal dominance affect the social reality of working women in complex ways.

Further engaging in the discourse of representation, the show’s embodied characterization of Liz Lemon counters conventional ways in which women are represented on television and in comedy. Directly challenging the notion that comedic women must be beautiful and utilize their sexuality to gain professional success, *30 Rock* characterizes Liz as decidedly *not* physically attractive; the times when she takes off her clothes are comically met with others’ disgust, like in “¡Que Sorpresa!” (Season 5, Episode 13) – when Lemon does a mock pregnant photoshoot. As she observes Liz posing for photos, Carmen Chao (Vanessa Minnillo)

suddenly panics and yells, “She’s grabbing oil- Owen, run!” and literally runs out of the room to avoid seeing more. The male gaze also protects its eyes from the sight of a naked Liz in “Dance Like Nobody’s Watching” (Season 6, Episode 1) when she unzips her sweater to reveal her Christmas dickey and a repulsed Jack (Alec Baldwin) quickly jabs at elevator buttons to escape from the monstrosity that is Liz in her bra. Furthermore, while often times “television’s female protagonists[’] personal ambitions and pleasures are cast to the wayside as the goal of ‘getting the guy’ trumps all,” Jace Lacob for *Newsweek Global* praises *30 Rock*’s “modern and forward thinking” portrayal of an “independent woman in the workplace.

While Liz has several boyfriends...her one true love was her job.” Even Liz’s almost frightening love for food rivals her desire for a relationship with a man, as evidenced in “Sandwich Day” (Season 2, Episode 14) when, chasing Floyd (Jason Sudeikis) at the airport, Liz refuses to compromise between her pursuit and her sandwich, devouring her sub so she can pass through security. Vesey and Lambert note the particular significance of this scene as “women rarely eat on network television,” and “the feminist pleasure in this scene resides in Lemon’s refusal to trade in self-gratification for heterosexual romance.”

Critics often note the ease with which Liz Lemon may be confused with Tina Fey. Vesey and Lambert note the difficulty of wrenching “the character from the actress,” while Brian Hiatt observes a level

of complicity in Fey's willingness to share similarities with her character: "I wouldn't want her to do anything that I wouldn't do," Fey has said. However, where Fey is tremendously successful within the industry (with *Celebrity Net Worth* calculating her net worth to \$45 million and cite her as making \$500,000 per episode of *30 Rock*, her show showered with awards over the course of its run, garnering trophies from such associations as the Writers Guild of America, the Television Critics Association, Screen Actors Guild, the Primetime Emmys, and the Golden Globes, as well as being acknowledged by Jacob as "a critical darling, known for its smart, tongue-in-cheek writing and acerbic wit"), Fey and the other creative forces behind *30 Rock* consistently work to subvert and contest Liz Lemon's authority within the workplace, creating dissonance between her own stature and her avatar's characterization. In the process, they explore the struggles that working women face in the professional sphere. Where Fey enjoys the respect and admiration of her colleagues and superiors, Liz frequently struggles to obtain the respect of the co-workers. In "Let's Stay Together" (Season 5, Episode 3), Lemon expresses to Jack her frustrations with her fellow writers' recurring prank of putting fake, insulting name-tags on her door, "I love a good joke, but I am their boss and at a certain point, it crosses a line." As a woman occupying a position of leadership in the workplace, Liz struggles to get both her male and female subordinates to treat her with respect

(whereas Jack, her male superior, is often treated with deference, most notably by his assistant, Jonathan (Maulik Pancholy)). In "Rosemary's Baby," (Season 2, Episode 4) Jack presents Liz with the GE Followship Award, "presented annually to the woman—sorry, person — who best exemplifies a follower." The award and Jack's Freudian slip satirize societal expectations for female submissiveness and the ways in which social institutions reward and reinforce such behavior. (The award is also an ironic subversion of Liz's workplace status, as Fey in real life is often cited for blazing the trail for women hoping achieve success within the entertainment industry: "one of the leading voices in a new generation of comediennes." Liz at first rejects the labeling as a follower, but when Jack informs her that the award comes with \$10,000, she immediately and proudly accepts without hesitation, poking fun at the notion that in this age of capitalism, "the higher people climb in corporatized media production, the more likely they will be compromised by economic security.")

Fey and co. even challenge Liz's authority to mediate representations of women of other races, highlighting the particularly difficult hardships encountered by women of color who often do not control representations of their ethnicities in the media. Trying to get Angie (Sherri Shepherd) to convince Tracy (Tracy Morgan), supposedly on sabbatical in Africa, to come back to *TGS*, Liz impersonates Jordan in the episode, "Queen of Jordan" (Season 5, Episode 17). She affects his speech and mannerisms

with the lines like, “damn woman, I wanna make love to yo’ neck!” and “damn you Liz Lemon—” before Angie, unamused, chastises her not to do impressions of other races. Liz gives her cause for indignance again when she catches her writing an email to Tracy pretending to be Angie: “...come home now. Sho’ nuff, Angie.” Angie eyes Liz after reading this directly back to her. “Sho’ nuff??” she says to the head writer, with a “really? Seriously?” tone of voice. As a white woman who holds the position of being a producer of content within the culture industry, she has the power of being able to mediate for popular consumption representations of other races and ethnicities and create their representations based on her gaze and point of view. Liz is embarrassingly put in her place though when forced to take responsibility for her mediations face-to-face to a rightfully disapproving Angie who scolds her for her offenses.

30 *Rock* actively engages in discourse about the complex structures of dominance that work within the field of the entertainment, not only subverting hegemonic ideas about women, but also making fun of the dominant structures within which it operates. Fey and her co-writers jab at everything from advertising (Liz looking into the camera and asking 30 *Rock*’s viewers, “Can we have our money now?” after a plug for Verizon in “Somebody to Love” (Season 2, Episode 6)), capitalistic greed (when Jack proclaims in the episode, “Black Tie” (Season 1, Episode 12) that “money can’t buy

happiness. It IS happiness.”), and even network television and Alec Baldwin’s professional merit (when Jack, trying to convince Tracy to come back to *TGS* for once and for all, monologues.

“Do TV and no one will ever take you seriously again. It doesn’t matter how big a movie star you are, even if you had the kind of career where you walked away from a blockbuster franchise or worked with Meryl Streep or Anthony Hopkins, made important movies about things like civil rights or Pearl Harbor, stole films with supporting roles and then turned around and blew them away on Broadway. None of that will matter once you do television. You could win every award in sight. Be the biggest thing on the small screen and you’ll still get laughed out of the Vanity Fair Oscar party by Greg Kinnear. Tracy, your career hit rock bottom the first time you decided to do *TGS*. You want it to hit rock bottom again? Go on network television.” “100: Parts 1 & 2” (Season 5, Episode 20).

Tina Fey truly is the “human bra” that Liz claims to be, a woman in the sub-profession of comedy as well as within the larger context of the entertainment industry who not only supports the advancement of women in society, but paves the way for other women to follow in her footsteps as one of the most powerful people (amongst other women and men) working in film and television today.

She brings feminist issues to the forefront in clever, complex, funny and engaging ways, providing a cornucopia of different, dynamic representations of women on television. A few critics highlight some of the troubling aspects of these characterizations, such as the moments when Liz “easily cows to the pressures of patriarchy,” as discussed by Vesey and Lambert, but these very contradictions open up the text to differing interpretations and negotiations of meaning. *30 Rock* engages in a complex process of mixing progressive and regressive comedy, talking about serious topics in absurd ways, confusing the

distinctions between high and low culture – providing audiences with a rich source of material to make sense of in different ways, as well as think about complex issues from many viewpoints and perspectives.

In doing so, Fey and her fellow productive forces behind *30 Rock* help to elevate the medium of television as a site of contested, conflicting, contradictory, complex struggles for meaning and representation, and in doing so, compliment their viewers in their assumption that they are both fully capable of such intelligent engagement and enjoy such an active spectatorship.

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# The Female Predator: Lesbianism in Pre- and Post-Code Hollywood Films

By **Daisy Rogozinsky**

The primary question I considered in embarking upon my research was “how did lesbian representation in sound film change before and after the implementation of the Production Code Administration in 1934?” Originally, I’d thought that there would be clear differences, with pre-Code lesbian films having a significantly different amount or type of lesbian representation than post-Code films. However, throughout my research, I discovered that such a difference didn’t exist; that, in fact, it wasn’t until far later in the 20th century that lesbians were explicitly identified in film and treated as positive characters on (more of) a regular basis. What became more interesting to me than lesbian representations’ relationship to the Hays/Breen Production Code Administration was the ideological implications of the ways in which lesbians were coded and shown, if at all. In this paper, I will trace the position of previous scholarship on homosexuality in film, discussing the reason I disagree with them almost completely. I will follow a brief historical account of the history of censorship in the early sound period, particularly concerning the Production

Code Administration, with an attempt to explain why its implementation didn’t have much of an effect on lesbian representation. Finally, I will conduct a close reading of some canonically “lesbian” films of the 30s, particularly *Dracula’s Daughter*, concluding that both before and after 1934, lesbian characters, behavior, and desire were either dismissed, framed as something to be fought against, or both.

In a quick review of existing scholarship about homosexual and lesbian representation in the 30s and 40s, I quickly discovered a preoccupation with volume or amount of representation – almost a desire to categorize as many films as possible as “lesbian.” My research consisted primarily of reading secondhand sources making these kinds of arguments and watching the films they refer to in order to ascertain whether or not I agreed with their categorization. I followed this up with rewatching the films that I found most interesting and looking into their reviews and advertisements. Finally, I revisited the secondary articles and books in more depth in order to more accurately form a comparison with my findings.

While I acknowledge the importance of any amount of academic research on homosexuality in film, the majority of sources I consulted fell flat. The first fault was what seemed to be a desire to assert that there were more homosexuality in 1930s films than otherwise would be assumed. In fact, this is the thesis of David M. Lugowski's article "Queering the (New) Deal: Lesbian and Gay Representation and the Depression-Era Cultural Politics of Hollywood's Production Code." He suggests that, because the Depression led to women taking on more traditionally masculine roles in culture and making up a larger part of film audiences, lesbianism had a strong presence in 1930s film (Lugowski 4). He goes on to cite quite a number of films as "lesbian," including *Blood Money*, *Broadway thru a Keyhole*, *Morocco*, *The Sign of the Cross*, *Heat Lightning*, *The Kiss Before the Mirror* - "[I have] evidence for queer references, characters, and situations in nearly 150 films out of those I've seen from the Depression era" (Lugowski 11). However, even he admits that his categorization of these films as lesbian relies on the presence of "mannish" women, those with a short haircut, a deep voice, or dressed in a suit. "By 'queer imagery,'" he writes, "I am focusing on... characters that represent behavior coded...as cross-gendered" (Lugowski 4). This overt conflation of gender transgression with homosexuality is quite bothersome. Admittedly, gender and sexuality are categories that are inevitably mixed up with each other and often times,

lesbians do read as cross-gendered – however, simply the identification of a woman with masculine gender codes in no way leads straight to the identity of "lesbian." If you remove the films in Lugowski's list that have no sign of lesbianism despite some amount of feminine androgyny and masculinity, you'd be left with very few – *Queen Christina*, *Morocco*, *Sign of The Cross*. Lugowski writes about this so-called surprisingly large number of homosexual films as a positive thing, yet when you bring the list down to a more accurate set of films, almost all of them have quite negative connotations. I will return to this later on.

Another pattern in the body of scholarship I researched was a focus on how clear the homosexuality in 1930s film was. One of Lugowski's more minor arguments is that the queerness he reads in these films is more than just subtext; that it was actually read as such by audiences of the time (Lugowski 8). The evidence he cites primarily comes from production code letters regarding the (potential) censorship of queerness in films, suggesting (to him) that lesbianism was more widely acknowledged by censors (Lugowski 19). In contrast, Rhona J. Berenstein finds the exact opposite, saying that censors "wrote around lesbianism." She takes a middle ground, saying that finding lesbianism in 1930s and 1940s films is and was an exercise of reading both with and against the grain. Finally, Chon Noriega takes a completely opposite position from Lugowski, suggesting that

the homosexuality that may or may not have been present in 1930s and 1940s cinema was largely subtextual and that since then, gay and lesbian film critics have worked specifically to “recuperate a history of homosexual images from the censored screen” (Berenstein 28).

While I choose to focus on quality rather than quantity of lesbian representation in this era of cinema, I acknowledge the reasons for Lugowski’s casting of a wider net for queer readings. It is the sparsity of queer characters itself that has motivated scholars to widen their definitions of what can be considered gay or lesbian. Yet it seems a glaring omission not to discuss the ideological implications of what the audiences were seeing, regardless of issues such as when audiences began to look at these films and see lesbianism. A focus on who picked up on what and when draws attention away from the more important question of what those images, stories, and suggestions *meant*.

The surprising thing is that it seems as though they meant the same thing both before and after the Production Code Administration in 1934. This is surprising because in popular filmic folklore, that year changed everything, including, it would seem, lesbian representation. Yet the Code doesn’t disallow lesbianism to be shown in film, nor homosexuality at all – simply “sex perversion,” an open-ended, ever-changing enigma.

Of course, the story of censorship in the American film industry is not quite so straightforward. The Production Code was not the first effort Hollywood made to self-

regulate – in 1909, the National Board of Censorship was created through the Motion Picture Patents Association as a solution to the tensions between film producers and exhibitors over the fact that the exhibitors felt they had little control over what films they’d be asked to sell to the public. The National Board of Censorship was a body authorized to implement the standards of morality that the general movie-going public seemed to hold (Rosenbloom 309). Yet a series of scandals involving Hollywood films and stars in the early 1920s raised concern, amongst mostly Catholics and conservatives, about the film industry’s supposed immorality (Doherty 7). Thus, in 1922 Will H. Hays was brought in to dissipate such fears and make Hollywood look good again. The first precursor of the Production Code was his 1927 list of “Don’ts and Be Carefuls,” a set of guidelines without much ability to be enforced (Vaughn 44). This step was not enough to prevent state legislatures from considering film censorship bills or civic, women’s, and Christian groups from accusing Hollywood of depravity (Vaughn 45). Thus, in 1929, Hays hired Catholic educator Martin Quigley to help draft the Production Code, which was adopted in 1930 by the Motion Pictures Producers’ and Distributors’ Association (Vaughn 48). Similarly to the “Don’ts and Be Carefuls,” the Code was at first not enforced. Then, in 1934, the publication of a study suggesting that films could be harmful to children and the Catholic move to categorize viewing of certain films as a sin motivated Hays to hire Joseph Breen and begin enforcing the

Code through the Production Code Administration (Doherty 60).

One would assume that the two primarily Catholic-influenced sets of guidelines – the Don'ts and Be Carefuls and the Production Code – would be explicit about banning homosexuality. However, both forbid “inference to sex perversion,” a totally vague category subject to change (The Production Code 3). However, the Code explicitly names such “perverse” acts as miscegenation or adultery. Why then, did it not name homosexuality in the same way? This is not because homosexuality wasn't a priority in terms of things to avoid exposing the public to but rather because it wasn't a real threat yet, because if it were shown at all, it was coded as something negative. The Production Code Administration didn't have to worry about films showing homosexuality in a positive light the same way as they did more obvious crimes. Time and time again, censorship records of films with potentiality for lesbianism show that the lesbianism wasn't mentioned as one of the relevant issues – not because lesbianism wasn't viewed as harmful but because this sense of harm was present in the films as much as it was in the minds of the censors (Berenstein 28). Both pre-Code and post-Code films represented lesbians in a way that was ideologically negative, if at all. The films often referred to as lesbian, by scholars such as Lugowski and Berenstein are as damaging as absence would have been, as they treated female homosexual desire and behavior as evil and worth

fighting against. What follows is an analysis of such ideological negativity in the canonically lesbian early films *Morocco*, *Ladies They Talk About*, and *Dracula's Daughter*.

*Morocco* (1930, Paramount) is a prime example of a pre-Code film often labeled “lesbian” that, in fact, barely shows lesbianism and connotes it in a negative way when it does. It is famous for a girl-on-girl kiss, a moment that is lauded as able to happen only because of its pre-Code time frame. In fact, it could be included because the kiss is then completely negated by later behavior. *Morocco* follows the story of nightclub singer Amy Jolly, played by Marlene Dietrich, after she moves to Morocco. The key moment of the film comes fairly early on, when the audience is first shown Amy's nightclub act. In it, she wears a tuxedo, something that would already lead some, such as Lugowski, to identify her as a lesbian. Her engagement in a homosexual act lends further credence to this assumption – at the end of her performance, Amy kisses a female audience member on the lips. Yet the kiss is chaste and clearly for entertainment purposes only – it is followed by big laughter and applause, a reaction Amy seems as though she sought. Afterward, Amy emerges in a more feminine costume – tight and revealing – to sing a new song. Her previous masculine clothing is shed as quickly as her brief moment of lesbian behavior. Amy then invites audience member Legionnaire Tom Brown to meet up with her by slipping him her key. When



they rendezvous later, she tells him, “husband? I haven’t found a man good enough for that... do you think you can restore my faith in men?” Naturally, throughout the rest of the film, Tom proves himself to be good enough, with just enough back and forth to keep the audience interested. Aligned with common views about lesbians, Amy’s brief, coded homosexual potentiality is suggested just to be an inability to find the right man, ending in a realization that heterosexual love is the most important thing of all. Ideologically, then, the “classic lesbian film” proves itself to do nothing but reinforce negative stereotypes about lesbians. Is it possible for a lesbian viewer to glom onto the few images that code Dietrich’s character as a lesbian in *Morocco*? They can and they did. However, anybody looking at the bigger picture can easily pick up on the implications of her potential homosexual attraction as invalid, particularly in comparison to her strong love for a man.

*Ladies They Talk About* (1933, Warner Bros.) is another example of a canonically lesbian pre-Code film. It follows the gorgeous criminal Nan Taylor, played by Barbara Stanwyck, as she is jailed for a robbery. The all-women’s prison is a classic setting for lesbian behavior, similar to the all-girl’s boarding school of films such as *Madchen in Uniform*. However, like in *Morocco*, the possibility for lesbian representation is wasted with a barely-there, stereotype-ridden character. When Nan arrives in prison, she makes a friend, Linda, who introduces her around. The opportunity for homosociality is palpable

in a quasi-flirtatious, “we are bad, aggressive girls,” type of way but almost immediately, Linda asserts that all the women in the prison want nothing more than “freedom and men.” She goes on to mention the heterosexual pasts of the women she introduces Nan to. Why, then, is *Ladies They Talk About* considered to be a lesbian film? For the sake of the brief presence of one unnamed character: in the bathroom Linda points out a short-haired woman in a suit-like dress to Nan, saying, “be careful, she likes to wrestle.” This character is only shown once more, exercising in her cell. This representation is, again, stereotypical, but even worse, it frames the sole lesbian character in the women’s prison as predatory, somebody to fear, somebody whose desire for women is dangerous. It may be possible that being produced and distributed before 1934 allowed for *Morocco* and *Ladies They Talk About* to have somewhat explicit lesbian behavior and characters shown, but to what end? This was permitted not because of some pre-Code acceptability of lesbianism (recall that “sexual perversion” was on the list of Don’ts and Be Carefuls before it was in the Code) but because the representations of lesbianism were negative, making it seem unappealing, invalid, and largely irrelevant. Not a concern for censors.

*Dracula’s Daughter* (1936, Universal), a post-Code canonical lesbian film suggests that the Production Code Administration didn’t change much in terms of lesbian representation. The film, like those before it, shows lesbianism in a

way that suggests it to be predatory, dangerous, and something only men can solve. As made clear by the title, *Dracula's Daughter* is a follow-up to *Dracula* (1931, Universal) that follows the vampire's daughter after his death. She is Countess Marya Zaleska, a mysterious woman first shown all in black, everything covered but her eyes. From the very beginning, she is shown to use her sexuality in a manipulative manner, using "something more precious than money" (in this case a literal ring that seems pretty clearly to be a metaphor for sexuality) to hypnotize a policeman in order to steal the body of her dead father. She burns the body in an attempt to become free – "free to live as a woman." After the ritual, Marya is excited about her new ability to live a normal life but her manservant, Sandor, reminds her of the inevitable evil within her. He tells her that she sees evil in her eyes.

This so-called evil that undeniably plagues Marya is her bloodlust, a genetic desire for the blood of mostly young, beautiful women. Later, Marya finds herself at a party, having a conversation with Dr. Garth, a psychiatrist quite familiar with the case of Van Helsing, her father's killer. In a discussion about the situation, Garth reveals his view that obsession, "like any disease of the mind... can be cured." Marya immediately seeks Garth out as a potential cure for her own obsession. She asks for his help, as a "man of strength and courage," though without revealing exactly what sort of desire ails her. Garth offers Marya the solution of meeting her dark influence head on and fighting it. Thus,

Marya seeks out the beautiful Lili, inviting her over to be painted. "I'm doing a study of young girls' head and shoulders," Marya tells her, "you won't object to removing your blouse, would you?" Though at first she doesn't, Lili quickly begins to panic as Marya hypnotizes her, leading to her being carried away from Marya's home on a stretcher.

Though Lili survives, she is clearly coded as a sexual assault victim, suffering from amnesia and what appears in hindsight to be symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder – memory loss, trouble communicating, troubling flashbacks. She is brought to be treated by Dr. Garth. Though Lili dies before being able to reveal the truth, Garth figures things out nonetheless. At first, he is unable to punish Marya for her behavior because she kidnaps his assistant, telling him that she wants his eternal companionship in death, or else she will kill the girl. Garth is prepared to sacrifice himself but Sander kills Marya in jealousy. The happy ending of the movie is a heterosexual coupling – when Garth and his assistant can be safely together at last.

The ways in which this representation of lesbianism is problematic are many. Marya's vampirism very clearly stands for a sexual desire for women, shown in her choice of Lili as a victim and in her later sexual behavior with Dr. Garth's assistant, who she refers to as "beautiful and helpless." The way that she talks about her desire frames it as something she cannot control but desperately wants to rid herself of. In discussing her affliction with Dr.

Garth, she tells him, “it came over me again, that overpowering demand. Wordless. Persistent. And I had to obey.” Further, the desire comes off as quite predatory – particularly when Marya readies herself to “paint” Lili. She offers her wine for “warmth,” telling her, “don’t be afraid, my dear,” before coercing her to undress. This calls to mind the stereotype of lesbian desire as rapacious, dangerous, and perverse. And, like Amy Jolly before her, Marya looks to a man for the solution to this “problem.” She is so desperate, in fact, for Dr. Garth, that she resorts to extortion. Yet, in this story, even the man is not enough to rid Marya of her perverse, lesbian desire and the only solution for her becomes death. In particular, death at the hands of the man whom she used to dominate, who finally rises to assert his natural power over her as a woman. Despite her desire to cure herself, Dracula’s daughter is ultimately a villain due to her threat to heteronormativity.

The reviews for all three of these films – *Morocco*, *Ladies They Talk About*, and *Dracula’s Daughter*, don’t seem offended or taken aback by the lesbianism. In fact, they don’t mention lesbians at all. *Picture Play Magazine* doesn’t shy away from mentioning desire – it just refers to the desire that Dietrich’s character has for her male love interest (Lusk 196). Time and again, the reviews rave over the heterosexual love story. This is because the brief lesbian moment is made totally irrelevant in comparison. Similarly, reviews for *Ladies They Talk About*, aggregated by *The Hollywood Reporter*

from six different sources, don’t have a word to say about the lesbian character (New York Reviews 402). She is unworthy of comment. It is worth noting that, though reviews for *Dracula’s Daughter* did not categorize Marya’s behavior as lesbian, they do pick up pretty clearly on the negative connotations of her character, referring to her as “sinister” (The Show Window 60) and her behavior as “ghoulish proclivities,” (Brief Review 258) “satisfying a blood-curdling obsession,” (Hollywood Preview 22) “terrorizing acts,” and “monstrous passions.” (Topper 52). Naturally these terms aren’t directly associated with the lesbian desire that Marya shows but the ideology tied to it.

If a lack of enforcement of the Production Code was the only thing that made possible the images of lesbian characters or acts, it would be safe to assume that the Production Code Administration would have stamped out all suggestions of lesbian desire or behavior. Indeed, the Code does forbid even just an “inference” to sexual perversion. However, 1934 was not the last year that lesbian images were shown onscreen. The reason for this is not because the representations of lesbianism were so subtextual that censors or reviewers couldn’t read them, but because they were ideologically coded in a way that did not subvert common “morality,” that did not transgress, but that reinforced traditional stereotypes and negative views toward homosexuality. The main goal of censorship was fighting the depiction of unlawful or immoral acts in a

positive light, but lesbianism, both pre- and post-Code was depicted as nothing but negative. Rather than focusing on the quantity of homosexual images in the

1930s, further research efforts would be best put toward a qualitative look at the ideological implications of homosexual representation.

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# *United States of Tara* and the Synergistic Relationship between Hollywood Production and the Scientific Community

By Omar Miranda

Utilizing mental disorders as a focal point for major motion pictures has become a big trend in the Hollywood industry among producers and directors. From the wildly successful Emmy nominated TV movie mini-series *Sybil* (Daniel Petrie, 1976) to the recent academy award nominated success story *Silver Linings Playbook* (David O. Russel, 2012), it is no secret that medical disorders generate appeal amongst huge audiences. While some critics argue that films featuring mental disorders help shed light on an otherwise unknown disorder, many other critics contend that several of these representations fail to accurately depict the reality of the disease. Margarita Tartakovsky, for example, comments on the problematic representations of mental illness in reference to the film *Thirteen* (Catherine Hardwicke, 2003), noting the film's portrayal of "substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, an eating disorder and self-injury, [and the fact that] the main character never seeks treatment. Ultimately, these behaviors may be viewed as 'a glamorous benchmark to beat,'"

(Tartakovsky). While filmmakers have an limited amount of time to display the struggles of a mental disorder, leaving more room for sensationalistic displays, a television show, contrarily, will ideally last multiple seasons, allowing depictions of mental disorders to be explored in a more expansive and efficient manner. One of the more established television shows that explore the realities of mental disorders is Diablo Cody's *United States of Tara*. The comedy-drama on Showtime focuses on a woman named Tara Gregson who suffers from Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) while also struggling to maintain the sanctity of her dysfunctional family.

Once known as Multiple Personality Disorder, DID, is a very complex disorder that is still difficult to understand today. According to the journal, *Psychology Today*, "DID is a severe condition in which two or more distinct identities, or personality states, are present in—and alternately take control of—an individual. The person also experiences memory loss that is too extensive to be explained by ordinary forgetfulness," ("Dissociative

Identity Disorder (Multiple Personality Disorder)”). These multiple identities are also known as alters because they are the repressed parts of the personality as a result of a trauma one has endured. “An alter is a part of the self that the person has ‘pushed away’ or disowned” (“FAQ’s on Dissociative Disorders (US Tara Edition)”). While there have been positive reviews in terms of the casting and the writing of the show, the integrity of the DID representation becomes questionable throughout the series (Lowry). The show triggered the scientific community—comprised of psychologists, researchers, and people clinically diagnosed with the disorder—to take action and inform audiences about the actualities of the disease. The synergy among the scientific community and the creative team at *United States of Tara* provides a meaningful situation for this television show. *Tara* is not only serving its loyal fan base as their primary audience, but also psychologists and scientific organizations as a secondary audience, who in turn provide their response to the fan base. The television form, unlike film form, allowed the production of *United States of Tara* the opportunity to construct extraordinary and in-depth narrative arcs that provide a more expansive and holistic representation of the disorder. Fans of *United States of Tara* are offered an exceptional chance to consider the intertextuality in media, utilizing both the text of the show, as well as the criticisms of Psychologists and researchers, in order to obtain a better understanding of DID as a whole, while still enjoying the

television show as an art work and entertainment piece.

One of the important techniques to highlight during the production of the show is the producers’ attempt to remain true to the disorder by employing a psychologist to be part of the creative team. “Richard Kluff, the clinical psychiatrist who serves as the consultant for the “Tara” series, took a look at the first episode and had concerns about how the seriousness of DID (and that its most common cause is thought to be childhood abuse) would be translated,” (Maron). Having that type of consultant adds credibility and authenticity to the overall execution of the disorder. However, the writers of the show did not always use Kluff’s advice. “Kluff offers as much advice on the medical accuracy of the show as he can, though he says the writers may not always use it. He’s happy with the show overall, but he admits he still winces at some of the depictions of Tara and DID and notes that the main character’s more flamboyant alters are typical of only 1 in 20 DID cases,” (Maron). The most complex aspect of having a show centralized on a mental disorder is balancing the accuracy of the disease while keeping the show interesting and fresh. The show experienced several instances in which the portrayal of DID did not adequately meet the standards of several members of the scientific community.

An organization called the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation (ISSTD) started up as a result of the television show’s representation of DID. This organization is

comprised of a Board of Directors who all have an expertise background in psychology or psychiatry,” with specialized studies in trauma and dissociation (“Board of Directors”). The ISSTD’s mission as an organization is to provide education regarding the dissociative disorders and to promote the effective treatment of clients with these disorders, (“United States of Tara and Dissociative Disorders”). Although this organization recognizes the positive nature of *United States of Tara* being the “first television show” to identify DID, it still aims, solely, to provide education on the disorder and clear up common misconceptions. The organization is really grateful for Showtime for shedding light on this disorder, but wants to make it clear that “only a small

percentage [of people with DID] have this classical presentation of DID while many go on to live normal lives with the disorder,” (“United States of Tara and Dissociative Disorders”).

The website provides many tools and resources for people interested in the disorder, as well as locations on the website made specifically for fans of *United States of Tara*, including a commentary on every episode of the entire series.

The Board of Directors of the ISSTD began their commentary with the pilot episode of *United States of Tara*. The episode begins with the very strong character development of Tara Gregson, as she reveals two of her three different alters. Tara’s alters can “range from a flirtatious and spunky teenager named ‘T’ and a gun-loving male alter-ego named Buck,” (“Pilot – United States of Tara”). As seen in the episode, these alters are so visibly different from each other, most notably observed through the unique wardrobes of each alter,

and the changing mise-en-scene of the show. Despite much of the intrigue brought on by Tara Gregson’s multiple personalities, ISSTD believes that the show’s version of DID is hyperbolized. “Almost everything about Tara and her alters is ‘over the top.’ DID looks like

this in only about 5% of cases, and even then is rarely paraded this openly. In the vast majority of cases, switching from one alter to another is covert or hidden, appearing as abrupt, but often subtle changes of mood, behavior, or attitude” (“US Tara Psychological Commentaries”). Having these subtle changes in DID on the show may not have been salient enough for the viewer to fully observe the change in personality. Thus, the writers of the show may have had to sacrifice the authenticity



Toni Collette as Tara and her alters

of the disorder in order to have a much more exciting narrative structure.

There were several instances during the show's run that the creators abandoned the authenticity of the disorder for more spectacular and carnivalesque performances. During season one, episode two of *United States of Tara*, an episode called "Aftermath" brings out Tara's third alter, Alice, "a 1950s-style, perfect homemaker who claims to be a graduate of Radcliffe," ("US Tara Psychological Commentaries"). Alice ends up washing her (Tara's) daughter's mouth out with soap because she was speaking inappropriately to her. This can be seen as an outrageous moment and not something that typically happens to someone who has DID. Later in the series, in season 3, episode 9 ("Bryce Will Play") Tara ends up developing another alter, Bryce, who is revealed to be the stepbrother that molested her as a child and caused all her childhood trauma. During this episode, Tara, as well as her psychologist, Dr. Hatteras, her sister, and daughter all have dinner together. Dr. Hatteras starts having an allergic reaction to the meal, because of the insertion of crab, a food he is deathly allergic. Dr. Hatteras has previously informed Tara about his allergy and even though Tara denies putting crab into the meal, her alter Bryce resurfaces and deliberately talks about putting the crab into the meal. Although these alters may be seen as ludicrous and exaggerated for their malicious behavior, there are reports that validate the bizarre activity some alters produce. "Many times, people have ended

up going to jail for crimes committed by one of their alters. Even today, with all the developments and research carried out by the scientific community, it seems that DID remains as mysterious as ever" (Pamoukaghlian). The alters may come across as exaggerated on the show, but there are possibilities that real people are going through similar experiences with their alters.

Some viewers feel empathetic with Tara's character and the complexities the "alters" bring to her life. Heather B., author of blog post "D.I.D. I Do That? Thoughts on Dissociative Identity Disorder" on the PsychCentral blog, reflects on her own experiences with DID, and comments on Tara's DID. When it comes to Tara's DID, and DID in general, she claims that "most of us with DID do not have alters that appear as extreme as Tara's... Tara is certainly 'over the top.' Nonetheless Toni Collette's portrayal of Tara accurately depicts the emotional experience of DID," (B, Heather). Despite the exaggerated representation of Tara's alters, the emotional struggle endured by both Tara and her family members is real and can be empathized with.

Others feel that DID in *United States of Tara* is a gross misrepresentation of the actual disorder. In another blog post, titled "Television: Ableism, Appropriation, and United States of Tara," Rachel McCarthy James critiques the overall message of the show, a message that Steven Spielberg introduces in a quote from the following New York Times article: "Ultimately the creators and Showtime executives hope



that the obvious metaphor in “United States of Tara” — that we all struggle with our fragmented selves — will be easy for viewers to relate to,” (Mcdowell). While Rachel McCarthy James respects the fact that Spielberg and his team wanted the show to be something people can identify with, she feels that DID is not something that should be appropriated. “This is not about a woman who happens to have DID. This is about DID as a sensitive freak show, and it contributes to the fraught perception of DID. Using disability to communicate these multiple personae, when no one prominently involved in the production of the show has actually experienced DID, is appropriation” (James). Although the language utilized by the following blog post seems somewhat aggressive, it is completely justifiable for her to believe Tara’s character is caricatured. James feels that people lack a greater understanding for the disease, and the show’s exaggerated take on DID does not help that situation. In a different blog post “I Am Not Your Plot Device,” blogger Static Nonsense, illustrates their qualms with the media representations of DID and gives commentary on those issues. “The problem with media portrayals of DID? *They don’t take these things into consideration.* They focus on what will sell, what will make their plot or character more interesting, edgy or unique. They do not care about accuracy, or who is affected by the lack of it.” Static Nonsense also reveals that many people are ashamed to have DID and try to hide it from others as best as possible (“FAQ’s on Dissociative

Disorders (US Tara Edition)”). It is clear that, although *Tara* attempts to depict an honest, thoughtful presentation of someone with DID, the creative team is still commodifying the subject matter to be edgier, to sell.

Steven Gold, psychology professor at Nova Southeastern University, also addresses his concerns with the portrayal of this show because of the ways it might affect actual people with DID. “Some of the major consequences of misleading portrayals of DID are widespread skepticism among the general public; the risk of hindering detection of clients with DID; and the creation of confusion and fear in clients with DID that they eventually will display behaviors as dramatic as Tara’s” (Giller) There are several consequences that can occur because of these misrepresentations. Gold further expounds that people with DID generally attempt to live fully functional lives, and since Tara never really seems to “develop a greater level of self-control, and her family resigns to it...the show is more disturbing than reassuring” (Giller). Since there are very few viable representations in the media, people with DID lack accurate reflections of themselves on TV, and Tara inherently becomes the only character who is somewhat comparable to them—whether accurate or not.

When living in a world where the “media is the message” it is important to have several distinct media outlets to offer. Depending on the media outlet, everyone has their own unique agenda and message they would like to convey. In the

Hollywood industry, officials seek to present a “reality” that maintains an artistic aesthetic, whereas a scientific community presents a “reality” that is backed by logical data. With a television show that combines both sources, it allows the audience to become active in interpreting the show in their own respective manners. In today’s media driven society, there are forums, blogs, and articles written on nearly all television shows that provide viewers an intertextual experience. Because so many people saw the disorder portrayal as over the top, several different

media texts arose in response to *Tara*. From blogs created by users with DID to an organization called The International Society for the Study for Trauma and Dissociation, having these scientific texts available to the audience while watching the show allows for the audience to fully immerse themselves in these texts for a more holistic understanding of the disorder. Through the integration of the Hollywood and scientific texts viewers are able to become more aware and better educated about the disorder while still deriving pleasure from the show.

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## **PART 5**

# The Import and Export of Culture

The Illusion of the National



# El Vampiro de la Cultura: The Reception of Universal's Spanish Drácula and the Appropriation of Spanish Cinematic History

By Justin Minor

In 1931, as a part of Universal Studios' ongoing effort to produce multiple-language versions of their films in order to expand into an international market, the studio produced two versions of the Bram Stoker novel adaptation, *Dracula*. The English version of the film (dir. Browning, 1931) made famous the iconic performance of Hungarian-born actor Bela Lugosi and served as a flagship franchise for Universal, spawning a number of sequels and "monster-mashes" spanning into the late 1940s. The Spanish version (dir. Melford, 1931), lauded by critics for its longer running time as well as its more varied and dynamic cinematography, proved to be one of Universal Studios' more successful entries in its multiple-language effort, regardless of its slip into obscurity for several decades before being pulled from an archive in Cuba (Jarvinen 37). In order to promote the Spanish-language film abroad in 1931, Universal would release advertisements heralding George Melford's *Drácula* as a preeminent example of what multiple-language versions could achieve. In the months leading up to the film's release, Universal

advertised the Spanish-language version in *Cine-Mundial* saying "Contribuya al auge del cine hispano parlante viendo sus primeras obras maestras;" or, "Contribute to the rise of Spanish 'speaking' cinema by watching its first masterpieces" ("Cine-Mundial"). The journal encouraged its readers to support Spanish "talkie" cinema by going to watch the films advertised therein; interestingly, since Universal (an American studio) produced both the English and Spanish versions of *Dracula*, the advertisement displays a Hollywood-centric mentality. Although the advertisement promotes Spanish viewership of these films in exchange for contributing to the impending "rise" of Spanish "talkie" cinema, the economic angle of the advertisement locates Universal Studios in a time when their multiple-language productions caused the studio to lose considerable money (Don Q. 373).

Universal Studios' effort at self-aggrandizement reflects an American appropriation of Spanish-speaking cinematic history. In a transnational context, this is complicated by the reception of George Melford's Spanish-

language version of *Drácula*—the film represents an anomaly, given the positive reception for an American-produced Spanish-language film in an otherwise hostile market characterized by class divisions, offended by the problematic linguistic dimension of these films, and unaccustomed to the production qualities of such a film in relation to others of its ilk. My research focuses on the reception of George Melford’s Spanish-language version of *Drácula* by Spanish-speakers in America and abroad in relation to its English-language counterpart. Whereas Spanish-speaking moviegoers in the United States and abroad had grown accustomed to the poor quality of Hollywood’s oft-maligned Spanish-language film production efforts, *Drácula* represents an exception that—by many accounts—surpasses the English version in terms of “mise-en-scene, editing, and camera work” (Jarvinen 37). By implanting an analysis of both films’ reception within the context of Hollywood’s domination of the global market in the beginning of the “talkie” era, and alongside Latin America’s push to develop a national cinema, the remarks to follow will demonstrate how the “better” of the two versions ended up shrouded in temporary obscurity, even with its initial commercial success at home and abroad. To research this topic, I have examined several English and Spanish-language film trade periodicals focusing on news regarding film production, distribution, and exhibition. In compiling a variety of reviews, an interview, and critical responses to the English and Spanish-

language versions of *Dracula*, I have located the latter version entangled within a web of social, cultural, and economic factors that lend insight into how such a well-received film faded into obscurity for years.

A review of the Spanish-language version of *Drácula* from the *Los Angeles Times*, dated May 11, 1931, highlights this film as an exception to the otherwise poorly executed Spanish-language films from Hollywood’s early production efforts of the 1930s. In this article, the writer commends George Melford’s directing techniques while also noting the work of translating screenwriter, B. Fernandez Cue, whom the reviewer credits for writing “not a few of the better adaptations” (“‘*Dracula*’ in Spanish Opens at California” A7). The review also notes an attraction that was to accompany the exhibition of the film at the California Theater in Los Angeles, as an added bonus to appeal to Spanish-speaking audiences—it showcases a newsreel based on the Mexican holiday, Cinco de Mayo, and its celebration by “the local colony,” in reference to the local Latino community (A7). The inclusion of such an attraction highlights exhibitors’ efforts to draw Spanish-speaking audiences who had presumably grown accustomed to the low-quality fare that characterized a number of Hollywood’s Spanish-language films. This article also calls into question the standard production qualities of American-produced Spanish-language films in general. According to the author, the quality of directing is “unusually good” for George Melford’s *Drácula* (A7). This distinction is



drawn from a canon of Hollywood-produced films that audiences detested for their poor translations, unrecognizable Spanish-speaking actors, and, according to Colin Gunckel “their neglect and/or misunderstanding of culturally specific subject matter” (“A Theater Worthy of Our Race” 107).

Exhibition of Hollywood films in Latin America as well as Spanish-speaking Los Angeles exposes class-related faultlines that lend insight into the film’s reception in these spaces. Gunckel notes that in the early part of the 20th century, downtown Los Angeles witnessed a paradigm shift in moviegoing demographics—where downtown was once principally dominated by elite, upper-class, Anglo-Saxon audiences, an influx of working-class Mexican immigrants into this urban space during the 1910s came at a time when major movie palaces were being constructed (“War of the Accents” 3). The construction of these new palaces in the 1910s and 1920s saw the conversion of older and smaller theaters into Spanish-language cinema

venues, yielding a “centrally located and vibrant Mexican-oriented entertainment district” in downtown Los Angeles (“War of the Accents” 3). In Mexico, moviegoing became an almost utopic event as audiences from a “broad spectrum” of Mexican society engaged in this social activity that was ever-increasing in its

importance (Noble 74). These theaters would be crucial for the exposure of Spanish-speaking moviegoers to American-produced Spanish-language films.

A crucial dimension to Spanish-speaking audiences’ experience of Hollywood-produced Spanish-language films was contingent upon “the war of the accents,” or the critical discourse directed at Hollywood studios for paying little

to no attention to the accents of the actors they cast in their Spanish-

language films. According to Lisa Jarvinen, disputes that arose “over accent and idiom” created controversy among film professionals and critics who noted Hollywood’s lack of competence in nailing down a “national variant” of Spanish that would be familiar to the ears of most, if not all Spanish-speaking countries (60). For Melford’s *Drácula*, this issue is taken to almost comic heights in the disconnect between the Mexican regional dialect of



Poster: Spanish-language version of *Dracula* (1931)

the actors and the setting of the film's opening scenes in Transylvania (especially for Carlos Villarias as the "Transylvanian" Count); the glaring similarity between the Spanish dialects of Pablo Alvarez Rubio (as Renfield) and Carlos Villarias (as the Count) as characters colliding from star-crossed cultures lacks the same atmospheric "bite" as the disparate accents of the American Dwight Frye (as Renfield in the English version) and Hungarian-born Bela Lugosi (as the Count) (37). Such criticisms were commonly leveled at Hollywood's Spanish talkies, but in the case of *Drácula*, this problematic dimension did not put the final nail in the coffin for the film's audiences abroad.

The anomalous positive reception of Melford's *Drácula* can be attributed to the great care employed by the largely Hispanic cast and crew which was able to produce the film away from the scrutinizing eye of Universal's producers who often hampered production of the English version (Lenart). The Spanish-language film was largely shot at night utilizing the same sets as were used by the English cast and crew, and this allowed Melford to avoid the stringent censorship that plagued the English version. This lack of oversight provided Melford the benefit of "following the instructions of the original screenplay" and resulted in a film with "more violence and erotic content" than the English version (Lenart). Screenwriter Baltazar Fernandez Cue is often credited with having written an excellent translated adaptation of the original screenplay, and the English-

speaking Melford was aided significantly in his direction by Spanish-speaking Enrique Tovar Avalos, who worked closely with the actors on set (Lenart). Tod Browning's *Dracula* was produced in accordance with increasing efforts to produce Hollywood films that were cleaner (Jarvinen 37). Where Browning's version relied merely on the power of suggestion and off-screen violence, Melford's *Drácula* left "much less to the imagination" with its depiction of blood, eroticism, and plunging necklines worn by the film's actresses (Tovar).

The marketing for both film versions also highlights discrepancies that provide insight into their respective releases and reception. Full-page advertisements in film trade journals such as *Film Daily* heralded Tod Browning's English version of *Dracula* as "the sensation of the year" and claim that it "will beat *All Quiet on the Western Front*"—the box office giant of 1931 ("The Film Daily" 425). Full-color advertisements for *Dracula* are featured on the front page of *Film Daily* twice in 1931; one cover page dubs the film as "Tod Browning's greatest production," while the other urges readers to "Save your best playdates" ("The Film Daily" 425). Such a vibrant and presumably expensive advertising campaign stands in stark contrast to the marketing for George Melford's Spanish-language *Drácula*—the campaign for this version was much less flamboyant, most notably because for films of their kind, Spanish-language versions of Hollywood films were made "in the shadows of Hollywood with small budgets" and news regarding their

production “rarely appeared outside industry trade papers” (Jarvinen 35). A full page photo in *Cine-Mundial* of *Drácula* co-stars Carlos Villarias and Lupita Tovar bares merely a caption naming the film advertised with no accompanying article or review, even though the photograph is featured at the front of the “Nuestra Opinión”—or, “Our Opinion”—section of the Spanish-language trade journal (“Cine-Mundial” 21). Regardless of the surprising commercial success of *Drácula*, the box-office returns it received did little to offset the tremendous costs incurred by the production of such multiple-language films; shortly after the film’s release abroad, Universal and several other production studios were forced to reevaluate their endeavors. Universal Studios found critical success with their Spanish-language film versions penned by screenwriter Fernandez Cue (including *Drácula*), but filming of these productions was indefinitely suspended in order to offset the debts that the studio was incurring, says an analyst for *Cine-Mundial*, a Spanish-language film news and commentary periodical that focused on in-depth exposés oriented toward a middle and upper-class readership. The analyst dubs the situation a “crisis” and states “se filmo muy poco y que la disorientacion sigue imperando en las esferas directivas;” or, that because of this situation, “very little is being filmed and a sense of disorientation prevails at the management level [in Hollywood]” (Don Q. 372).

The reception of Spanish-language films produced by Latin American

countries proved largely successful among Spanish-speaking populations in New York. By the time Hollywood’s Spanish films had met their inevitable conclusion, Spanish-language films produced by Spanish-speaking countries began to dominate at the box office (Jarvinen 83). However, Hollywood demonstrated a sharp decline in their multiple-language productions by this time. Nataša Durovicová notes the collapse of all foreign language versions in Hollywood in the early 1930s and points out that the dissemination of these films negotiated power differentials between Hollywood and foreign markets following the advent of sound (139). Durovicová also argues that Hollywood attempted to position itself as the dominant force in the global film market and would eventually succeed following the implementation of cheaper forms of language conversion (dubbing and subtitling), while the short-lived production of foreign language versions would ultimately bare little negative effect on contemporary domination of English in today’s global mass media (139). The production of Hollywood foreign language versions was drained of its vitality and the effects of this decline left visible marks on the industry. Jarvinen qualifies the decline of Hollywood’s Spanish-language films by noting that a significant job vacuum was left after the collapse which left many Spanish-speaking film professionals looking for work elsewhere—namely, in the burgeoning Spanish-language sound cinema of Spain and Latin America (Jarvinen 84). In the context of Spanish

cinema, the sudden drop-off in Hollywood's production of multiple-language versions is conversely attributable to the rise of national cinemas in Spanish-speaking countries (specifically Mexico) that arose in response to and in the wake of critically panned Spanish Hollywood films. This rise in national Spanish-language features demonstrates a reciprocal exchange transferring the Spanish-language talkie market from Hollywood control into the context of a Mexican national cinema.

At the beginning of the sound age, the Hollywood studio system had gotten a jump on the global film market and sought new methods for exporting their films internationally. Prior to the coming of sound, silent films were easily exportable for their universality of language in displays of physicality through the pantomime of silent actors—when the sound age erupted on the scene, Hollywood began producing “talkies” with spoken English and this complicated the international distribution of films to countries where English was not the native language. Practices of dubbing and subtitling seemed a solution but had their own drawbacks—particularly because of the disconnect between actors and speech with dubbing, while the reading of subtitles was impossible for illiterate audiences. Universal Studios announced plans to greatly expand their output of foreign language versions of their films as late in January-June 1931 (“Bigger Foreign Version Program Being Mapped Out by Universal” 169). This same year, the studio

was forced to completely suspend filming on these productions as the studio began hemorrhaging money to cover the massive cost of these films' production. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* makes it clear that by 1945, Hollywood-produced Spanish-language films had been all but wiped off the face of the cinematic planet—by this time, Hollywood was solely in the practices of dubbing and subtitling (Schallert B1).

The reception of *Drácula* serves as an interesting case study for the lofty economic goals of Hollywood in the age of the coming of sound. Although Latin American film critics and historians bemoaned the technical, aesthetic, and cultural faults of the Hollywood-produced set of Spanish-language films, a number of these American films proved popular among mass audiences. Opinions of the elites often clashed with populist opinions; the stigma surrounding Hollywood's Spanish-language versions reveals a historiography of critical aversion that surely dealt a hand in the disappearance of Melford's *Drácula* from physical and academic memory for several years following its release and subsequent fall into obscurity. Even a film like *Drácula*, which was received well in the market, could become lost among the shuffle and buried by those who wanted to obscure this illegitimate child of American and “Spanish” cinema, and put a stake through the heart of Hollywood-produced Spanish-language films; but—as Universal's monster films never tire of reminding us—nothing lies buried forever.

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# The 'Golden Age' of Spanish Language Theaters in Los Angeles: The Formation of a Transnational Cinema Audience

By **Carlos Sanchez**

The rising international popularity of the Mexican film industry during the 1940s started an unprecedented era of foreign film exhibition. At the start of 1941, approximately 145 American theaters included Spanish-language movies in their programs, and by 1945 about 300 theaters were regularly showing Mexican films (Agrasánchez 8). The boom reached a high point in 1951, when 683 screens in 443 U.S. cities packed houses with Spanish melodramas and *charro* films.

Most historical accounts about American movie theaters tend to overlook this period of Mexican film exhibition, or it is often suggested that high Mexican immigration rates during this period explains the phenomenon. Although there has been extensive writing on the study of Latin American immigrants in the United States, most publications say little about the leisure activities of Hispanics regarding filmgoing. Because movie theater attendance during the 1940s was the highest ever recorded in America, a significant question remains unanswered: What kinds of people made up the audience for Mexican films in the United States, and what factors defined the moviegoing experience in Spanish-language

theaters? A closer analysis of spectatorship in these foreign-language theaters is vital in understanding the mechanics of transnational film history during the early sound era.

I have selected Los Angeles as the site of my research because by 1928 it had the largest Mexican population of any city in the United States, and therefore became an important distribution center for Mexican films. In Los Angeles, Frank Fouce established a powerful organization of Spanish-language theaters, including three picture palaces. I investigate one of the theaters under Fouce's ownership, The Mayan Theater, to provide an understanding of how Spanish-language theaters operated and attracted spectators at the peak of foreign film exhibition. This study makes extensive use of *La Opinión* and the *Los Angeles Times*—two periodicals that publicized and extensively reviewed the events at the Mayan during Fouce's management.

It is evident from these sources that Spanish-language theaters did represent a niche market in the United States; however, I argue that the audiences who went to these theaters were more diverse than previously defined. At the Mayan

Theater, three distinct groups of moviegoers found Mexican cinema appealing in different ways: 1) Immigrants who migrated more than once between Mexico and America due to fluctuating labor needs between 1920 and 1960; 2) Second-generation families who established long term homes in the U.S., with loyalties divided between Mexico and America; 3) Non-Spanish speaking moviegoers with an interest in foreign films, and a particular fascination with Mexican Cinema, who attended Spanish-language theaters even though films rarely had English subtitles.

### **The Appeal of Mexican Cinema for Immigrants and the Emergence of Spanish movie houses**

When the United States mobilized for World War II, the military draft and growing demand for factory workers created agricultural labor shortages. In 1942, the government responded by establishing the Bracero Program, a guest worker program with Mexico. At the program's peak in the late 1950s, the program attracted 400,000 Mexicans a year, who took jobs in 25 different states (United States 6). The transportation infrastructure that was used to recruit and deport Mexican laborers between the Mexican interior and American Southwest had a lasting effect on the business of film exhibition. In regions of the Southwest where Mexican populations were high, failing first-run theaters converted to specifically attract Spanish-speaking audiences. In the section that follows, I aim

to answer why immigrants were interested in Spanish-language cinema and theaters.

Of course, Hispanic laborers who did not speak sufficient English were drawn to entertainment in their native language. At the reopening of the California International Theater, the importance of native language was emphasized in the *Los Angeles Times*: "The theater's policies were flashed on the screen previous to the starting of the picture and it was evident that the audience, always used to reading English titles, gave a sign of relief upon the appearance of the first paragraphs in their own language" (Baguez).

Illiteracy in Spanish and English also contributed to the popularity of filmgoing as a central leisure activity for immigrants, but specifically for Latin American productions. As Lisa Jarvinen notes in *The Rise of Spanish-Language Filmmaking*, Hollywood failed to satisfy Spanish-speaking audiences with their own production of Spanish-language films throughout the 1930s. Jarvinen argues that the persistence of American studios to offer Spanish films suggests that audiences during the early sound period had a strong desire for films spoken in their local language. By 1945, Hollywood still struggled to dominate the Spanish-speaking market, and the *Los Angeles Times* even reported that American pictures were unsuccessful in Latin America, despite their "pan-hemispheric" appeal. Dubbing appeared to be Hollywood's last hope for capturing the Spanish-speaking market, as rural audiences in many Latin American countries were unable to read

subtitles. Yet, dubbing was ultimately deemed “disconcerting for some of the native population” (Schallert). Sharing these sensibilities, Mexican immigrants moving back and forth between the U.S. and their homeland, were therefore more likely to spend spare wages on films produced in their native language—films not considered “disconcerting.”

Hispanic moviegoers who did want to attend first-run theaters to view American pictures confronted racial discrimination. A common theater policy in Texas and certain parts of California was to sit white spectators in the orchestra section, and send Hispanics and African-Americans to stand in the balcony (Tobar). Many first and second-run theater owners also had no interest in exhibiting Spanish pictures, even when potential revenue from Mexican immigrant populations was high.

A leading distributor of Spanish-language films in the United States, Clasa-Mohme, kept detailed reports of theaters that would not play Mexican pictures. A theater in White Face, Texas was reportedly “not interested in Mexican pictures, will not play them... exhibitor believes in segregation” (Agrasanchez 24). When theater owners were persuaded to exhibit Spanish-language films, Hispanic spectators faced unfair viewing policies. In a letter sent to Clasa-Mohme, the Secretary of the Hispanic American club in Austin expressed the poor treatment of Hispanics and the need for theaters devoted solely to Mexican pictures:

*As if they were doing us a big favor in charging 40 cents to see only one picture in our Spanish language, and at those scandalous hours, up until two or three in the morning, in a theater packed full to the second balcony with so many people left standing. It's an injustice. The way of handling these exhibitions is an insult to the Mexican people. I will not allow them to treat me like an animal” (Agrasanchez 26).*

Under these conditions, distributors were able to argue that Spanish-language movies had a dedicated and enthusiastic audience in the United States—racism and discrimination could not completely deter them away theaters showing Mexican pictures. Movies provided Mexican immigrants temporary relief from their daily struggles; Mexican cinema offered them an addition pleasure—a memory of native traditions and values, and an imagined connection to the homeland.

### **The Second-generation and the Question of Nationality**

Prior to the 1930s, when economic opportunities vanished in America, it was common for Mexican immigrants to return to Mexico—their loyalty remained with Mexico (Sánchez 212). By the 1930s, however, a large group of Mexicans were beginning to view the United States as their new homeland, and indeed many were now citizens by right or birth. Consequently, their identity as “Americans” and “Mexicans” was called into question during the onset of the Depression. Mexicans became a popular scapegoat for



the economic troubles, and the government responded by enacting repatriation polices.

George Sánchez's *Becoming Mexican American* provides a detailed history of the Mexican community in Los Angeles during the enforcement of these polices between 1930 and 1940, a history that contributes to our understanding of the formation of the Mexican-American spectator. Sánchez argues that repatriation policies attempted to regulate immigration from the South while igniting a nativist discourse that stigmatized Mexicans and self-fashioned Mexican-Americans as impure "others." President Hoover, for instance, enacted deportation plans in 1930 claiming Mexicans "took jobs away from American citizens"—this policy came after he eagerly recruited Mexican farm workers to maintain wartime production during World War I (Sánchez 213).

Sánchez maps the demographic shift of the Mexican population in Los Angeles that occurred when one-third of the Mexican residents departed. Repatriation initiated two significant shifts: 1) the departure of single Mexican-born men and young families, which increased the prominence of second-generation families; 2) increased racial segregation and decreased inter-ethnic contact as families moved into suitable housing in East Los Angeles (225).

Despite the exodus of Mexican-born immigrants, the growth of foreign film exhibition in Los Angeles continued. Frank Fouce opened his first three theaters during this period—the Teatro California (1932), the Roosevelt (1937), and the Mason

(1937)—suggesting that second-generation families continued to attend in high enough numbers to encourage exhibitors to open more Spanish-language theaters.

The 1930s also represented a crucial period in Mexican cinema history, when the government deemed filmgoing as crucial to forging national identity. Andrea Noble makes this argument in "The Formation of a National Cinema Audience," stressing that Mexican audiences participated in Mexican cultural experience by going to see films during the "Golden Age" of Mexican cinema. Because the consumption of Mexican cinema also peaked in the United States during the 1940s, Mexicans in America continued this cultural experience. The transnational distribution of Mexican films allowed Mexican-Americans to nourish their native roots in Spanish-language movie theaters.

Off-screen, two significant nationalizing projects were initiated over the remaining population of Mexicans in Los Angeles. In hope of creating a homogeneous America, U.S. agencies began strong "Americanization" efforts to prune Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants of their native culture. More surprisingly, however, the Mexican government initiated counter efforts by imposing policies of a "New Nationalism" that promoted native heritage and Mexican loyalty throughout the Southwest (Sánchez 113). In Los Angeles, for instance, the consulate office founded Spanish-language schools and libraries for Mexican immigrants and their American-born

children to study Mexican history and culture. The central hope was to lure immigrants back to Mexico (113). Neither programs succeeded in controlling the cultural adaptation of Mexican immigrants, but they encouraged unintended responses among second-generation Mexican-Americans.

A significant portion of second-generation self-identified as Chicanos and were characterized by high political involvement. At the top of their political goals, the second-generation wanted to reclaim their rights, heritage, and city against Americanization efforts. *In Making Lemonade Out of Lemons*, Jose Alamillo argues that this generation of Mexican-Americans laid the groundwork for the civil rights movement by transforming leisure spaces, such as movie theaters, into politicized spaces. This was clearly evident in Frank Fouce's Teatro California, where Mexicans could conveniently obtain voting cards at the door ("Teatro California"). As a result, Spanish-language theater spaces became charged with new meanings. To survive on the margins, Mexican-Americans invented lifestyles that were influenced by both the traditions of their homeland and the realities of their new environment. Movie theaters became a place where Mexican-Americans could negotiate competing national identities.

I argue that the establishment and financial success of Fouce's Spanish-language theaters demonstrates that Mexican Americans resisted cultural assimilation and challenged the melting pot policies of the 1930s. Because Mexican

cinema was crucial to Mexican cultural experience at this time, the second-generation's attendance at the Mayan as a central leisure activity contributed to the acquisition of a hybrid Mexican-American identity. Denise Chavez, a distinguished Mexican-American author, illustrated the clear relationship between national identity and film. Regarding Pedro Infante, the leading star of the Golden Age:

*"If you're a Mejicana or Mejicano, and don't know who he is, you should be tied to a hot stove with a yucca rope and beaten with sharp dry corn husks as you stand in a vat of soggy fideos. If your racial and cultural background or ethnicity is Other, then it's about time you learned about the most famous of Mexican singers and actors."*

Thus, identity-formation culminated in the 1930s, during a crucial period when theaters emerged specifically for Spanish-speaking audience in Los Angeles.

### **Mexican Cinema for Non-Spanish speaking moviegoers?**

Although Spanish-language theaters primarily attracted the Spanish-speaking population in Los Angeles, the films and events were publicized in the English-language press. The *Los Angeles Times* extensively reviewed Mexican films in a way that encouraged Americans to catch these films, even when very few features had English subtitles. At the time of the lavish reopening of the Million Dollar Theater, a critic said, "What a pity no English subtitles illuminate [Cantinflas'] most amusing comedy, 'Puerta, Joven.' Yet

so vivid is his pantomime that it is likely the story can be traced even by non-Spanish speaking spectators” (“Stage Revue”).

When the first theaters began showing Spanish-language films in the 1930s, it was perceived that these theaters were only appealing to foreigners, and the films were inferior to Hollywood productions. A positive review of *Cuerpo del Delito* went like this: “It is a form which passed from Hollywood long ago. But disregarding this, it is well done—surprisingly well done for a country unaccustomed to picture production... The cast includes only native players who are amazingly competent” (Baguez, “New House”). As exhibitors programmed more Mexican films, however, a small English-speaking audience for these foreign films developed. By the mid-1940s, spectators who went to see these films in Los Angeles were labeled “travel-minded” college students or “international-minded older folk” (“Spanish Cinema”).

The historiographical problem posed by this moviegoing culture is that there is no demographic data or concrete record of attendance rates. English-speaking spectators did have access to Mexican movies, however, as most theaters were located outside of Hispanic neighborhoods in the tourist-clotted city core. Moreover, advertising for Spanish-language films did appear in English-language newspapers. And there was a great body of reviews in the press on Mexican films that targeted this enigmatic group of “fans who do not speak Spanish” (“Mexican Stars”). But why did English-speakers attend these theaters,

and how were their experiences different from Mexicans and Mexican Americans?

By the late 1940s, critics continued to distinguish Mexican films from Hollywood’s, but this now made them attractive. During the war years, Mexican cinema provided an alternative to Hollywood’s propaganda films. In the post-war era, independent niche markets or Hollywood alternatives thrived, and there was an especially high proliferation of foreign language theaters emerging across the U.S. The English-language press presented the news to Los Angeles moviegoers enthusiastically: “The Mexican method, so frankly emotional, is completely unlike Hollywood’s” (“Mexican Stars”), and “the acting is good, as always in Mexican film, with a number of players seldom seen in American-released pictures” (Mexican Film).

In some instances, sex was emphasized, which further differentiated Mexican movies from Hollywood products that faced higher scrutiny. The star of *Ballando en Las Nubes* (1947) was introduced with the following line: “Her name is Canta Maya and she has a sensationally lovely figure... Senorita Maya appears in one barbaric number which our censors probably would blue-pencil pronto” (“Mexico Provides”). At this time, Latina actresses working for American studios were typically marketed as excessive and inviting bodies, which played on historical tropes of Latinas as seductive but trivial sex objects (Beltrán 85). Mexican stars were marketed

following the same tropes, which reinforced these stereotypes in the U.S., even when the films themselves tried to project authentic Mexican identity.

A critic who denounced *Carta Brava* (1949) as “one of those melodramatic pattern pictures which Mexicans turn out so frequently,” did not fail to mention the “unusually wriggly rhumba dancer” (“*Carta Brava*”). Alternatively, a review of the film in *La Opinión* emphasized how the gangster conventions and action sequences made the film worth seeing. Because the sexualized female was the redeeming quality of the film in the English press, spectators who read the review entered the film with a different set of expectations than readers of the Spanish press.

### **Exhibitors of Spanish Language Cinema in Los Angeles**

During the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema, Los Angeles was the most important distribution center in U.S. for Spanish-language film industries. This was evident from having both the largest population of Latinos outside Mexico City, and also from the proliferation of theaters that exhibited Mexican movies. In *Mexican Movies in The United States*, Rogelio Agrasánchez suggests Mexican films went almost uncensored in Los Angeles. Although this claim is quite overgeneralized<sup>1</sup>, Los Angeles projected a supporting attitude towards Mexican movies, unlike many American cities, to a point where LA exhibitors programed controversial Mexican films.

In one bizarre case, *Harrison's Reports* included an editorial entitled “Beware” that

warned exhibitors across the nation about the suppression of *The Angry God* (1948) in Iowa theaters. The film was withdrawn from its original U.S. release for unstated reasons because “common decency” did not allow the journal to publish why the film was offensive. But the warning was clear: “DON'T BUY IT—IF YOU HAVE BOUGHT—DON'T SHOW IT!!!” (“Beware”). Nevertheless, *The Angry God* had multiple screenings in Los Angeles in 1949, and the film was advertised in the *Los Angeles Times* as a full color Mexican film with English dialogue (“*Angry God*”). In part, the exhibition of *The Angry God* in Los Angeles is explained by the city's strong metropolitan film culture, which supported greater access to specialty and novelty films than less multicultural cities did. Yet the culture of Los Angeles also embraced a Hispanic tradition, at least in the eyes of tourists, and had a high demand for good, bad and even controversial Mexican films among both English and Spanish-speaking spectators. English dialogue also added value to *The Angry God*, which likely caught the attention of Los Angeles exhibitors.

In the 1940s, the few Mexican films released with English subtitles captured wide attention. Films were not just released with English subtitles; they were “decked out” (“*Singer*”). One longstanding reviewer of Mexican films in Los Angeles hoped Mexican producers could be persuaded to at least put English subtitles on their best films, so they could contend with other foreign films (“*New Mexican*”). Ultimately, the lack of English subtitles

suggests that Mexican film producers did not recognize English-speaking Americans as a significant audience for their films. Instead, they were focused on unifying a diverse Hispanic film audience through Mexican cinema.

### **The Mayan Theater: Where Mexicans, Americans, and Mexican-Americans mingled**

The news—carried by *La Opinión* in 1949—that Libertad Lamarque was flown from Argentina to Los Angeles for the opening of the Mayan Theater came as a sensation. Though the Mayan was to be the home of Mexican pictures, the opening program intended to showcase the most famous figures of Latin American cinema and radio in a spectacular live presentation. The international stage revue headed by Lamarque included a cast of 30 dancers, singers and musicians from Argentina, Mexico and Spain. Fouce already appeared to hold the loyalty of his patrons, charging them \$1.50 (triple the average entry price thereafter). The inauguration was drawn out for two weeks and underwent several program changes, with Mexican film “masterpieces” added in the second week. Fouce’s lavishly choreographed program cut across national boundaries and enticed a diverse population of Hispanics in Los Angeles, who had varying social backgrounds, levels of education, and economic statuses.

To Fouce, the Mayan represented something more than a movie theater. Boldly advertised as “El Teatro Máxima de la Raza / The Great Theater of The [Mexican] People,” he presented the space

as a home for Mexican culture and art. The architecture and pre-Columbian theme distinguished the theater from Fouce’s previous venues and complied with his marketing of the Mayan as nostalgic and mythical homeland. A week prior to the reopening, a full-page advertisement ran in *La Opinión*, which presented a story of Fouce’s efforts to obtain the Mayan. Reminiscing on a time when the California region was a part of Mexico, Fouce told the Hispanic community in Los Angeles:

*Eso teatro, que en otras circunstancias hubiera costado cerca de dos millones de dólares, ha sido obtenido a través de una serie de sacrificios y de esfuerzos, con el objetivo de convertirlo en escaparate para el Arte de Nuestra America: de la America que todavía piensa, siente y habla en español.*

*This theater, which in other circumstances would have cost nearly two million dollars, has been obtained through a series of sacrifices and efforts, with the goal of converting it to showcase the art of Our America: of the America that still thinks, feels and speaks in Spanish. (“Teatro Maya”).*

In other words, Hispanic spectators could show their loyalty to Mexico and keep their cultural traditions alive by attending the theater.

The environment of the Mayan also enhanced the fantasy and sensationalism of Mexican films. First imagined as a legitimate theater in 1927, the Mayan was designed by Stiles O. Clements and

Francisco Cornejo, a well-known Mexican artist, using both Mexican and Mayan themes (“All About”). After two decades of shifting ownership and an overall decline in the building’s condition, Fouce brought the theater back to its former glamour in 1949. He exploited the theatrical design in several ways: the architecture and interior style complemented the cultural narrative that Fouce marketed; and the theater space, functioning as a movie palace, was utilized economically.

Andrea Noble notes that the Golden Age of Mexican cinema was underpinned with indigenous mythologies and pre-Columbian cultural imagery (Noble 80-82). From a distance, the theater’s exterior projected these same iconographic features and set expectations as to the inner

entertainment. From the street, spectators stepped into the outdoor ticket lobby and were enveloped by relief-carved tiles that paneled every surface with mythological and narrative subjects. The sacred Quetzal bird, serpents and other ancient symbols feathered the walls throughout the inner-lobby and corridors. Two gila monster heads guarded the stairs to the balcony, and in the auditorium a magnificent ceiling

piece, modeled after a Mayan calendar, commanded attention. Even the exit sign—plastered to look like stone and engraved with tribal-block-lettering—conformed to the theme.

Moreover, the building operated like a “de luxe” movie palace of the 1920s—as it had a stage show, lavish interior decoration, over 1,700 seats, and extra spaces for live entertainment. In “The Movie Palace and the Theatrical Sources of Its Architectural Style,” Charlotte Herzog indicates that the function of the movie palace was “to provide quality

entertainment to as many people as possible at one time, as often as possible, and for the most reasonable price.” Though varying exhibition practices, Fouce certainly intended to reach a wide-ranging audience—from the affluent to the less prosperous. He changed the program

weekly and adjusted prices in accordance to the cost of each week’s spectacle. At “precios populares” (popular prices), patrons could expect to see popular comedians, live presentations from film stars, and musical features in addition to the films. Thus, Fouce’s vaudeville programming was utilized by the theater space and was an effective marketing



Mayan Theater circa 1965

strategy that attracted thousands of customers.

The presence of stars at the Mayan also allowed spectators to participate in the entertainment. For many years, Libertad Lamarque's films were exhibited in Fouce's theaters, which helped fashion her international stardom. Her live appearance at the Mayan therefore engaged Los Angeles spectators in a new way: "Oírán su voz, no a través de los micrófonos, ni de las sincronizaciones de la película, sino directamente ("You will hear her voice, not through the microphones, nor through the synchronization of the film, but directly") ("El Maya"). The spectators' identification with the characters on screen was thus reinforced by the star's performance at the Mayan.

Fouce's advertising in Spanish-language newspapers exploited this fascination by featuring the star's name larger than the name of the movie being exhibited. Latin stars were also well known among English-speaking audiences, as many Hispanic actors worked in both Hollywood and the Mexican film industry. Headlines in the English press often featured the names of Latin American actors and singers without telling readers who they were or what they did. It was assumed they knew. Latino and Latina stardom was therefore crucial to the promotion of Mexican films.

Frank Fouce's ability to bring stars to the Mayan gave the theater an undisputed respectability among fans. Spectators entering the theater could expect first class entertainment that would generally be beyond their economic reach. Throughout

its existence as a Spanish-language theater, moviegoers of different national origin, social background, and who spoke different languages would mingle in this space to view national Mexican cinema. Beginning February 1968, this gathering would end. The Mayan would become a run-down venue for pornography, and a new type of customer interested in eroticism found only in films like "101 Acts of Love" would fill this architectural jewel ("Mayan Theater").

### Conclusion

As for the other Spanish-language theaters during this period, most began as venues exhibiting commercial American films. If the theaters still exist today, they have either returned to showing commercial English-language films, or have been converted for non-theatrical use. As this paper has shown, Mexican immigration was not the only factor contributing to the establishment of these theaters. Mexican migration to the United States has increased significantly since the 1940s and began doubling in the 1970s (United States 5). Yet, the theatrical exhibition of Mexican film had the highest activity from 1920 to 1960, and the phenomenon finally ended in the 1980s (Agrasánchez 2). Remarkably, the consumption of Spanish-language cinema in the United States flourished at a time when Americanization efforts were strongest, and then declined in later decades when multiculturalism was embraced and Mexican immigration continued.

Arguably, the popularity of Spanish-language theaters is linked to the period of the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema, when both the quality of Mexican films high and theater attendance in the U.S. peaked. The transnational practices of film distribution between the U.S. and Mexico also highlight another reason, which destabilizes the concept of national cinema.

While Mexican films were crucial to

the formation national identity for Mexican citizens, Mexican-American moviegoers developed a different identity using those same films—one that was culturally tied to Mexican heritage but nationally aligned with the U.S. Despite having no legal relation to the Mexican state and by choosing to remain in the United States, Mexican-Americans strengthened their imagined relation to Mexico through film.

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#### END NOTES

1. Agrasánchez only cites a questionable musical sequence in *Ballando en Las Nubes* that went unnoticed by the local censor board.

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## **PART 6**

# Convergence

## The Illusion of Divergence

# Homogeneity: Mathematical Paratexts in *The Simpsons*

By **Julia Petuhova**

*“The Simpsons, basically—and Futurama—are really smart shows. They’re kind of disguised as these goofy animated sitcoms, but the references within the shows, if you’re paying attention, are pretty smart and pretty sophisticated.”*

— Matt Groening

At its inception, *The Simpsons* (Fox, 1989—) was neither envisaged nor received as a “smart” show. As the story goes, Matt Groening created the Simpsons family characters in five minutes, while waiting in a lobby for a meeting with Fox producer James L. Brooks (Singh 9). Groening knew Brooks was looking for an animator to produce a series of shorts as interludes during hair and makeup changes between sketches on *The Tracey Ullman Show* (Fox, 1987-1990); he also knew Brooks was interested in his comic strip *Life in Hell*, which starred a depressed rabbit named Binky (9). But, hesitant to dole out all legal and financial rights to the character that had elevated him to the big leagues of major network attention, Groening instead offered a new set of characters: Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie. The shorts became immediately popular, and, in 1989, Brooks proposed they be extended to a full-length animation

pilot. So, Groening hired a Los Angeles-based team of eight writers to create a Christmas special that aired on December 17, 1989. Fox picked up the show in early 1990 as a cheaply-produced primetime sitcom, and, twenty-five seasons later, the show boasts an archive of over 550 episodes and status as a renowned cult classic. Much of the early popularity of the show, specifically during the first nine seasons, stemmed from the show’s ability to simultaneously access multiple audiences. Those that sought out a goofy sitcom marveled in the show’s slapstick humor (*d’oh!*), while those that sought out “smart” humor could just as easily deconstruct references to disciplines such as astronomy, evolutionary psychology, and political theory, though the most salient and common references were to theoretical mathematics (e.g. number theory, topology and probability). The emergence of niche groups that would

deconstruct *The Simpsons*' referential text prompted the creation of an online forum space, alt.tv.simpsons, which, in the early 1990s, became one of the first mass online "newsgroups." Though *The Simpsons*' writing team initially began to reference mathematics in background jokes for their own amusement, the references became increasingly self-reflexive as the writers began a dialogue with these fans on newsgroups, which produced one of the earliest cases of television texts responding to online forums.

If *The Simpsons* was not initially envisaged as a "smart" show, it was the writers' inspiration that made it one. Of the eight writers that drafted the inaugural episode, two were Harvard-graduate mathematics enthusiasts: Mike Reiss and Al Jean (Singh 13-14). Reiss and Jean were responsible for the earliest mathematics jokes on the program, and though they were rather elementary and entirely narrative-driven, these jokes set the tone for future writers. For example, in the early episode "Dead Putting Society," Lisa seemingly miraculously realizes that mini-golf can be understood as a simple geometry game, to which Bart retorts, "I can't believe it. You've actually found a practical use for geometry!" Quite unusually, many of the future writers—and nearly all of the most prolific creative contributors—also had higher education degrees in STEM disciplines. The following are a few of the most notable (Greenwald):

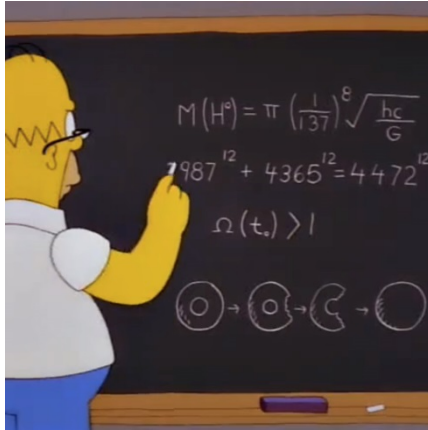
- David Cohen: BS Physics (Harvard University), MS Computer Science (UC Berkeley)

- J. Stewart Burns: BS Mathematics (Harvard University), MS Mathematics (UC Berkeley)
- Ken Keeler: BS Applied Mathematics (Harvard University), PhD Applied Mathematics (Harvard University)
- Al Jean: BS Mathematics (Harvard University)
- Jeff Westbrook: BS Physics (Harvard University), PhD Computer Science (Princeton University)

Upon first realization, the heavy mathematics-based educational backgrounds of the *Simpsons* writing team may seem surprising. But, if nothing else, this mathematics served as the underpinning for the fine-tuned logic necessary for meta-humor; I also believe, though, that their STEM backgrounds made the writers more sensitive to the dialogues entering the online technological space, which they later joined themselves via the program's text. Yet their degrees certainly didn't contradict their careers or preclude their interest in humor—Reiss, Jean and Cohen all wrote for *The Harvard Lampoon*, and others, like Ken Keeler, were highly invested in college comedy-writing clubs (Greenwald). Reiss and Jean's basic mathematics jokes strewn throughout the first two seasons could have been fluke occurrences of isolated humor. Instead, at the beginning of the third season, Groening promoted them to executive producers, and that new control cemented the power the mathematicians held.

Though this power was mostly cemented, it must be noted that the degree of mathematics within each particular episode varied depending not only on the

executive producers, but also on the writers and the consultants giving creative input during read-throughs. Because of this, there is no one formula that describes the role of mathematics within the humor of *The Simpsons*. I posit that mathematical humor on the program exists on three orders. The first order includes jokes whose resolution or “punchline” explicitly relies on basic mathematics (or at least its absurdities), while the second order includes jokes that deal with more obscure math and thus live on the periphery of the narrative and visual landscape. Nearly all essays discussing math in *The Simpsons* describe jokes on these first and second orders. But perhaps the most interesting order is the third. Recall that the nature of



mathematics is arbitrary—formulas and equations aren’t inherent truths, but rather codified systems of patterns. Thus the most natural way to observe embedded mathematics is as what I will refer to as the third order: a system of humorous (though still homogenous) patterns, as opposed to an isolated joke. If we closely examine the text of *The Simpsons*, we see new patterns emerge, particularly beginning in the third season, that combine visual references with first- and second-order jokes to create mathematical paratexts spread throughout the series, creating a new kind of meta-

humor. While a viewer accessing the show on a lower level of humor could effortlessly enjoy first- or second-order jokes, viewers accessing the show on a higher level—like the active participants of the online newsgroup alt.tv.simpsons—could enjoy jokes of all three orders.

The first examples of first-order jokes whose resolution relies on mathematics can be found in the second episode of the first season, “Bart the Genius.” In this episode, Bart Simpson cheats off the class brain on

an intelligence class, which prompts the Springfield Elementary psychologist to declare him a genius and request that Bart be transferred to an academy for gifted children. Bart, an exceptionally average student, cannot follow

his peers’ discussions, and when they turn the conversation onto him, he loses his entire lunch through a series of trades (e.g. “Tell you what, Bart, I’ll trade you the weight of a bowling ball on the eighth moon of Jupiter from my lunch for the weight of a feather on the second moon of Neptune from your lunch”). Later, when Bart returns to the classroom after lunch, his teacher rearranges a basic calculus integral to read “r dr r.” His peers, having both followed the teacher’s algebra trick and realized the homophonic relationship between “r dr r” and “hardy-har-har,” burst into chuckles. Bart appears obviously

confused, and his teacher again explains the joke: “Don’t you get it, Bart? Derivative dy equals three r squared dr over three, or r squared dr, or r dr r!” Again, Bart does not understand; again, his peers chuckle. In neither the interactions between Bart and his peers nor the interaction between Bart and his teacher does a viewer need an extensive understanding of mathematics, whether calculus or weight conversions, to appreciate the humor—the humor can just as easily exist in the context of Bart’s overwhelming experience dealing with a cluster of nerds. Because these jokes rely on mathematics to some extent as part of their resolution—on a lower-level as plain “nerdy” or on a higher-level as actual plays on mathematics—they are first-order jokes.

As early as the second episode of the program, viewers accessing the show on a higher level turned to the online newsgroup “alt.tv.simpsons” to deconstruct these mathematical jokes, as evidenced by posts on the thread entitled “Inconsistencies in ‘Bart the Genius’” in 1990. Some of these very early posts characterize the anxieties surrounding forum discussions. On June 1, 1990, Kent Paul Dolan wrote, “Geez! I read the net so that I won’t have to watch television to waste hours and hours sitting in front of a cart full of mindless drivel. Now you nerds are importing TV onto the net. G e t a l i f e ! ! ! ! !” Other posts demonstrate users’ attempts to negotiate definitions of the space, as in Evan Marshall Manning’s June 1, 1990 response post: “I want to get really technical. That’s what this newsgroup is for, isn’t it? I think I

read that somewhere :-).” But mostly, the posts on this thread discuss jokes—particularly the “r dr r” one. On May 30, 1990, Tom Almy wrote, “Personally I was put off by the  $y = r^3/3$  joke... While her verbal explanation was correct, what she wrote on the board was ridiculous... Also nobody I know would refer to r squared dr as ‘r dr r’ which was the point of the joke.” A response from Kyle Jones noted that: “It seemed very realistic to me. Try crashing a Mensa shindig sometime. You’ll find people who thrive on jokes even more obscure and oblique than ‘r dr r’.” Ultimately, the “deconstructions” of first-order jokes on these spaces are not so much deconstructions as discussions of reactions—because the jokes are more explicit and narratively exposed, there is less to deconstruct.

Second-order jokes, however, were heavily deconstructed on these spaces, largely because the nature of the jokes was inherently different. Perhaps the most well-known second-order joke is that of the “solution” to Fermat’s last theorem in the 1995 episode “Treehouse of Horror VI” (a second “solution” appeared in the episode “The Wizard of Evergreen Terrace” three years later, but was less discussed because the users had already heavily deconstructed—and “solved”—the joke). In this episode, Homer becomes trapped in a three-dimensional world. After piercing the space-time continuum, Homer wobbles around a wormhole; it is here, in the background of this three-dimensional wormhole, that the viewer sees the equation “ $1782^{12} + 1841^{12} = 1922^{12}$ .” If

true, this equation would solve Fermat's last theorem, which states that there exists no three positive integers  $a$ ,  $b$  and  $c$  such that  $a^n + b^n = c^n$  for any  $n$  greater than two. Many viewers noticed this "solution," if perhaps belatedly. On the October 29, 1996 thread "Homer<sup>3</sup> equations," "curtis cameron" called it to attention: "I checked it out on my calculator. I added the two terms on the left side, and took the 12th root. The answer was 1921.99999996. This is like calculator round-off error. What's going on here? Did we just disprove Fermat?" On a related thread, "Esoteric Observation," Steven Boswell's also noted it: "The equation works... is this a dis-proof of Fermat? Seems awfully weird to hide something that profound in a Simpsons episode." Of course, this equation does not prove Fermat. The writing team merely found a solution that was exact up to ten digits (called a "near miss"), and thus—if inputted into a calculator—would appear correct. Interesting, here, is that every single thread that dealt with the equation, found some "solution" to this second-order mathematical joke. On the "Esoteric Observation" thread, for instance, Peter Vachuska solved the joke by realizing the left side must be odd, while the right side even: "Actually  $1782^{12} + 1841^{12} = 1922^{12}$  becomes  
 $2541210258614589176288669958142428$   
 $526657 = 254121025931480141081927864$   
 $9643651567616$  which is close enough to be interesting, but...no cigar." Meanwhile, on the "Homer<sup>3</sup> equations" thread, "curtis cameron" answered his own question using a calculator—"the numbers are pretty

amazing. The left side comes out to: 2.541 210 258 614 589 E 39 and the right: 2.541 210 259 314 801 E 39 A difference of 0.00000003 percent ! I had never seen this before. Is it famous?" Second-order jokes, which deal with more obscure math, like Fermat's last theorem, and lie on the visual periphery, like in the background of a wormhole, were prime for deconstructions online because they could be both "detected" and "solved."

I first realized the relationship between the writers and online forum participants during an NPR interview with David Cohen in which he told Ira Flatow, "...these are sort of background jokes, things that you can only see really if you freeze frame later on, at that time a VCR, or nowadays on your DVR. It didn't really matter to us that much if people got them. You know, we just wanted to fill up the space and make it look like Homer was doing something smart. So only later when we saw people discussing it energetically on the Internet did we realize people were actually getting these jokes that were done really pretty much for our own amusement." So, I began to explore other ways in which the writers of *The Simpsons* could have filled up "space" by embedding mathematical jokes. And what I discovered was that many first- and second-order jokes with a common mathematical "theme" (e.g. bases) could be linked, even across episodes and seasons, to generate greater humor, almost like meta-humor.

Jokes that can be so linked, I call third-order jokes.



My idea for a third-order joke dealing with bases, the number of distinct digits used by counting systems to signify numbers, initially came from a “Numberphile” Youtube video. Numberphile is a group that is supported by the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute and consists of twenty-two STEM professors—one of them, Simon Singh, the recent author of *The Simpsons and Their Mathematical Secrets*. In this particular video, “Pi and Four Fingers,” Singh discusses the clash of bases 8 and 10 in the episode “Marge in Chains.” Singh points out that, since the Simpsons characters have four fingers on each hand, they should live in a base 8 world; instead, they live in a decimal one. But this is accounted for in “Marge in Chains,” in which we see the only Simpsons character that has five fingers on each hand: God. And so, according to Singh, during Apu’s recitation to God of the first 40,000 digits of pi, it makes sense that he offers the decimal version of pi. But I posit that this clash of bases can be further extended. The Simpsons characters all have base 8 physical characteristics—though Singh only points out their fingers, this also includes their teeth, eyelashes and toes, and Lisa and Maggie Simpson both even average 8 spikes in their hair (Bart averages 7—what a rebel!). This trend is made especially apparent during the 1991 episode “I Married Marge” in which Homer sees Bart for the first time and tells Marge, “Hey, as long as he’s got eight fingers and eight toes, he’s fine by me!” (Singh 101). Yet most of the Simpsons’

belongings are in base 6—most noticeably, Marge and Lisa’s necklaces average 6 pearls, Homer’s favorite “Duff” beer is sold in packs of six and most of the Simpsons’ household belongings are found in pairs of three, including cans always present on the kitchen counter and books always placed on the shelf next to the couch. (I must note that earlier episodes have inconsistencies in these bases, while later episodes follow them closely.) And yet everything else in Springfield—from pi to money to statistics jokes—is in base 10.

If we define base 6 as material, base 8 as physical and base 10 as numerical, we find some jokes elucidated. In the 1992 episode “Dog of Death,” for instance, Principal Skinner fantasizes that if Springfield Elementary had lottery money, he could buy “math books that don’t have that base six crap in them.” At first, this joke doesn’t make sense—why do they have base six textbooks in the first place?—and is written off as absurdist. But if we consider that material objects, like textbooks, belong to base 6 in the Simpsons’ world, this joke suddenly has much deeper meaning. However, these third-order jokes are not limited to material objects. The 1997 episode “Lisa’s Sax,” contains a flashback in which Homer, Marge and Lisa meet with Springfield Elementary’s psychologist, Dr. Pryor. When Dr. Pryor asks Lisa how old she is, she responds, “I am three and three-eighths.” Again, this seems initially odd—why not say three and four and a half months?—and is, again, written off as absurdist (or as just “nerdy Lisa,” similar

to Bart's interactions at the school for gifted children). But if we consider that the Simpsons' physical beings are in base 8, it makes sense that Lisa would describe her physical age (at least partially) in terms of base 8. And, unsurprisingly, alt.tv.simpsons is littered with deconstructions of base paratexts, with what I believe is most success in the 1992 thread "Base 8," the 1993 thread "Four Fingers" and the 2007 thread "Notes for KABF01 (Funeral for a Fiend)."

More importantly, though, is the fact that there are currently nearly 100,000 threads on alt.tv.simpsons, deconstructing similar first-, second- and third-order jokes. The relationship between the writers and

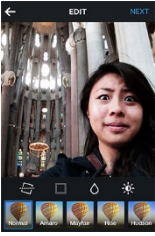
fans was not just elementary or temporary—it was symbiotic and remains to this day. Cohen, an integral part of *The Simpsons*' writing team, admitted, "our theory was if you put in a very obscure joke in the background, those few people who get it will be so amazed that you hit this obscure thing that only they and a few other people know about, that they'll really be hooked for life" (Flatow). With a total of twenty-five successful seasons (and counting), it would appear that, through this formula of linking fan analysis and textual response, the writers of *The Simpsons* uncovered possibly the most successful "hook" in American television to date.

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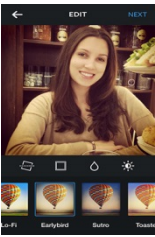
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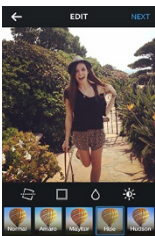
# Selfies



**Cynthia Chin** (writer) is a fourth-year Art and Communication double major. She loves watching a capella groups, drinking water with ice cubes floating in it, and dancing like no one's watching. She looks forward to graduation and is waiting for the day she can finally get a dog.



**Suzanne Cimolino** (writer) is a third-year Film & Media Studies major. When she graduates next year, she plans to move to Paris for a few months to have a great adventure before moving back to her hometown of LA to start a career in film production. She loves classic films, especially those of Godard and Hitchcock. She would like to thank the Academy and her UCSB professors for introducing her to some of her now-favorite films.

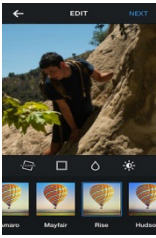


**Alex Goldstein** (writer, staff) is a second year Film and Media Studies and Psychology double major. She can be found color coordinating her to-do lists and meticulously planning her iCal, sometimes, months in advance. When she isn't making

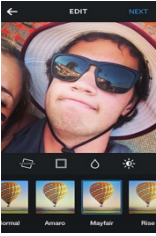
lists/calendars or doing homework, she can be caught re-watching *Sex and The City* or *How I Met Your Mother*. A film fanatic and closet comic book nerd, her favorite superhero is the Flash because he gets things done very quickly and has a great sense of humor. In July, she is crossing the International Date Line to spend a semester studying abroad in Australia (she can't wait to meet all the Liam Hemsworth look alike!).

**Nick Hornung** (co-editor-in-chief) is a second-year Film & Media Studies major. His interests include rain, clouds, darkness, staying inside, and puppies. After learning he was too tall (and too awkward) to make it as an international pop sensation, Nick chose to pursue his second passion in life: writing. He hopes to be the voice of his generation. Or at least a voice...of a generation. (If you understand this reference, he will buy you a cookie\*)

\*He probably won't do that.

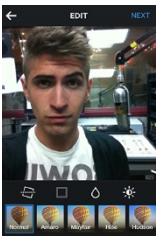


**Alberto Lopez** (writer, staff) is a third-year Film & Media Studies major. He hopes you will read his essay in its entirety.

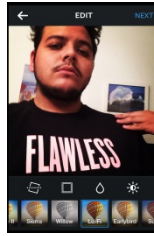


**Jess McKillop** (writer) is a second-year Film & Media Studies/History double major. Originally from Washington, D.C., he is a huge Redskins fan and eagerly awaiting

RG3 to return to form and take over the NFL. Officially a west coast sell out now, for the first time in his life Jess will not be spending summer in DC, but instead is going to be interning for a small production company in Venice and doing a film program at UCLA. Jess one day hopes to work in the Entertainment Industry in one way or the other, and ultimately wants to start a production company / media house with his older brother, Greg.

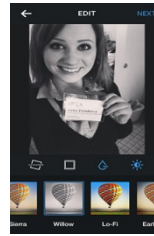


**Justin Minor** (writer) is a third-year Film & Media Studies major at UCSB. He grew up somewhere that no one has ever heard of and he currently works as a radio DJ and assistant chef. He has passions for horror films, screenwriting, and David Bowie.



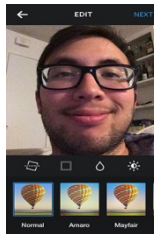
**Omar Miranda** (writer) is a fourth year Psychology and Film and Media Studies double major. Omar's involvement on campus ranges to planning an

event with Program Board, helping out at the Student Resource Building or to rhapsodizing about everything and anything Beyoncé. Omar plans to work in the Entertainment industry in hopes of trumping Oprah and Ellen Degeneres in having the ultimate talk show.

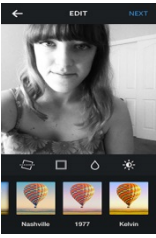


**Julia Petuhova** (co-editor-in-chief, writer) is a third-year Film & Media Studies major. She can usually be found either doing number

theory homework or crying to soldiers-coming-home videos (more realistically, crying to both). Next year, she's shipping herself off to Americorps. Her primary life goal is to be reunited with her golden retriever, Abby, but finally catching up to Game of Thrones and becoming the next feminist icon are close seconds.

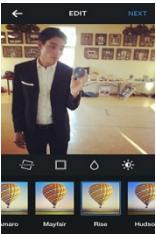


**Christopher Ridsen** (writer) is a third year going to school at UCSB. He is a pretty cool guy.



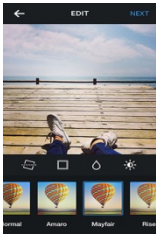
**Daisy Rogozinsky** (writer) is a filmmaker and a student of life/The Universe (and the Film & Media Studies department). She speaks Russian, English, and

French but prefers to communicate through dance. Please don't ask her what she's doing after graduation. Ask her about poetry instead. You'll both have more fun.



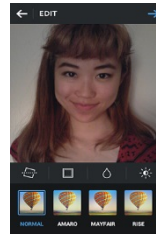
**Carlos Sanchez** (co-editor-in-chief, writer) is fourth-year transfer Film and Media Studies major. He spent most of his final year editing short films. His interests includes

animation, queer theory, TV writing, napping, yoga, and dark chocolate.



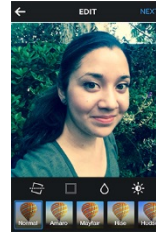
**Pailin Srukhosit** (writer) is a recent Sociology and Film & Media Studies graduate. Whether she's gasping for breath running up a 20-degree incline or shredding

treacherous 2ft waves at Devereux, she's always contemplating new and exciting contexts for cheese-eating. She is fascinated by the processes of subjective meaning-construction and the development of social relationships. She can be found engaging in feminist film theory or looking at herself in a mirror.



**Victoria Tsai** (artist) is a second-year Communications major. She loves drawing, video games, films, droll comedy, and food. Her favorite pastry is a lemon

bar. If there is an opportunity for dancing, she will grab that opportunity and shake it out to its fullest. She is probably dancing right now.



**Mariela Villa** is a junior transfer majoring in Film and Media studies. When she isn't being consumed by coursework and her job, she can be found in her kitchen cooking up

new vegetarian recipes. A perfect day for her consists of a challenging hike that will allow her to reward herself with an abundance of dark chocolate while watching Robert De Niro films, whom she thinks is a gangster on and off screen. While at UCSB, she has also participated in the Film Studio club, where she has been able to practice her interests in promotion and event coordination.

# Thank You! We Couldn't Have Done It Without You

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