

## Lesson 2: Media And Society

- Media and technology have, over time, fundamentally changed the way human beings interact with each other and with media, cultural norms, and the kinds of stories that can be and are told. Mass media today is infinitely more interactive than it ever has been, making consumers much less passive. Consumers now have the power to respond back to a text and the producer of that text as well as the power to create their own texts.
- Going over this message in class was very interesting to me and provided me with a lot of insight. I say this because it deals with an idea that I pondered by myself prior to this lesson, so gaining even more information and thoughts about the topic expanded my knowledge on it. It's undeniable that technology has completely changed the way we as humans not only think about the world, but also act and interact with one another. Before social media existed, people would have their group of friends that they would really talk to and tell about their lives, and those people would listen and reply with their thoughts. These meaningful interactions rarely exist nowadays. Instead, people take to social media outlets like Instagram, twitter, and snapchat to name a few, and publicly post these previously private thoughts and experiences for the world to see. Often times, the people that end up seeing these posts hardly even know the person responsible for the post, but still might comment something just to feel seen and appreciated. These interactions aren't real or meaningful, but they occur because of the world of relationships that mass media has created. Mass media is also responsible for a lot of negativity and hate that goes on in the world. Because they have the power to respond to a text or post in an anonymous manner or even with their own identity, people use the internet and social media to tear down people, especially famous ones that we have decided to put on a pedestal. It becomes a vicious cycle of meanness and hate, and often just leads to identity issues and sorrow.

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- Media texts are polysemic – they are embedded with multiple meanings. Texts are imbued with messages about power – who has it and who doesn't, who should have it and who shouldn't. Media texts and pop culture texts are laden with messages about big picture identity categories like race, gender, sexuality, ability, age, and class and normalize and naturalize specific ways of knowing and being in relation to those categories.
- As someone that has always had trouble decoding images because of a visual processing discrepancy that I was born with, learning how to break down the polysemic messages that media texts present was very satisfying and important to me. It was interesting for me to find out that media texts made available to the public always have a deeper underlying meaning than what's immediately presented. It's not always obvious either, sometimes the way the camera is angled or the color of clothing makes all the difference in the message that is trying to get communicated. When we examined the *Vampire Diaries* photo as a class, the sexual promiscuity that was shown through revealing clothing and poses was something clear that the creators were trying to get across.

However, less clear was the danger and lust that was presented in the red color of the dresses and dark overall theme. Media texts don't just communicate messages about the topic that they are covering, but also help set the norms of what's ideal in the world. If we look at the *Vampire Diaries* cover photo again, the skinniness of the women, the length of their hair, and the way they wear their makeup can be seen as the value of certain feminine characteristics in society. Understanding these sometimes hard to read messages is crucial from a public eye because our brains are constantly getting manipulated by the media, with even something as small as a woman standing behind a man, so being able to identify this helps us become aware of the messaging going on.

### **Lesson 17: Spiral of Silence Theory**

- Mass media, like news media, can have a significant role in creating a spiral of silence. People often use mass media to help them to determine the majority opinion. However, mass media can make the opinion of a small minority *appear* to be the opinion of a majority. This happens in the language chosen, the amount of segments produced about a topic, the placement of a segment in a news hour, etc. (framing, priming, agenda setting). The news media can help to contribute to the feeling that a small minority is much larger than it really is
- Mass media's role in creating a spiral of silence in recent years cannot be understated. In today's society, the information that we choose to take in from what is available heavily shapes the way we think, and often communicate. As we discussed in class, republican and democratic political ideas nowadays seem to be on completely different sides of the spectrum, and a lot of this thinking is due to what we, as the masses, hear about each party from our chosen news sources. If you only watch Fox News and follow conservative accounts on Instagram and Twitter, chances are that you are going to understand the conservative way of thinking, and side with it. And no one can blame you for that because the same thing can be said about liberals and CNN. We don't want to dilute the information that we absorb, because that makes things harder. We would rather just believe what is given to us, and negate the validity of the other side at all costs. The trickiest part of this whole thing though, is when you believe one thing, but are too scared to say anything because everyone around you seems to believe something else. I saw this happen on a personal level with the 2016 presidential election as I was living in Washington DC during this time, an extremely liberal city, and kids in my high school would post every day about how much of a monster Donald Trump and his supporters were. There were a few kids in my school that spoke up in support of Trump, and they got absolutely bullied, online, and in person. I know for a fact that there were more in my grade alone that supported him too but they were way too scared to say anything in fear that they would get obliterated. Mass media had me thinking that Trump had no shot, but that was only because of what I was taking in; there were millions that were silent about their support, and in the voting booth it's just you, and that's what ultimately won him the election.

## Lesson 22: *Black Mirror* - "The Entire History of You"

- The technology in this episode is fascinating. The episode brought up a variety of issues (in relation to the tech) in terms of privacy, truth, paranoia, biotechnology, and relationships. In a previous semester, we discussed the potential benefits and downfalls of this kind of biotechnology (one that enables users to relive every detail of their lives).
- “The Entire History of You” was without a doubt the one *Black Mirror* episode that took the biggest emotional toll on me. I say this not because it made me cry or uncontrollably laugh, but because it made me ask a lot of questions about myself, both in my actual life right now, and the hypothetical one that I would be living if I had access to that sort of biotechnology. I think that we as audience members can agree that Liam was already a toxic boyfriend before the cheating information came out; he was jealous, territorial, and had a drinking problem. What we don’t know however, is how much the biotechnology contributed to him becoming these things. Having access to your memories at all times is a scary thought, it gives you the power to relive your best and worst moments at any time, and thus can bring you to your highest and lowest emotional points whenever you feel like it. Specifically in relationships, this type of technology can make someone or both people paranoid, envious, and always having doubt. The truth is always just one little step away, and that can drive someone crazy. As someone that recently got into my first real romantic relationship myself, I can attest that the hardest thing for me to do is fully trust my partner. I believe everything that she tells me, but sometimes think if I could just see it too, I would be more happy. The truth is, I would go crazy obsessing about her past lovers and little interactions, and just thinking about it makes me squirm in my seat. The biotechnology in the episode is almost like a super advanced cell-phone, but in this case, there’s no way to lie over text, and that’s just too scary to me. I came away from the episode shaken up, but fully confident that technology like this has no place in my life.

## Lesson 26: *Black Mirror* - "White Bear"

- We also talked about the idea of justice – we tried to come up with some words that might define or encompass the idea of justice. Important in that conversation is – who is justice for? We determined that justice is about the victims, the victims’ family, the audience/public, and the criminal. Justice is much more than just punishment of an offender.
- This idea of justice that came up when discussing the *Black Mirror* episode, “White Bear”, was an important conversation to have in my eyes because it covered morals that often separate people and reflect their values. After I watched the episode, I immediately thought that the messages that this episode intended to send out to the audience were the dangers of vigilantism and people’s appetite for justice, and the cruelty of dehumanizing

criminals. The interesting thing about the episode, was that in addition to Victoria being put through this horrific repetitive maze if you will, it was revealed that people were filming her throughout her journey. It was almost like filming Victoria filled the public's void of justice and made them feel satisfied with her punishment. People have this deep desire and itch to find justice and punish those who society deems as bad people, and treating Victoria like a caged animal through the filming shows this perfectly. This thought also ties into the idea of whether or not it's okay to dehumanize a criminal just because of the wrongs they have committed. It is pretty much unanimously agreed on that this type of torture would be inhumane to subject a law abiding citizen to, so my question is, what makes it okay to do it to a person that committed a heinous crime? They are still people at the end of the day. People that made horrible choices? Yes, no one is debating that, but the punishment that they are subjected to should not be barbaric in nature just to fill the appetite of the bloodthirsty public. The argument is often made that these people took a life so why should they get to live regularly when the victim died and their family still suffers. To that, I offer a quote from the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great of a burden to bear." Punishment is necessary, but cruelty without any goal but to seek vengeance does not solve anything, and instead adds to the pain.