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COLLEGIATE JOURNALISTS, MEDIA LITERACY, THE CULTURE OF FEAR, AND *CONSCIENTIZAÇÃO*: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

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By

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COLLEGIATE JOURNALISTS, MEDIA LITERACY, THE CULTURE OF FEAR, AND *CONSCIENTIZAÇÃO*: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis.
Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world.

— Paulo Freire
Pedagogy of the Oppressed

The more fear you make, the more loot you take!

— Superman arch-nemesis Lex Luthor, as quoted by William, journalism student

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative project explored collegiate journalists' experiences with a mass-media generated Culture of Fear and investigated the theoretical interconnections of this culture, journalism education, college newspaper advisement, and the awakening of Freirian critical consciousness, or Conscientização.

A tremendous amount of power and responsibility rests with individuals who create mass media products, and likewise with educators who teach and mentor the creators of these mass media products. Media literacy instruction and education for critical consciousness may positively impact traditional journalism curricula and provide journalism educators resources in which to address the quickly evolving and dynamic nature of modern mass media.

Five 20- to 45-year-old undergraduate journalism student editors, staff writers, and photographers for the campus newspaper at a regional university in the southwest United States participated in the study, and archival data from introductory journalism courses taught by the researcher were utilized as data as well. The researcher also serves as the faculty adviser to the campus newspaper for which the student editors work. This study draws upon models of research and analysis found in both ethnographic and phenomenological qualitative traditions. Three dominant themes emerged during analyses: "The Culture of Fear," "Media Literacy," and "*Conscientização* and Education for Critical Consciousness." Several sub-themes emerged within each macro-level theme. While this project began as an examination of collegiate journalists' experiences with a mass-mediated Culture of Fear, media literacy, and Freirian notions of critical consciousness, the researcher also was able to begin critically defining the role he played

as an educator for critical consciousness within a journalism curriculum and as a collegiate publication adviser.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Project Overview

Mass media communication technologies have the capacity at once to entertain, enlighten, educate, inform, and persuade. Their use influences and shapes public opinion and can perpetuate dominant public perception. Mass information products exist in many forms: advertising media, entertainment media, educational media and news media. People recognize within the first two forms – advertising and entertainment – a leaning toward fiction, and an intentional, orchestrated level of meaning which often will be built upon persuasion and psychological trickery. In comparison, people tend to perceive educational and news media as inherently more honest and ethical, and having a generalized purpose of serving the greater social good. Of these four mass media types, modern news media is unique in that it combines the cachet of honesty and higher aims typical of traditional educational media with a slickness and marketability typical of entertainment and advertising media. This makes news media uniquely worthy of increased scrutiny and inquiry. A tremendous amount of power rests with individuals who create mass media products. Therefore, educators who teach creators of mass information products have a tremendous responsibility.

News in its many forms is a product to be consumed. As such, it is a product produced for profit. With recent reductions and eliminations of intentional social safeguards, such as FCC rules regarding ownership and market monopolization, profit motives can too easily overwhelm benign or beneficial social purposes. Alarming and sensational news attracts more attention with fear-based tactics, more viewers, and therefore has the capacity to reap more profit. Glassner (1999) writes that “the short

answer to why Americans harbor so many misbegotten fears is that immense power and money await those who tap into our moral insecurities and supply us with symbolic substitutes" (pg. xxviii). This project examined the construct of a *Culture of Fear* and how this culture may be perceived and interpreted by the collegiate journalists who are immersed within a particular example of mass media, as well as the perceived influences of mass-distributed news information upon this culture. Of interest also was the relevance of this media-saturated culture as examined through the critical lens of Freire's critical consciousness, and the perceived impact of Conscientização – the awakening of a critical consciousness – on journalism education and instruction.

An individual who develops a sense of critical consciousness can "gradually perceive personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his or her own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it" (Freire, 1970, p. 32). As individuals go through Conscientização, they become capable of analyzing, evaluating, and, most importantly, taking action against those elements within their world that manipulate, coerce, and oppress (Freire, 1970, 1973; Shor, 1987). This study explored what student journalists perceive to be the impact of a critical consciousness education, especially as applied within the frame of mass-media influences, media literacy, and a defined culture of fear.

This project is not meant to portray fear mongering as the primary purpose of American news media. As Glassner (1999) reminds, "News organizations are distinguished from other fear-mongering groups because they sometimes bite the scare that feeds them" (pg. xxiii). Rather, it is intended to examine the Culture of Fear through the experiences and observations of journalists-in-training and determine, through a study

of their personal realities and shared experiences, how mass-media information and critical consciousness theory may be intertwined and interrelated within that mediated culture.

Issue Sub-Questions

A central objective of this research project was to investigate whether and how collegiate journalists identify, define, and interact with a defined *Culture of Fear*, especially as it relates to and is impacted by mass media consumption and Freirian notions of critical consciousness. Specifically, issue sub-questions (Cresswell, 1998) included the following:

(1) How do collegiate journalists identify any level of media-driven fear in their lives and, if so, how do they experience what Glassner defines as a *Culture of Fear*?

(2) What is the potential impact of a defined culture of fear on an individual's everyday experiences and how do collegiate journalists experience this day-to-day impact?

(3) What are the perceived underlying themes that may account for the phenomena of a culture of fear and what is the collegiate journalists experience with these themes?

(4) What perceived role do collegiate and societal mass media play in promoting a culture of fear through the experiences and perceptions of the collegiate journalist?

(5) How will collegiate journalists interpret critical consciousness theory, especially in relation to a societal culture of fear, and what impact will these

journalists see critical consciousness education having upon both themselves and others in the analysis and critique of mass media products?

(6) What personal and educational impact might the development of a critical consciousness have on perceptions concerning the mass media and a defined culture of fear?

(7) What is the perceived role of critical consciousness awakening within a given culture, and what are the potential impacts of an education for critical consciousness for this culture overall?

The aim of these particular sub-questions was to provide a structural framework that would allow the participants to effectively explore the primary themes of fear, mass media effects, and critical consciousness theory. They provide, as Creswell (1999) describes, a venue to determine "possible structural meanings of the experience," and allow for rich descriptions of "the underlying themes and contexts that account for the experience" (p. 102). The sub-questions are structured in this fashion to both outline the general flow of the project and to provide the participants a scaffold with which they can explore and build upon the constructs in question.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature regarding the potential effects of mass media products on the audiences they serve is critically reviewed here, as well as the potential of these technologies to influence what Glassner (1999), Altheide (2002) and Moore (2002) have defined as a *Culture of Fear*. This section also reviews the application of a media effects model, as grounded in theories of Potter's (2005, 2003) Media Literacy theories. Addressed here also is the notion of Critical Consciousness, as described in the educational theories of Freire (1970, 1973), as well as the research literature addressing the applicability of this critical model within various academic and instructional domains. Following a review of the general theories underlying these diverse communication, media, and pedagogical constructs, I propose a qualitative research model that explores the theoretical existence of a media-driven Culture of Fear, the potential, perceived impacts of media literacy and mass media effects upon this culture, and the exploration of critical consciousness education upon both.

Media Literacy and Mass Media Effects

Media effects research and the study of the impact of mass-distributed information on individuals and groups within a society is complex and multidimensional, and has been ongoing in the U.S. since the early 1900's (Corner, 2000; McCombs, 1994). "Social life being multicausal, sorting out the causes of any event can only be approximate – and the effects of a large set of diverse institutions like the mass media even more so" (Gans, 1993, p. 29). Media effects and the countless complex interactions within these effects are difficult to both predict and classify (Bryant and Zillman, 1994; Gans, 1993, Potter, 1998). It is far beyond the scope of this project to review completely

all of the various philosophies and theoretical constructs that have emerged out of the study of mass media influence. The overarching goal of this review is to examine the possible interconnections in the research literature on theories of media effects and media literacy, a societal culture of fear, and education for critical consciousness. Given this objective, it is appropriate here to discuss the foundational constructs of media effects research as detailed by one of the field's leading scholars, and, using this unique perspective as a theoretical frame, provide empirical examples of how a media literacy based effects theory is relevant throughout various societal and educational settings.

Four-Dimensional Effects Model

In the study of potential influences on consumers of media products and society members, Potter (1998, 2005) suggests a four-dimensional model of mass media effects that is applicable across multiple academic and social domains. Potter's perspective also effectively frames the basic, underpinning nuances of a generalized media literacy theory, and will provide a structural organization for a broad discussion of these nuances and their specific traits and characteristics.

Advancing from the notion that "we live in a media saturated environment, and are constantly being influenced by media effects as they shape our knowledge patterns, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors" (p. 276), Potter (1998, 2005) recommends thinking about media effects as occurring on four separate dimensions: timing, level, direction, and intentionality. Timing refers to the immediacy of the actual effect, whether it is instantaneous or occurs over many exposures to the media/message. Level of effect refers to the specific domain that the effect impacts or influences: behavioral, cognitive, attitudinal, psychological, or emotional. Direction determines whether the effect is

constructive and helpful to the individual or society, or destructive (Potter, 1998). Intentionality, made up of both intentional and unintentional effects, is the planned relationship an individual has when seeking out and engaging with certain media (Potter, 1998, 2005). The intended experience individuals seek do not always match the experiences they ultimately have.

The key benefit of this four-dimensional perspective is the malleability and descriptive potential of the individual constructs. Each may be used independently to describe a potential effect of media, and each generally may be combined with the others to further describe the actual effect and illustrate specifically how it might impact or influence the given audience. For example, a single media product might have an immediate attitudinal effect that is primarily destructive. Or, a medium might constructively affect an individual behaviorally over the long-term. Media also may have the potential to affect multiple domains and be perceived as both constructive and destructive, either immediately or over an extended period of time.

As discussed within this context, media effects do not necessarily imply direct causation. According to Potter (1998), media effects should be studied from a probabilistic perspective, viewing the potential impact of an effect from the standpoint that it may increase the *probability* of specific outcomes occurring. Given the vast number of variables that have the potential to influence an individual's perceptions of both the message carried by the media and the media itself, statements of direct causation, generalizeable across all members of a medium's audience, are extremely difficult to make (Bryant and Zillman, 1994; Gans, 1993; Potter, 1998). Any number of traits or combination of an individual's prior experiences, cognitive and social

developmental level, attitudes, socio-economic status, political leanings, and general temperament may impact how he or she perceives and interacts with mass media and the messages they carry.

Timing of Effects

Media effects generally are thought to occur, if indeed they actually do, immediately after contact with the media or after multiple exposures over a given span of time. Immediate effects will occur during or just after exposure to a specific message. The duration of an immediate effect may be brief, lasting only a short while, or, depending upon the type and format of the information presented, the effect may last throughout the life of the impacted consumer or audience (Potter, 1998). An example of an immediate effect of short duration is the excitement felt while watching a football game on television. An individual might become extremely excited during specific instances in the game, but that heightened emotion will likely fade away after the game is over. A lasting effect would be an uneasiness regarding bumblebees after reading a news story about killer insects migrating to the U.S. from South America. Here, the effect is immediate, but may last throughout the reader's life. Other examples include television producing instant and extreme fright reactions in children or heightened emotional responses to violent mass media images (Gunter, 1994). Long-term effects occur over an extended period of time after numerous exposures to a mediated message. This effect is not attributable to a single medium or message. Rather, it is the impact of repeated interactions with multiple media and reinforcing information. An example of a long-term effect is an individual believing his community is a high-crime environment after reading

numerous reports on increases in crime rates or watching fictional crime dramas (Gunter, 1994; Potter, 1998).

Direction of Effects

A second media effects dimension proposed by Potter (1998) is direction. A given direction will indicate whether the relative nature of the overall effect is constructive or destructive. Although the present discussion is largely immersed within the potentially negative aspects of the media effects argument, media effects are not always harmful or dangerous. "If your goal is to get some information in order to satisfy your curiosity, then finding facts in a book, newspaper, or on television can be very satisfying" (Potter, 2001, pg. 264). Interestingly, the classification of whether a media construct is helpful or hurtful might again be reduced to questions of perception. An individual may think of a particular message as extremely helpful, whereas other individuals, or the society, view it as harmful or destructive. For example, a cigarette company might look upon a particular advertisement campaign as constructive: the campaign will lead to a higher number of jobs, a better overall area- and nation-wide economy, and a greater income for the company and its members. However, the other members of the population impacted by these mediated messages may see the advertisement campaign as an atrocity, a malicious ploy to create a population of addicted consumers that will continue buying the product as long as their health allows. In terms of news media motivation, it is arguable that most mass media productions likely are created with primarily noble intentions from the outset, at least from the point of view of the reporter or producer (McCombs, 1994). The Ad Council (2001) is a prime example of a mass media organization whose goals include improving the overall quality of life for individual members or groups in our society.

However, the effect on the consumer of that media will determine whether the media is considered constructive or destructive, regardless of the intention of the media's creator.

Level of Effects

Although much of the media effects research reported within the actual mass media focus upon behavioral effects of media influences, there are five defined potential levels of media/human interaction: cognitive, attitudinal, emotional, physiological, and behavioral (Potter, 1998, 2005).

Cognitive and attitudinal effects.

Mass media, much like traditional educational media, can serve in an instructional capacity in that they are capable of communicating new information from a source to a receiver, imparting some type change in knowledge or understanding. According to Potter (1998), this "cognitive" effect may be either formal or incidental, depending upon whether the consumer actively sought out information or whether, through simple exposure, they developed some type of cognitive skill or knowledge set. As is the case in educational psychology, there are many variances concerning the depth of processing of the learned information. Some media may be more personally meaningful or influential for an individual, allowing them to understand and retain the information better and over a longer period of time. Potter (1998) refers to this, in mass media terms, as temporary, extensive, and intensive learning.

This type of cognitive effect was cited among the various findings in a literature review of media violence effects (Gunter, 1994). The amount of television individuals watched was thought to impact their perceptions regarding levels of violent crime in society. As another example, audience tracking data from a longitudinal study with the

British Film Institute indicated that many individuals interacted daily with mass media as part of their routine activities, watching, reading, or listening to the news when they woke up, at mealtimes, or while doing housework (Guantlett and Hill, 1999). As these individuals engage in multiple tasks, their cognitive engagement with the news information likely will be incidental (Potter,1998). Likewise, their level of interaction and analysis of these news messages will likely be low as well. "At a low level, looking at the news each night (whether in a newspaper, a magazine, on radio, or on television) can be nothing more than a mindless habit that provides people with a sense that they have been exposed to what is important each day" (Potter, 1998, p. 358). This lack of depth in cognitive processing and analysis of media information may contribute significantly to the extent which individuals' perceptions, beliefs, and emotional state are impacted.

Attitudinal effects occur when a message transferred by a form of mass media reinforces or modifies an individual's opinion about something, or influences their personal ideologies, values or beliefs. Potter (1998) notes that even in the absence of a particular attitude, a powerful mediated message still will serve an attitudinal effect, creating opinion where there once was none. Advertising within the mass media thrive bys manipulating this type effect (Hallin, 2000; Kellner, 1990; Steward and Ward, 1994). If an advertiser can design and develop a message geared toward a particular audience and couple it with an equally effective medium, a change in opinion or belief is quite likely to occur. It is not surprising then that often younger, more impressionable consumers of mass media are favored by advertisers (Postman and Powers, 1992). If a long-term attitudinal effect can be developed with enough strength and impact, that advertiser has succeeded in creating a life-time consumer.

As Postman and Powers (1992) warn, we must "never underestimate the power of commercials…. The backbone, the heart, the soul, the fuel, the DNA (choose whatever metaphor your wish) of nonpublic television in America is the commercial" (p. 162 and 115). Shor (1992) notes that these type influences also tend to impede children and young adults as they go about their everyday social and academic lives. He says that students' perceptions of their world have been unnaturally accelerated and amplified to where they are unable to engage in critical processes to question the mass mediated information constantly bombarding them. "They are used to fast talk and fast action, to high levels of stimulation, and to dealing with a *product* ... so they are uncomfortable with the deliberate pace of a critical *process*..." (p. 219). This critical process can be manifest in a student's ability to question the form, functionality, impact, intent, and meaning of mass mediated information.

This attitudinal effect also may impact how mass media audiences think about and view the presented information in relation to its overall importance in their lives (McCombs, 1994; Schanberg, 2000). While individuals may learn facts and details from the mass media, they also may develop attitudes and opinions regarding the relative importance of the information simply by the emphasis given to it by the media organizations. McCombs (1994) notes that much evidence points toward journalists as major influences in the shaping of audiences' perceptions and opinions of what is occurring in the world, just by functioning in their jobs as information gatekeepers. Journalists produce media products that may serve as agenda-setting forces by influencing an individual's personal attitudes and views with regard to what is important in their lives on a day-to-day basis (Hallin, 2000; McCombs, 1994).

Emotional and physiological effects.

Emotional and physiological effects occur when media lead an individual to feel in a certain way or physically react to specific stimuli. Depending upon the individual and the information carried, media can trigger in the person any number of emotions, including fear, sadness, rage, irritability, lust, and boredom (Potter, 1998). In the specific discussion of emotional fear below, the potential effects are extremely important in defining how and to what extent individuals may react to specific mass media images and information. In terms of a physiological effect, mass media have the capacity to influence reflexatory functions, such as iris contraction, blood pressure elevation, heart rate, breathing, and sweating (Potter, 1998). These emotional effects and, to a lesser degree, physiological effects also are influenced by and influence the other effects as well. This seems to be true across the multiple levels of effects. For example, an attitudinal effect will likely trigger a behavioral effect, or an emotional effect may trigger a physiological or emotional effect.

Behavioral effects.

Mass media that lead to an individual acting or reacting in a certain way are described as having behavioral effects (Potter, 1998). Again, this terminology is not intended to imply causality, even though mass media often present oversimplified or misinterpreted arguments when publishing effects research (Altheide, 2002). Rather, behavioral effects, like the other categories of media effects, refer to a possible increase in the probability of specific outcomes occurring based upon interactions with and exposure to media products.

Much research has been conducted on the potential interaction and influences of both real and fictional mass media on specific human behaviors, especially violence and aggression (Gunter, 1994; Kidd-Hewitt and Osborne, 1995; Schubart, 1995), sexuality (Harris, 1994), consumerism (Dowling, Mohammadi and Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1990; Hallin, 2000; Stewart and Ward, 1994), and criminality (Altheide, 2002; Chiricos, Eschholz, and Gertz, 1997; Kidd-Hewitt, 1995; Holmes, 2000; Liska and Baccaglini, 1990; Moore, 2002; Osborne, 1995; Schubart, 1995; Sparks, 1995). For example, Schubart (1995) describes several theories in which fictitious media are thought to influence aggression. *Trigger theory* posits that violent media messages may trigger already existing aggressive tendencies in individuals who interact with or are subjected to the media. *Catharsis theory* holds that individuals, through viewing the violent media, are allowed the opportunity to release any pent-up aggressions they might have. *Syringe theory* claims that violence is injected into an individual or audience, forcing them to act violently even when they might otherwise have no aggressive leanings. The *copy-cat theory* says that audiences will attempt to imitate the violent acts they perceive occurring within the media. *Desensitization theory* leads people who view violent media to be desensitized to that type of information or media and, likewise, be more tolerant of violent behaviors within other mass media and other aspects of their lives.

A central theme that seems to emerge from this body of behavioral effects research is the lack of consistent and conclusive evidence that mass media directly influence individual behaviors, even though "behaviour is clearly a stronger indicator to find than 'opinion' or 'attitude', which in turn are stronger than a 'perception' or a 'feeling'" (Corner, 2000, p. 384). Schubart (1995) even notes in his discussion of

aggression theories that he himself, as a fan of horror movies, is suspicious of data that have emerged from the media effects research concerning fictional portrayals of violence. It would seem, then, that "despite many decades of research and hundreds of studies, the connections between people's consumption of the mass media and their subsequent behaviour have remained persistently elusive" (Gauntlett, 1998, p. 1). However, what is quite apparent from these bodies of work, as well as the whole of media effects research, is that the continued study of mass media effects on human emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors is critical to understanding the various social and political influences media may have on our society. Clearly, mass media have the *potential* to influence, impact, or direct in some form various aspects of an audience's behavior, even if that impact varies or changes among individual members.

The Culture of Fear

A great deal of the research within the area of media literacy and mass media effects has related to the potential influences and impact of media information on the human emotion fear. Many of the first studies of media effects in the U.S. during the early 1900's examined the impact of mass media on individual fright reactions (Cantor, 1994). Today, the study of mass media-generated fear has essentially become its own, separate field of inquiry within media effects research, especially in relation to studies of aggression, crime, and violence in our society (Kidd-Hewitt, 1995). As is the case in the overall study of media effects, there are mixed findings and a wide array of research methodologies in the study of media influences on feelings of fear and anxiety (Heath and Gilbert, 1996). This section of the discussion, however, is less concerned with questions of how or why mass media tend to influence fearful emotions; instead, it

examines how and to what extent media may contribute to what Glassner (1999) has called an American *Culture of Fear*, and how this culture is specifically defined and addressed within mass media research.

Fear is defined as an "unpleasant often strong emotion or painful agitation caused by anticipation or awareness of danger" (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1993, p. 425). *Culture of Fear* then is a socially induced generalized state in which a people are anxious or frightened as a result of perceived threats of harm or violence. According to Altheide (2002), this type of fear "accumulates and is deposited over a wide social terrain" (p. 195). Certainly there are dangers in our world, both physical and social, and obviously it is prudent to be aware and rationally equipped to cope with these dangers. However, an exaggerated, misinformed, or flawed view of the magnitude of these hazards may lead to a heightened sense of imagined fear, which eventually may be more harmful or destructive than the actual danger itself ever threatened to be (Altheide, 2002; Glassner, 1999; McChesney and Nichols, 2002; Moore, 2002). This false sense of threat leads to the formation of a culture dominated by fear-induced attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. In this type of environment, danger becomes omnipresent. Consequently, individuals may become irrationally afraid of violent crimes, travel, illness, entertainment, or even one another (Altheide, 2002; Glassner, 1999; Moore, 2002). Events that might be frightening if physically encountered by an individual may be equally frightening when experienced via a mass media product (Cantor, 1994). Whether these media presentations are fictional or factual, the fear-inducing stimuli seem to be the same: "The major stimuli and events producing fear … have been categorized as dangers, injuries, distortions, and endangerment, and fear experienced by others" (Cantor, 1994, p.

239). Each of these fears may lead to other actions or beliefs, such as buying guns for protection, refusing to travel with a budget airline, treating a specific ethnic group or individual unfairly, or spending exorbitant amounts of money on clothing to ensure popularity and acceptance within a peer group (Glassner, 1999; Kellner, 1990).

Calling upon the specific language Potter (1998, 2005) uses in his discussion of dimensional media effects, it is possible to address succinctly the ways in which this culture of fear may be manifest in our society, as well as to identify the potential influences of mass media upon this culture. Here again, effect timing, level of interaction, and direction of effect are central to the argument, as is identification of the various cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal effects that may emerge from consumption of or exposure to mass media and the information carried within.

Fear and Criminal Violence

Although results vary, research generally has shown that media coverage of violence and criminal behavior, both in the U.S. and Britain, can sometimes be a contributing factor in the generation of fearful emotions and beliefs (Kidd-Hewitt, 1995; Rountree, 2000). Kidd-Hewitt (1995) outlines four general directions researchers seem to follow in the study of fear, media effects, and criminal violence. The first and most apparent topic is the question of whether mass media depictions of violent activities actually contribute to deviant behaviors. Glassner (1999) reported on several studies that found when people watched a significant amount of television, they were more likely to misjudge the amount of real crime in their neighborhoods, as well as overrate the possibility of they themselves becoming victim to these violent acts. These individuals also were more likely to purchase self-protection equipment, such as guns, security

systems, and extra locks for their homes. The second research area Kidd-Hewitt (1995) defines is the analysis of mass media as contributing to advancement of social or ethnic stereotypes within a given culture. For example, Osborne (1995) writes that "Starting from police stereotypes there is evidence that the media reinforce certain dominant images, upon which adults and police then act and which naturally are then translated into further realities in which people are 'criminalized' rather than becoming criminal" (p. 41). The third research area addresses whether mass media sensationalize crime-related information, which then creates a fearful panic among their audience or individual. Described in great detail by Glassner (1999) and Altheide (1999, 2002), this over-dramatization of news information may lead to baseless fears of anything from insect attacks, internet addiction, crimes against the elderly, young black males, specific ethnic groups, health care, Halloween candy, road rage, monster mothers, youth-gone-wild, rampant drug abuse, white extremists, and societal boogey-men. The fourth research area looks at the similarities and differences of the potential effects of fact-based crime reports and fictional depictions of criminal activities, such as in movies, novels, or television dramas.

Even if causality is not a primary objective within these specific categories of study, and even if the debate concerning media influence is enveloped around notions of direct effects and quantification (Kidd-Hewitt and Osborne, 1995), the potential of media impacting some individuals in some fashion is still highly probable. As Glassner (1999) noted, it is not hard to imagine that, after individuals see constant portrayals of crime and violence in every form of media they encounter, the world will probably begin to look like a violent, scary place.

While crime rates in the U.S. are among the highest in the world, the actual occurrences of crime have not seemed to increase significantly in the past 20 years, and have even decreased in some populations (Cohen and Solomon, 1995). However, media coverage of the crimes that do occur has increased exponentially. So then, why is there so much brutality in the mass media? In terms of violence on television, one argument that claims consumers and audience members actually want to see violent content such as that found in the television show *Cops* and crime dramas such as *CSI* may not be entirely accurate. "The American public didn't ask for trash television. They'll watch it the same way we go out and watch a fire" (Ellerbee cited in Cohen and Solomon, 1995, p. 58). Our popular culture seems to be obsessed with depictions of violence and criminal behavior (Osborne, 1995). Sparks (1995) notes that these depictions of violent acts and the law enforcers that stop them have become a fertile ground in which a culture – read here as culture of fear – can both affect our emotions, entertain us, distract us from real societal problems, frighten us, and then reassure us with various moral fixes.

Fear and Consumerism

A Culture of Fear is not just reflected in the violent or criminal elements of mass media productions. Even messages that might give the impression of benevolence or might be developed purportedly to help a specific group or audience may contribute significantly to the establishment of mass-mediated societal fear. Usually targeting audience's emotions, attitudes or opinions, certain advertising campaigns create problems or dangers where none may have existed before, and then offer a commodity-based solution to the audience member/consumer (Kellner, 1990). Musician Marilyn Manson highlights this notion while being interviewed by film-maker Moore (2002) when he says

that the media provide a "campaign of fear and consumption…. You are watching television, you are watching the news, and you are being pumped full of fear. There is floods, there is AIDS, there is murder. Cut to commercial. Buy the Acura, buy the Colgate. If you have bad breath they're not going to talk to you…. Keep everyone afraid and they will consume" (DVD, Track 15). Mainstream advertising is theoretically constructed to intelligently inform the consumer as well as appeal to an audience's sensibilities and then, most importantly, persuade the audience to purchase specific products. As is the case with other mass media messages, sometimes the most effective persuasion technique is fear, especially when solutions are offered that directly attack the presented threat (Altheide, 2000; Kellner, 1990).

Construction of Crisis

Although mass media have the potential to influence and strengthen a societal culture of fear, that does not necessarily mean the individuals who are involved in the production of this mass media should be classified as fear mongers. Journalists and the people within the mass media who report on events in our world are gatekeepers of information. Each day, they must decide on what news will be reported to the public, how it should be addressed, in what order or fashion it will be presented, how it will fit in proximity to other information, the breadth and depth of detail to engage in, how prominently it will be displayed or presented, and in what medium it will be carried (Altheide, 2002; Guantlett and Hill, 1999; Hallin, 2000; McCombs, 1994; Postman and Powers, 1992). Several factors can influence journalists as they filter and process this reality for their audience, including specific geographical forces, resource constraints, organizational forces, advertisers, and the "news-worthiness" of available stories (Potter,

1998). News "is what news directors and journalists say it is. In other words, when you turn on your television set to watch a network or local news show, whatever is on is, by definition, the news" (Postman and Powers, 1992, p. 11-12).

Codes of ethics for professional journalists disallow presentation of content intended to persuade or influence (McCombs, 1994). Indeed, objectivity is a defining construct of news media information as it exists within a democratic society and as is defined in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that a separation is forming between traditional journalism and business, where the news content, editorial content, advertising, sales, and circulation are integrated into a singular product, making news media a market-driven commodity (Hallin, 2000). Violence, sex, sensationalism, and melodrama sell. If mass media organizations exploit these devices and strategies to sell their products, and if the media accept "a culture of talk-show shock-horror that parades endless deviance as entertainment, the personal as magnified and fragmented repetition" (Osborne, 1995, p. 29), and as long as an audience of consumers remains, this culture of fear will persist (Altheide, 2002, 1999; Glassner, 1999; McChesney and Nichols, 2002; Moore, 2002).

Education for Critical Consciousness

Altheide (2002) and Glassner (1999) both note that Franklin D. Roosevelt's maxim "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself" is not necessarily accurate. There are many things in our society to be fearful of, and it would be irrational for individuals to completely disregard the possible dangers that exist in their culture. However, it is equally irrational for an individual to live in a constant state of anxiety, creating imagined dangers or believing threats to exist where there are none (Altheide, 1999, 2002;

Glassner, 1999). A malevolent culture of fear exists within our society, and that culture of fear is influenced or impacted by effects of mass media messages. Something must be done to reduce these influences and to combat this oppressive force. Several educational and mass media researchers say one option is to fight back (Altheide, 2002; Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992; Glassner, 1999). Mass media are pervasive in the U.S. culture, but fear does not have to be. A critical understanding of how these media are formed and function within our society, of how the information they carry is created and disseminated with all of its inherit biases, may work toward counteracting perceptions of fear. If these media are addressed critically by their audience, and if the individual audience members rely upon their own experiences and understandings of how and why these media exist, they will be empowered to actively question and critically comprehend the messages presented to them. Through an education for critical consciousness, and the development of a media literate audience of consumers, this counteraction may be possible.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The theory of critical consciousness emerged from the work of Brazilian educator, philosopher, activist, and scholar Paulo Freire (1970, 1973). In essence, critical consciousness is the ability of an individual to perceive, analyze, evaluate, and take action against any powers within their culture that may be manipulative, coercive, and oppressive (Freire, 1970, 1973; Shor, 1992). While the whole of Freirian critical consciousness theory cannot be covered here, the basic constructs that seem to make up the theory can be addressed. Likewise, the utility of education for critical consciousness can be discussed, as well as the methods by which a critical pedagogy will facilitate education for a critical consciousness within a journalism curriculum.

Freire (1970, 1973) asserts that individuals who are "unable to perceive critically the themes of their time … are carried along in the wake of change. They see that the times are changing, but they are submerged in that change and so cannot discern its dramatic significance" (p. 7). An individual who develops a sense of critical consciousness learns to perceive the various social and political contradictions or changes within their culture and act critically against them, an awakening process Freire calls *Conscientização* (Freire, 1970, 1973; Shor, 1987). Through the process of Conscientização, learners begin to identify and understand their individual realities, and see the duality in the different ways they interact with their society and how it interacts them. However, as Shor (1992) points out, an understanding of reality is not enough: knowledge, in and of itself, is not necessarily power. Knowing is just the first step in a process Freire calls *praxis*. Consisting of three dependent phases (Wink, 1997), praxis involves naming that which is oppressive in nature, critically reflecting upon it, and then taking action against it. Praxis is a key component of critical consciousness theory, and key to fully understanding the complex relationships between what Freire identifies as the oppressors and the oppressed. "In their political activity, the dominant elites utilize the banking concept to encourage passivity in the oppressed, corresponding with the latter's 'submerged' state of consciousness, and take advantage of that passivity to 'fill' that consciousness with slogans which create even more fear of freedom" (Freire, 1970, p. 95). As individuals learn to break away from these oppressive constraints, they essentially emerge from their oppressors' prescribed way of thinking, they move from spectator to actor and begin interpreting their world through their own critical lens (Freire, 1973).

Critical reflection, the second phase of praxis, is essential in the process of Conscientização, as is engagement in a critical dialogue. Critical dialogue "presents problems and criticizes, and in criticizing, gives human beings their place within their own reality as the true transforming Subjects of reality" (Freire, 1973, p. 123). This critical dialogue allows an individual to perceive the inconsistencies within their reality and, as they move toward thinking of their world as dynamic and causal (Freire, 1970), constantly transform it. Through dialogue, people "transform the world and in transforming it, humanize it for all people" (Freire, 1973, p. 115). Importantly, as critical consciousness emerges through critical reflection and critical dialogue, learners may begin to realize the ways in which they themselves are oppressors within their worlds. As individuals become liberated, they may assume the role of oppressor within the situation they acted against. This is the model they have lived with and have been conditioned to accept, forcing them to fight against both oppression and not becoming oppressors (Freire, 1970).

Critical Consciousness Education in Practice

Recognizing the significant contributions of education for critical consciousness, many scholars and educators have developed a critical pedagogy to infuse their curricula with liberatory ideologies. While specific methods will certainly differ, Shor (1988) calls upon an agenda of nine values that will aid educators in establishing this type critical paradigm within their own instruction. First, education for critical consciousness should be participatory, with the learners personally engaging with the instructor and the given curriculum. As is called for within praxis, once presented with a problem, the learners should identify the nature of what is being addressed, critically reflect upon it, and then

act within and against the posed issue (Shor, 1988). This establishes the second agenda item proposed by Shor: create a critical classroom environment. The third value is to ensure that the pedagogy is situated, letting the students become the center of the curriculum and establishing it within their specific knowledge and learning processes. The fourth value is to ensure that the teaching is dialogic: the learners should engage in critical reflection and critical dialogue with one another to both discuss the world and act upon it together. Desocialization, whereby learners are transformed from passive information-receptacles to active educational participants, and whereby the instructor transforms from a didactic lecturer to a learning collaborator, make up the fifth and sixth recommended values. However, desocialization is not just applicable to learner behavior. Remarkably germane to the overarching topic of this project is Shor's (1988) idea that educators can desocialize the passive-aggressive nature of their learners, and also "the agenda of negative values absorbed from mass culture: racism, sexism, love of the rich and powerful, obsession with communism, excessive consumerism, and authority-dependence…" (p. 106).

The seventh value Shor (1988) outlines is democracy. In a culturally democratic classroom both teacher and learner have equivalent status within a discussion and, although their views and experiences may differ throughout the educational process, both are considered equal in the end. The teacher must constantly integrate the students' voices into the instruction process, allowing for their development of critical reflection, and supporting their critical dialogues within the frame of the classroom. The eighth item in the critical paradigm agenda is to ensure that the curriculum is interdisciplinary, drawing upon various domains of knowledge so as not to limit the possible connections

between and within the curriculum. As in Freirian praxis, the final value Shor (1988) describes is activism. Students should be directed toward acting upon their critical reflections and dialogue and attempt to change in some way the societies in which they live.

The agenda values recommended by Shor (1988) are couched in Freire's notion of problem posing, a methodology that generally is considered central to the development of a critical pedagogy (Wink, 1997). Problem posing, or dialogic methodology (Shor, 1988), involves the presentation of critical issues that are relevant to both the necessary curriculum and the students' realities. "Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation…. The world – no longer something to be described with deceptive words – becomes the object of that transforming action by men and women which results in their humanization" (Freire, 1970, p. 86). In this educational environment, the teachers' role as the subject matter expert is changed to problem poser. Instead of lecturing, they engage the students in a critical dialogue so the learners may bring their own voices to discussion and create a meaningful and critical understanding of the posed issues (Shor, 1988; Wink, 1997). Adapting a model by Freeman and Freeman (1992), Wink (1997) outlines four general steps for using problem posing methodologies within any given curriculum. Clearly rooted in Freirian notions of praxis and, likewise, reinforcing Shor's (1988) recommendations for critical pedagogy, the first step is to couch the curriculum within the students' own lived experiences. The teacher should then allow for the students to identify and define a problem within their own lives, critically

reflect upon the problem together, and, when a solution is found, construct a plan and act upon it (Wink, 1997).

Many other educators in a variety of academic settings have found success in engaging their students' critical conscious abilities through implementing critical pedagogy strategies. These critical methodologies have been employed in math courses (Frankenstein, 1987), writing and composition courses (Finlay and Faith, 1987; Fiore and Elsasser, 1987; Morrell, 2002; Sapp, 2000), and in language instruction (Auerback and Burgess, 1987; Elsasser and Irvine, 1987; Squires and Inlander, 1990). Writing instructors Finlay and Faith (1987) note that they initially questioned the relevance to a college writing course of utilizing a pedagogy created to educate peasants in a Third-World country, and were concerned with the possibility of reducing "the educational process described by Freire to a mechanical technique, thereby dulling its cutting edge, the moral/political awakening concomitant with emerging literacy" (p. 63). However, they describe effectively constructing an environment in which their students eventually were able to critically address issues that seemed to be hindering their writing processes, mainly their feelings of alienation and concern for the lack of a social community. Employing Freire's three-phase process of praxis, the students guided the course's thematic content and were subsequently able to explore how and why they encountered specific problems when writing essays and compositions. They eventually determined that they resented the whole of the writing process, as well as the instructor who assigned the tasks, and did not feel confident to employ the methods taught or in expressing their confusion with the composition-specific rhetoric and jargon. When this social

communication rift between the instructor and students was removed by the students themselves, their writing improved dramatically (Finlay and Faith, 1987).

Frankenstein (1987) describes the process of employing critical methodologies within a mathematics education curriculum that focused both on statistics and social change. The researcher found that allowing students to engage in a dialogical analysis, reflect upon their learning processes, and be encouraged to pinpoint their own misunderstandings fostered a sense of independence within them. Even math-phobic students felt better prepared to engage in careful thinking processes and seemed to better understand the overall purpose of the constructs they were learning about. Although the curriculum was structured primarily around statistical analyses, the instructor posed problems steeped in hegemonic ideologies, allowing the students to explore the math concepts through socially relevant, real-world examples (Frankenstein, 1987).

In another study that looked at students' challenging the use of nonstandard English in freshman composition courses, Elsasser and Irvine (1987) found that when Creole-speaking students critically addressed the social constructs surrounding their spoken language, their perception of their own literacy and communication abilities was transformed completely. When the students discovered that Creole was indeed a language and not a "broken" form of English, they were empowered to use the language in their creative processes, which in turn seemed to improve their skills within traditional English. In both remedial and advanced writing courses, the students' experiences and generative dialogue allowed them the opportunity to critically question and understand the general tenets of composition construction, especially as it impacted their own lives. They learned that the rules of grammar and writing, for both their English and Creole

languages, were not simply arbitrary conventions but rather established constructs that help people communicate more effectively (Elsasser and Irvine, 1987).

Each of these examples typify the range in applicability of Freirian notions of critical consciousness instruction and critical pedagogy, as well as emphasize the idea that critical consciousness learning experiences may take place in any number of academic settings. Indeed, education specifically for the development of critical consciousness abilities is often not the primary objective in most instructional settings. The teachers certainly will want their students to engage in critical activities, but the overarching instructional objective likely is grounded within a traditional curriculum. A critical pedagogy may be employed to instruct in any given academic domain, and while the students progress through the primary course content, they also may develop a sense of critical consciousness that can be applied throughout the rest of their academics. Development of these critical abilities may influence aspects of the students' lives outside academia as well (Shor, 1988). Conscientização thus becomes both an instructional tool and an instructional objective. In empowering the students to work critically through a traditional curriculum, the teacher is both meeting whatever content objectives exist for the course, and providing the students with an academic tool set that may change completely how they both learn and live.

Literature Discussion

"Fear destroys justice…. Every oppressive society – particularly in the modern era – has been consumed with fear of the 'other' and has justified the extreme horrific and often genocidal actions that have been taken as necessary to deal with the evil other" (Altheide, 2002, p. 196). Presented within the same context, it is clear that notions of fear

and critical consciousness are astoundingly relevant to one another, especially as applied within the framework of a generalized media literacy theory. The Culture of Fear that seems to be pervasive throughout the U.S. mass media potentially impacts everything and anyone it touches. Mass media, while serving a valuable democratic function within our society, have the potential to be destructive, harmful, and, using the language of Freire, oppressive. However, as educators, we have the capabilities and resources to combat this debilitating, mass-mediated culture of fear through education for critical consciousness. Every individual within our society, regardless of "how ignorant or submerged in the culture of silence" (Freire, 1970, p. 32), can learn to critically evaluate the images, words, and sounds the media sell, interpreting the messages through his or her own personal and social reality. This type of overt criticism (Downing et. al., 1990) is a necessary component of a media literate audience, and is absolutely essential to counteract the potential influences of an all-encompassing Culture of Fear.

Communication theorists claim that for individuals to become media literate, they must be able to analyze the perspectives in which information is presented, identify the specific contextual characteristics of the media, search for and synthesize alternative sources of information and, most importantly, be skeptical of what passes for public opinion (Potter, 1998). If an educational objective is to establish media literacy within a given body of learners, what better pedagogy to call into action than one so heavily steeped in liberatory ideologies and learner-centered literacy as is Freirian critical consciousness? Media, whether for entertainment, advertisement, news information, or education, are carefully crafted and designed to carry messages in such a way that the audience attenuates only to the information being transmitted. An effective medium will

be largely ignored by its audience: only the message will be seen and remembered. However, a critical, media literate consumer may know this to be true. Armed with the ability to analyze and critically evaluate the innumerable ways in which media effects can influence attitudes, emotions, behaviors, perceptions, and beliefs, media consumers may learn to resist or rebel against these powerful influences. Without the power of the mass media bolstering it, and without a malleable, uncritical audience to propagate its message, it would seem that a Culture of Fear would be diminished, if not eliminated entirely. "Danger surely lurks in occasional missteps and periodic acts of terror. But danger does not produce a shared environment of fear; we can deal with danger, we can be educated about it, take steps to avoid it or minimize its impact. Danger is not enigmatic. Fear is" (Altheide, 2002, p. 197).

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

I have approached the analysis, design, and development of this project from the ontological assumption that reality is largely subjective and dependent upon individual perceptions (Cresswell, 1998; Jensen and Jankowski, 1991; Potter, 1996). Likewise, the study is framed within a postmodern ideological perspective in that the "knowledge claims [are] set within the condition of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations" (Creswell, 1998, p. 79). Notions of fear, especially fear as influenced and impacted by societal constructs such as popular culture and mass media, are relatively abstract and difficult to define and operationalize. However, if individuals approach their independent realities differently, and if their perceptions are altered because of their subjective experiences and points of view, then a sound research design will seek to examine the nature of the proposed construct from their perspective. The theoretical framework from which I am approaching this study calls for the types of perspective-based questions I have posed. Likewise, the research questions I have developed call for a relativist theoretical framework and qualitative research design.

Effective qualitative research relies on "the belief that the particular physical, historical, material, and social environment in which people find themselves has a great bearing on what they think and how they act. Acts must be interpreted by drawing on those larger contexts" (Smith, 1987, p. 175). With this study I sought to interpret, through journalism students' experiential context, the combined social phenomena of media impact, the existence of a cultural fear within these media, and critical consciousness. I

was interested in the phenomenon of media literacy-based effects as they exist within, or create, a specific culture. Therefore I utilized a combination of qualitative traditions of inquiry as my primary research methodology: phenomenology and critical ethnography.

The first series of research questions I posed were concerned with how student journalists perceive the media they create as impacting the world they live in, and explores whether these created media may contribute to fearful emotions and behaviors and what, specifically, the journalists' role is in this creationary process. The *phenomena* here are the potential of media effects, and fear.

The overarching goal of a phenomenology is to describe individuals' personal experiences with the specific phenomena under study, employing elements such as personal interviews, written transcripts, and group interactions as data (Glesne, 1999; Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Within this phenomenological framework, I began with a broad question about these issues and moved, inductively, through the discovery process (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). I attempted to seek out a variety of individual participant perspectives and interpret meanings based upon those multiple interpretations (Glesne, 1999). The underpinning theoretical goal, as Potter (1996) describes, is to develop an understanding of how we construct meaning and share that information with one another. Specifically, I hoped to understand how journalism students understand the impact of the media they create, if/how/when the media they create becomes fear-inducing, and what it means to be fearful, both as journalism consumer and creator, within a mass-media influenced society. Their subjective experiences as journalists-in-training provides insight into their world and allows for an outsider, including the researcher attempting to interpret their experiences, to begin to understand the complex

interactions that exist within. “Human experience makes sense to those who live it, prior to all interpretations and theorizing. Objective understanding is mediated by subjective experience, and that human experience is an inherent structural property of the experience itself, not constructed by an outside observer” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 86).

“Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture” (Fetterman, 1998, p. 1). The second series of research questions I posed relate to the existence of a descriptive, mass-mediated Culture of Fear, how students journalists perceive themselves as potential contributors to this culture, and whether development of critical consciousness has any perceived influence on this constructed culture. I was interested in how collegiate journalists define their mass media culture, specifically within the context of fear, and whether they perceive critical consciousness as impacting this mass media culture in any way. Likewise, as utilized within an ethnographic frame, culture becomes “something the researcher attributes to a group as he or she looks for patterns of daily living. It is inferred from the words and actions of members of the group and is assigned to this group by the researcher” (Cresswell, p. 59).

A phenomenological and ethnographical inquiry such as that described in this study calls for the researcher to play a key part within the research process. Here, I am an interviewer and participant observer. As the primary research instrument, I must acknowledge that I bring to the study my own experiences, social footings, and ontological and epistemological assumptions. I have extensive experience as a consumer of mass media, as a journalist and producer of mass media information, and as a mass communication instructor, where I teach how to best research and market these media products. All of this has the potential to impact both the methodological design of the

study and the data I collected. It remains my responsibility to analyze and interpret my preconceived notions concerning these variables and attempt to understand cultural fear, media effects, and critical consciousness through the perspectives of the research participants (Creswell, 1998), all the while paying careful attention to the potential impacts of my personal preconceptions.

As a researcher, I am very interested in studying how these various notions may be intertwined and interrelated, especially as seen through the eyes of an immersed audience. As an educator, I am very interested in praxis and in empowering my students to effect change in their lives. Within this study there emerged themes regarding mass media and fear that can be applied utilizing a critical theory model of learning and instruction. The data indicate that these participants may see critical consciousness as a path to becoming informed and cognizant consumers of mass media, which in turn may reduce the influence of fear and lead to a less fear-centric culture. However, this was not an overtly stated, a priori assumption. How I view these notions of fear and media and critical theory is important, however as the researcher I do not want to speak critically on the behalf of the students (Potter, 1996). I may be the research instrument, but the participants' perceptions, experiences, and personal realities concerning the topics are the research data (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

I approached this study largely from an emic perspective. My goal was to explore the students' perceptions of these phenomena and collect data on how they perceive themselves as creators of truth potentially contributing to a media-constructed culture. As an educator, of course I believe it would be ideal if the individuals participating in this study begin developing their own critically conscious views of these constructs.

However, before it is possible to effectively teach relevant aspects of critical interpretation of mass media and mass media influenced cultures, it is necessary to first understand the perceived nature of these interactions. While generalizeability is not a goal of this study, understanding aspects of these students' perceptions of these constructs has the potential to impact many instructors and many students across multiple educational settings. This project specifically was a study of the perceived impact of critical consciousness education, mass media, and fear on these students' worlds, as well as the students' perceived abilities to transform their worlds through praxis-based reflection and action.

Research Participants

Participants for this study were five 20- to 45-year-old undergraduate journalism students serving as editors, staff writers, or photographers for the campus student newspaper. Archival data from journalism courses I teach in editing, writing, and media literacy were utilized as well: classes that the primary subjects in the project – writers and editors for the campus press – were required to take. In any given semester I have between 20 and 40 students enrolled in these courses. Specifically, I selected course artifacts from eight journalism students enrolled in a spring "Introduction to Journalism" class.

As a general guide, Creswell (1999) recommends from 5 to 15 participants in a phenomenological study. As adults living within a media-saturated society and, perhaps more importantly, as potential creators of mass media, the individuals I selected as participants in this study provided a unique point of view regarding the potential influence and intertwined nature of the proposed constructs. They were at once members

of a society impacted by media, creators of media, and students of media. They are an interested group and can speak to not only their perceptions of mass media in U.S. society, but also of how this media is constructed, and the potential power of an educational system centered upon media literacy. Much of what this study addresses is impacted by popular culture media and technologies such as video games, television, computers, digital communications, movies, music, and the Internet. By both their choice of college major and their age, student journalists are immersed in this popular culture (The Ad Council, 2000) and have a unique perspective concerning the impact of these type of media on news information and those who receive or consume it, as well as the potential impact of critical consciousness development on both the creation of news and the existence of a Culture of Fear.

Given the issues raised here, this study has the potential to impact these students personally, simply through raising their awareness of mass media effects, fear, and critical consciousness as way of thinking. As a researcher, to comprehend these notions from these students' perspective is profound; as a teacher, the potential to also affect a change in their awareness and understanding of these constructs – to essentially practice *praxis* – is even more significant, and adds immensely to the overall value of the study.

Since this is a phenomenological/ethnographic qualitative study, the sampling procedure for the major participants was purposive. Participants were selected from among a group of collegiate journalists serving as editors or staff writers for the collegiate newspaper and students enrolled in journalism courses. The primary selection criteria were that the students have completed a basic level Newswriting course and/or be proficient in some aspect of newspaper production and basic journalistic procedures. The

study methodology required a considerable amount of writing and communication, much of which was completed electronically. Instruction regarding electronic mail and bulletin board protocol was provided, but a general knowledge of computer navigation and communication skills was essential.

Given the length of time and level of interaction required of the primary participants for this type study, the five students meeting with me on a weekly basis needed some form of compensation for their participation. Therefore, I allowed each of the them to enroll in a 3-hour Directed Study course with me (Grade: S/U). Each student who enrolled in the class earned an "S" at semester's end.

Context and Procedures

To create as authentic an environment as possible, and for the comfort of the research participants, the majority of data for this project was collected within a classroom at the university. The interview students met as a group during set times throughout the week, and were observed as they produced the campus newspaper each week. Classroom archival data was collected throughout the course of a regularly-scheduled semester. For the primary participants, I digitally recorded our regular meetings during the 14-weeks of the study, and each meeting followed a general focus group format. This methodology enabled sharing of ideas and experiences among the members, as well as the formation of a group dynamic to better identify and explore the proposed ideas (Krueger, 1994). Focus groups also allowed for complementary and argumentative interactions among the group members in which various worldviews and differences in opinion could be examined and explored (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). In addition, the participants were interviewed individually when specific needs arose, and

were provided electronic journals in which they responded to open-ended questions regarding the research topics. A private discussion board also was made available in which they were able to communicate asynchronously with one another on topics that emerged from the discussions.

There were five independent phases of this research project, with the first four phases scheduled for between two and three weeks, and the final stage consisting of archival data collected throughout the course of a regular semester following the initial collection of data. Each phase of the primary, four-stage project was dependent upon the others and built upon information presented in each of the prior steps. This procedural ordering structured the overall study and allowed the students to explore the dependent nature of the individual constructs being discussed.

The first meeting consisted of introductions and a general statement about the goals and procedures of the project. I did not want, as Creswell (1998) warns, to unfairly influence the participants' responses or descriptions during data collection. These introductory, open-ended comments served only to engage the students and provide them an organizational structure in terms of what they generally could expect through the course of the study. During the first two meetings, the first 14 scenes from the DVD documentary *Bowling for Columbine* (Moore, 2002) were shown. This presentation served as an introduction to the concept of a culture of fear as defined by Glassner (1999), Altheide (2002), and Moore (2002), without delving too deeply in the specific definitions of the media effects debate. The students constructed a written response and provide a personal argument related to notions of fear and society that were discussed in the following meetings.

This first phase of the study consisted of approximately six to eight focus group meetings and individual interviews concerning fear and society. During this time students also responded to specific questions in their journals and posted comments on the digital bulletin board. Although a list of context-specific questions (Appendix A) was developed that were addressed throughout the course of the study, early analysis of the discussions and postings led to other questions and concerns that were brought before the group. Again, it is critical to note that I was not certain where the discussions would lead. As the primary data collection tool, it is the researcher's responsibility to be aware of the overall scope of the project and effectively facilitate the discussions to provide an informal structure and preempt a single individual from dominating the conversations.

The second phase of the project began with the presentation of the final 18 segments of Moore's (2002) documentary. This provided a segue from the culture of fear discussion to the media effects arguments. The students again were provided open-ended questions, as well as general information regarding media effects theory. Students enrolled in the Introduction to Journalism course, from which archival data was collected, also watched the documentary as part of their regular coursework in the class.

The third phase of the study was an introduction to the concept of critical consciousness as is described in the works and critical theory research of Freire (1970, 1973; Shor, 1987). This brief instructional segment presented a short lesson of critical consciousness and the basic theoretical underpinnings of critical theory. I utilized a web-based instructional module that introduced the students to Freire, gave a bit of his history, and allowed them to practice an exercise intended to elaborate on critical consciousness ideologies. This introduction to the concept of critical consciousness provided a

foundation for the journalists from which informed discussion emerged. It would be virtually impossible to teach the whole of critical theory and Freirian notions of critical consciousness within the scope of this type of study, and it would be equally impossible to ascertain whether this type of instruction were effective. Indeed, such an assumption would violate a basic principle of the theory: learners must develop these skills, traits, and abilities through personal reflection and application in their own lives. Especially given the theoretical underpinnings of Freirian philosophy, these students are apprentices, not banks in which to store these various notions of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, 1973). However, I thought it very possible to ascertain whether this group of learners was capable of developing a basic grasp of these constructs, and whether the small amount of instruction provided would serve as a foundation for their development. As an educational researcher, I have just barely begun to understand the breadth and depth of these critical theory ideologies and their application within my own life. It would have been presumptuous to claim that I could effectively instruct a group of learners on critical consciousness theory within this project. Even so, I was confident that I was able to provide for the students a declarative knowledge structure on which their own ideas and reflections could begin to form, and that they would begin and continue to show signs of reflective and critical processes.

The fourth phase of the primary data collection involved examining how the students perceive critical consciousness and each of the previous individual components – culture of fear and mass media impact and effects – interacting with and influencing one another. The students also discussed the potential applications of the defined constructs within their own personal and professional lives. As their final project, the

students constructed a free-thought composition in which they provided a summary of what they perceived as the most critical and impacting information to emerge from their participation.

The fifth and final data collection element of the project consisted of classroom archival artifacts collected throughout a full semester in the academic year following the primary data collection. I analyzed discussion board postings, exam question responses, and student research projects from an "Introduction to Journalism" course in which many of the same questions posed to the initial research group were discussed, although to a lesser extent.

Qualitative Analyses

As a general strategic model, Creswell (1998) recommends a data analysis spiral for the organization, management, classification, and explanation of qualitative research findings. This process begins with an initial categorization of the content and spirals up through conversion, examination, memo-taking, interpretation, and presentation of the analyses. Throughout this process the researcher continues to process and classify the data into various categories and chunks of thematic meanings and structures. A hierarchical analysis procedure specific to a phenomenological project also can be employed. The steps to this procedure include: (1) establishing the researcher's own involvement with the specific phenomenon; (2) creating topical categories of specific quotations or observations that seem to address independent ideas (also referred to as horizonalization); (3) classifying these topical categories into units of meaning and providing textural descriptions of these units; (4) reflection upon the categories to determine possible meanings and frames of reference for how the phenomenon was

experienced; and (5) constructing a descriptive summary of the overall experience, using explicit data references as support (Creswell, 1998). This is the general model that was followed in analyzing the data for the study described here.

Six primary sources of data for this project exist: focus group transcripts, personal interviews, bulletin-board notations, researcher observations, students' electronic journals, and journalism classroom activities. In the analysis of these data, I attempted to identify general themes as they emerged, moving from broad topical categories to the development of possible meanings and frames of reference. I have attempted to ascertain whether or not specific overall themes emerged from the research, triangulating meaning from among the various data sources. This, as well as the use of member checking procedures throughout the analyses, clarification of my own possible biases, and utilization of thorough, in-depth descriptions of the process ensured my coding schemes and interpretations are based upon the actual data and are not reliant on my own perceptions or preconceived notions of the constructs (Glesne, 1999).

While I believe, as a researcher, scholar, and consumer of mass-mediated information, that a Culture of Fear exists in our society and that this culture is influenced in some fashion by information carried in the media, for this project I did not exhibit any type of formal expectation within the analysis of the data (Potter, 1996). Rather I attempted, as Potter (1996) describes, to let the data speak as evidence. Through these analyses I moved inductively from the initial, low inference descriptions of the students' perceptions and experiences, to a high-inference interpretation of how these notions of fear, critical consciousness and media consumption thematically fit together and what, taken together as a unified construct, they seem to indicate (Creswell, 1998).

Project Challenges

There are many challenges inherit to both phenomenological research and research that seeks to explore complex interactions among abstracts notions such as those presented in this study. Much attention must be given to design, implementation, and analysis to ensure the collected data are valid within the given phenomena. For example, within the actual research procedures, the manner and tone in which questions are presented may influence participant responses or the designed questions might not adequately address the specific phenomena in question. A challenge within the analyses is to ensure the researcher sensibly organizes, codes, and thematically represents the data as provided by the research participants. Specifically, for this study I tried to pay careful attention to how I perceived the data forming and make certain I did not unfairly guide the students' responses into my own, subjective categories. Moustakas (cited in Creswell, 1998) provides a series of questions researchers can ask to ensure that these type challenges in a phenomenological-specific study do not impact or obstruct the capturing of valid data. These include asking whether the researcher mistakenly influenced the participants to respond in a certain way, whether the analysis and transcription accurately reflected the interview data, and determining whether there are other possible meanings the researcher did not describe that might be inferenced from the data (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

There also were managerial concerns to address. As designed, there were significant amounts of critical reflection, composition and writing, and mental effort required from the students. They needed some type of incentive to take part in the project. The environment in which the study took place and the overall structure of the

interview processes also was critical. I tried to ensure that the setting was as comfortable and authentic to the participants as possible, and all of the students were allowed full access and participation. Especially given the tenuous and abstract nature of the constructs being discussed, environmental conditions in which the students are uncomfortable or afraid to interact with the researcher and group members would have hindered both the project and the data that emerge.

CHAPTER 4
PROJECT ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION

To facilitate the discussion of my findings, I have organized this final chapter of this dissertation into five specific, theme-based sections. Each of the main, macro-level theme sections has detailed sub-themes described within, and the chapter ends with a concluding discussion in which I explore the various connections I found within and among the macro-level and sub-themes. With the intent of organizing the discussion as clearly as possible, I structured these emergent themes similarly to the way I structured my review of relevant literature, insomuch as the data allowed. The sections are organized as indicated below, with each of the principal sub-themes listed below each main, macro-level theme. At the conclusion of each macro-level theme, I have also provided a summary table which outlines the primary sub-themes and provides a short data example for each.

1. Thematic Overview
2. The Culture of Fear
    a. What it Means to be Afraid of Your Newspaper: *Culture of Fear* Defined
    b. *Good* Fear vs. *Bad* Fear
    c. The Journalist Paradox 1: Fear as a Constant
3. Media Literacy
    a. Perspectives of Media Literacy Defined
    b. The Journalist Paradox 2: Media Literate Reporters
4. *Conscientização* and Education for Critical Consciousness
    a. *Conscientização* Misunderstood
    b. The Journalist Paradox 3: Critical Consciousness Mis-Education

c. The Journalist Paradox 4: Ontological Dualism

5. Concluding Discussion: A Move to *Conscientização*

Thematic Overview

Conscientização is, perhaps above all things, an awakening process. One does not suddenly become critically conscious, nor does one, in the process of Conscientização, reach an absolute state of nirvanic critical consciousness. This process of awakening exists on a continuum: individuals may become more critically conscious of aspects of their world, but they arguably never become fully critically aware. I acknowledge this as a preface to the presentation of these themes and analyses to address a dominant emergent theme I have encountered throughout my collection of data. I have discovered, not surprisingly given the nature of the constructs I am studying, that I am changing in the way I see myself as an educator and researcher and, likewise, am changing in the way I teach and approach my scholarly work. I find myself in this stream of Conscientização – awakening and growing in my own critical consciousness. With this said, it is important to remind that, along with my role as researcher in this project, I also serve as the faculty adviser of the campus newspaper at the regional university in south-central United States where the study took place, as well as an assistant professor in the Journalism program of the Communication Department. I teach two courses a semester and have two courses of newspaper advisement. My role as the newspaper adviser varies each term, depending on the staff, all of whom are students. A very young, inexperienced editorial staff requires more direction and technical assistance from me as the adviser than does a trained, seasoned group. However, regardless of editorial experience, I make it clear to the students that my role as adviser is just that: advisory; they ultimately are responsible for

making all decisions concerning tone, focus, content, advertising, and design of the student press. I also am the chief print journalism professor in our department and am responsible for teaching core courses in news writing, editing, media history, media literacy, and media law. I therefore play a formative role in the journalism education of the students who become editors of the newspaper. In this regard I acknowledge the enormity of my role and my potential influences. I may say, and even believe, students are free to make their own choices regarding the newspaper, but I influence and shape their opinions – or at least how their opinions are expressed – through the requirement that they take my courses. My views, biases, interests, and ideological judgments make it into the newspaper regardless of my limited role as "adviser."

In analyzing my role as "adviser," my awareness of my symbolic and expressed power has increased during the course of this project. I have changed already how I teach my courses; critical dialogue is becoming the core of my instructional approach. Within this critical dialogue, the problem I find myself faced with is the tension and conflict that results from employing all of the tools and tricks we use to sell our mass media products, which dominate most journalism programs, and simultaneously teaching that the media's use of fear-based tools is a basic element of the Culture of Fear that we are acknowledging, confronting, and attempting to disrupt through Praxis.

Early on in the analyses of these data I began to realize the many ways in which I have not been a liberatory educator, but rather an instrument of the same oppressive systems I am trying to help my students recognize. In many ways I am the dominant elite described by Freire – regardless of my noble intentions as an instructor and adviser, I have been filling my very receptive (read passive) students' consciousness with fear-

based slogans. I have been startled on several occasions to confront myself doing this, although in the larger context of the study it is not surprising. As a teacher, a scholar, and a man, I am still struggling to become critically conscious and must be aware of my role as both an oppressor and oppressed. I have begun the life-long process of Conscientização and am beginning to see myself in a critical sense. Through this discovery process, I am becoming more critically conscious, I am becoming more critically aware, and can likewise engage in praxis in my own teaching and research. Ironically, by seeing myself as an oppressor as I attempted to teach my students about oppression, I am able to begin the process of educating for critical consciousness.

This project began as an examination of collegiate journalists' experiences with a mass-mediated culture of fear, media literacy, and Freirian notions of critical consciousness. At several points throughout the course of my primary data collection, I found myself explaining concepts as I do in my journalism courses and then, upon reflection, discovering that I was teaching the very concepts I was asking my students to attempt to think critically about. As a simplified example, in my Newswriting course, I explain that for raw information to be news, for it to be important enough to make it into print, the information must capture the reader's attention. It must be exciting, or presented as such, informative and unique, and be of use to the reader in some form. I present several examples of possible news stories, such as a murder, a fatality vehicle accident, a wedding announcement, and a local business' public relations release. I then ask the students to decide, based on class discussions, which story should be placed above the fold of the newspaper, with a color image or graphic, on the front page. Using the guidelines I have taught, the students always select the murder or fatality, not

necessarily because this information is more important to the reader, but because it is "bigger" news. It should not have come as a surprise to me then, when in the course of the study the student editors chose to run two banner headlines on an inside spread of the newspaper stating the following: "Get out the sunscreen: dangers of fake tanning," and "Bioterrorism education available at CU," with the inverted pyramid lead, "Is the community prepared to handle a bioterrorisim attack?" launching the reader into a fear-based narrative. Like most journalism professors, I taught my students the maxim "If it bleeds, it leads." I shouldn't have been surprised to read these fear-based headlines in the newspaper when I was the one who taught the editors to do this in the first place.

In conversations about this study, I have begun – half seriously – to call my teaching of journalism and newswriting a "mis-education." I am attempting to be both a teacher of journalism (in the hope that my students will be successful as professional journalists) and a teacher of critical consciousness – two constructs that seemed in conflict with one another. How may I call myself an educator for critical consciousness and still preach this dialectic of fear and consumer-driven sensationalized media production? Both I and my students have struggled with this seeming contradiction, as is apparent through the sub-theme the Journalist Paradox that I found as a constant through each of the primary emergent themes in my analyses. Fear, likewise, was a thread that ran through each of the emergent themes in this project, and is the macro-level theme I address here first. Following the Culture of Fear macro-theme, I present the emergent theme Media Literacy, concluding with *Conscientização* and Education for Critical Consciousness, and a final summary discussion entitled A Move to *Conscientização.* To facilitate understanding of the various macro-level themes, I have also provided a summary table

following the conclusion of the three main thematic sections, with each primary sub-theme listed and data examples that support each sub-theme.

The Culture of Fear

Since the first inklings of the ideas for this project began to emerge in the process of my doctoral coursework, I have wrangled with this notion of "Culture of Fear:" not just in defining what exactly I mean when I say the words "culture" and "fear" together, but also in trying to understand the societal relationships implied by the term, the various potential impacts of fear-based news and mass-mediated information, and even the theoretical origins of the term. As my research questions evolved, and as the methodology necessary to study what I saw as relevant within these questions began to solidify, I made a few assumptive mistakes. For example, I assumed wrongly that this idea of a fear-filled culture was necessarily a "bad" thing, and that fear was automatically something that should be warded against, avoided, and left alone in the practice of good journalism and journalism education. However, as data began to emerge, and as I began to visit with my students and study these concepts with them, it became apparent that there are very specific instances in both their and my personal and professional lives when fear was considered beneficial, helpful, and even sought after. As one example, Photographer Alex explained in a group interview how he used fear in his life as a form of entertainment. He said that fear wasn't necessarily fun, in and of itself, but rather "the overcoming of fear." He sees excitement in the overcoming of something he is afraid of. Alex, in several instances throughout the study and in conversations with me, explained how he was drawn to things that scared him. He is a 22-year-old man, single, loves photography and philosophy, works as a manager of a sports equipment store, and is a self-proclaimed daredevil. He searches out things that will scare him for the excitement factor.

I also made a mistake in how I initially approached the research questions concerning this notion of fear. My goal with this study from the onset was not to show that a Culture of Fear existed in society, or even to define specifically what the descriptive term Culture of Fear was (Glassner and Altheide, among several others, have already done a fine job of that in their research). I knew, and it is has become increasingly more apparent throughout the course of this study and in my teaching over the past two years in specific, that a Culture of Fear clearly exists in professional American journalism and even, I have found, in journalism education. However, I caught myself at several points in the primary data collection, and in the early stages of analysis, fixating on this question of "if" with my students in interviews and group discussions, when it was abundantly clear to them, as I would discover in my analyses, that a culture of fear indeed exists and that there really was no point in belaboring that specific aspect of the study.

> *Editor Susan*: We are inundated with stories that could incite fear. For example, while years ago it was getting sucked into escalators, today it is bird flu, heating Styrofoam in the microwave, eating too much of certain foods, etc. These undoubtedly affect the way some people in the nation live their lives. We don't just see these stories every once in a while. We see them every day. Same thing with crime stories. They could be the reason why we lock our doors in America.

When I would catch myself forming questions or making statements or writing up analyses that attempted to quantify this notion of Culture of Fear I would stop and try to determine precisely what it was I was attempting to ask. My students seemed to be much

more in tune with what it was we were studying, and they seemed to know intuitively that "Culture of Fear" was a given, which allowed for much richer and more insightful and significant questions concerning the "Why" and "How" of fear to emerge. Then, near the end of the study, we ultimately were able to address questions of "What" – specifically, "What is to be done *with* and *about* this culture and what is my role, as a journalist, within this culture?"

With this said, it obviously was and remains critical for both the students in the project and myself to have a base, working knowledge of what we collectively define as Culture of Fear, and a general understanding of what all is caught up in the term in relation to journalism and news mass media. On this basis, the first sub-theme I address in this, the first section of my analyses, deals with how the participants, and myself as the researcher, defined Culture of Fear*,* and the various ways in which they as students chose to represent themselves living and working within this culture. "What It Means to be Afraid of Your Newspaper" consists of how the participants identified what Culture of Fear is for them. The second sub-theme I present is the notion of "*Good* Fear vs. *Bad* Fear" that Photographer Alex so succinctly defined earlier: fear can be debilitating and abusive, but sometimes the emotion fear is enriching, socially effective, enjoyable, or may even save your life. "To be careful is good," Linda said in one of our early meetings, "to be obsessed is bad. There are things you *should* be afraid of!" The third and final theme of this section I have titled "Fear as a Constant: The Journalist Paradox." Here I present some of the most surprising findings of the entire study. Fear is omnipresent. Not only do my students recognize a Culture of Fear exists within their world, but they also illustrate the many ways in which fear, especially fear in the world of journalism, is

manipulated and used as a calculative tool, and how it has become almost necessary to call upon fear-tactics within their professional work to be "successful." "There is a negative undertone for many people's lives," Journalism Student William said. "In a day and age when fear controls the media and is all over every newscast, it is hard to find serenity." It is utterly amazing to me, and I believe to my students, the degree to which we have allowed fear to pervade our social structure and how we have resorted to utilizing fear-based tactics in the production and consumption of our mass media. This "Fear as a Constant" sub-theme provides a summary for the "Culture of Fear" macro-level theme, brings together both the "*Good* Fear vs. *Bad* Fear" and "Culture of Fear Defined" sub-themes, and serves also as an ideal segue into the second major emergent theme of the project, "Media Literacy."

What it Means to Be Afraid of Your Newspaper: Culture of Fear *Defined*

After a full semester of discussion and debate regarding fear, media impact, journalism and society, and the role of mass-mediated news information in American culture, I asked Journalism Student Janet to discuss any relationships she saw between fear, news, and popular culture. Within her response lay the defining elements of what the greater part of the student participants would say the Culture of Fear is.

> We live in a culture of fear…. The use of fear as a technique of delivering information has been used for a long time. Movies like *Bowling for Columbine* use fear to persuade the audience to share the creator's beliefs and values. The irony of it is that Michael Moore, in order to share his views, uses the very thing that he created the movie to warn people about: FEAR. He shows how the mass media use fear to gain viewers and money. He doesn't lie about it because the

media does use fear to attract audiences, however, he uses the same technique. Just sitting down to watch the morning news, you can see how many headlines invoke some type of fear in the audience. Its not just television either, this can be witnessed in all types of media, from newspapers to radio to the internet. Michael Moore used his movie to invoke fear of the NRA, America, video games, the mass media, and so on.

Journalism Student Brandon was asked to respond to the same prompt, and noted similarly:

> We blame music, movies, television, video games, the government and an endless string of culprits for the violence that is said to be so prevalent in our society…. Whatever the reason for the violence in our society the media plays it up by reassuring our fears of the dangers that are out there. In one segment of [*Bowling for Columbine*] Moore walked down a street that was depicted in the media as being violent. As he continued down the street he saw no signs of the fear and danger that he expected to feel by the reports in the news. Then in another piece he went to a scene of an attempted drowning where police and news crews were already camped out. Even though the L.A. smog posed a greater worry than an attempted drowning the drowning was going to make headlines because as a reporter on the scene said, 'if it bleeds, it leads.' I think that because we see so much violence in the media we automatically think that the violence in society is increasing when it might be actually decreasing. We live in a culture of fear

because we do not take the time to ask questions and seek out the truth in the media.

Janet's and Brandon's ideas are very much in line with the definitions of Culture of Fear offered by the researchers who have written on this topic. As I stated in my review of literature, Culture of Fear in the context of this project is a socially induced generalized state in which a people are anxious or frightened as a result of perceived threats of harm or violence – here, specifically, in the context of *mass-mediated* "threats" of harm or violence. However, as is shown in these two students' descriptions, this rather condensed definition does not capture the depth and breadth of the Culture of Fear concept. Likewise, it does not begin to describe the struggle both I and my students worked through, and continue to wrangle with, in attempting to characterize and identify the theoretical complexities of a fear-based mass media culture.

Throughout the initial Culture of Fear discussions with the core research group and journalism students, several of the participants brought up questions of whether the media is responsible for things that happen in our society, or if the media is just a reflection of that which already exists – that is, do the mass media actually create fear within our society, or is the fear already there and the news media just do the job of reporting it? This topic was hotly debated in various contexts throughout the course of my data collection, and no exact, black and white answer has emerged, nor will it if the ongoing political and academic debates I see daily are any indicator. Some students, such as Editor Nixon, claimed that "The media reflects what is going on in society. It reinforces what is already there. Violent things are happening … the news is reporting things that are already there, even things that might incite fear. I think the fear is real."

Others felt that although there are indeed bad things happening in the world, the media choosing to report on certain, fear-based items chiefly and rather incessantly leads to a Culture of Fear. According to Photographer Alex, "The media generate the fear. There's a business point of fear ... fear sells. I think they report on it because it sells. Period. They can choose not to, but it sells."

Everyone agrees that there are dangers in our world, dangers of which we should be afraid. Everyone agrees that it is prudent to take safeguards against the dangers. With this said, a question still remains concerning the determination of at what point the news media's reporting on these dangers becomes an impediment to its consumers as opposed to providing a healthy, practical, democratic service. How much is too much, and are the media simply reporters of fear-based information, or creators of it? "If [the media] are creating [news] they'd be inventing it," Editor Linda said. "They're reporting on things, actual studies and actual things going on, in my opinion of choosing what you put on there will have to do with it but I don't think you're creating it, you're just picking which ones to throw out there." Journalism Student William did not entirely agree. "The world-wide culture is on the edge of their seats waiting for the next big scare," he said. "There is no question that the different mediums available to us have a tremendous effect on our lives. All can influence our way of thinking, but few can cause mass panic like news programming. Classically, fear was associated with threat, fear of war or fear of fear of hunger. In these circumstances, the threat is the object of fear. Yet, today the threat is fear itself. Our fear of many situations becomes a greater problem than the situations themselves." As a student journalist, Photographer Alex defended the media's right to report potentially fear-inducing stories. "We're not necessarily trying to instill fear," he

said. “We’re trying to educate somebody and we’re doing it maybe through the subversive use of fear because we’re saying, ‘Be afraid of this,’ or ‘Think about this. Be aware of it. Not go outside and be you know, careful.’ Not like *What about Bob?*[1] and walking around with tissues in our hands cause we don’t want to get, you know, a germ or something.” I asked Alex and the other editors in the core research group if it was the media’s job to “educate,” as he had said. Neither Alex nor the other editors could come to a definitive conclusion, nor could they entirely agree there was a difference between “telling” and “teaching.” For the sake of time and in an attempt to control in some way this potentially monstrous topic, I did not pursue the debate further in that sitting, although I hope to revisit it in a future phenomenological project.

I have been studying this notion of fear and the media intently now for nearly two years and in that time I have found myself avoiding news content more and more. Certainly the writing of a doctoral dissertation on a specific topic is an arduous task, and some level of exasperation with the core concepts is to be expected. I can’t help but think however that there is something more occurring here within myself than simply needing a break from my dissertation research topic. I have been a news and information junkie since I was teenager, but of late in my free time I prefer to read a book, an entertainment magazine or play a video game when before I would be scouring news websites or reading newspapers or news magazines from cover to cover. I see the manipulations within the news content, and I see everywhere the utilization of fear-based tactics to sell a story or product, and I have grown weary of it. With this said, within the various media I consume, it has become exceedingly difficult even for me, a media scholar, to delineate

[1] In the movie *What About Bob*, the main character Bob Wiley is a neurotic man who is deathly afraid of most everything in his life, especially germs.

between what passes for news information, entertainment information and advertising information. Even if I attempt to self-monitor and identify the various manipulative tools that are being acted upon me, it is often easier to just attempt to find an escape. This escape can be either complete media avoidance – which is practically impossible in our media-saturated society – or by attempting to ignore the various ways the media may be impacting me, essentially letting the media effects carry me as they will. I further define this notion of "automaticity" later in this project, but it hinges on the constant struggle to identify and understand the personal effects of this fearful culture. As Journalism Student William points out, similar fear-based tactics and triggers are embedded everywhere within the various media. This proliferation of fear tactics defines in a practical sense the Culture of Fear. "[Newscasters] give the more serious stories with stern faces," Journalism Student William said. "They laugh and smile through the more entertaining portions of the programming, but when the time comes to scare they are more than ready. They fill their stories with keywords intended to cause a stir like: fear, warning, trouble, or dangerous. These key words stick in the minds of the viewing audience and is branded into their thinking. And politicians and police to aim their concern at reducing the fear of crime rather the crime itself." This fear burrows deep within every aspect of our lives, thriving from the constant media onslaught. "The fear referred to here is not simply fear for one's safety," Editor Nixon said. "In this [media-driven] context fear is being used in the broadest of terms to also include fear of rejection, fear of failure, fear of poverty, fear of your neighbor, fear of other cultures, fear of not fitting in, fear of loneliness and just about any other kind of fear imaginable."

Good Fear vs. Bad Fear

Fear is a relative expression; not every person will be frightened by the same things. Conversely, danger – a core element of the base "fear" definition – is not similarly enigmatic (Altheide, 2002). People typically are frightened by that which they perceive as genuinely dangerous. "Danger does not produce a shared environment of fear; we can deal with danger, we can be educated about it, take steps to avoid it or minimize its impact" (Altheide, 2002, p. 197). As some of my students would say, we can even embrace danger – and the fear of danger – using it as a tool, and manipulating it as a resource. "I don't necessarily think that fear is a bad thing," Editor Nixon said. "It depends on the nature of what is being feared and the effect the fear has on individuals." Editors Alex and Linda agreed completely. Alex said he is often exhilarated by fear in his life, pursuing dangerous activities for the thrill. Linda, who has three teenage boys, said that sometimes fear is the best tool she has for protecting her children. In one of our discussion groups, Linda spoke of using fear with her boys and Alex provided a very insightful response to both Linda and the group concerning his perceptions of the discussion. Shortly after Linda spoke, Alex, without my prompting, proceeded to tie together some of the group's previous discussions involving educational systems, journalism, and the Culture of Fear, and formulated comparisons between teaching, safety, and the mass media. The following is a segment of dialogue between the two in one of our group meetings:

> *Alex*: I want to do the running of the bulls thing. I'm an adrenaline junkie. I'm going skydiving this summer. No, not all fear is fun. I'm not saying fear is fun, I'm saying the overcoming of fear. Cause if you're afraid of something, you're

afraid of it. But if you can do it, to me if you can prove to yourself that you can do something that you may be afraid of, then it changes you in a way. And it can be fun. And I think that a lot of times fear is the easiest way to educate. I mean with kids, with anybody, if you say, 'Don't touch that, it's hot, you'll be hurt,' you're trying to tell them to be afraid of not sticking their hand…

Linda: And then say it in a scary voice!

Alex: Yeah! And you're trying to tell that kid to be afraid of putting his hand on a stove. Cause you can't say, "Hey, just don't do it." Why not? What's it going to do to me?

Here Alex brought in previous weeks' discussions and formulated an astonishing comparison within the ideas we had been studying.

Alex: I mean there has to be, it goes back to our definition last week, fear is, however we define it, is something we can think of as causing physical or emotional harm or whatever to us. So fear is an easy way to teach people. And I think a lot of times [a reporter does this] whether or not [he realizes it].

Alex claimed that "fear is an easy way to teach people," – not just children, but adults also. As a journalist he is not attempting to frighten, he says, but to inform or perhaps motivate, even if it means to use a potentially "subversive" fear tactic. Editor Nixon expounded on this notion, and said that in some situations fear can be used effectively as an educative tool, for the good of those being "educated," but that it is primarily the individual's fault if they over-react and live in a perpetual state of fear, such as Alex's *What About Bob* reference.

> The discussion about the dangers of escalators was a case in point. After seeing a news story on the possibility of being injured by an escalator, I naturally thought about it more. However, the thought of getting injured was present before I saw the story. So perhaps somewhat of a confirmation of my existing fear made me a little more aware. I don't think this sort of fear is unhealthy because I still use escalators. Some may develop an unhealthy fear of escalators and avoid them completely. Is this the fault of the media? I don't necessarily believe so. If, however, the media warned people to stay away from escalators because they have an excellent chance of getting hurt, then I would blame the media. Otherwise, I think individuals are to blame for their own ridiculous overreactions.

Throughout the discussions, the editors and students seemed to provide bemused responses, or even at times contradicting reactions, when attempting to define when a mass-mediated fear was considered harmful or beneficial. Often our discussions would circle to an "it depends" statement: *it depends* on the individual, on the situation, on the use of the fear tactic, or on the entity orchestrating the fear tactic. "Kind of like the [fear of] escalators you know that escalators can be dangerous," Alex said. "I mean it's a big, moving chunk of metal with different components. You read a story about; you could – "could" being the key word – get your shoelace caught in an escalator and it could rip your shoe off and maybe your foot might get caught in there. You might not have thought about those things before but now that you've read it your sensitivity has increased."

Editor Susan provided a similar example. She described for the group a television show she had been watching in which law enforcement officials and a professional

burglar will enter a family home, pointing out all of the potential defense weaknesses of the residence, and identify the many ways in which a criminal could attack or enter the house.

> *Editor Susan*: They take somebody's house, and these people think their house is pretty safe from burglars and stuff. And they take a [burglar] he goes through and finds all the ways he could break in. And then people that are watching that are probably thinking, 'Oh, maybe I should protect my house.' I don't know, I guess it's you think you know more, like I thought my house was pretty safe but now that I know there's a better chance now that I know thieves think this way. There's a better chance now of me being robbed.

Susan thought this type of show was more instructive as opposed to fear-inducing for the audience it reached; it was not harmful, and if the audience felt a sense of fear, then all the better, as they would take measures to protect themselves and their families. She did not point out the potential fear manipulations that exist within this type of program, nor does she address the ways in which this type of broadcast specifically fits within the very definition of a mass-mediated Culture of Fear we had been defining. Interestingly, later in the year Susan made the following statement when I asked her to write about the mass-media's potential to influence, on any level, an individual's behaviors, beliefs, or emotions: "Those who consume [fear-based media and are influenced by it] are not all intelligent enough to determine whether the media are inflating the number of stories on murder, being biased when covering certain stories, or only presenting a certain type of news story. These people are more likely to form

opinions because they don't know enough about the media to question it." Susan maintained that in some situations it is appropriate for the media to present fear-inducing information if she saw it helping those who consume it, even if the media are taking advantage of a populace that might not be capable of seeing the potential manipulations (read here, lacking Critical Consciousness). At other times, however, she said "I think … [the media] are irresponsible." Susan is an intelligent, caring and, in my estimation, ethical journalist (she is currently employed at a large, metropolitan newspaper in the southwestern U.S.). Her rather conflicting statements hint at a prominent sub-theme that is threaded within each of the major themes emerging in my analyses: *The Journalist Paradox*. I address the "Journalist Paradox" sub-theme more completely in the next section, but at its core are these "it depends" declarations. Case in point here, what is the difference between *good* fear and *bad* fear? "It depends on the degree to which you're affected by it," Editor Linda said.

The Journalist Paradox 1: Fear as a Constant

The third and final emergent theme within this "Culture of Fear" section has, at its foundation, this central tenet: Literal objectivity in news reporting is a farce. News "is what news directors and journalists say it is. In other words, when you turn on your television set to watch a network or local news show, whatever is on is, by definition, the news" (Postman and Powers, 1992, p. 11-12). Journalists are acutely aware of this apparent oxymoron in their profession: it is impossible to be wholly objective in the business of news reporting. A human being's complete and accurate reporting of "truth" can be impacted by countless external and individualistic forces. Personal political leanings, internal motivations, past experiences, artistic vanity, environmental conditions,

and a host of potential situational concerns all can impact how an individual interprets and presents "truth" as information. And this is to say nothing of the organizational environment in which the reporter works: mainstream news media are businesses, and both the reporter and the media company as a whole must deal with the intricacies of the business world to survive. With this said, journalists still are trained to be ethical, responsible, and as objective as is possible. A journalistic code of ethics (Appendix F) has been developed by the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) and, while not compulsory, outlines several tenets which can be seen as the defining constructs of what makes a reporter of information a journalist. The SPJ Code of Ethics Preamble states:

> Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and adopt this code to declare the Society's principles and standards of practice.

There are 37 individual code items that make up the SPJ Code of ethics, all which fall within four separate and specific categories. The four organizational codes are as follows:

- **Seek Truth and Report It**: Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

- **Minimize Harm**: Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.
- **Act Independently**: Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.
- **Be Accountable**: Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other.

All of the editors, photographers and journalism students from whom I collected data for this project are intimately familiar with the SPJ Code of Ethics, and all likely would consider the code extremely important to the job of being a professional journalist. Several of the main newspaper editors even addressed the importance of the Code in discussing specific questions concerning the culture of fear.

> *Editor Nixon*: [As journalists] we need to show both the cause and the effect, the background along with the result and, as it is stated in SPJ's code of ethics, tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so. We should present the news fairly so that we may all learn about each other in an honest way rather than perpetuate division for the sake of fear.

Journalists must both "minimize harm" and "seek truth and report it" – all the while working under the auspices of a business organization which likely has its own commerce-driven ethic. With these oftentimes conflicting requirements, filling the role of an ethical, professional journalist is a demanding and daunting task. "We [as journalists] should present the news fairly so that we may all learn about each other in an honest way

rather than perpetuate division for the sake of fear," Editor Nixon said. However, journalists must be aware of the business element of their jobs. What happens when an ethical journalist utilizes the fear which Nixon alludes as a tool to perform the task of seeking truth and reporting it? Given the previous discussion of *Good* Fear vs. *Bad* Fear, it seems that fear may indeed be an effective instrument for an ethical journalist. According to my students and newspaper editorial staff, it is used often as such.

Therein lies the conflict, and the paradox, of being both a successful professional journalist and a successful ethical journalist: fear is relative. At first blush it would seem that the use of fear in a news story, either as a tactic or as a topic, might seemingly go against one of the key principles of the SPJ Code of Ethics, which is to "Minimize Harm." However, where is the defining line for a journalist who is actively *seeking out the truth and reporting it* when the "truth" consists of terrorism, murder, kidnappings, rape, political unrest, and natural catastrophe? One of the items within the Code of Ethics states: "Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context." Another code item says: "Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity," and to "Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief." A reporter who produces an article or a series of articles dealing with fear-based constructs could very well be thought of as "pandering to lurid curiosity" or "misrepresenting" an incident by constant repetition or the production of multiple stories on a similar topic. In reporting on a potentially fear-inducing story, a journalist must be at once objective, sensitive, and aware of his obligations to his media company. If indeed "fear sells" as Photographer

Alex surmised, then there is a very grey line indeed between violating the journalistic code of ethics and producing a mass media product that will be financially successful.

Journalists and editors must always take into consideration these often conflicting elements in the selection of the news that their audiences will see. "This process [of deciding what to cover] is so hard when we decide what's going to be on the front page as opposed to the middle of the newspaper," Editor Susan said. "'Cause you want people to pick up your paper so you're going to put stuff you think they're going to most want to read about on the front." Journalism Student William noted similarly, "Broadcast companies do not look at the news as just a job, but a very profitable business that always has room for more profit. In that aspect, businesses tend to use whatever they see working in their own companies. This is the reason that news casts have become some of the most violent and graphic programs on television." Thus, depending upon what the reporter, or perhaps more importantly the reporter's managing editors, consider newsworthy, a Culture of Fear might be either undermined or reinforced.

Altheide (2002) said as much in his book *Creating Fear*: "News organizations are distinguished from other fear-mongering groups because they sometimes bite the scare that feeds them" (pg. xxiii). Journalists intentionally perpetuating a Culture of Fear would seem to be in clear, direct violation of the SPJ Code of Ethics, yet the perpetuation of this culture may be a major element of what makes a mass media product a viable profession, allowing it to perform all of the altruistic functions the mass media serve in a democratic society. This is the journalist paradox. According to my students, there is one certainty within all of these philosophical contradictions: fear is pervasive within the media they consume and produce. Fear is a constant, and fear contributes to the paradox of being

both a *successful* journalist and an *ethical* journalist. “It’s no secret that fear sells,” Journalism Student William said, “and mediums are always looking for the newest ways to scare their audiences. For example, **** had been airing promos for the **** gang story for the last two weeks. It was very successful and has created a buzz in town about the gang activity. It has just added to the fear of crime that I mentioned earlier.”

The Culture of Fear: Sub-Themes Discussion

“‘Lex Luthor said it best in *Superman IV*: The more fear you make, the more loot you take,’” Journalism Student William said. With a single quote from a comic-book villain, William intelligently summarized one of the base mechanisms in this complex dichotomy of news and entertainment in our social culture, and exemplifies perfectly the ways in which these themes of fear, mass mediated information, and journalism are interrelated. “The entire culture of the media is based on entertainment,” William said. “It’s an era where the cliché is, ‘If it bleeds, it leads!’ News stories today are presented in what is called a ‘problem format.’ Al-Qaeda is a perfect example. The news reports have broken it down into a battle between good and evil, right and wrong. Even President Bush refers to them as ‘evil ones’ and ‘evil doers.’ Our culture looks for things to worry about and cling to. The ratings have skyrocketed as the news programs become more and more filled with problems.” William, and the other student journalists involved in this project seems to understand the basic nature of fear within the craft of journalism, and the culture that both exists *because* of this fear and *by* it. They see the news media employing fear-based tactics, and through my interaction with them in the course of this project, they seemed to recognize how they themselves use, or have been trained to use, fear as a tool, as I will discuss in the “Mis-education for Critical Consciousness” thematic section.

"[Our job is] keeping viewers, keeping readers," Editor Linda said. "And the shocking stuff is selling."

As an educator of journalists, a consumer of journalistic mass-media products, and a writer of non-fiction prose, I believe that the craft of journalism is an art form. Journalists are artists who want to share their work. When an effective tool is available to the journalist to accomplish the very complex job of reporting and disseminating truth, it is not surprising that a journalist may will call upon the utility of fear-based tactics to get the job done. This does not make the journalist right, or even ethical, but the utility of fear, and the truth of its application, remains. "Maria [the University Newspaper Managing Editor]'s job changes from not only wanting to put out a good newspaper and quality journalism, but to make money," Photographer Alex said. "Period. Bottom line, if she doesn't make enough money, it doesn't matter how good of a journalist and paper she turns out." I have no doubt my journalism students would strive to be ethical in their craft. Yet – as Alex shows – they still are aware that there is a production aspect to their jobs that may lead to the utilization of fear-tactics. "That's the business point of fear," Photographer Alex said. "You don't think if we had some big gun distributor in this town that saved a lot of jobs and stuff, like Memorial Hospital that Channel 7 wouldn't be covering it? This is my opinion, but I think there would be an increase in crime coverage." Editor Susan agreed, referring back to several sections in *Bowling for Columbine* where Michael Moore interviewed a home security business owner. "Businesses want fear in media because it drives their business."

Toward the end of the first semester in this project, I asked Editor Linda to respond on the discussion board to the question: "Is the media, in your estimation,

irresponsible? Do mass media adequately fulfill the role you see them serving in our society?" Among the other themes, her response shows much about her, and I would say the majority of her peers, in how they feel about their role as journalists in our society.

> As a whole, no. Those with the journalism passion chose that profession for a reason, and it wasn't the money. I just asked my 11-year-old what he thinks of the news, if he believes what the news reports. To him it was obvious that they can make mistakes. He even suggested that some reporters might exaggerate (his choice of word) parts of the story, 'to get more attention.'

Humans will make mistakes in objectivity, and even Linda's 11-year-old son understands that certain journalistic rules may likely be bent to "get more attention" and, subsequently, move more product. This Culture of Fear seems to exist in a vicious cycle: the exploitation of fear-tactics creates a Culture of Fear, and a Culture of Fear perpetuates the exploitation of journalistic fear-tactics. Journalism Student William provided a thoughtful statement that presents an accurate and concise conclusion to this Culture of Fear discussion, and also alludes to the next macro-level theme that emerged from this project: Media Literacy.

> *Journalism Student William:* Fear has completely consumed our culture. There is a time and a place where fear can be an effective tool in media, but we have passed that point. Studies recently have shown that when a news story has a child involved, the first thought is that it is a negative story. In another study, a picture of a man cuddling with a child was shown. The question was asked to those who saw the picture, what are you looking at? A large majority of those asked said that

it was a pedophile, not a father holding the child. If our society as a whole could become more media literate and know what it is that the mediums are doing, then our fear as a whole would start to diminish.

Table 1

The Culture of Fear: Sub-Theme Data Examples

The Culture of Fear		
What it Means to be Afraid of Your Newspaper: Culture of Fear Defined	***Good* Fear vs. *Bad* Fear**	**The Journalist Paradox 1: Fear as a Constant**
"We blame music, movies, television, video games, the government and an endless string of culprits for the violence that is said to be so prevalent in our society…. Whatever the reason for the violence in our society the media plays it up by reassuring our fears of the dangers that are out there." *– Journalism Student Brandon* "We are inundated with stories that could incite fear. For example, while years ago it was getting sucked into escalators, today it is bird flu, heating Styrofoam in the microwave, eating too much of certain foods, etc. These undoubtedly affect the way some people in the nation live their lives. We don't just see these stories every once in a while. We see them every day. Same thing with crime stories. They could be the reason why we lock our doors in America." *– Editor Susan*	"To be careful is good. To be obsessed is bad. There are things you should be afraid of!" *– Editor Linda* "I don't necessarily think that fear is a bad thing. It depends on the nature of what is being feared and the effect the fear has on individuals." *– Editor Nixon* "I'm an adrenaline junkie. I'm going skydiving this summer. No, not all fear is fun. I'm not saying fear is fun, I'm saying the overcoming of fear. Cause if you're afraid of something, you're afraid of it. But if you can do it, to me if you can prove to yourself that you can do something that you may be afraid of, then it changes you in a way. And it can be fun." *– Journalism Student Alex* "Fear is, however we define it, is something we can think of as causing physical or	"This process [of deciding what to cover] is so hard when we decide what's going to be on the front page as opposed to the middle of the newspaper. 'Cause you want people to pick up your paper so you're going to put stuff you think they're going to most want to read about on the front." *– Editor Susan* "Broadcast companies do not look at the news as just a job, but a very profitable business that always has room for more profit. Businesses tend to use whatever they see working in their own companies. This is the reason that news casts have become some on the most violent and graphic programs on television." *– Journalism Student William* "It's no secret that fear sells and mediums are always looking for the newest ways to scare their audiences. For example, **** had been airing promos for [a] gang story for the last

The Culture of Fear		
What it Means to be Afraid of Your Newspaper: Culture of Fear Defined	***Good* Fear vs. *Bad* Fear**	**The Journalist Paradox 1: Fear as a Constant**
"I think that because we see so much violence in the media we automatically think that the violence in society is increasing when it might be actually decreasing. We live in a culture of fear because we do not take the time to ask questions and seek out the truth in the media." *– Journalism Student Brandon* "Classically, fear was associated with threat, fear of war or fear of fear of hunger. In these circumstances, the threat is the object of fear. Yet, today the threat is fear itself. Our fear of many situations becomes a greater problem than the situations themselves." *– Journalism Student William*	emotional harm or whatever to us. So fear is an easy way to teach people. And I think a lot of times [a reporter does this] whether or not [he realizes it]." *– Journalism Student Alex*	two weeks. It was very successful and has created a buzz in town about the gang activity. It has just added to the fear of crime." *– Journalism Student William* "[Our job is] keeping viewers, keeping readers. And the shocking stuff is selling." *– Journalism Student Linda*

Media Literacy

The mass media, journalistic, and educational theories described in Potter's (2006) book *Media Literacy* served as a foundational resource for my dissertation research, and the text has become the core requirement for all of the sophomore level *Introduction to Journalism* courses I teach. Therefore, I have become intimately familiar with the work, and the philosophies and ideologies presented within. Likewise, I have developed rather specific definitions of what I consider the term "media literacy" to mean, both through the course of my research and after having taught six full-semester undergraduate sections utilizing *Media Literacy* as the primary required text.

I entered into this study believing that the primary, defined purpose of media literacy was to identify and define specific media effects – as I addressed at length in my literature review – and that the development of media literacy essentially was to provide a basis from which to approach the study and application of elaborate media effects research. However, as data began to emerge in this project, and as my understanding of the underpinning meanings of media literacy has broadened and evolved, I have come to realize that the study of media effects is but a small element of the overall media literacy model. Media literacy is a way of approaching the information, a model of processing in which we make sense of the glut of mass media we encounter daily. According to Potter (2005), "media literacy is a set of perspectives that we actively use to expose ourselves to media to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter…. Active use means that we are aware of the messages and are consciously interacting with them" (pg. 22). Specifically, it is this notion of "perspective" within the definition of media literacy that I have found to be most critical in my research, teaching, and the emergent themes in this

project: “Media literacy is not a category – like a box – where either you are in the category or you are not. For example, either you are a high school graduate or you are not; either you are an American citizen or you are not. In contrast, media literacy is best regarded as a continuum – like a thermometer – where there are degrees” (pg. 23). My interpretation of Potter’s media literacy model, as it emerged and as is applicable to this body of research and to the courses I teach, marks it as having clear and distinct connections with theories of critical consciousness. Indeed, through the course of this project, I have begun to approach my instruction of media literacy as a pedagogical framework for education for critical consciousness, as I will address in the third and final section of this chapter. First, however, I present here a discussion on this, the second main theme that emerged in my analyses: “Media Literacy,” and explain how the individuals participating in this study interpreted media literacy, how they see the development of media literacy impacting the Culture of Fear. I purposefully attempted to keep my own interpretations of the Media Literacy knowledge out of this analyses. Rather, through student journalists’ perspectives a thematic definition of media literacy emerged, and a defined, practical application of what it means to be “media literate” was established.

The change in my personal philosophy and instructional frame concerning notions of media literacy has been a slow evolutionary process, due in no small part to the findings in this study, and I still struggle with the paradox that exists between being at once an instructor of, a creator of, and a consumer of mass-mediated information. Similarly, as the data that have emerged in the course of this project show, both the editors of the student newspaper and the undergraduates in my journalism courses

struggle with many of the same concerns. The "perspective" element of the defined media literacy model seems to be key in understanding how media literacy impacts, and is impacted by, the Culture of Fear and education for critical consciousness from the student journalist perspective. This perspective element is key in understanding how notions of media literacy emerged in these findings; therefore, "Perspectives of Media Literacy" is the first sub-theme I address in this macro-level "Media Literacy" section. Once the various perspectives regarding the media literacy model that emerged in my data are established, I discuss the potential issues that seem to exist within a media literacy curriculum, and explore emergent notions of media literacy impact. In the sub-theme "The Journalist Paradox 2: Media Literate Reporters," I close with a discussion of that same contradiction that has emerged throughout each of the major themes in this entire project: the seeming conflict of media-literate mass media consumers employed as successful mass media journalists.

Perspectives of Media Literacy Defined

Toward the end of the semester in my Introduction to Journalism course, I asked my students to answer specific questions concerning the relative importance of critical dialogue and education regarding the media's role in U.S. society. From their responses, I began to see what becomes a reliable and valid student perspective on what the term "Media Literacy" means, and the potential impacts media literacy may have. Journalism Student Janie provided an excellent definition of how the students perceive media literacy impacting their lives, especially in regard to the existence of a media-influenced Culture of Fear.

> *Journalism Student Janie:* Being media literate is very important in our culture of fear. It is difficult for many people to discern the truth from fiction when it comes to media. Because many people lack the knowledge structures and a strong personal locus, they make uninformed and uneducated assumptions and beliefs about our world. This is a cause for concern. Because we live in a democracy, it is important for people to understand all of the details before they come to a decision. However, many times this is not the case. Most people simply use the bits and pieces of information picked up from here or there and fill in their own blanks, many times causing them to have a false sense of being informed, a false sense of being in control, and faulty beliefs.

From Janie's perspective, media literacy is critical in the role democracy plays in our country in that individuals should be able to make knowledgeable and informed decisions, and the media is the vehicle in which they become informed. Her cause for concern is that without a media literate people, false assumptions concerning governance might be made, and decisions based upon mis-information may occur. Media literacy, then, becomes the tool with which individuals may govern elements of their social lives. Journalism Student Marcos' response advances the same themes found in Janie's reply, and further defines media literacy from the student journalist perspective. "Media literacy can help people discern the difference between truth and information that has no value. The idea is to control how the media programs our minds," he said. Again here, media literacy is a tool, an instrument to be called upon. Both Marcos and Janie referenced the Culture of Fear in their responses, and noted how media literacy might allow an individual to wade through sensational news media and find kernels of true information.

"One prominent junk message in the media—especially the news—is fear propelled by sensationalist stories," Marcos said. "The news uses a statement: 'If it bleeds, it leads,' to determine what shows on the top headlines. Consequently, it creates a mass of fearful stories ('Avian Flu,' 'Terrorism level raised') played by every major news corporation. Because the news picks sensationalist stories, it causes us to only see violence and view a negative image of people." According to Marcos, consumers of mass-media information may fall victim to sensationalized news stories that, although true, emphasize the negative or frightening elements of an event or situation to grab the attention of the buyer. A media literate consumer, then, Marcos says, may have some safeguards against these influences – all of which are the core, defining elements of what he and other student editors and journalists have defined as a Culture of Fear.

Effort and automaticity.

In defining the intricacies of what a *media literate* consumer of news information may be, the journalism students and editors noted how difficult it often is for individuals to see through the tricks and deceptions mass media employ to sell their products. "I guess people are really influenced by what they see on the media cause the media is like supposedly true and everything," Editor Susan said. "I mean even if there is that small part of you that says 'oh that could never happen to me' there's still that other part of you that's like 'well, maybe, I *did* see it on the news.'" Editor Linda said the same. "Less skeptical people, who forget that the media is human, may take reports made as absolute fact because it's 'the news.'" A media literate consumer then, according to Linda, must be skeptical of truth-based information disseminated by news media, lest they make decisions or establish opinions influenced by sensationalized or exaggerated reports.

Journalism Student Marcos agreed with Editors Linda and Susan, and explained how individuals must also be aware of the intricacies of news information production, and how stories often are examples of clever craftsmanship as opposed to careful and concise reporting. “As a media literate person, we also need to be aware of the information within the stories,” he said. “Many times news organizations will twist their information or only use one source in order to get the information they want. We need to recognize how the media uses quick quotes from experts to create fear. [It is as if] because they are experts and describe in a 50-second bit how things influence children, etc., we should take their advice without question.” Journalism Student Janet elaborated on this notion of “50-second sound-bites as truth,” explaining that consumers must be aware of the tools mass media utilize and see behind the stage and screen: “This is why media literacy is so important,” she said. “Just because someone has a suit, camera, and a microphone it doesn’t mean that everything that comes out of his or her mouth is accurate, objective, or true.”

However, even if an individual is aware of these theater aspects of mass media, it is often difficult to be constantly alert and aware of potential influences. As Editor Susan pointed out, when we watch news media, we do not want to believe we may be being manipulated or coerced: we want to believe that since we are watching news, we are watching truth. “I think that part of everyone wants to believe that the media is truly reporting unbiased facts,” Susan said, “so our emotions and perspectives are at least partially manipulated by the media.” This “wanting to believe” is a theme throughout many of the students’ responses and discussions: we, as consumers of media, often do not take the time to pay attention to what passes as truth-based news information and

question its validity. “When normal people watch the news, for example, they are not thinking to themselves, ‘Hey, are they being totally unbiased and reporting a balanced set of news?’ In [*Bowling for Columbine*], Marilyn Manson brought up a point that after Columbine, the media’s focus was on violence in entertainment and gun control. This could definitely shape one’s opinion of the event, no matter if it was meant to or not,” Susan said. Susan is describing here precisely a construct Potter (2005) defines in his media literacy model: automaticity. “Automaticity is a state where our minds operate without any conscious effort from us” (pg. 6). In terms of media literacy, the default model of automaticity, as Susan described, is essentially the automatic filtering of information. We are inundated with so much media on a daily basis, we must filter through what we encounter, attenuating to whatever is useful or triggers our interest. Mass media companies are able to invest a tremendous amount of resources into the research and development of trigger-based, mediated products that it is actually easier for a person to enter a state of automaticity rather than consciously be aware of the influence. In a state of automaticity, individuals may view news as true information and will not necessarily question for truth what is being presented, especially when they are inundated with so much information and automaticity becomes a factor. “Because we are bombarded with messages everyday from several different types of media, most people go into automaticity,” Journalism Student Janet said. “This is dangerous because it creates information fatigue, a false feeling of being informed, a false sense of control, and faulty beliefs. As a result of these traps, most people do not actively seek information and knowledge needed to be media literate.” Journalism Student Yolanda: “Being able to

discern truth in the thousands of messages we see or hear everyday is the key to media literacy."

Education for media literacy.

While it may be premature here to say, simply, that media literacy is the "fix" to the Culture of Fear, there appears to be some relationship in these students' perspectives between the establishment of media literacy and the impact of fear-based news media products. Media literacy, then, may become instrumental in the complex process of defying the negative impacts of a defined Culture of Fear. "If our society as a whole could become more media literate and know what it is that the mediums are doing, then our fear as a whole would start to diminish," Journalism Student William said. Journalism Student Janet responded similarly, and succinctly: "We live in a culture of fear," she said. "The only way to see through this fear is to be media literate." While I do not believe the answer to the Culture of Fear problem is this simple, I do think some truth lay in William's response. If media literacy can become in some way a cognitive device in which an individual may circumvent the typical reactionary response to fear-based slogans in news products, perhaps there may be some impact on the overall Culture of Fear. Journalism Student Thomas said the same as William and Janet: "The more media literate people are – the more they are able to see that they don't need to be so fearful. The relationship is: if we are not media literate then we fall into the concept of the Culture of Fear."

Again, the short answer to defending ourselves against a mass-media generated Culture of Fear may lie within establishing systems which educate a consumer base to understand the innerworkings of mediated messages, and bring to light the various tools

and tricks of the trade that are utilized in the media industry. However, within this emergent theme of educating for media literacy, the journalism students and editors did not seem to be able to explain how, specifically, and in what manner, this notion of educating a media literate consumer base might be implemented. Indeed, in the theme *Us* vs. *Them* that takes full form in the next section of this discussion, the students and editors nearly always spoke of "the media" as if they were somehow separate from it, especially when discussing the negative aspects of mass media companies, newspapers, radio stations and televisions (i.e., those traits and characteristics of the mass media which feed into the media-generated Culture of Fear discussed earlier). For example, Editor Susan said: "I think ["Bowling for Columbine"] brought up the point that the media broadcast too many negative stories. I think people tend to remember negative stories rather than positive ones, and I think that sometimes it makes one curious to find out more. I could go on and on about stories that have influenced the people around me. However, I think the main point is that media are influential, even if subconsciously."

The Culture of Fear, as it has been defined by the perspectives of the students in this study, is a complex, multi-faceted, and multi-dimensional construct. It was not my aim in the collection of these data to attempt and "solve" the problem of a Culture of Fear, nor did I imply to my students during the course of this study that they should be searching for a dramatic end to the negative impacts of this culture. Education for media literacy may hold some clues to understanding the broad-reaching impacts of a Culture of Fear, and educating media literacy has a place within education for critical consciousness, as I address within my concluding discussion. However, the thought of educating a mass media audience to be literate, to understand all the political, commercial, psychological,

and aesthetic manipulations and orchestrations involved in the dissemination of mediated information is overwhelming at best. Journalism Student Brandon spoke of the enormity of these ideas in his definition of media literacy:

> To be media literate we have to be exposed to the media as well as to real life experiences that project images and messages in our society. These messages affect the way we act and think about everything and to be media literate is to be aware of the messages that we experience and to realize the effects that they have on us. No one can ever be completely media literate because there are too many messages produced to keep up with and with that much information out there, there will always be something more that we can learn about the media and its effects. Also there are so many levels to media literacy that are involved that we can not possibly have all the skills and experiences that it takes to be completely media literate.

In describing the import of media literacy, Brandon also references Potter's (2005) assertion that media literacy development is a life-long endeavor: we must constantly work and adapt, training ourselves to understand the hidden nuances of media influence. "No one can ever be completely media literate," Brandon said, and this theme is echoed in notions of critical consciousness and Conscientização, as I will discuss shortly. First however, I address a sub-theme that Brandon alludes to in his definition, and a theme that has emerged within all of the macro-level themes in this dissertation: The Journalist Paradox. Brandon says, "to be media literate is to be aware of the messages that we experience and to realize the effects that they have on us." The paradox

exists in the fact that to be a successful journalist, he must also be able to *craft* those messages that will have an effect on their audience.

The Journalist Paradox 2: Media Literate Reporters

Consumers and Constructors

As I described earlier, within the Culture of Fear macro-level theme, the Journalist Paradox sub-theme describes the contradiction within a journalist who ethically cannot intentionally perpetuate a Culture of Fear, but who often must call upon fear tactics to be successful in his profession and perform all of the altruistic functions the mass media serve. A similar paradox also emerged within the Media Literacy macro-level theme: Successful journalists should be, according to my students, at once both literate *consumers* and literate *constructors* of mass-mediated information. The knowledge structures that are established when an individual develops media literacy skills can likewise be effectively manipulated to better disseminate a specific message or produce an influential news product. A media literate reporter may better understand the various influential tools available to him – whether they are perpetuating a Culture of Fear or not – and use these tools in such a way that his work will be exceptional, noteworthy, and rise above the other news messages he must compete with. Or, unfortunately, an unethical journalist could manipulate this understanding of media literacy to create propaganda or influential misinformation. “We have looked at this issue [of media literacy] from the perspective of a layman and from the perspective of a journalist,” Editor Nixon said. “The way that media as a whole influences those who are exposed to it depends, among other things, on their level of media literacy. On the other hand, even a journalist who is completely oblivious of the concept of media literacy can

have a level of influence over his audience." Here, Editor Nixon describes a base element of this paradox theme. Journalists have tremendous power in terms of potential influence, whether they are themselves media literate or not, and a media literate reporter may indeed have more influential, symbolic powers at their disposal than a reporter that has not developed media literacy abilities. Editor Linda agreed with Nixon, and provided an elaboration on his statement: "Journalists (catch-all term to include reporters as well as editors and higher-up decision makers) do choose, either consciously or unconsciously [read here, media literate and not], what exactly and how exactly to report on any story," she said. "The way in which a story is reported makes a difference as to how it is interpreted and responded to." Media literacy, then, may allow a reporter to better understand the potential influences of her story and adjust accordingly, depending upon the impact she sees her work having or the conceptual direction she sees her story going.

Linda's statement begins to establish another parallel between the "Culture of Fear Paradox" and "Media Literacy Paradox" themes that emerged: How the student journalists perceived the role of media literacy in terms of information presentation and dissemination. The student newspaper editors said that journalists must be media literate in terms of how they attempt to classify and categorize the information they disseminate. How information is presented often will determine how the information is received by its target audience, specifically as either news, entertainment, education, or advertisement. The editors explained how news information does not fall into the same category of entertainment and advertisement information, yet the media – and reporters in the media – must often use entertainment and advertising mechanics to produce and sell their products. Oftentimes, the reporters must make decisions based upon what they perceive

to be important for the audience, or produce works that they think the audience wants. Just as in the Culture of Fear discussion, ethical professional journalists will hopefully approach this selection and presentation of news information with altruistic intent, and call upon the guiding mandates established in the SPJ Code of Ethics as a foundation. However, the student editors pointed out that journalists may not be aware of the impact specific information will have, or misinterpret how and what information should be packaged and released. "Our audience governs the selection of news," Editor Susan said. "We report what we think they want to know about. This, in itself is probably biased, because we are judging what we think they need to know, when we should be reporting everything." Susan continued, explaining how, as a media literate journalist, she saw the role of entertainment information as very much different from news information, even though a person without media literacy skills may not see the difference so readily. "I think that entertainment media is exempt from some of the rules of news media because they are fulfilling a different purpose – to entertain. For example, they could put biases in their stories if they wanted to because the general consensus is that they are for entertainment, not to be considered 'truth.' News media is supposed to be 'truth' no matter what." Editor Linda seemed to agree with Susan, explaining how a journalist will understand, in the construction of a news product, that certain elements will impact audiences in certain ways. "For those less critical, less educated, more gullible viewers, well, they're easily manipulated and the "media" has the option of reflecting that aspect back to its audience. A good example of that situation is the Nichols guy and the teenagers in the poolroom in ["Bowling for Columbine"]. Choosing to show the viewpoints of those individuals in conjunction with their ignorance probably made an

impact on less critical viewers." According to Editor Linda, clever editing, seamless transitions, and carefully chosen interview subjects might not "trick" the media literate. Linda did not intend here, in my estimation, to sound haughty or self-righteous by calling those without developed media literacy skills as "less critical, less educated, more gullible" – rather, I believe she was attempting to point out that journalists will tend to have less sway over viewers who may understand the entertainment and advertising-like tools journalists have at their disposal. Her statement, however, does lead to another defining, thematic element of the "Media Literacy Paradox" sub-theme: an *Us vs. Them* mentality my students seem to have when referring to the mass media industry, the general media-consuming populace, and they themselves as members of both.

Us vs. Them.

In addressing Editor Susan's and Linda's quotes above, it is important to the defining of this sub-theme to note the way in which both editors refer to the mass media as if they were separate from it. As professional journalists, even though it is at the collegiate level, they both reasonably should be using pronouns such as "we" or "I" when referring to the news media. This distancing in language is also apparent in many of the journalism courses I teach. I have begun to notice that when we critically discuss news information organizations, or criticize less-ethical characteristics of the mass media industry, the students often will begin using words such as "they," "them," and "the media." My students do not seem to identify themselves as belonging to the same groups of which we are critically analyzing. For example, when I asked Maria to respond to the potential emotional influence of journalism media, she responded: "In my opinion, the media manipulates and creates our emotions and perspectives towards what is going on in

the world. We 'receive' what they (media) choose to send to us, and, from this standpoint, we are limited. To a large extent, we 'trust' whatever is put before us." Maria has been a collegiate and professional journalist for three years now, but continues to think of herself as outside of that group when critical dialogue begins. Editor Susan responded similarly: "I think in some instances they [the media] are irresponsible. They have a choice on how and when to present the news," she said. "Sometimes their judgment is clouded by business. However, on the whole, they do an adequate job of fulfilling the role." Journalism Student William did the same, and even explained how "the media" create fear: "The different news mediums are aware of the power they possess and have no shortage of techniques they use to spark fear in the minds of their audience," he said.

It is within this perception of separation that the paradox of a media literate journalist seems to be most significant, and most precarious. In terms of the negative impacts of a Culture of Fear and the development of journalist media literacy skills, the question arises of which is more damaging or abhorrent: A media illiterate journalist who does not understand the potential impact of his work, or a media literate journalist who actively abuses the powers of manipulation this knowledge may bring? While I will discuss this question in length in the final macro-level theme of this project, "Education for Critical Consciousness," I note it here to further define the perceived impact of media literacy development among my students and editors. This perception of separation from the journalists (and the general populous for that matter) who are media-illiterate or un-ethically media literate, seems to provide a sense of separation for my students. Indeed, this separation may even provide a sense of absolution, or an absolvment of

responsibility, for student journalists when discussing issues of mis-used power and influence, and the persistence of the Culture of Fear. Several of these thematic intricacies are seen in Journalism Student Vanessa's statements concerning media literacy, the Culture of Fear and journalistic responsibility. Because of statements such as Jessica's – and the many other instances of this *Us vs. Them* mentality – that I have begun urging my students, when critiquing various aspects of the mass-media industry, to always refer to mass media and journalistic industry as though they are a member of the group; they themselves are "the media."

> *Journalism Student Vanessa:* Honestly speaking, I doubt that my comments or opinions will make it any further than this class, but [Michael] Moore [in "Bowling for Columbine"] on the other hand, has the power to market his opinion to the general public. Having this power, Moore uses it to influence both media literate and illiterate people. I say both literate and illiterate because obviously the illiterate are going to be affected and probably believe everything he says, but it also affects the media literate whether they agree with his statements or not by making them, on a very basic level, have an emotional response. This raises the question, should we hold him at a higher level of responsibility because he can produce a movie for the public or should he have the same right as any red-blooded American to give his opinion whether the audience understands it or not?

Media Literacy Discussion

This theme of "Media Literacy" is complex, and continues to evolve even as I discuss these findings. From a practical stance, media literacy seems to be a developing

tool, something to govern the consumption of extremely powerful and influential information that touches every aspect of our society. From a student journalist perspective, media literacy is a type of ward against unwanted influences. Editor Nixon: "Some people will easily overreact to any sort of media message, while others will be hard pressed to change even a minute detail of their daily existence because of some advertisement or a news story. However, I still believe that the majority of those exposed to media are influenced by it in some manner." Development of media literacy skills may enable both consumers and constructors of mass media information to better understand these potential influences of which Nixon speaks. In that same vein, education for media literacy may also allow for some protections – both in a professional journalist and personal consumer sense – against the harmful or destructive effects of a Culture of Fear.

> *Journalism Student Cathy*: If we are not media literate we fall victim to the news reports … wanting us to start believing our neighborhoods are unsafe because of gun control issues, airports are unsafe because of suicide bombers, and our cafeteria food is made of parts of animals not being mentioned (mystery meat). Living in a culture of fear is exactly what we should constantly be fighting against. Becoming media literate allows me to view media as an information source, but certainly not the only source for information.

Summarizing many of the same ideas as Cathy concerning media literacy education and the Culture of Fear, Editor Nixon again offered an insightful response:

> Perhaps the most important theme addressed this semester is this idea of media literacy. Having the capacity to discern bias in oneself and in the messages to

which one is exposed is a fundamental part of living in this media driven global environment. If a person sees through the messages of media and understands the bias, this person had the opportunity to form his or her own opinions and develop a sense of individuality. In the case of those messages that generate racial stereotypes, that person will also have the opportunity to be more tolerant of different cultures since he or she will not easily accept the negative stereotypes that breed fear and division.

The student journalists that participated in this study consider themselves to be ethical and responsible practitioners of their craft. However, they often see themselves as separate from the darker aspects of the mass media industry. As students of journalism, they see themselves developing media literacy skills, but also seem to stand outside of critical discussions when negative impacts of journalism are discussed. Insofar as student journalist perceptions are concerned, this development of media literacy skills may be paradoxically both beneficial and detrimental to a professional journalist, depending upon how the skills are developed and utilized. A journalist may either ignorantly or unethically manufacture and disseminate a news information product that, instead of fulfilling all of the beneficial responsibilities of a democratic free press, instead creates propaganda and fear in its audience.

Editor Linda: It's one of those vicious circle things. The media reflects that part of happenings in society that they wish to reflect. That, in turn, creates certain perspectives and manipulates emotions in the viewers. The saving graces are critical viewers, intelligent discussions of such events and their corresponding

media coverage, and the fact that to some degree, the different media outlets reflect their own version of events giving audiences multiple viewpoints of the same story, helping to refine the 'critical' in critical viewer.

The following conversation with the lead editors of the collegiate newspaper captures these notions of media literacy and provides an interesting summary of the student journalist perspectives. One of the students in my Newswriting class had given me, for discussion, a flyer from a local Christian church. I brought the handout to our weekly meeting. The title of the church bulletin, which was intended for a youth ministry, was "No More Night: Freedom From Your Fears." On the back of the glossy flyer, next to a picture of an apparently terrified young girl, was the statement:

> Is your personal alert status on high? Our daily news can keep us in a constant state of fear: the tsunami, other natural disasters, terrorists activities, war in Iraq, car accidents, disease, crimes, etc. Facing life's phobias can make all the difference between happiness and a life of terror. Through this creative series, Pastor **** will help you discover solid biblical solutions allowing you to conquer your fears, whatever they may be.

This was the core research group, made up of the managing editor and the leaders of the college newspaper. I asked them to discuss the bulletin:

> *Editor Linda*: Apparently someone else noticed the media is kind of scary.
>
> *Editor Nixon:* Is there a Culture of Fear? This church says yes.
>
> *Editor Linda:* Well, I was going to address the word 'manipulate.'

Keller: Talk to me about manipulation.

Editor Linda: You've got to step back and think about what manipulation is used for and it's not all evil and manipulative. I mean we manipulate our loved ones, 'I'm cold' — 'I'll go turn the heat on' — you know? 'Kiddo, empty the dishwasher and you can have your allowance.' Of course that's all manipulation so of course the media is used to manipulate. It's not necessarily a bad thing. They're trying to get you to be careful, you know about some health care crisis or something. Giving you that news and sharing with you the idea that is a form of manipulation and it's not a bad thing.

Photographer Alex: I think in that aspect it's actually kind of cool because compared to news media where it just offers the problems and leaves you to your own devices to figure out a solution where … or how you want to deal with it, but to an extent that says hey there's a problem out there and we may be presenting it in different ways but we're going to show you our way of thinking of it and how to deal with it. And I think a lot of times the news media or popular media, mass media that says, 'I'm going to exploit this problem' or, 'I'm going to exploit terrorism,' or 'I'm going to exploit crime to sell you something and to get you interested in my product and I don't care what you think about it as long as you bought it and read it.

Editor Linda: But, I think at the end of those types of newscasts there going to offer, you know, if they're discussing terrorism they're going to start discussing shelters where you can go and what kind of things you need to stock up on … gas masks, huge jugs of water, and if it's a health thing they're trying to scare you

into they're going to tell you to go get your check up and ask for such and such test, take a baby aspirin every other day.

Editor Nixon: That's what Marilyn Manson said, right? He said they scare you into buying, they make you afraid of and then you consume.

Editor Maria: That reminds me, I heard in the news yesterday, that some people are now suing the weather service companies over there because of lack of rain for the summer. So they are suing the [weather reporters] now because of that.

Photographer Alex: I'm going to start suing OU if I get in another tornado.

As the macro-level "Media Literacy" theme began to emerge from my analyses of the data in this project, I began to realize certain clear and distinct relationships between this and the final macro-level theme I will discuss in the next section: "Critical Consciousness." My students' defining interpretations of media literacy – especially media literacy from an educational standpoint – begin to look very much like my own, personal interpretations of education for critical consciousness. Indeed, many of the underpinning constructs of Conscientização appear to exist in the thematic patterns that emerged in the journalism students' and editors' definitions of media literacy. However, as I discuss next, I set out with unrealistic goals concerning Conscientização and education for critical consciousness. As the formal elements of this study draw to a close however, my hope is that education for media literacy may be utilized as a tool within education for critical consciousness, and that I may employ what I have learned of media literacy and structure it as a concrete grounding point from which to establish an education for critical consciousness.

Table 2

Media Literacy: Sub-Theme Data Examples

Media Literacy	
Perspectives of Media Literacy Defined	**The Journalist Paradox 2: Media Literate Reporters**
"Media literacy is a set of perspectives that we actively use to expose ourselves to media to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter…. Active use means that we are aware of the messages and are consciously interacting with them" (pg. 22). *– W.J. Potter (2005)*	"Journalists (catch-all term to include reporters as well as editors and higher-up decision makers) do choose, either consciously or unconsciously, what exactly and how exactly to report on any story. The way in which a story is reported makes a difference as to how it is interpreted and responded to." *– Editor Linda*
"Being media literate is very important in our culture of fear. It is difficult for many people to discern the truth from fiction when it comes to media. Because many people lack the knowledge structures and a strong personal locus, they make uninformed and uneducated assumptions and beliefs about our world. This is a cause for concern." *– Journalism Student Janie*	"Our audience governs the selection of news. We report what we think they want to know about. This, in itself is probably biased, because we are judging what we think they need to know, when we should be reporting everything. I think that entertainment media is exempt from some of the rules of news media because they are fulfilling a different purpose – to entertain. For example, they could put biases in their stories if they wanted to because the general consensus is that they are for entertainment, not to be considered 'truth.' News media is supposed to be 'truth' no matter what." *– Editor Susan*
"Media literacy can help people discern the difference between truth and information that has no value. The idea is to control how the media programs our minds." *– Journalism Student Marcos*	
"If our society as a whole could become more media literate and know what it is that the mediums are doing, then our fear as a whole would start to diminish." *– Journalism Student William*	"For those less critical, less educated, more gullible viewers, well, they're easily manipulated and the "media" has the option of reflecting that aspect back to its audience. A good example of that situation is the Nichols guy and the teenagers in the poolroom in ["Bowling for Columbine]. Choosing to show the viewpoints of those
"To be media literate we have to be exposed to the media as well as to	

Perspectives of Media Literacy Defined	The Journalist Paradox 2: Media Literate Reporters
real life experiences that project images and messages in our society. These messages affect the way we act and think about everything and to be media literate is to be aware of the messages that we experience and to realize the effects that they have on us. No one can ever be completely media literate because there are too many messages produced to keep up with and with that much information out there, there will always be something more that we can learn about the media and its effects." *– Journalism Student Brandon* I think people tend to remember negative stories rather than positive ones, and I think that sometimes it makes one curious to find out more. I could go on and on about stories that have influenced the people around me. However, I think the main point is that media are influential, even if subconsciously." *– Journalism Student Susan* "This is why media literacy is so important. Just because someone has a suit, camera, and a microphone it doesn't mean that everything that comes out of his or her mouth is accurate, objective, or true." *– Journalism Student Janet* "We have looked at this issue [of media literacy] from the perspective of a layman and from the perspective of a journalist. The way that media as a whole influences those who are exposed to it depends, among other things, on their level of media literacy. On the other hand, even a journalist who is completely oblivious of the concept of media literacy can have a level of influence over his audience." *– Editor Nixon*	individuals in conjunction with their ignorance probably made an impact on less critical viewers." *– Editor Linda* "In my opinion, the media manipulates and creates our emotions and perspectives towards what is going on in the world. We 'receive' what they (media) choose to send to us, and, from this standpoint, we are limited. To a large extent, we 'trust' whatever is put before us." *– Editor Maria* "The different news mediums are aware of the power they possess and have no shortage of techniques they use to spark fear in the minds of their audience." *– Journalism Student William* "Fear is, however we define it, is something we can think of as causing physical or emotional harm or whatever to us. So fear is an easy way to teach people. And I think a lot of times [a reporter does this] whether or not [he realizes it]." *– Photographer Alex*

Conscientização and Education for Critical Consciousness

My role as newspaper adviser and teacher is to empower my students and provide for them an educational environment in which they may actively develop and utilize skills that will promote their own intellectual growth and professional abilities. I believe in the social value of an ethical, democratic free press, and my students know this about me. I have a sign posted on my office door that says "Question Everything." I have a movie poster of the "The Matrix" hanging on a wall in my office next to my computer with the Latin phrase "Carpere Veritas" (Seize the Truth) in laminate above it, and a porcelain Guy Fox mask from the film "'V' for Vendetta[2]" perched atop the tower of my computer. In a recent convocation speech, one of my students quoted lines from her classes with me, noting that I urge my students to always seek the truth, report it fairly, and never tolerate those that would attempt to coerce or intimidate them in any way, or oppress in any form their role as champions of an autonomous free media. "Keller tells his students to 'take the Red Pill[3],'" she said. I take extremely seriously my role as newspaper adviser, and believe with every fiber of my being that as a mentor to future journalists, I have tremendous social influence and, likewise, a tremendous social accountability. Likewise, I take extremely seriously theories of critical consciousness, both as an educational philosophy and as a personal, ideological stance. I believe it is my responsibility to structure an environment in which my students may "gradually perceive personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his or

[2] Many of the themes in the film "'V' for Vendetta" deal with fear, freedom, and media control that I often reference in my courses.

[3] Another reference to the the film "The Matrix." Neo, the main character in the movie, is given a choice between either a red pill or a blue pill. The red pill will allow him to see the real world stripped away from the virtual reality that is the Matrix. Choosing the blue will allow him to stay immersed in the false reality of the machine-generated Matrix.

her own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it" (Freire, 1970, p. 32). It was very difficult for me then, as my analyses in this dissertation project began to formalize and as concrete themes began to emerge, to see that I had largely failed in specific attempts to teach critical consciousness to my students.

As I designed this study a little more than two years ago, I developed an elaborate, carefully structured system in which I planned to "teach" Conscientização. I had read much research literature involving education for critical consciousness, had devoured multiple times over Freire's (1970, 1973) "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" and "Education for Critical Consciousness," and produced multiple drafts of potential methodologies for setting this grand critical consciousness educational system in motion. I followed the methodology I described earlier in this dissertation to the letter, and perhaps to a fault. I created a web-based tutorial that outlined the basics of Freirian philosophies and presented the basic defined elements of critical consciousness theory, complete with an assessment section and summary response system. Following the completion of the introductory tutorial, I provided a series of critical consciousness-themed academic research articles to my core group of editors, which they read, summarized and then presented to their peers in the group. I then lectured over critical consciousness theory, addressing themes that my students found in their research articles. I also attempted to bring in our previous discussions as a focus group, asking for perceived themes with what we had been discussing of the Culture of Fear and what we were discovering in Freire's theories. In fact, the managing editor of the newspaper was even an exchange student from Brazil, and was able to bring her own personal experiences with Freire to the group, providing a real-world connection to Freire as an

individual. It was, in my estimation, a textbook-perfect instructional unit to introduce critical consciousness and provide a forum in which Conscientização would begin. However, as I discuss in the first emergent sub-theme in this section, The Journalist Paradox 3: Conscientização Misunderstood, in my original estimation I was not successful in what I initially set out to do in the research plan, which was to assist my students in establishing a firm grasp of critical consciousness ideas and explore the impact of Conscientização on a constructed fear-influenced culture. My students did not seem to grasp the intricacies of the theories I presented, for which as their teacher I take full responsibility, and they confused constantly what I understand development of critical consciousness to entail. In fact, many times in discussions the editors would intermittently switch from using critical consciousness to critical thinking in their descriptions, and I was not successful in broadening the scope of their definitions. "My first impression is that critical consciousness is a label put on the idea of teaching critical thinking skills," Editor Linda said. "The concept of such teaching has certainly been around for a while."

However, it was in this perception of an apparent failure in teaching critical consciousness that one of the most significant themes in this project emerged. In my analyses, I was unsuccessful within the core research group in directly addressing questions of perceived impact of critical consciousness education on the Culture of Fear, yet I became considerably better prepared to understand both my own misconceptions concerning Conscientização and my own misunderstandings of what "education for critical consciousness" means. I also was unable initially to identify the potential of my students' development of critical consciousness, even after multiple approaches at my

data. As my analyses progressed, I realized I had from the outset established unrealistic goals concerning education for critical consciousness, even misunderstanding the application of the theories myself and the potential ways in which Conscientização may have manifest. The examination of the perceived impact of education for critical consciousness was not possible in my initial structuring of the study – in my own attempts at Praxis, I was essentially attempting to strong-arm critical consciousness theory upon my students, trying to force them into a state of Conscientização. I did not realize my error through the course of the study; I was so excited to be overtly teaching these notions of Freirian theory, as well as being rather hell-bent on my dissertation research, I did not pause for elaboration where it might have been necessary, or make time for personal critical reflection to better grasp my own misconceptions.

Critical consciousness is an awakening process, and while a practical, knowledge-level understanding of the terms and definitions used in describing the theory are important, the value of Conscientização comes from personal application. Proceduralizing critical consciousness, the process of becoming capable of evaluating and taking action against those elements within a culture that coerce and oppress, relies upon an understanding of the fundamentals of Conscientização, but the actual process of Conscientização requires much more. I was largely unsuccessful in facilitating the development of an understanding of Freirian theories, and I was equally unsuccessful in assessing my students' progress toward Conscientização. However, as I conclude my analyses, I see how unlikely it would be in the time I engaged in this project for any student to fully understand critical consciousness theory, and make large, major moves toward Conscientização. Even if this body of instruction planted within these journalists

the seeds of Conscientização, it may be many months or years before their growth can be determined, if ever. It may be that this type of learning cannot happen in an academic semester, nor probably a set of semesters. Indeed, it has only been after writing a doctoral dissertation utilizing basic theories of critical consciousness that I feel I can even begin to understand the complexity and enormity of Conscientização, and I know I have just scratched the surface. With this said, the final emergent themes of this project, The Journalist Paradox 3: Critical Consciousness Mis-Education and The Journalist Paradox 4: Ontological Dualism, expound upon the positive impact of the mistakes I made in educating for critical consciousness, the subsequent positive impact of these mistakes on my personal development of Conscientização, and a realization of the multiple modes of interpretation required to understand the potential impact of these data. Through my oversights, I have a better conceptual understanding of how Conscientização and an education for critical consciousness are related to one another, and a more thorough grasp of the potential relationships between notions of fear, mass-media impact and collegiate journalism that I may share with future generations of student journalists.

Conscientização Misunderstood

Critical thinking as critical consciousness.

"My first impression is that Critical Consciousness theory is a label put on the idea of teaching critical thinking skills. The concept of such teaching has certainly been around for a while, but perhaps Freire's ideas encompass a broader use of such teaching methods, with a more defined benefit for a greater number of people," Editor Linda said, following several weeks of discussing Freirian notions of critical consciousness, and the study of several articles concerning Praxis and Conscientização. In her mind, critical

consciousness was really just a fancy name for "critical thinking," and Conscientização was essentially a subject that, while important, could be taught as a unit during home room hour in a junior high school. Critical consciousness, as I presented earlier, is the ability of an individual to perceive, analyze, evaluate, and take action against any powers within their culture that may be manipulative, coercive, and oppressive (Freire, 1970, 1973; Shor, 1992). It is certainly possible that an individual may be able to think critically but not engage in the process of critical consciousness; it is not likely, however, that an individual would engage in the process of critical consciousness without utilizing some level of critical thinking skills. The process of becoming critically conscious – Conscientização – is essentially several cognitive steps beyond critical thinking. Conscientização relies on praxis, the three-fold process of identifying and taking action against that which is oppressive. Critical thinking skills are certainly necessary for Conscientização, but the two are not like terms. This perception of a misconstruing of critical consciousness is further established in Editor Linda's description of her experiences as an undergraduate English major:

> My high school years were too long ago to remember clearly, but this article made me remember what an eye-opening experience it was to learn in my college Comp II class (at the ripe old age of 38) that there was more to a story than the story itself. I've always liked reading and even writing, but until the day [my literature professor] talked about why fiction-writers assign certain names to certain characters, I never realized what else might be in a story. I remember saying out loud, 'You mean they do that on purpose?' What an idiot I must have seemed! What if that stuff had been taught in high school? Might I have been

> interested enough to pursue college then instead of two decades later? How many other bored high school students could have their interest ignited by the idea that they could more actively participate in their own learning experience? And, perhaps teach the teacher something? With my own interest ignited I wrote one hell of a freshman literary analysis on 'The Catcher in the Rye' and was given a 'Recognition of Critical Thinking' award by the English department that spring. That's when I began to develop critical consciousness, rather than 20-30 years earlier, as it should have been."

Editor Linda confuses the terms *critical thinking* and *critical consciousness*, using them interchangeably to mean the same thing. She won an award for critical thinking abilities, but this does not necessarily translate into her abilities to engage in critical consciousness. When I asked her to elaborate on these ideas, and explain how she saw critical consciousness impacting her life personally she replied with the following:

> Personally, the biggest impact I see in my own life is teaching critical thinking skills to my kids, particularly the youngest who struggles with standard teaching practices and concepts. If I can help him get that kind of edge, he won't be hampered as much by his disabilities and he may even end up equipped to teach himself much of what he will have missed out on. That's what empowerment is all about. And, as Spiderman's uncle said, 'with great power comes great responsibility.'

Managing Editor Maria replied similarly as Linda: "Being educated for critical consciousness means thinking outside the box and always wanting to know more and

explore more of theories, ideas and concepts," she said. "It means knowing how to critically evaluate topics and go beyond the information presented…. Critical consciousness should be applied worldwide because every human being should have the privilege to go beyond and learn all that he desires to learn." Maria realizes the importance of critical thinking skills, but did not provide in her statements any indicators she had begun to explore critical consciousness in any depth. Conscientização is rather specifically reliant on Praxis, and is a social action system as well as a personal philosophy and mode of thought. Editor Susan replied with the same ideas as Editors Linda and Maria. With Susan, as was the case with Linda and Maria, notions of oppression and critical action were not ready components of her interpretation of Conscientização.

> *Editor Susan*: The critically conscious education is pretty interesting, but some students don't learn well through interaction, so, while it might be good for some, it might not be good for others. If the learning method is one of critically conscious discussions and engagements between the professor and the students, there is no room for individual pondering. I think that if everyone was critically aware of things and people around them, the world would be a much better place. It is basically saying that one needs to be aware of things and ideas and topics in order to not be oppressed or oppressors for that matter. I think education for critical consciousness would force people to think, instead of just sliding by with the minimum. It would prevent us from having to 'dumb things down' so much, possibly."

Susan is repeating the correct language of Freirian theory here, but she is misunderstanding the role of critical thinking with the development of critical consciousness – she speaks of oppression and oppressive systems, but does not seem to grasp the full meaning of what she is saying. In fact, she may be making the same error I did in assuming people can be "forced to think" in a critical conscious mode. In her estimation, becoming critically conscious is important so she, as a journalist, doesn't have to "dumb down" her content. Oppression in her definition seems to be derived from a lack of intelligence or ignorance, and the development of critical consciousness, to her, equates to the development of intelligence and critical thought processes. Again, Susan and the other student editors, are very intelligent and talented journalists; they were just unable in this setting and in my interpretation of the day to provide positive examples of an authentic theoretical understanding of critical consciousness.

Journalists as the dominant elite.

By the very basic nature of their editorial positions, I consider these college students junior members of what Freire would call the dominant elite – they are singly in control of the collegiate free press, and have a tremendous capacity for influence and power. Especially in Editor Susan's definition, I see an individual who sees the journalist, standing above a group, looking down and in. In this context, this position may very well be interpreted as a stance of authority, and in that regard, potentially oppressive. Indeed at several points in these analyses, I was surprised by my student editor's seemingly arrogant responses to questions of critical consciousness and social impact, and to an apparent lack of acceptance of responsibility in terms of media influence. "Those who consume [the media] are not all intelligent enough to determine whether the media are

inflating the number of stories on murder, being biased when covering certain stories, or only presenting a certain type of news story," Editor Susan said. "These people are more likely to form opinions because they don't know enough about the media to question it. I think [critical consciousness] means like uneducated maybe, to a degree anyway. Because they're not educated on the other side of things."

With Susan's comment, it is important to note that thus far I have discussed only my interpretation of these students' inability to grasp the very basic, knowledge-level understanding of critical consciousness. As my analyses narrowed in scope and theme, I also attempted to identify patterns of higher order understanding of Conscientização. Even though it may have had nothing to do with my instruction on Freirian theory, the participants may have provided data in which their own critical consciousness development might be demonstrated, even if they were not aware of their own predilections for it. In attempting to determine if the data indicated this, I found myself questioning my own abilities to describe critical consciousness development in another person, and I struggled to determine whether it was possible, even from the ontological perspective I attempted to approach these analyses from, to qualitatively determine if indeed my students were on their way toward Conscientização. I understand that an individual who develops a sense of critical consciousness learns to perceive the various social and political contradictions or changes within their culture and act critically against them, but I am not certain it is possible in the time frame of this project, even given the rather specific ethnographic setting, to accurately describe this awakening process. Nor am I certain whether it is possible in this frame to accurately assess a level of growth in Conscientização and critical consciousness. I say this in order to better describe my own

perceptions of these data, and accurately describe my standpoint as the researcher in these defined emergent themes.

The fact that I did not find in my students' responses overt indicators that they grasped the core of critical consciousness theory does not mean their path toward Conscientização was not begun. Certainly there were examples in many of their responses of critical thought, and they seemed to genuinely struggle at times in attempting to understand these very complex notions. As an example of this, in one discussion group setting the editors broached the subject of journalist as oppressor, a discourse that might have led to the realization of a potential innate power system apparent within the media, and likewise a potential indication that the editors were engaging in some level of Conscientização. However, just as in the "Culture of Fear" theme discussed previously, there was no direct responsibility taken by the editors concerning the potential of information mass media to serve an oppressive function within society – even though the power and influence of mass mediated information had been established – and no conclusion to the discussion. I even attempted, with no result, to refocus the discussion back toward the ideas of oppression that they had begun to hint at.

> *Managing Editor Maria*: I think that Freire is a good guy.
>
> *Keller*: Good, good. Elaborate on that then.
>
> *Maria*: I think his theory is valid and I think it probably works for media.
>
> *Keller*: Not just because it's an educational theory, yeah do you think it has impact in terms of a mass media discussion?

Maria: It is, but when like you talk about the oppressed, and they are oppressing the oppressors. Like for example, remember when I talked to you about when I'm choosing the content of *The Collegian*, I might be oppressing the student body here because there's some stories we don't put in there that I think aren't worth to cover.

Keller: Give me some examples.

Maria: I don't remember every detail of it anymore, but there was like very complex, very political, very complicated story and I was like, you know people are not going to read this. They're not, because college students they already have a lot of complex things, you know, and classes and they're not going to get a *Collegian* and read complex stuff. So I chose not to, you know.

Editor Susan: Like [a specific university professor] has gotten a massive amount of coverage in the paper this semester, so there was a story … did we do that story? We did another one about her didn't we? No, she was part of the graphic art. So there was another story about her that I got a press release about, and I didn't think we should run it because we've already done like four stories on her.

Keller: Even though she could be the biggest news, you think it wouldn't be worth having her in the paper again? Because people get tired of her or because you're tired of her?

Maria: It's repetitive.

Susan: And we could be having that space for something else. It would be more … not necessarily more newsworthy but more relevant to the times because she has just been in there so much.

Keller: Okay, well you guys tell me, what do you think the word oppressive means. When Freire talks about oppressive, what do you think he's talking about? When he says pedagogy of the oppressed and he talks about the oppressors in these articles that you guys read, what are you thinking?

Susan: I think it means like uneducated maybe, to a degree anyway. Because they're not educated on the other side of things.

Maria seemed to be ready to discuss the possibility that she held the power to influence, to name her role as managing editor as a potentially dominant, authoritative figure. Countless times, the editors and journalism students discuss the power and influence of the mass media, yet they never characterized themselves as holding the same influential responsibility, hence the various example of the "Journalist Paradox" themes that have emerged. In the above dialogue, I asked them to further elaborate on what Editor Maria meant when she said "I might be oppressing the student body here because there's some stories we don't put in there that I think aren't worth to cover." However, the discussion again dwindled to descriptions of critical thinking and lack of educated readership. Again, while critical thinking skills are certainly necessary for Conscientização, the two are not like terms. Even when calling upon the specific language of Freirian theories, the nature of their stance was apparent. "I think that in some way, media are oppressors to those who are, as Freire would say, 'riding the wave of change,'" Editor Susan said. "Our discussions of media impact and the Culture of Fear lead me in this direction. However, we are only oppressors to those who choose to simply take in the media like sponges and not think about things before accepting it as truth." In a single, contradictory statement, Editor Susan underscores this theme of Conscientização

misunderstood. The media may indeed be oppressive, she says, but only to those ignorant consumers who "simply take in the media like sponges." She responds to the discussion questions utilizing the language of Freire, but does not seem to understand the whole of the theory she cites, and with a rather arrogant flourish, seems to place herself in the very journalistic dominant elite category she says individuals should take caution against.

As a further example of this theme, take Editor Nixon's end-of-semester response in which I asked him to summarize the import of our discussions over the 16 weeks he participated in the project. His answer is intelligent and addresses at once notions of media literacy, the journalists' role in the Culture of Fear, and the social impact of ethical media. He also speaks of the need for tolerance and the removal of class social structures. With this, in my estimation, Nixon comes closer to an authentic understanding of critical consciousness theory and a move toward Praxis than any editor or student in this project, but he does not seem to advance beyond these few testimonials.

> *Editor Nixon*: Our discussions this semester have helped me to see that we are all one global community with many of the same dreams, desires, and values. Much of the perceived differences and resulting division is merely the result of our history and circumstance. We need not allow those images presented in the media to be the only basis for forming opinions about others. Rather, we should seek to interact with other free from the perception that any person or group is superior or inferior to any other person or group. I believe that as journalists it is our responsibility not to fall into the cycle of perpetuating bias and division by presenting a fair and balanced view of every issue. We need to show both the cause and the effect, the background along with the result and, as it is stated in

> SPJ's code of ethics, tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so. We should present the news fairly so that we may all learn about each other in an honest way rather than perpetuate division for the sake of fear. All this does is encourage people to consume and to hate. All it does is play us into the hands of those who benefit from people not coming together as one human community.

Within Editor Nixon's writing, there are significant, laudable ideas: tolerance, responsible journalism, and a call for ethical reporting "on the diversity and magnitude of the human experience." In both the "Culture of Fear" and "Media Literacy" themes, the editors described the potential influence and power of the mass media. But nowhere here, or specifically in any of Editor Nixon's eloquent and well-thought responses, does he address notions of critical dialogue and praxis, or that journalists – and himself by the very definitions he and his peers discuss in the Media Literacy and Culture of Fear themes – may be oppressors. There is no direct discussion concerning the possibility that influential reporters might be a part of the powerful dominant elite described by Freire, or that consumers of mediated information might be seen as oppressed, given the power of media influence and control described by this very group. As I will discuss in the next thematic sub-section, this also reinforces the "Journalist Paradox" theme described in the "Culture of Fear" and "Media Literacy" section: Editor Nixon appears to not perceive himself as contributing to the role of media creator, and likewise contributing to a potentially oppressive culture. This was true for each of the primary student editors. They all provided cohesive responses to the discussion questions, and engaged in critical discourse, but did not seem inclined to connect the ideas back to their roles as journalists.

In describing the goal of critical consciousness in any educational system, Editor Linda provided an excellent concluding statement for this sub-theme, and brings up some of the complexities she encountered:

> *Keller*: Provide a personal definition of Education for Critical Consciousness. Think about the articles your peers presented and come up with an explanation of what it means to be educated for critical consciousness.
>
> *Editor Linda:* The goal of education should be to teach students to think beyond what they are taught. There's no getting around textbooks and accepted theories and facts, but a good teacher can address how those theories and facts impact people. That goes to helping students think of the same old theories and facts in a new and different way, perhaps prompting more thinking outside the box. I don't really know what you're looking for in the way of an absolute definition, but I find that I am unable to give one…. If a class of 50 education majors are taught Freire's theories, half may be impressed enough at the time to study and plan to teach that way. But as life marches on, other factors interfere and ten years down the line, maybe one third of that original half think about teaching critical thinking half the time. Half of their students pick up on it to an extent to be able to put theory to work for themselves. It dissipates with time like any other fad.

The Journalist Paradox 3: Critical Consciousness Mis-Education

Thus far I have presented two primary examples of the Journalist Paradox that emerged as a constant theme throughout the whole of my analyses. First, in the context of Culture of Fear, the Journalist Paradox 1 basically refers to how fear in the world of

journalism exists both as a topic and as a tactic. Even though it may feed the negative aspects of a Culture of Fear, ethical journalists often must call upon fear-based tactics within their professional work to be successful in a commercial environment. In the second macro-level theme, Media Literacy, the Journalist Paradox 2 describes the contradiction that seems to exist with journalists who have developed media literacy skills, have the capacity to both ethically and altruistically inform, and unethically disseminate influential propaganda. A corollary of the second journalist paradox is the "Us vs. Them" mentality that emerged: the student editors often would seem to distance themselves from negative mass media influences, even though they themselves are practicing professionals. In the context of the Critical Consciousness macro-level theme, there emerged the Journalist Paradox 3: Critical Consciousness Mis-Education. As I presented earlier in my discussion of Conscientização Misunderstood, I was largely unsuccessful in my attempt to teach the student editors in this project Freirian theory and the basic underpinnings of critical consciousness. I did not find clear indicators in the multitude of data I collected that this group of journalists-in-training comprehended the basic, defined processes associated with Conscientização, nor did I find overt indicators of a progression toward the development of a critical consciousness concerning the impact of their roles as journalists within the self-defined Culture of Fear. However, as I have presented, this is not surprising, given the very individualistic complexities innate in the development of Conscientização, and the innate complexities of evaluating the development of Conscientização in another individual. Development of critical consciousness relies upon critical reflection, critical dialogue, and action: through this, individuals may begin to understand the nature of their realities, confront or become

aware of the existence of oppressive structural systems, and begin to understand the potential ways in which they themselves are oppressors. Through my inability to efficiently "teach" Conscientização in my estimation, and my students' apparent unwillingness to see themselves as potential oppressors, that I can better see my potentially oppressive role as their teacher. Herein lay a core element of the defining paradox in this emergent mis-education theme: through my perception of failure to teach critical consciousness, my own road as a scholar and professor toward Conscientização was paved. Through the process of critically analyzing these data, and the critical reflection and dialogue I undertook with both my students and myself in data analysis, I can see how I may be a component of the dominant elite described by Freire, and how I have the capacity to transfer this culture to my students.

This development of a personal critical awareness is not flattering and is an uncomfortable position to find myself, both as a scholar and as an educator. Consequently, this thematic section has been the most demanding for me to address, and holds the most promise for my future research. As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, I play a formative role in the journalism education of the students who become editors of the newspaper, and am 50 percent of the journalism program at my university. I have a significant role in the journalism training of students who enter this program, and have the potential to be heavily influential in their professional development. As an adviser, it is understandably possible – regardless of how hard I attempt to be an objective advice-giver – that my personal biases, views, and ideological judgments may make it into the newspaper, either through my instruction, my relationships with the staff, or the editing responsibilities the staff requests of me, resulting in yet another instance of

the Journalist Paradox. I have been forced to ask myself rather pointed questions concerning my role as journalism educator: How do I responsibly and ethically teach my students to be responsible and ethical journalists? Do I, as a media literate teacher, contribute to a Culture of Fear, especially given that I know that the use of certain fear-based tactics may be necessary for my students in their professional lives? How do I empower my students with media literate abilities while also addressing ethical dimensions of calling upon these skill sets to produce slick, powerfully influential propaganda? How may I call myself an educator for critical consciousness and still preach a dialectic of fear and consumer-driven sensationalized media production? Again, what is more abhorrent: A media illiterate journalist who does not understand the potential impact of his work, or a media literate journalist graduating from my program who intentionally abuses the powers of manipulation this knowledge may bring? The *emergence* of these questions defines this thematic paradox. I have been a journalism professor for six years now, and only with this dissertation did I begin to critically address these conceptions. My very personal development of Conscientização has become for me the defining element of this entire dissertation.

> The following is an excerpt from my personal research log, dated March 4, 2005: I plan on calling upon Nixon's [fear-based church bulletin] discussion in our case meeting Tuesday. What I brought up in class discussion, however, was how interesting it is to see how the newspaper staff writers come up with news stories (on their regularly scheduled Friday meetings) and how not much thought goes into crafting what we cover. This was heightened more by my getting my students motivated to cover a story about a former coach that was fired from [another]

university for professional indiscretions. I was motivating my students to get into a culture of Yellow Journalism! This is the first time I have thought about how I myself might be contributing to this culture as an educator. I have never before considered myself part of what might be a problem before.

The discussion I refer to in this entry is the glossy "No More Night: Freedom From Your Fears" church bulletin presented earlier in the media literacy theme. When Nixon brought this flyer to our group meeting, I was extremely excited, both that he was identifying potential contributions to the Culture of Fear outside of our group, and that such a remarkable example of the notions we had been discussing would present itself. As we began discussing the flyer, I cautioned the students to try and understand that their group peers might have different religious beliefs and to be cautious of potentially offensive remarks. It was shortly after I made this statement, and after we began discussing notions of fear and business, that I was struck with the remarkable similarities to what the church bulletin was attempting to accomplish as an organization and what I was attempting to accomplish as an educator, and even as a researcher within this project. Editor Nixon even commented on the potential similarities: "I'm thinking the church, any church for that matter, realizes that you need to use some kind of work in promotion just like any other business. Trying to just stand out among the flyers, I mean how many flyers to get every year. They have to compete," he said. Educational media are utilized in much the same way as news information or entertainment mass media. As an instructional technologist, I create educational media to communicate, to provide an organized, cohesive form in which information can better flow from a specific source to a specific receiver. "The learning process involves the selection, arrangement, and delivery

of information in an appropriate environment and the way learners interact with that information…. The learning environment includes the physical facilities, the psychological atmosphere, instructional methods, media, and technology" (Heinich, Molenda, Russel, and Smaldino, 2002, p. 6). In another of our group meetings, the students discussed how mass media may often serve as a mass instructional tool: learning doesn't stop after graduation, it is just that teachers are replaced with newspapers, magazine, and broadcasts. Instructionally, when more effort is exerted in the front end design and development of instruction, there is an inverse relationship with how much effort the learners must exert; as one increases the other decreases. The same appears to hold for mass media: the more stylized, groomed and trigger-intensive the mass media product is, the less effort the end user must exert in consumption. This may allow for a greater media effect on the consumer, and an easier transition into a state of automaticity. The following is a collection of several discussions we had concerning the potential educational influences of mass media:

> *Keller*: The question I want to leave with today … because we are beginning to talk abstractly, is Alex's saying, 'Oh, it's our job to educate.' If it's our job to educate…
>
> *Photographer Alex*: I didn't say it was my job to educate. I said that we do.
>
> *Editor Linda*: We're trying to make them keep reading.
>
> *Editor Nixon*: So media has to influence people?
>
> *Linda*: That's my impression. I'd love to impact 2000 people.
>
> *Photographer Alex*: Well, it's not because not all news was meant to influence people.

Editor Maria: I don't think that they have to, but they do have the power to.

Alex: I think that the media is an influential tool, to be honest. The media, films, books, entertainment magazines where they have columnists, that's not necessarily hard news. But it is a form of news to me. It is a media tool. It's a medium of media. I think once that media is used as propaganda, to an extent, it becomes a portion of media because it is a way for a culture to express an ideal to a group of people. If you go back years ago, if you had Dr. ****'s class you'll remember Martin Luther, whenever he tacked up his tenants on the church door that said this is what I think, I don't like what you're doing. That became media because it was a form of expression to a group of people to influence their behavior.

Freire addresses these ideas in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), in which he speaks of the banking concept of education. In the banking concept of education, information is essentially deposited by the teacher (read, oppressor) into a passive learner's mind. This model of teaching and learning "regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention ion the world as transformers of that world" (pg. 73). Freire provides a list of educational attitudes and practices which are indicative of a general lack of critical consciousness, and an ignorance of Conscientização:

(a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;

(b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;

(c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;

(d) the teacher talks and the students listen – meekly;

(e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;

(f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;

(g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;

(h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;

(i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with her or his own professional authority, which is set in opposition to the freedom of the student;

(j) the teacher is the Subject in the learning process, while the students are mere objects.

To elaborate further on the issue brought up by the editors concerning the media as an instructive tool, and to further elaborate on my potential role as "instructor oppressor," I have replaced the original word "teacher" in Freire's list with the word "media," and the word "students" with "media consumer." It is striking here the similarities between influential teacher and influential mass media, and likewise oppressive teaching model and oppressive mass media:

(a) the [media] teaches and [media consumers] are taught;

(b) the [media] knows everything and [media consumers] know nothing;

(c) the [media] thinks and the [media consumers] are thought about;

(d) the [media] talks and the [media consumers] listen – meekly;

(e) the [media] disciplines and the [media consumers] are disciplined;

(f) the [media] chooses and enforces [their] choice, and the [media consumers] comply;

(g) the [media] acts and the [media consumers] have the illusion of acting through the action of the [media];

(h) the [media] chooses the program content, and the [media consumers] (who were not consulted) adapt to it;

(i) the [media] confuses the authority of knowledge with [their] own professional authority, which [they] set in opposition to the freedom of the [media consumers];

(j) the [media] is the Subject in the learning process, while the [media consumers] are mere objects.

While this descriptive list is meant only to reinforce the notion of media as instructional tool brought up by my students, it is intriguing the ease with which the term "teacher" can be replaced with "media" within this list and still retain much of the original meaning. It is within this notion of media/instruction duality, that I began to consider it was very possible the Culture of Fear-fueling tactics my students and I had been discussing might very well be utilized in the instruction and setting I was attempting to create for this study and in my regular courses. Indeed, as these students' instructor, their very understanding of what it means to be a journalist likely was influenced by my instruction. I have the potential to be a role model, a catalyst for empowerment, and a mentor whereby I may help my students identify and take action against oppressive

systems. However, in reflecting back on my own instruction, and even upon my own training as a journalist, it is not difficult to find ways in which I was an instrument in perpetuating the Culture of Fear described in the first section of these analyses. My students certainly develop their own ideas and journalistic processes and techniques in their college education, but as their primary instructor I have tremendous influence and power. For example, the very SPJ Code of Ethics the student journalists called upon in both the Media Literacy and Culture of Fear themes described in this analysis and discussion are heavily debated in three of my journalism courses. One lesson has the students divide into groups and debate both for and against the availability of gruesome and violent true-life videos in the media. The students are provided an editorial column that discusses the accessibility of these type images and movies and must choose a side to support, calling upon the Code of Ethics to back up both arguments. Within this debate, I teach my students that journalists have the right and responsibility to both publish and not publish this violent, potentially fear-inducing material. We discuss how journalists must minimize harm, but also completely report the truth. We must not forget too, I teach, that "if it bleeds, it leads," and we are in the "business" of journalism. From the textbook for my Newswriting course, I lecture that news should characteristically be timely, have impact, timeliness, and prominence in the readers' life, and describe some type of conflict or controversy (Fedler, Bender, Davenport, & Drager, 2005). Arguably, I teach my students to be embroiled in the Culture of Fear. I play a dual role: both a supporter of liberation, and an instructional fear-monger and oppressor in the very context in which I am trying to educate.

I do not mean to say that I am the cause of the Culture of Fear, nor am I asserting that I am singly responsible for my students' opinions, ideologies, and ethics regarding the complex relationships within the themes presented in this study. However, through this project I have begun to identify the paradox that exists within my being both a teacher of journalistic mass media and an educator for critical consciousness. I must contend with the same conflicts my students face in the journalist paradoxes I have discussed, both in terms of media literacy and within the Culture of Fear. As I will present shortly in the conclusion to these analyses, there is much research still ahead for me regarding these emergent themes and the potentially conflicting responsibilities I face as an ethical mass media professor and an ethical educator for critical consciousness. This paradox is one of the most significant and relevant themes to emerge within this ethnography, at least from a personal perspective. In critically addressing this theme here, I am taking active steps to explore my position as an educator with conflicting roles, and practicing praxis as I continue exploring and experiencing a personal realization of Conscientização.

The Journalist Paradox 4: Ontological Dualism

As I have stated, I attempted to approach the design and implementation of this research project from the ontological perspective that reality is largely subjective and dependent upon individual perceptions. In analyzing the multiple sources of collected data, I attempted to discern emergent themes with a perspective that held "knowledge claims [as] set within the condition of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations" (Creswell, 1998, p. 79). I was interested in the multiple perspectives of my students and the editorial staff of the college

newspaper, and I hoped to interpret meaning from these individuals' experiences and personal realities. As the final drafts of my analyses drew to a close and I began revisiting with my doctoral adviser the ideas I had discerned within and among the data, I began to identify examples of another rather startling and exciting emergent theme. I noted at length in my description of the conscientização misunderstood theme the ways in which I saw my students misinterpreting and misconstruing notions of critical consciousness and praxis. This misinterpretation led to my realization of the paradox that seems to exist in my being both an instructor of journalism and, hopefully, an educator of critical consciousness. Within my continued analysis of both the Critical Consciousness Mis-Education and Conscientização Misunderstood themes, I began to recognize that I was struggling – and continue to struggle – with my ontological perspective regarding these emergent constructs. Within the critical self-reflection initiated through my discoveries in the Critical Consciousness Mis-Education theme, I have begun to evaluate my perceptions as the research instrument in this dissertation. I may have been overtly structured, even absolutist, in my understanding of how critical consciousness develops over time. Just as I seemed to want to strong-arm critical consciousness upon my students, I was equally restrictive in what I would allow to count for interpretation of Conscientização and an emergent critical consciousness. I did not plan with this study to attempt to fully integrate an education for critical consciousness element within my traditional journalism curriculum. I set out to study the ways in which my students, collegiate journalists, interpret critical consciousness theory, and explore the potential perceived impact they see the development of a critical consciousness might have. As an instructor of both journalism and critical consciousness, I teach within two often

contrasting and conflicting paradigms. As I have described within the paradox themes of this dissertation, I and my students often tread a thin line between creating and warding against oppressive, fear-based journalistic tactics. Through the emergence of these previous paradox themes, I see my personal ontological dualism as an emergent theme: I struggled in identifying potentially emerging critical consciousness within my students because I am struggling with my own ontological perspectives. In an ethnography such as this, indicators of Conscientização likely will not emerge when the primary researcher, and the primary research instrument, is unable to interpret meaning that requires varying levels of subjective tolerance. Clearly throughout all of my analyses I attempted to interpret themes based upon my students' perspectives. However, when I began addressing themes of critical consciousness, I ironically may have held too rigidly to my own definitions of praxis and did not allow myself to interpret potential growth toward Conscientização in many of the data that, from a different ontological perspective, may have indicated otherwise. As I discussed within the Critical Consciousness Mis-Education theme, these data have allowed me as a researcher and teacher the opportunity to reflect critically upon my potential roles within this project's emergent themes. I can be both a researcher of, and active participant within, Conscientização. This Ontological Dualism theme is a significant further indicator of my own active struggle with an emergent critical consciousness.

I have established that my students seemed often to engage in critical thinking and problem solving concerning mass media and their positions as journalists-in-training. I even describe how critical thought is a component of critical consciousness development, though the terms cannot be used interchangeably. The theme of Conscientização

Misunderstood is well-established and well-defined within this project, and is a transitionary element to both paradox themes that emerged subsequently. This Ontological Dualism theme is strengthened through the identification of the ways in which my students seemed to misinterpret notions of critical consciousness, and by my subsequent personal realizations concerning the paradoxical role I play as a journalism educator. With intentional ontological mindfulness and a greater tolerance for potential ambiguities within the data, the students' responses may indicate the beginnings of Conscientização. For example, in the Culture of Fear thematic section, Editor Linda described how her son commented on journalists who may be required to sensationalize to "get more attention." However, her son's comment was in response to a specific question that Linda posed to him.

> I just asked my 11-year-old what he thinks of the news, if he believes what the news reports. To him it was obvious that they can make mistakes. He even suggested that some reporters might exaggerate (his choice of word) parts of the story, 'to get more attention.'

Linda was taking our discussions home to her family. She was thinking critically about the notions we had been wrangling with in our meetings, and had even gone so far as to broach the subject with her youngest son. This may be indicative of early critical consciousness development. Our discussions may have brought about a level of understanding and she may have been engaging in a form of critical dialogue by sharing the information with her child. She may have been engaging in praxis: identification, critical dialogue, and then action. However, because of my ontological assumptions both

at the time the interview occurred and in my later analyses, I did not address Linda's comments as indicative of an emergent critical consciousness. Only after this Ontological Paradox theme began to take form did I see the potential within Linda's statements for Conscientização. As another example, take the following quotation from Editor Susan I provided earlier in the Conscientização Misunderstood Theme. Depending upon perspective, this quote may be at once indicative of a misinterpretation and misuse of Freirian theory, or the first step of praxis (identification) and movement toward the second stage (critical dialogue):

> *Editor Susan*: The critically conscious education is pretty interesting, but some students don't learn well through interaction, so, while it might be good for some, it might not be good for others. If the learning method is one of critically conscious discussions and engagements between the professor and the students, there is no room for individual pondering. I think that if everyone was critically aware of things and people around them, the world would be a much better place. It is basically saying that one needs to be aware of things and ideas and topics in order to not be oppressed or oppressors for that matter. I think education for critical consciousness would force people to think, instead of just sliding by with the minimum.

Other potential examples of this Ontological Dualism theme exist within data I have already presented. When describing his interpretation of media literacy, I quoted Journalism Student Brandon saying:

> No one can ever be completely media literate because there are too many messages produced to keep up with and with that much information out there, there will always be something more that we can learn about the media and its effects.

Brandon is recognizing that media literacy exists on a continuum, and explains that no one person may ever become completely media literate. This statement may be indicative of Brandon's growth toward critical consciousness. I initially may have interpreted these statements as simply reciting a memorized definition, and it may indeed be just that, but there is also a very distinct possibility that Brandon has started the process of Conscientização and these are the first steps he is taking. Again, it is difficult to full interpret Brandon's statements as clear indicators of Conscientização; only now through a critical analysis of my personal ontological perspectives can I begin to perceive the existence of potential critical consciousness development. I also re-visited a lengthy response provided by Photographer Alex in which he describes his media use patterns. Within his statements, and with intentional ontological mindfulness, one may interpret potential examples of an emergence of critical consciousness.

> *Photographer Alex*: When I get home every night after work or before I go to work I am online. I have news streams on my homepage so I usually get up to date information about current news. One of the streams I have is from a local station in **** City. It has updates about what is happening and what current stories they are covering. I am almost always assured of some sort of violence or catastrophe that has occurred during the day. I started this process of trying to

become more media literate without the preconceived notion of looking for the bad things that happen to people in the news. I use the example of this station's choices of content for their stream only as an example of what could happen if I only looked at the five or six stories that are posted.

I have kept a loose track of how many murder, robbery, rape or otherwise violent stories are posted and my conclusion has been that about 20 percent of the stories posted are consistently of a somewhat violent nature. Keep in mind this station only posts five or six stories a day to the stream. I have been paying attention to the kinds of stories for about 10 months now so though it is not a majority of the stories posted, the amount is significant.

I have to look at each story and wonder would I be safe going to **** City today. I personally do not take much stock in one or two stories because I know they are only a small compilation of all the news that has been produced. I know that if it is a slow news day then I am more likely to get reports about wrecks or some type of crime because crime is a consistent variable in news. Crime is always happening and it is somewhat easy to report on. Wrecks happen all of the time as well. It allows the news outlet to produce an easy story that could possibly attract more readers. I know these things and believe that it is up to me to decide how to take them.

In this narrative, Alex is describing how he critically analyzes news content, attempting to identify how the media information impacts his life on a daily basis. He then explains his views on how individual reporters may decide to report a story because of the ease of access to the information and the sensational aspect of the story. There is

no set format, no statistical measure, no magic ball that I can shake that will provide an answer to whether Alex is exhibiting examples of critical consciousness in his response. Even as Alex's journalism professor, and as the primary researcher and primary research instrument in this project, I cannot say with certainly these are clear indicators of Conscientização. This uncertainty may be indicative of my own struggle regarding my ontological perspectives as the research instrument within this project. Alex does show advanced level of understanding regarding issues of media literacy and fear, and he is attempting to apply what he has learned within his personal, daily routine. Even if it is not named by Alex explicitly, his attempt to make practical sense of the constructs we had been addressing within our group sessions may be the first stages of praxis.

This Ontological Dualism theme is a reflection of an attempt to discern within my own perspectives the ways in which I may be responsible, as the research instrument, for these emergent themes. I strive to be both an excellent journalism educator and an effective educator for critical consciousness. As I have discussed, education specifically for the development of critical consciousness abilities is often not the primary objective in most instructional settings. The emergence of this final Journalist Paradox theme is indicative of my struggle to create an environment in which an education for critical consciousness can emerge while grounded in an ontological perspective consistent with a traditional curriculum. A more interpretivist ontology may be more conducive to facilitating critical consciousness education than is the objectivist ontology that typically grounds journalism education. What has become increasingly apparent to me during this project is the difficulty in allowing Conscientização to become both an instructional tool and an instructional objective. An indication of my own struggle with how to

authentically assess an education for critical consciousness, I resist even now in allowing myself to fully interpret these type of data as potential examples of the emergence of Conscientização. However, I am extremely excited and energized by the emergence of this theme within this project. I did not set out in this study to integrate a curriculum infused with an education for critical consciousness component. I wanted to study how collegiate journalists interpret critical consciousness theory, and explore what personal and educational impacts they see the development of a critical consciousness having regarding the mass media. However, as I began to critically reflect upon the emergent themes I found within the data, I discovered multiple levels of meaning I had not anticipated. Through my struggles in identifying the paradoxical traits of my role as a critically conscious journalism adviser, I am better prepared to further study the impact and application of the ideas presented in this study, and am more capable of interpreting and analyzing my personal development of Conscientização and the ways in which I can be a more effective educator for critical consciousness.

Conscientização and Education for Critical Consciousness: Sub-Themes Discussion

All of the student editors involved in this project were engaged and interested participants, and all provided sound, intelligent responses to any questions that were raised in group discussions or in my individual interviews with them. They are, to a person, talented and brilliant scholars and journalists. In attempting to discern themes within the data these students provided, I desperately wanted to find examples of what I could identify as an emergence of critical consciousness within this talented group, an affirmation that I had helped create an environment that would be revolutionary for them and start them on a path toward Conscientização. However, to report honestly and fairly,

and to identify clearly my role as a participant observer in this study, I had extreme difficulty seeing clear examples of an emergent critical consciousness. In many responses, the students seemed to begin to grasp the concepts of the theories we addressed, or at least seemed to have a basic understanding of the language needed to articulate a response, though much of that may have been parroting terms we had used in discussion. At several moments in my analyses, there were glimmers of what I hoped was potential growth and understanding on the part of the editors. "What Freire talks about in critical consciousness, being able to, I think be free of attack on your knowledge," Photographer Alex said. This was correct language and a sound idea, and I was hopeful for a continuation. Editor Nixon elaborated on the ideas in Alex's statement:

> *Editor Nixon*: I'm thinking that this is the idea of emancipatory education. They ask you to assess the world better and be more aware of the world. Just from people's basic idea of what it means to be college educated without even applying the phrase to it or term to it. Paulo Freire purported the idea of emancipatory education for critical consciousness. His aim was to allow those he considered oppressed to have the capacity to recognize the oppression they are subjected to by the media and other forms of education and to take steps to counter this oppression. However, I see it is better applied in more general terms. A broad application of Freire's ideas would allow an individual to see that many of them only serve a particular agenda and do not serve the common good. Whether or not any of this is true, repeated exposure of these ideas could breed acceptance.

Editor Nixon provided an interesting, if not confusing, interpretation of the theory

underlying emancipatory education. He called upon the language we used within our group and individual discussions, but within the initial presentation of that theme, I was unable to confidently say what, if any, connection to critical consciousness Nixon's interpretation might signify. Emancipatory education is education for critical consciousness. Emancipatory education can lead to Conscientização, an understanding and cause for action against oppressive systems. Nixon strengthens with his statements both the Conscientização Misunderstood and Ontological Dualism themes I have presented. He utilizes the language of Freire but does not seem to capture the element of praxis, or the understanding that within praxis, critical reflection leads to critical dialogue, which leads to action. However, in using the language of Freire he may be grappling with the practical impact of the ideas, and establishing a base from which a critical dialogue may emerge. Nixon and Alex both seemed to misunderstand the complexity of Conscientização, and attempted to reduce critical consciousness in all of its depth and philosophical intricacy to notions of critical thinking and social tolerance. Education for critical consciousness is not the basis of a college education in which critical thinking skills are developed. It is much more. Reinforcing the dual paradox themes that have emerged, their statements also may be indicative of the possible emergence of a critical dialogue.

> *Editor Nixon*: On this issue of emancipatory education and whatever, what is it that is expected of us as scholar students? This idea that you're college educated is supposed to mean more than you just did courses. There is this idea that you have this better view of the world and how to succeed in it. Not just because you have a skill, cause you go to a tech … a vocational school, but they expect in

college that there is something more intellectual about you.

Editor Linda: That you've become a more critical thinker, I would think.

Through this type dialogue, and through my interpretation of apparent misconceptions and subtle misunderstandings, I see the beginnings of growth and opportunities for critical consciousness development. Conscientização is an evolutionary process and, as I present next in the final discussion of these themes, many research threads concerning the various interactions within the development of critical consciousness education have emerged along with the complex themes I have presented. I have a direct responsibility as these students' teacher, and to all of the future journalists I will teach and advise in my career, to actively pursue further research into the potential impact of these themes. This dissertation, and specifically these emergent themes at this concluding stage of my analyses, has revealed much in regard to the complexities that may exist within facilitating education for critical consciousness in a traditional mass-media curriculum. With this project, I believe to have barely scratched the surface of what I am certain will become a rich and impacting career's work. The themes that emerged in this project were surprising and much more far-reaching than I ever expected in the initial design of the study. As a researcher and academic, I am both energized and intimidated by the complexity, potential influence, and personal impact of these emergent themes.

To conclude this sub-theme, and as a segue into the final discussion of the potential impact of these various emergent themes for this project, I describe next an example of the conflict I face in attempting to be an educator for both critical consciousness, and instructor of mass media and journalism. In the fall 2006 semester of

an introductory journalism course, I became frustrated with a student who was debating the ability of the media to influence behavior and contribute to a general feeling of unease within the people that consume it, essentially the existence of a Culture of Fear. This student worked as a newscaster for a local television station, and was understandably defensive about her news media organization and the function it plays within our community. Within my curriculum, I teach critical dialogue, and urge my students to question each other, the text and instructional materials for the course, and most importantly me as their instructor. I want them to develop critical skills, and engage in a critical mode of thought concerning their education. With this said, I still had to stop myself from being upset and angry with this student who questioned my stance in the class discussion, and who disagreed essentially with the emergent themes I have described within this project. Obviously these data, and this study overall, are dear to me, and I had to resist the urge, in essence, to brow-beat her with my research and destroy her argument with the theories I have developed. Of course I did not react angrily that day, but it struck me at that moment that even with all of the time I have spent contemplating and attempting to integrate and develop critical consciousness, I still fell into patterns of oppression and dominant elitism described by Freire.

> Manipulation, like the conquest whose objectives it serves, attempts to anesthetize the people so they will not think. For if the people join to their presence in the historical process critical thinking about that process, the threat of their emergence materializes in revolution…. The dominant elites are so well aware of this fact that they instinctively use all means, including physical violence, to keep the people from thinking. They have a shrewd intuition of the ability of dialogue

to develop a capacity for criticism. While some revolutionary leaders consider dialogue with the people a bourgeois and reactionary activity, the bourgeoisie regard dialogue between the oppressed and the revolutionary leaders as a very real danger to be avoided" (1970, pg. 149).

Table 3

Conscientização and Education for Critical Consciousness: Sub-Theme Data Examples

Conscientização and Education for Critical Consciousness		
Conscientização Misunderstood	**The Journalist Paradox 3: Critical Consciousness Mis-Education**	**The Journalist Paradox 4: Ontological Dualism**
"My first impression is that Critical Consciousness theory is a label put on the idea of teaching critical thinking skills. The concept of such teaching has certainly been around for a while, but perhaps Freire's ideas encompass a broader use of such teaching methods, with a more defined benefit for a greater number of people." *– Editor Linda* "Being educated for critical consciousness means thinking outside the box and always wanting to know more and explore more of theories, ideas and concepts. It means knowing how to critically evaluate topics and go beyond the information presented…. Critical consciousness should be applied worldwide because every human being should have the privilege to go beyond and learn all that he desires to learn." *– Editor Maria* "Personally, the biggest impact I see in my	*The following is an excerpt from my personal research log, dated March 4, 2005:* "I plan on calling upon Nixon's [fear-based church bulletin] discussion in our case meeting Tuesday. What I brought up in class discussion, however, was how interesting it is to see how the newspaper staff writers come up with news stories (on their regularly scheduled Friday meetings) and how not much thought goes into crafting what we cover. This was heightened more by my getting my students motivated to cover a story about a former coach that was fired from [another] university for professional indiscretions. I was motivating my students to get into a culture of Yellow Journalism! This is the first time I have thought about how I myself might be contributing to this culture as an educator. I have never before considered myself part of what might be a problem	"I just asked my 11-year-old what he thinks of the news, if he believes what the news reports. To him it was obvious that they can make mistakes. He even suggested that some reporters might exaggerate (his choice of word) parts of the story, 'to get more attention.'" *– Editor Linda* "I am almost always assured of some sort of violence or catastrophe that has occurred during the day. I started this process of trying to become more media literate without the preconceived notion of looking for the bad things that happen to people in the news. I use the example of this stations choices of content for their stream only as an example of what could happen in I only looked at the five or six stories that are posted." *– Photographer Alex* "No one can ever be completely media literate because there are too many messages

Conscientização Misunderstood	The Journalist Paradox 3: Critical Consciousness Mis-Education	The Journalist Paradox 4: Ontological Dualism
own life is teaching critical thinking skills to my kids, particularly the youngest who struggles with standard teaching practices and concepts. If I can help him get that kind of edge, he won't be hampered as much by his disabilities and he may even end up equipped to teach himself much of what he will have missed out on." *– Editor Linda* "Those who consume [the media] are not all intelligent enough to determine whether the media are inflating the number of stories on murder, being biased when covering certain stories, or only presenting a certain type of news story. These people are more likely to form opinions because they don't know enough about the media to question it. I think [critical consciousness] means like uneducated maybe, to a degree anyway. Because they're not educated on the other side of things." *– Editor Susan* "The critically conscious education is pretty interesting, but some students don't learn well through interaction, so, while it might be good for some, it might not be good for others. If the learning method is one of	before." *– Keller* "I'm thinking the church, any church for that matter, realizes that you need to use some kind of work in promotion just like any other business. Trying to just stand out among the flyers, I mean how many flyers to get every year. They have to compete." *– Editor Nixon* *Editorial Board Discussion:* Photographer Alex: I didn't say it was my job to educate. I said that we do. *Editor Linda*: We're trying to make them keep reading. *Editor Nixon*: So media has to influence people? *Linda*: That's my impression. I'd love to impact 2000 people. *Photographer Alex*: Well, it's not because not all news was meant to influence people. *Editor Maria*: I don't think that they have to, but they do have the power to.	produced to keep up with and with that much information out there, there will always be something more that we can learn about the media and its effects." *– Journalism Student Brandon* "I look for the broad scope of the news cast and try to pick out the filler stories from the real news. I consider real news to be non-consistent events that have bearing on the lives of the residents of a region. Real news to me informs people of significant events that do not normally occur every day. The dealings of a business, some promotional stories, new buildings, and investigative stories are what I like." *– Photographer Alex* "On this issue of emancipatory education and whatever, what is it that is expected of us as scholar students? This idea that you're college educated is supposed to mean more than you just did courses. There is this idea that you have this better view of the world and how to succeed in it. Not just because you have a skill, cause you

Conscientização and Education for Critical Consciousness		
Conscientização Misunderstood	**The Journalist Paradox 3: Critical Consciousness Mis-Education**	**The Journalist Paradox 4: Ontological Dualism**
critically conscious discussions and engagements between the professor and the students, there is no room for individual pondering." *– Editor Susan*	*Alex*: I think that the media is an influential tool, to be honest.	go to a tech … a vocational school, but they expect in college that there is something more intellectual about you. *– Editor Nixon*

Concluding Discussion: A Move to *Conscientização*

Even after spending as much time on this topic as I have, the countless hours collecting data, time spent analyzing and interpreting themes and thinking about and revisiting the ideas found within, it strikes me how much I have yet to learn: of media literacy, the abstract notion of a mass-media influenced societal Culture of Fear, and of education for critical consciousness. In "Pedagogy of Freedom" (1998), Freire writes:

> There is, in fact, no teaching without learning. One requires the other. And the subject of each, despite their obvious differences, cannot be educated to the status of the object. Whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning (pg. 31).

This statement summarizes what emerged most prominently in this project: my students have taught me infinitely more than I could hope to teach them. I may have started them, stutter-step, on their way toward Conscientização, or at least provided the forum in which they might begin their critical development, but they also have helped me engage more deeply and authentically in my own praxical journey and are "teaching" in the act of learning. Knowing and naming that which is oppressive is just the first step of praxis. To develop an understanding of the relationship between oppressors and the oppressed we must also critically reflect upon this knowledge information, engage in a critical dialogue, and then take action. From a personal perspective, the significant themes that have emerged in the course of this dissertation essentially have allowed me, as a mass media instructor, the opportunity to engage in exactly this type of critical dialogue and praxis. As the complex relationships between the various themes have

emerged, I am better prepared to critically address notions of fear, media literacy and effects, and education for critical consciousness. More importantly, I can encourage this critical perspective with my current and future students, and continue exploring the complexities of these culture-defining constructs, and authentically "practice" praxis.

Thematic Summary

Three dominant, macro-level themes emerged within this project: "The Culture of Fear," "Media Literacy," and "*Conscientização* and Education for Critical Consciousness." Each of these main themes share defining characteristics. Likewise, several sub-themes exist within each macro-level theme, are interrelated, and share similar characteristics as well. Within the "Culture of Fear" main theme, I defined three emergent sub-themes:

1. What it Means to Be Afraid of Your Newspaper: Culture of Fear Defined
2. *Good* Fear vs. *Bad* Fear
3. The Journalist Paradox 1: Fear as a Constant

The first sub-theme within the Culture of Fear section is essentially a description of how the student journalists participating in this study interpreted and defined Culture of Fear, and a description of the various ways they saw mediated fear manifest in their lives. Here I presented data that established what is, for these journalists, a working knowledge of that which we collectively defined as Culture of Fear in relation to journalism and news mass media. In the sub-theme *Good* Fear vs. *Bad* Fear, I provided data that described how the human emotion fear is often perceived differently by different journalists and in differing contexts. Fear as a tactic within mass media products may be considered at once beneficial and harmful. "Fear is an easy way to teach people," Photographer Alex said.

Fear then can be described within this context as an effective instructional tool, a theme that carries on within the Education for Critical Consciousness macro-level theme, in which the mass media are described as a tool for "mass instruction." The final sub-theme that emerged in the Culture of Fear macro-theme I entitled "The Journalist Paradox 1: Fear as a Constant." Within this section emerge ideas that translate across each and every theme I present in this project. Here, specifically, I describe the conflict that arises when a journalist must call upon fear-based tactics to be competitive and successful in their profession. Fear is a constant within these journalists' lives. The Culture of Fear exists in part due to journalistic exploitation of fear tactics, even though journalists are trained to be ethical and avoid sensational or exploitive processes in their work. This is not the journalists' fault entirely: some responsibility belongs within the individuals and systems that educate these students to be journalists. As was presented in the Mis-Education for Critical Consciousness theme, this paradox also exists at the instructional level, in which I, as their adviser, perpetuate a Culture of Fear through a traditional curriculum, all the while teaching that they should avoid using fear tactics in their profession. With this said, it is important to note that, save for a few brief discussions, these student journalist did not see themselves as contributing to a mass-mediated Culture of Fear, nor did they ever accept any responsibility as journalists for this culture, even though their descriptions clearly defined both the Culture of Fear and the media's role within it.

The second macro-level theme that emerged is entitled Media Literacy. Within this theme, I present two significant sub-themes:

1. Perspectives of Media Literacy Defined
2. The Journalist Paradox 2: Media Literate Reporters

Again, each of these sub-themes is made up of descriptive details that translate among and across the other sub- and macro-level themes. For example, in the Perspectives Defined theme, I describe the perceived impact of media literacy skill development, and the various constructs in which these students see media literacy to be applicable, especially in relation to the Culture of Fear themes described in that section. Media literacy as interpreted by these student journalists is a system for understanding the potential effects mass media can instill. If utilized correctly, development of media literacy may even serve as a counterpoint to the negative impacts of a Culture of Fear. This defensive function of media literacy is made all the more significant in the second sub-theme I present, the Journalist Paradox 2: Media Literate Reporters. In this continuation of the paradox thread that emerged in each of the major themes, I describe the apparent necessity of student journalists to be at once literate *consumers* and literate *constructors* of mass-mediated information. My students described how, calling upon a knowledge of media literacy, news information may be presented in different formats and constructed in ways that may be more appealing to a target audience. Just as in the previous Culture of Fear paradox theme, there lay a great amount of power within this journalistic ability, and an unethical journalist, or a well-meaning but ignorant ethical journalist, may manipulate this knowledge to both disseminate propaganda and perpetuate fear. Within this sub-theme, I also presented a discussion of an "*Us* vs. *Them*" mentality that seemed to emerge. When discussing the potential negative impacts of both the Culture of Fear and the development of media literacy, these students seemed to consider themselves separate from those that would misuse or manipulate media tools for unethical means. As students of journalism, these students see the development of media

literacy skills as critical, but also seem to believe themselves outside of critical discussions when negative impacts of journalism are brought up for critical dialogue.

The third macro-level theme I have presented discusses the perceived impact and functionality of an education for Critical Consciousness. Entitled *Conscientização* and Education for Critical Consciousness, this final main theme is constructed of two descriptive sub-themes: (1) *Conscientização* Misunderstood and the third and fourth paradoxical sub-themes, (2) The Journalist Paradox 3: Critical Consciousness Mis-Education, and (4) The Journalist Paradox 4: Ontological Dualism. In terms of academic and professional significance, this section of the dissertation has had the most impact on me personally as the researcher, and many questions for future study have emerged specifically from these analyses. *Conscientização* Misunderstood, the first sub-theme I present, discusses my perceptions of an apparent failure to truly teach my students the basic, underpinning theories of Freirian critical consciousness theory. While some of my students were capable of repeating back rote definitions, they largely confused the development of critical consciousness with the development of critical thinking abilities. Critical thinking, while important to the development of critical consciousness, does not equate to Conscientização, and I was unsuccessful in the initial interpretation of my attempts to broaden the scope of their understanding. Critical consciousness is a very personal, developmental process and I made the mistake of essentially forcing the theory at a declarative knowledge level upon my students, just as I did not constantly evaluate the ontological assumptions I held throughout the many levels of my analyses. However, it is within this perception of apparent failure on my part as their teacher, I became better prepared to understand my own misconceptions concerning Conscientização, my own

misunderstandings of what I intended to accomplish with the establishment of an education for critical consciousness, and my own ontological awareness concerning the potential emergence of Conscientização. This realization led to the final sub-themes I discuss in the study, the Journalist Paradox 3: Critical Consciousness Mis-Education, and the Journalist Paradox 4: Ontological Dualism. In the Paradox 3 sub-theme, I present examples of my own realizations of Conscientização and the development of a personal critically conscious sensibility. In attempting to discern meaning within these complex and intertwined data, I found myself contributing to the very systems I was attempting to teach my students about. Likewise, as I explained in the Paradox 4 sub-theme, I also continue to become more aware of the conflicting ontological assumptions from which I have been analyzing these data. Some aspects of these emergent themes are indicative of my continuing struggle with perceptions of Conscientização, and the critical analysis of my ontological assumptions regarding both the formation and assessment of an education for critical consciousness. Finally, within all of these sub-themes in this Critical Consciousness theme, I again provide examples of the student editors perceiving themselves standing above those less media literate, or superior to those who they define, in their interpretations, as less critically conscious. This perception of standing above and beyond is apparent in each of the journalist paradoxes sub-themes within each major theme I have presented, and seems to be both indicative and reinforcing of the notion of dominant elite described by Freire. Just as I see examples within myself and my personal ideologies of the existence of this elite, oppressive capability, I see it within my students.

My father-in-law called me on the morning of Sept. 22, 2005. Hurricane Katrina was inbound and the news reports he had been watching had scared him. He warned me

to go buy as much gas as I could before the prices shot up to $5 a gallon. Shortly after this call, one of my best friends, a veteran photojournalist at the largest newspaper in the city I live, called shortly after with the same warning. “You better go fill up both you and your wife’s cars,” he said. “I just saw a report and gas prices are about to skyrocket!” I did not go stock up on gasoline that day, nor did gas prices reach that mythically awful $5 mark. However, this collective incident established firmly many of the ideas I had been addressing in my analyses of the data presented here. This descriptive Culture of Fear exists within many facets of my daily life, both as a consumer and as an instructor of mass-mediated information, and I am continually struck by the relevance of both this and the other emergent themes within this project. While this dissertation may lay the groundwork for a qualitative analysis of Critical Consciousness, media literacy, and mass-mediated fear, much research still remains regarding the interconnections between these complex themes.

Research Concerns and Plans for Future Research

The complex relationships between the various qualitative themes that emerged within this project are both personally relevant and professionally significant, and this critical ethnography has established the foundation of what I am confident will become the cornerstone of my career’s work. More was accomplished with this dissertation than I would have ever imagined possible, yet as this project draws to a close, I realize far more questions emerged from the study than were answered because of it. There are many potential relationships within these type ethnographic and phenomenological data yet to be explored, and much that should be questioned concerning the critical evaluation of media, fear, and Conscientização. With this said, there are specific concerns within this

current study that must be addressed as I move on into a larger body of research. As I have mentioned, I am one of only two professors with whom the students involved within this study will take journalism courses. As such, I clearly have the ability to influence their responses and the various ways they chose to present information to me as data. As an adviser, I work daily, for many hours, with each of these students, and develop close, mentoring relationships with each of them. The current data likely reflects their concern for my success in this project and a desire to please me by attempting to tell me what they imagined I wanted to hear. This may be illustrated by some of the responses I analyzed within the Critical Consciousness sections of the project, where the students' recited definitions did not seem to coincide with their discussions regarding the nature of news and their roles in its production. While this does not detract from the complexity and consequence of the emergent macro- and sub-themes I present, it is a concern that should be reported and consideration in future research.

In terms of personal relevance and timeliness, my next research proposal will address concerns emergent from the journalist paradoxes themes raised in this project. Specifically, I hope to further define the role I play as an educator for critical consciousness within a journalism curriculum. I anticipate exploring in depth my position as a collegiate newspaper adviser, and will examine further this Culture of Fear of which I appear to be at once a member and a contributor. Likewise, I also will engage in further critical analysis of my personal ontological assumptions and the potential impact these assumptions have on both my teaching and research. The final paradox themes that emerged in this study are complex and multi-dimensional, and indicate the need for further analysis of journalism curricula and instructional methodologies. I have serious

concerns regarding the role of a publication adviser and the impact advisers may have on media literacy, education for critical consciousness, and the Culture of Fear. The emergent themes of this dissertation have allowed me to comprehend what critical consciousness entails, and begin the process of Conscientização. To be an educator for critical consciousness, I must realize that, as Bradshaw (Amy C. Bradshaw, personal communication, October 30, 2006) has observed, the three-fold process of praxis is recursive, often incomplete, and evolving. Praxis is not linear, neat or predictable: "It spirals back in upon itself and evolves and unfolds. Dialogue alters intended action, and action may beget more dialogue and more identification or need for identification." Consistent with this perspective, I have begun to identify potential oppressive constructs within myself and that which I teach, have taken steps to engage in a critical dialogue regarding these constructs, and have begun to take action in both my research and in my teaching.

The following is a series of concerns and specific questions that have come to light as a result of the emergent themes within this project. This list is not complete, nor does it capture the enormity and complexity of the various powerful, thematic relationships described in this work. However, as a practitioner of praxis, I see this plan of study to be a fulfilling and evolutionary guide toward enriching Conscientização for both myself and those I mentor.

Questions for Future Research

- What is the relationship between journalistic ethics and journalistic professionalism concerning fear-based tactics in print and digital mass media, both from the perception of those who create it and those who consume it? Specifically, what is the perception of the SPJ Code of Ethics ability to allow for the creation of potential propaganda?

• What is the perceived role of educator within a mass media program in which potentially manipulative or socially dangerous mass media methods are taught?
• How might an instructional system which incorporates Freirian theory appropriately utilize critical consciousness as a philosophical framework for establishment of media literacy skills, and what perceived impact might this type instruction have for journalism students?
• What is the perceived role of the media adviser with a defined Culture of Fear and what impact will knowledge of that role have on instructional methodology, pedagogy and curriculum development?
• What future impact will new media have on the development of a Culture of Fear, and what role will positionality, politics, and education for critical consciousness have on the development of this culture?
• What changes, if any, might need to be made in current mass media education programs to positively impact both the development of critical consciousness and a reduction in the journalistic element of a defined Culture of Fear?
• How do mass media publication advisers perceive their role in the development of a Culture of Fear?
• What is a viable methodology for the best assessment of an educational system for Critical Consciousness that has been implemented within a mass-media and journalism program of instruction?

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APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP AND INVIDUAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

APPENDIX A

Focus Group and Individual Questions

Introduction

1. What is fear?
2. In what ways can fear manifest itself?
3. How does fear impact your everyday life?

Culture of Fear

1. How would you personally define the concept of *Culture of Fear*?
2. What specific elements of our society might contribute to this *Culture of Fear*?
3. How do Moore's ideas regarding *Culture of Fear* differ from your own?
4. What impact do you believe weapons ownership, law enforcement, and our political justice system have on the *Culture of Fear*?
5. Do you believe everyone in our society is generally treated fairly?
6. Do you feel relatively safe in your life?

Mass Media Effects

1. In general, do you consider yourself a consumer of current events and the news?
2. If so, in what medium do you prefer to receive your news?
3. Do you read any news online? If so, what are your favorite sites and why do you like them?
4. Do you read any newspapers? Which ones? How often? Why do you like those newspapers?
5. What mass media do primarily watch, listen to, or read?
6. Do you believe what you see/hear/read in the mass media?

7. What do you feel is the most important news information to get every day?
8. What types of information would you like to see more of in the news?
9. How might the mass media impact a *Culture of Fear*?
10. Do you agree with the traditional theories of mass media effects?

Critical Consciousness

1. What do you think it means to be *critically conscious*?
2. How would you define critical consciousness in your life?
3. What do you think the term *Oppressed* might refer to in American society today?
4. What are some different ways you might apply the term *Praxis* in your life?
5. What kind of social, political, or economic contradictions to you perceive in your own life?
6. What would be the best way for you to represent the discontent you might feel in your own life?
7. What is propaganda? Do you believe propaganda to exist in our culture?
8. Do you believe you communicate effectively with the people in your life? With adults?
9. What do you think is the purpose of education in our society?

Conclusion

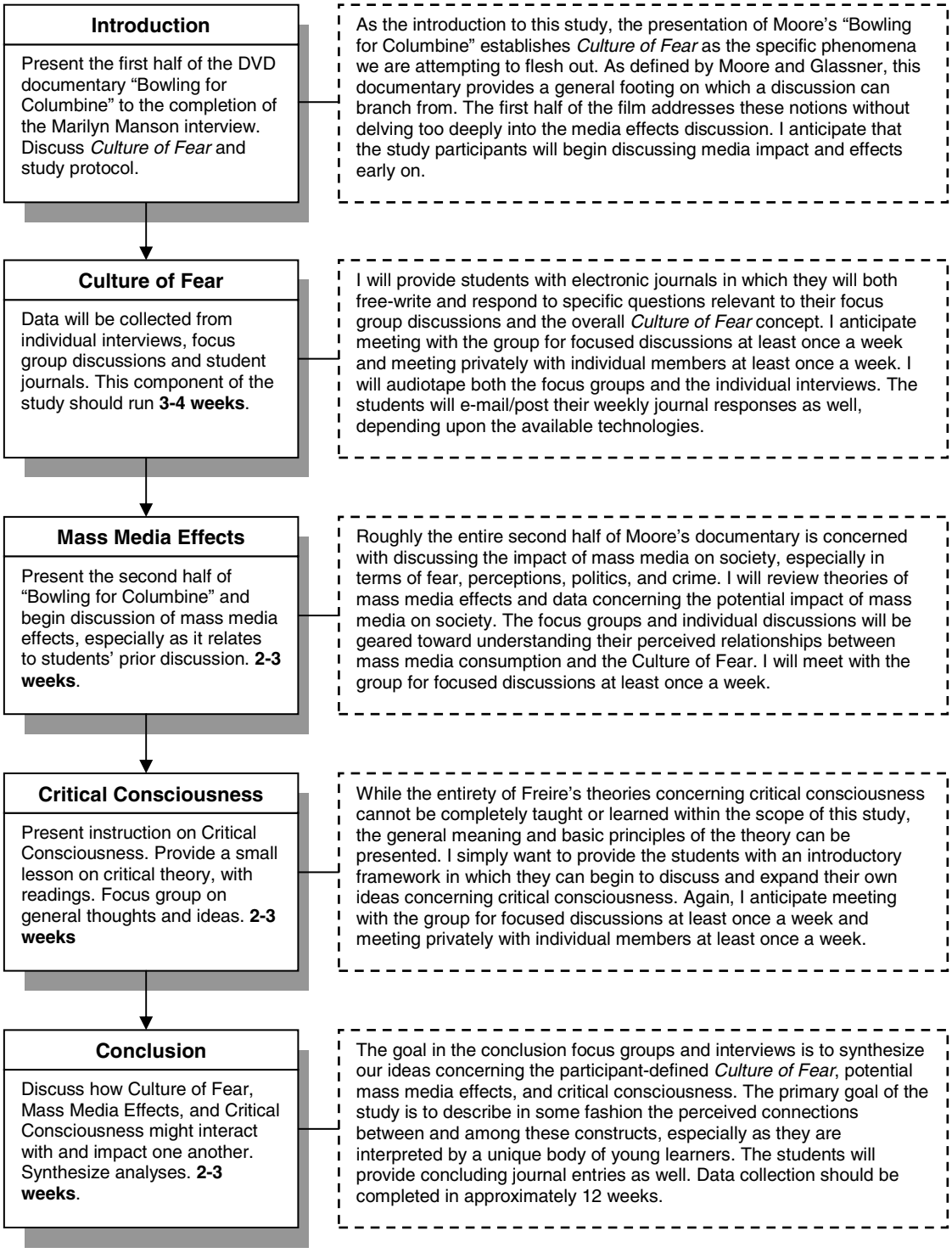
1. How are the constructs we have discussed related, if they are at all?
2. Do you think any of the topics we have discussed influence or impact one another?

APPENDIX B

PRIMARY EDITORIAL DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE

APPENDIX B

Primary Editorial Data Collection Timeline



APPENDIX C

SAMPLE INTRODUCTION TO JOURNALISM EXAM

APPENDIX C

Introduction to Journalism **Mid-Term Exam**

Name:_____ Date:_____

Introduction to Journalism
Media Literacy Exam

Instructions

Answer each of the following questions using **only** the space provided [space has been modified for Appendices formatting]. Answers should be LEGIBLE and written in COMPLETE sentences.

Each question is worth a total of **four to 16 points**. The total exam is worth **68 points** with a **12-point Bonus Question**. To receive the total points for a question, answers will need to have the following characteristics:

- ✓ Clearly and concisely address the question.
- ✓ Effectively utilize concrete examples from class discussions and the textbook, as well as real-world examples found in the mass media.
- ✓ Present a practical argument based upon sound mass media theory.
- ✓ Show an advanced level of thought and application of the construct addressed.

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1. What does it mean to be "Media Literate?" When can someone be considered completely Media Literate? (4 pts.)

2. Describe the differences between knowledge and information. What is the relationship of knowledge and information to media literacy? (4 pts.)

3. Should information found on the Internet ever be censored? Why or why not? (4 pts.)

4. Describe the Four Major Factors of Potter's Media Literacy Model. How are each of the individual factors related? (8 pts.)

5. What is the relationship between Media Literacy and the concept of "Natural Abilities"
   as Potter describes them in our text? (4 pts.)

6. What is Automaticity? How are Media Literacy and Automaticity related? (4 pts.)

7. What is the relationship to Media Literacy and The Culture of Fear? Please cite specific examples from our class discussions, Bowling for Columbine and the textbook to support your answer. (8 pts.)

8. Define "Filtering" and explain why humans would need a cognitive ability like filtering. (4 pts.)

9. Define censorship and identify at least three potential advantages and three potential disadvantages to censoring information. (4 pts.)

10. Out of the four traps of being Media *Illiterate*, which ONE do you consider to be the most damaging? Why? (4 pts.)

11. Out of the 10 personal strategies for increasing media literacy, what do you consider the 3 most important to be? Why? (8 pts.)

12. According to Potter, media exert a wide range of effects — immediate and long term, positive as well as negative — across five specific levels. Define these Media Effect levels, the terms "immediate and long term," and the notion of "positive and negative" effect. How are each of these concepts related? Also, provide 1 concrete example of each level of effect as it exists in your life (i.e. a Behavioral Media Effect occurs when you tap your foot to the beat of your favorite song). (12 pts.)

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE MEDIA LITERACY COURSE ACTIVITY

APPENDIX D

Free Press Critique
- 1 -

Organization

- Class will number off (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8)
- Groups will pair off against one another (1 vs. 8; 2 vs. 7; 3 vs. 6; 4 vs. 5)
- Within the individual groups, students will take the following roles (if a group only has three members, the "TaskMaster" and "Judge" will be combined as one role):
    - Spokesman/Leader
    - Reporter
    - Cheerleader/TaskMaster
    - Judge

Assignment

- Read the article: "Inside the Dark Corners of the Net," *Brad Stone/Newsweek (2004)*
- Using details from the article **AND** the Code of Ethics, construct an argument either for or against an *unhindered free press*, citing definitions, theories and philosophical notions presented in class discussion and through the course readings. Pay special attention in your arguments to notions of *media literacy* and *culture of fear*.
- Even Groups **(2, 4, 6, & 8)** will argue **FOR** unhindered free press.
- Odd Groups (**1, 3, 5, & 7**) will argue **AGAINST** unhindered free press.

Debate

- **Group 1** will enter a debate with **Group 8**. *Judges* from **Group 2** and **Group 3** will score the debate, naming the group that most successfully presents its argument as the winner.
- **Group 2** will enter a debate with **Group 7**. *Judges* from **Group 4** and **Group 5** will score the debate, naming the group that most successfully presents its argument as the winner.
- **Group 3** will enter a debate with **Group 6**. *Judges* from **Group 1** and **Group 8** will score the debate, naming the group that most successfully presents its argument as the winner.

- **Group 4** will enter a debate with **Group 5**. *Judges* from **Group 6** and **Group 7** will score the debate, naming the group that most successfully presents its argument as the winner.

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE DATA EXAMPLES

APPENDIX E

Qualitative Data Examples*

* I have provided here only one data example for each of the three primary emergent themes in the project. These examples are taken from a much larger body of data.

Critical Consciousness Example: Student Journals Group Discussion

Linda: ...being applied to college students, right? Yours was written about applying critical consciousness to college students right?

Alex: Yeah, (Wasn't it?) college professors?

CK: Yeah, more or less. It's not important it's just ...

Linda: What was interesting about mine then, I guess I just needed to read the Freire bio closer because a lot of this stuff I've been thinking, "Oh, I don't know this." And my article didn't specifically mention him. She did what she discovered, what she studied, to be basically what I think he's trying to say. Lisa Shade, and this is the paper that she presented, and this is a formal paper, I remember finding only one typo in this.

CK: You guys are both editors. What do you think, what's the title of your article?

Linda: You know I didn't think to bring it with me but it was critical consciousness and English.

CK: Okay.

Linda: The teaching of English is what it was, and it may have had his name and I wish I had brought it with me. She is a high school English teacher, and I didn't realize this has already been done, high school was a long time ago. But you know when I took intro to literary studies, they taught us the different ways to look at literature, the different ways to critique it, the different perspectives to look at it from whether you've got your feminist approach or your Marxist approach or reader-response. There is just a whole slew of different ways you can look at one short story, poem, or whatever. And so she thought it was important, as a next step in teaching students to read, to teach critical theories so that—and in this case we're talking about just literature. Once they, and I can see a lightbulb going on for them, once they realize they can apply this idea to anything. Because she started teaching them, say, the reader-response theory where any reader, every reader is different from another reader so any one is going to have a slightly different response to the same story. So, she uses that as a scaffolding, she kept referring to a scaffolding whichn I'm thinking is the lower tier of bricks in the wall which they're building, got to have that bottom part.

CK: Constructivist education?

Linda: I don't remember if she used that term or not, she may have.

CK: Yeah, you create a structure and let your students build on it.

Linda: Just to open their eyes to the fact that there's going to be, and you can tell—and everybody's going to get something different from this—but to actually teach them to look at something with their own ideas, their own background. And she started with that and then went on with the different sorts of critical theory, so that they can learn, and again any one story can be looked at from many different ways. I found it facinating that she was actually teaching this to high school students and the class she was looking at was, and she was the teacher of the class so she was participating in it and learning from it too but they were at-risk kids. They weren't all poor, they weren't all stupid, they were a mix, mix of gender obviously, but some

of them had had headed for college type classes but they were still at risk for some reason or another. Some of them, the reading levels were so low that they'd never had, so it was just a really wide range. But she gave them more tools and it made them more integrated readers, which the way I see it, she didn't go into it, but the way I see it, but anything after that they're going to be able to look at it, like a news report and have an understanding that that's going to be taken differently by different viewers. It just opens them up to see that there are different perspectives and different viewpoints and different ways to look at things.

CK: Good stuff.

Linda: (started making plans?) I didn't realize they didn't teach that to high school students.

CK: They don't teach it to college students all the time.

Linda: Into Lit, I don't know why it's not a prerequisite to all these other...

Alex: See, I never had Intro Lit.

Linda: Yeah, well, you're not an English major.

Alex: Well yeah but it would be...

Linda: It still would be useful for anybody

CK: So English majors are getting more about this stuff than other students are maybe. I've thought that actually ...

Linda: They're becoming more critically conscious

Alex: I think he's talking about communications courses

Linda: Was the difference in perspectives taught?

Alex: Well you know, I don't know how it is with English classes a lot, we never shut up, ever because we are always talking about something and you have very strong personalities a lot. I tend not to be one in classes because I'm sitting there and I like to listen and I'll, you know throw my (???) every now and then. Sometimes you get those very strong personalities in classes that are like, "No. That's it. My way." (???) And I'm thinking, "Well, I see. That's one way of thinking about it." But then, you know the girl in the front row's got (a problem with it?) But they cannot realize that there are other areas that you can look at and you can draw from each one of those and say, "Hey, check this out." See that makes it make more sense, smooths it out a little bit when you do that every now and then.

Linda: I guess teaching the literary theory every now and then kind of formalizes the whole idea of ... you've got good discussion going on, I mean in Intro to Journalism we had that, in Newswriting we had that.

CK: You don't say.

Linda: Gee, could it have had anything to do with the instructor? But in teaching literary theory you're getting a formal way of doing it, you've got to write a formal paper looking at, and you just learn it.

Alex: Well see, I remember us doing that in Comp classes and it was like, you know we have ... we have a short story that was feminist based ...

Linda: Ah, well see you could look at it as a feminist or you could look at it as, you know historical, or you could ...

Alex: Well, the first class I had at [our] University was Philosophy with Dr. **** Very first class and I walk into that man's world with flip flops and (I think I'm still stuck there? Stepped in something?)

Alex: I don't know, we were smelling (Les Tahoes? eh?) even for days from the asbestos or something.

CK: Yeah, I remember he wore some kind of oil scent. It smelled wonderful.

Alex: Did he? I love hanging out with that man. His entire class, you went through you know Christian philosopy, different world views, feminist, Buddhist, and something else. But it taught you, and I think it was a great class. I think it should be a required class in your first or second year.

Linda: I need to do that before I'm gone. But it's only available online now.

Alex: Is it really?

Susan: Yeah.

Alex: Wow.

Linda: For the next several semesters it's only available online.

Susan: With ****.

Alex: That sucks.

CK: Yes, all of this, we've only got about five minutes left. Lisa made a comment about news. We're going to go back to that. I'm going to bring it back up, you said it, so it's fair game now. Clearly that's where we're going to be headed so…. Good job on the article. Great job, Alex. I'll get you guys next week. I'm going to have questions posted, you guys please respond, it's getting tight.

Media Literacy Example: Introduction to Journalism Exam

Name: **** *******

Introduction to Journalism
Media Literacy Exam

Instructions

Answer each of the following questions using **only** the space provided. Answers should be LEGIBLE and written in COMPLETE sentences.

Each question is worth a total of **four to 16 points**. The total exam is worth **68 points** with a **12-point Bonus Question**. The bonus question was given in class. To receive the total points for a question, answers will need to have the following characteristics:

- ✓ Clearly and concisely address the question.
- ✓ Effectively utilize concrete examples from class discussions and the textbook, as well as real-world examples found in the mass media.
- ✓ Present a practical argument based upon sound mass media theory.
- ✓ Show an advanced level of thought and application of the construct addressed.

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13. What does it mean to be "Media Literate?" When can someone be considered completely Media Literate?

Potter describes media literacy as a set of perspectives (different ways we view the media) that we continually use to expose ourselves to the media to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter. Media Literacy is multidimensional and a person must not only look at the cognitive field but also in the emotional (recognize different emotional triggers created by the media; love, hate, fear, and higher emotions like confusion and wariness.), the aesthetic the visual and hearing properties (determining visual effects/good artists/good actresses), and also the moral field which helps the person define the hidden message in the media (good and bad). The idea is to control how the media programs our minds. Media literacy is a continuum and each person can always improve, which depends on their knowledge structures (then skills and experiences).

14. Describe the differences between knowledge and information. What is the relationship of knowledge and information to media literacy?

Information is temporary and separate ideas/facts, and is found in the messages of the media (CDs, TV, Radio, Books etc.). Information is raw bits that a person can translate into meaning (structure). Information has two forms factual and social. Facts are those raw bits, and social would be beliefs that people get by watching society i.e. clothing style, slang terms, what's hip in society. Knowledge is what's developed/put together from the information in the messages. Knowledge is imprinted in a person's mind (long term), and a media literacy person will be able to take the information from messages, decode them (their meaning), and add them to their knowledge base

15. Should information found on the Internet ever be censored? Why or why not?

This topic is incredibly controversial. The Society of Professional Journalists have created a code of ethics pertaining to the idea of censorship or withholding information. Some instances include: when the information

affects someone due to the tragedy, show good taste and avoid pandering to lurid curiosity, listen to the public voice about grievances by the media. Although the idea of media literacy is decide for yourself whether or not you want the message to saturate your mind, media literacy also helps you to decide beforehand which information is vital or trash before total immersion. Over all I feel censoring information on the internet that isn't illegal or completely vile is wrong. Media literacy is about choice, the right to look or not to look and then make the decision whether or not it should be added to your knowledge structure.

16. Describe the Four Major Factors of Potter's Media Literacy Model. How are each of the individual factors related?

The first major factor is the knowledge structures, which is the idea of knowing. Of course there is a difference between information and knowledge. Knowledge structures take time to build, and must take a great amount of work. Within the knowledge structures, people receive the information (that builds upon to make the structures) from five different sources: media effect, media content, media industry, the real world, and ourselves. Basically, all these sources, combine to build the knowledge structures in our mind and form the beliefs about our world, society, looks, etc. Next you have personal locus, which is the level of drive you have when viewing messages; it helps you determine what messages to let in or reject. If you have a strong personal locus, then you will have strong goals, which will help you determine which messages you want to be influenced by. Personal locus ties in with the knowledge structure by saying if a person has a weak locus then he will not be as aware of his goals and will default to the mindless media content submersion, thus increasing the media's control. After the locus gives a person the drive for a plan towards media consumption, tools (skills and competencies) are needed to execute the plan. Competencies are basic such as reading and also meaning matching to a particular word. Without competencies a person will not be able to become media literate, because he will not be able to understand/access the information. Skills are more complex, and are developed over time. People can exert more ability in some areas than others. As a person continues to practice them, they will grow strong, but if they don't, they will atrophy. There are seven skills: analysis, evaluation, grouping, induction, deduction, synthesis (putting elements into a new structure), and abstraction (capturing essence of message with fewer words). Skills are used to construct the knowledge structures by using them to focus on the good messages ignore the junk. Information processing is the final step in which a person uses the competencies and skills to process the information in to schema. First a person must filter messages, which will use the skills of evaluation and analysis mostly. Next is the meaning matching which uses basic competency skills to learn the meaning of words, and after, the info must be constructed—broken down with the skills and looking at the deeper meaning and how we apply it to schema.

17. What is the relationship between Media Literacy and the concept of "Natural Abilities" as Potter describes them in our text?

People have different natural abilities—some higher than others; A person has to continually work on it! Although a person may have low natural abilities, they can learn to build it up with hard work. Potter talks about seven different natural abilities—field independency, crystalline and fluid intelligence, conceptual differentiation, emotional intelligence, tolerance for ambiguity, and nonimpulsiveness. All the natural abilities can be strengthened in order to increase a person's media literacy. For example, field independency helps a person distinguish the difference between the signal and the noise in a message (telling information from the symbols and images). With low field independency, a person is more likely to fall in to a state of automaticity due to all the chaos implanted with the information (to increase: recognize triggers.)

18. What is Automaticity? How are Media Literacy and Automaticity related?

Automaticity is simply when your brain shuts down to combat the thousands of messages that bombard the brain and the brain operates unconsciously. Automaticity is how we filter which messages we want to pay attention to (triggers our mind) and which we want to ignore. Relating to media literacy, automaticity has traps that discourage media literacy like information fatigue (we feel overwhelmed by the messages and are discouraged from experiencing new messages), false feeling of being informed (you can only accept the surface level due to the mindless state), false sense of control (because more ways take in media we feel overwhelmed and give more time to try and soak it all in, which allows the medias message to influence you), and finally faulty beliefs (because we absorb the surface of information we base beliefs on the little info).

19. What is the relationship to Media Literacy and *The Culture of Fear*? Please cite specific examples from our class discussions, *Bowling for Columbine* and the textbook to support your answer.

Potter states that people who watch long hours of television has an emotional effect on people due to the amount of violence in TV. Potter says that the violent instances lead people to unrealistically believe high estimates of risk of victimization and a belief that the world is a mean and violent place. Media Literacy can help people discern the difference between truth and information that has no value. One prominent junk message in the media—especially the news—is fear propelled by sensationalist stories. The news uses a statement, "If it bleeds, it leads," to determine what shows on the top headlines. Consequently, it creates a mass of fearful stories ("Avion Flu." "Terrorism level raised") played by every major news corporation. In Bowling for Columbine, Moore also talked about how the media uses fear to sell products i.e. talking about crime level in area falsely to sell alarm systems. Because the news picks sensationalist stories, it causes us to only see violence and view a negative image on people. Bowling talked about the fear of the black man in the media, and sensationalist stories cause people to be afraid of certain areas more populated by a black community (seeing crimes committed by black people everyday on the news). As a media literate person, we also need to be aware of the information within the stories. Many times news organizations (media presenters) will twist their information or only use one source in order to get the information they want. Also, we need to be aware of media editing tricks. In bowling for columbine, Moore talks to Terry Nichols brother, and at first he seems crazy. However, it is possible that the scenes may have been cut in order to achieve the portrayal of the character. In turn, it caused people to see Nichols' brother as crazy, and incited fear in people about his gun possession. Also important, we need to recognize how the media uses quick quotes from experts to create fear- because they are experts and describe in a 50 second bit how things influence children, etc., we should take their advice without question.

20. Define "Filtering" and explain why humans would need a cognitive ability like filtering.

Potter describes filtering as the process of deciding what messages you want to filter in (pay attention to, and which messages to filter out (ignore). In order for a person to become more media literate, he must be able to filter out the junk messages. Filtering out the junk helps lower the message saturation, and in turn people can break from the automatic consciousness. Breaking from automatic consciousness allows a person to look at the message in depth and see the signal between the noise, which also helps a person to interpret meaning from the message.

The key is to find a balance to filter out not all the messages, which would prevent from enjoying the positive aspects from the media and not filtering at all, which causes fatigue.

21. Define censorship and identify at least three potential advantages and three potential disadvantages to censoring information.

Censorship is defined as limiting, withholding certain information, or restricting information from an individual, society, or country. Depending on the information, censorship can strengthen safety for an individual (personal information) or to a group (an army company) by withholding the whereabouts. Also censorship can help if the information released that could be about a person would affect someone close to him/her. Censorship can keep certain illegal organizations from spreading such as child pornography sites, drug related sites, etc. I feel that certain commercial sites/companies that sell grotesque videos and images are not worth giving people the option to decide. If they clearly are commercial (for money) and not for information purposes, then they should be censored. However it is difficult to hire someone to decide what is censored or not. The FCC tries and can be controlled by the public, but most people don't like the idea of giving a group of men their freedom. The first disadvantage to censorship is the loss of information, which effects knowledge on the subject. Secondly, that restriction of information allows the media to exert more control over you due to the lack of knowledge on the subject (not allowing you to make up your own mind). Moreover, it is our right as a people to decide what is good information to know and what is junk. Even if the information may seem grotesque, people need to decide whether or not they need it.

22. Out of the four traps of being Media *Illiterate*, which ONE do you consider to be the most damaging? Why?

I believe False Sense of Control is the root cause and most damaging towards a person's media literacy. Due to all the increased channels that the media offers us, it increases the message saturation which causes information fatigue because we want to spend more time with the media. That in turn causes us to enter in to that state of automaticity, which leads to all the other traps. First, because we are so tired from the messages, we lose the ability to break free and branch out of the monotonous messages. Secondly, as the fatigue causes automaticity, it allows us to look at the messages on the surface level (False feeling of being informed). Finally, that leads to the faulty beliefs, which occur when a person constructs/accepts his beliefs based on the messages in the media. Automaticity causes the faulty beliefs because a person in that state can only look at the surface level. If there were less channels of communication, then we would be able to exert more control what/when/how we want the information and therefore be more awake and literate.

23. Out of the 10 personal strategies for increasing media literacy, what do you consider the 3 most important to be? Why?

Although all the strategies are high important, I feel "Strengthening your persona locus, Reduce the amounts of mindless exposure, and Examine your options are the founding strategies. First, your personal locus is most important because without the drive to search out information and set goals, none of the other strategies will leave the ground; a person will continue in a state of automaticity increasing the media's influence. Having a strong personal locus will help increase your knowledge structure as well which is vital to determining truth from fantasy. Reducing the amount of mindless exposure is the next step after you've set goals. If you look at the media

"consciously" then you can begin to construct meaning from the messages and be able to filter out what's good and bad. Therefore a person reduces the media's control by breaking the automatic state, which kills the programmed triggers because you are in control of what you want to be exposed to. Controlling what you are exposed to leads to being able to determine what you like within the media and how you react to it; that leads to Examining your options. This is highly important for analyzing the overall media effect- such as behaviorally, emotionally, cognitively, etc., and what you like (giving you independence from the media) and how you respond to different media influences. Knowing how you respond to certain messages will help you realize your weaknesses within the media. Doing that helps you achieve your goals that you set.

24. According to Potter, media exert a wide range of effects — immediate and long term, positive as well as negative — across five specific levels. Define these Media Effect levels, the terms "immediate and long term," and the notion of "positive and negative" effect. How are each of these concepts related? Also, provide 1 concrete example of each level of effect as it exists in your life (i.e. a Behavioral Media Effect occurs when you tap your foot to the beat of your favorite song).

Potter talks about five media level effects: Cognitive, Attitudinal, Behavioral, Physiological, and Emotional. The cognitive effect occurs when a person learns socially or factually from a media message. This happens when I watch MTV and learn the bands they say are "hot" to buy. Attitudinal effect happens when the media influences our opinions, beliefs, and values about different subjects such as politics, health, religion, etc. I notice a strong attitudinal effect with politics and the current president in office when I watch certain news channels, and if I wasn't media literate, I would accept their opinion on the matter. Behavioral is the most common effect from media, and also the most reported; however, this effect entails much confusion due to lurking variables i.e. socioeconomic status, past abuse, drug use, etc. When I watched "The Fast and the Furious," I wanted to race my car fast and try dangerous stunts, which is a combined effect of cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral because I learned that fast cars are a socially popular item and thought they were "cooler" after watching the movie. Physiological effects occur when the media causes a physical response such as goose bumps due to songs or scary movies; also media with mystery can elevate blood pressure and the heart rate, and even sweaty palms. When I watched "V for Vendetta" my heart began to race as the main character proposed the idea that the media uses fear to control the public, and how action should be taken. The emotional effect is caused when the media causes emotional reactions—lust, hate, fear, sadness, happiness, etc. In the movie "Garden State," I noticed my emotion's changing with the emotional peaks in the movie: from extreme sadness, happiness, and sometimes boredom (because the characters in the movie were bored). The idea of "immediate and long term" refer to when the effect happens and not how long it occurs. For example, immediate can be short (fear from a scary movie) or it can be long term. Immediate happens during the proposed message. Long term refers to not just one instance of exposure but many times that condition your responses. For example, a person watching the news that focuses on crimes committed by black people leads to the belief that black people commit the most crimes. Positive and negative effects can be looked at in two ways: by the individual and society. A positive individual effect usually occurs when a person uses the media effects to achieve their personal goals such as learning facts from a book, magazine, etc. Negatively, a person is used by the media's effects such as buying products you don't really need (attitudinal). Societal positive effects come when the media helps inform the public to make better decisions with reform policies, information on leaders, etc (cognitive effects). Negatively, the media can teach violent behavior through violent programs and trigger that behavior. The five beliefs can have an immediate effect such as physiological or emotional (fear), or they can have long term effects such as behavioral or attitudinal (belief about a public figure due to continual press coverage). We may not be able to control what messages the media throws out, but we can

choose which ones to hit away and which ones to take in. We can learn how the media's effects and their messages lead to behavior changes, opinions formed, etc, and it's our job to decide which ones are positive and negative to our minds' knowledge structure.

The Culture of Fear: Group Discussion 6 Transcript

Culture of Fear (2)

Alex: You should have taken us all to go to Carnival for a week.

Maria: Do you want to die?

Alex: Yeah.

Maria: You want to die?

Alex: I want to go.

Maria: Okay…

Keller: *Tell us about Carnival.*

Maria: There are so many deaths.

Keller: *What?*

Maria: So many deaths that constantly you are frightened. So many deaths unfortunately.

Alex: I want to do the running of the bulls thing. I'm an adrenaline junkie. I'm going skydiving this summer.

Keller: *Where at?*

Alex: I don't know yet, but I'm going. It's one of my goals for the summer.

Maria's got to go here in about fifteen minutes don't you?

Maria: Ten.

Ten, alright. Even less. Just real quick what were we talking about last week? I've been doing little mini-interviews with you guys. I've talked with you at various points throughout the week about different things that we've talked about. I haven't scheduled formal interviews with you yet. That's going to start this week. I've been a little behind schedule. But we'll kick it back up into gear. Nothing very formal, just finding out what you're thinking. Please go onto Blackboard. It's really critical that you guys are writing on Blackboard. I know, in fact I think all of you have posted something.

Maria: Did you see what I wrote yesterday?

Alex: I haven't been on there since last week. I haven't done it.

Keller: *How is that working for you guys? The blackboard thing? Is that alright?*

Alex: It's cool.

Keller: *I mean really. If there's a different way I can do it maybe?*

Alex: It's the easiest. It's cool. I like it.

Alright. Wonderful. It's going to be the most helpful for me whenever

Alex: I think it's cool anyway.

Keller: *Now tell me what we talked about last week. Cause we got down the road to some disagreements and then we had to leave. I want to give you some things to write about and then we'll do a personal interview. Just real quick, what instantly comes to mind when you think about what we were talking about last Tuesday?*

Alex: What were we talking about last week?

Maria: Yeah, I don't remember.

Keller: *I remember.*

Maria: You brought up the culture of fear.

Well, you guys brought it up, I was just (hinting? Hitting on it?)

Maria: On Blackboard, I think that's what we were talking about?

Keller: *Right, you guys were talking about culture of fear. That's a lot of, that's something that, since we've talked about it and it's been brought up, and I told you guys this last week, and I want you to concentrate on that. This idea of fear. So, this morning I want you to tell me, what is fear? What is fear? Define it.*

Nixon: In this context?

Keller: *I don't care, in any context. What do you think?*

Maria: Being afraid of losing control.

Okay, what is afraid?

Alex: Trying to think of a way to say it.

Nixon: A concern for some sort of injury, be it mental, physical, or emotional.

Okay, so afraid of being hurt?

Maria: A concern for security?

Keller: *Okay, a concern for security. What do you think, Susan?*

Susan: I think more along the lines of what Nixon was saying, like metal or physical anguish.

Keller: *Okay, Alex?*

Alex: I think it's kind of the feeling of not wanting something to happen.

Keller: *Sure.*

Alex: I don't know how to go much more in depth.

Keller: *No, no, that's good. It's tough to define an emotion. Because how do you … like hope, I've studied a little about hope, and how do you define hope? So how do you define fear? I'm going to put a post up and ask you guys to give your definition of fear and to talk a little more about it.*

Maria: I think it kind of keeps you under control.

Alex: I think it's kind of our own little checks and balance system.

Keller: *Okay, what do you mean by that, Alex?*

Alex: I mean like, we know we can do something, like I was talking about going sky diving, you're not afraid of it, if there's some sort of safety factor, you may not respect it, which means you may not be able to understand the full implications of what you're doing, which is actually jumping out of a plane with a piece of nylon strapped to your back.

Keller: *Sure. And you were talking about just a second ago that you're an adrenaline junkie. Do you think that fear plays a role into that?*

Alex: Oh yeah. Because if I wasn't afraid of something, then it wouldn't be any fun to me. I like to try to overcome things that I'm afraid of sometimes. Well sometimes. So I mean, if there's, you know driving a car, I'm not afraid of. It's not fun to me. Big deal. You get in a car and you drive around. Some people are completely scared to drive a car.

Susan: I don't like driving cars.

Keller: *But you're not saying you get fear just to have fun. Do you use fear for fun?*

Alex: Sometimes, yeah.

So do you guys agree? Alex, you're not saying that all fear is fun?

Alex: No, not all fear is fun. I'm not saying fear is fun, I'm saying the overcoming of fear. Cause if you're afraid of something, you're afraid of it. But if you can do it, to me if you can prove to yourself that you can do something that you may be afraid of, then it changes you in a way. And it can be fun.

Keller: *Okay. Alright.*

Alex: Kind of like going to Carnival.

Keller: *So, yeah, tell us about, people die at Carnival?*

Maria: A lot of deaths.

Keller: *Murders?*

Maria: Well, yeah cause they get drunk. They get very, very drunk.

Keller: *They fight?*

Maria: They have knives on them, like they're very protective of their girlfriends or their wives. And if some guy tries to comes and tries to do something with their girlfriend, they start in a fight and a lot of people die this way. There are a lot of people using drugs. Because, it's so much of a crowd. You can just breathe people's sweat because it's so crowded. People use a lot of drugs and get very drunk. And then they get drunk so they have sex before they … they have a lot of babies. Sure enough, after Carnival that's when the babies come. And then the abortions (follow?) then too. One thing maybe, in good fear, my parents never let us go to Carnival. Never let me and my brothers go to Carnival. We went one time in a small town, which is not the magnitude of a big town Carnival.

Keller: *So what do you see in a big town carnival? Is it like … Now, how do you guys find out all this information about all this death?*

Maria: The news … the media. Oh, the media and personal friendships. Personal contact with friends, you know, in our schools. I mean the majority of kids go to Carnival. So they know people, if situations have happened to them personally then … but the media of course. The assaults or the pregnancies. But there have been so many deaths, like it increases each year.

Maria: Yeah, one time there was a singer there. He was completely naked. I mean he had no piece of clothes at all. He was completely naked.

Alex: Well, it's Mardi Gras. It's the American version of it. It's all it is.

Keller: *Really?*

Alex: Yeah, I mean it's all it is.

Keller: *Well, but I'm interested because you were talking about Brazilian media, what you were saying about, so talk about that. Do you think what's in Brazilian media is true?*

Maria: Uh … I believe most of it is true. I believe because they don't just … I don't know because they provide evidence about it. You know, they might like, well … I'm sure you could just go to the hospitals and find out the people who died. I'm sure you can. And the police beats, like the United States, you know.

Keller: *Do deaths go up during Carnival you think?*

Maria: Oh yeah. Deaths go up, definitely. So I believe most of it. Now they might overemphasize it. I haven't been there since '97 (it's a bit garbled here) They might overemphasize because it's like, you know like yellow journalism?

Keller: *Sure.*

Maria: They really … not that they exaggerate it, but they emphasize it a lot. Because they want to, it's news. It interests people. Before Carnival they publicize it a lot, all the preparations all over the country. But the consequences of Carnival are deaths. I might try to (see?) some articles to bring next week.

APPENDIX F

SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS CODE OF ETHICS

APPENDIX F

SPJ Code of Ethics

SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS.

Code of Ethics

Preamble

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility.

Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and adopt this code to declare the Society's principles and standards of practice.

Seek Truth and Report It

Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

Journalists should:

- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.
- Always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises.
- Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.
- Never distort the content of news photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Label montages and photo illustrations.
- Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.
- Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story.
- Never plagiarize.
- Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.
- Examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others.
- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.
- Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.
- Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.
- Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.
- Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection.

Minimize Harm

Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.

Journalists should:

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
- Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
- Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.
- Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.
- Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.
- Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.
- Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.
- Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.

Act Independently

Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.

Journalists should:

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.
- Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
- Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
- Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.

Be Accountable

Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other.

Journalists should:

- Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
- Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
- Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.
- Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

Sigma Delta Chi's first Code of Ethics was borrowed from the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1926. In 1973, Sigma Delta Chi wrote its own code, which was revised in 1984 and 1987. The present version of the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics was adopted in September 1996.