

Lesson 20: Screening Response - “The National Anthem”

Question 1:

Why is this episode so uncomfortable to watch?

Answer:

This episode was extremely uncomfortable to watch for many different reasons. The distortion and perversion of what is normally an intimate, pleasurable and private act with a human into a humiliating, shameful, public degradation of a powerful, seemingly respected and popular individual is what is most uncomfortable. From the moment he understands what he is going to do until the act is over, it is painful to watch his suffering, his sobbing, his vomiting. The episode vividly depicts the utter breaking of a man and his family for no reason other than an artist’s perversion. Watching the Prime minister struggle with the decision and the effects of the decision is painful to watch. The Prime ministers struggle with maintaining the status quo and his position as a politician initially and then saving the princess’s life or risking his career is frustrating to watch as there is no winning in the situation. His lack of consideration for or consultation with his wife is disturbing. His reliance on his popularity and poll numbers at the expense of his family and wife is a sorry statement about the insidious nature of political life. Both the Prime Minister and his wife experience a state of cognitive dissonance in which he attempts to justify the repulsive act to save the life of the princess, However, his wife cannot reconcile the act with her belief and cannot reconcile the act even a year later.

Question 2:

What are the intended messages of the episode?

Answer:

There are so many messages from this episode it's difficult to claim one as the most important, but I believe one important message concerns the unbridled and unchecked power of social media. The kidnapping first spread on social media and as a result of that world wide spread, the news media breaks their own agreements and rules and dives head first into the story. The sequence of framing, priming and agenda setting is evident. The media controlled the story, the act and the coverage of it. Media made the issue and all aspects of the issues more accessible to the general public and by doing that influenced the standards used by people in their opinions and attitudes about the prime minister. We see that in every conversation the Prime Minister has with his advisors when they discuss his polling and popularity numbers as well as the end of his career if he doesn't perform the act. The agenda-setting, with the increased media coverage led to increased perceptions of the importance of the dilemma. The priming occurs as the media’s non stop coverage makes the issue itself the act of the Prime Minister the basis for judgment

against or for him. Other important issues include the ease with which domestic terrorism , cyber bullying and absurd conspiracy theories take on life. The disconnect between the use of social media as entertainment without a thought to the real adverse effects on individuals plays out in this episode as the story grows with each media and social media post. The emphasis on maintaining power and status quo in the political arena rather than concentrating on personal relationships and family speaks to the present state of politics in our country.