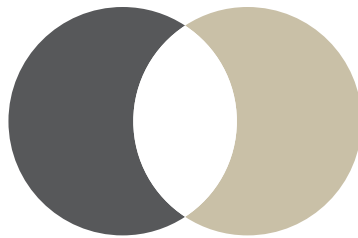


# λπιη

LAMBDA PI ETA UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL



VOLUME 3 • SUMMER 2015



NATIONAL COMMUNICATION  
ASSOCIATION

*The Lambda Pi Eta Undergraduate Journal*  
is published by  
National Communication Association,  
Washington, DC, United States of America

Cover design by Carrie Lyle

**EDITOR** LaKeshia Anderson, NCA Assistant Director for Academic and Professional Affairs

**EDITORIAL ASSISTANT** Megan Moore, NCA Academic and Professional Affairs Associate

#### **LAMBDA PI ETA UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL REVIEW BOARD**

Chitra Akkoor, Keene State College

Donna Allen, Northwest Nazarene University

Jordan Atkinson, West Virginia University

Amanda Bridges, Gardner-Webb University

James Burton, Salisbury University

Amy Grim Buxbaum, North Central College

Theresa Castor, University of Wisconsin-Parkside

Anne Marie Czerwinski, University  
of Pittsburgh at Greensburg

Daniel Cochece Davis, Illinois State University

Jayson Dibble, Hope College

Randy Dillon, Missouri State University

Francine Edwards, Delaware State University

Vickie Shamp Ellis, Oklahoma Baptist University

Sandra Faulkner, Bowling Green State University

Sarah Flinko, Duquesne University

Jennifer Furkin, Lindsey Wilson College

Susan Gilpin, Marshall University

Diane Gruber, Arizona State University

Ellen Hay, Augustana College

Christina Knopf, SUNY Potsdam

Matthew LeHew, Shorter University

Cara Mackie, Florida Southern College

Michelle Maresh-Fuehrer, Texas A&M  
University-Corpus Christi

Kelly McBride, Virginia Tech

Janet McCormick, Middle Tennessee State University

Tammy McGuire, Pacific Union College

Elizabeth Ortiz, Cedar Crest College

Laura Russell, Denison University

Michelle Scollo, College of Mount Saint Vincent

Rachel Silverman, Embry Riddle Aeronautical University

Mary Toale, SUNY Oswego

Andrew Tollison, Merrimack College

Michelle Violanti, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Ron Von Burg, Wake Forest University

Tiffany Wang, University of Montevallo

Pamela Wicks, Aurora University

Daniel Stuart Wilbur, Purdue University North Central

Thomas Wright, Temple University

Cem Zeytinoglu, East Stroudsburg University

Phyllis Zrzavy, Franklin Pierce University

#### **2015 LAMBDA PI ETA FACULTY ADVISORY BOARD**

Caroline Parsons, University of Alabama

Leslie Reynard, Washburn University

Mary Toale, SUNY Oswego

Frances Ward-Johnson, Elon University

Deborah Whitt, Wayne State College

#### **2015 LAMBDA PI ETA STUDENT ADVISORY BOARD**

Alyssa Bish, Wayne State College

Catherine Glover, North Carolina State University

Briana O'Neal, University of Alabama

# Table of Contents



- 5** Rage and Love:  
**A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF GREEN DAY'S AMERICAN DICHOTOMY**  
**Stephen J. Koffel** Eastern University, Xi Delta Chapter
- 16** Redefining *Latinidad*:  
**EXPERIENCES OF SPANISH NON-FLUENT LATINOS IN THE UNITED STATES**  
**Celeste Zatarain-Alsina** Denison University, Delta Upsilon Chapter
- 29** The Role of Anger in Democratic Deliberation and Discourse  
Through the Rhetorical Strategies of Malcolm X  
**Whitney Powel** Denison University, Delta Upsilon Chapter
- 41** Propaganda for the Common Good:  
**AN IDEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF MICHAEL MOORE'S FAHRENHEIT 9/11**  
**Conor Delaney** University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg, Epsilon Theta Chapter

**Stephen J. Koffel**

Eastern University  
LPH Xi Delta Chapter



# Rage and Love:

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF  
GREEN DAY'S AMERICAN DICHOTOMY

**T**his essay examines Green Day's award-winning album *American Idiot* from two critical angles: narrative criticism and the Illusion of Life rhetorical perspective. The former considers how the overarching narrative of the album works rhetorically, encouraging a redemptive change of perspective from rebellion and helplessness toward hope. The latter examines how the music shapes and enhances audience reception of the narrative message. The analysis shows that narrative criticism complements the Illusion of Life approach and illustrates the complex and meaningful relationships between narrative and music.

**T**hroughout musical history certain bands have created albums that act as musical representations of the time. Often, the music becomes a rallying cry or creed, successfully capturing the feelings of a generation. The Who and The Beatles championed the 1960s, connecting with young people across the globe while ABBA's disco and the Sex Pistols' punk followed suit in the 1970s. Who can imagine the 1980s without the iconic music of Simple Minds or the 1990s without Nirvana's influence on Generation X? Albums with this type of presence in history and rhetorical significance are few and far between.

One such album is Green Day's 2004 album *American Idiot*. It is a significant occurrence when an album characterizes an entire movement, a national disenchantment, like *American Idiot* did. At the time this album was gaining popularity, the United States was under the leadership of former President George W. Bush and rebounding from the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The low approval rating of that administration and negative feelings of the generally liberal young adults of the early 2000s were explored in this album, and the story told in *American Idiot* follows a fictional member of this group. Despite being fictional, this character was no less real to a generation of frustrated young people, and their identification with this story propelled Green Day to a new level of stardom and success, as *American Idiot* was 2004's fourth biggest selling album (Spitz, 2007).

This album is significant, both in terms of popularity and embodiment of a social trend. First of all, the album revived Green Day's career and brought them to the mainstream consciousness of the global music scene (Spitz, 2007). The much-anticipated album was critically well-received ("Critical reviews for *American Idiot*," nd) and went on to win many awards (Recording Industry Association of America [RIAA], nd) including a Grammy Award in 2005 for Best Album (Spitz, 2007). As an expression of a social trend, the album was a response to the Bush Administration and loss of post-9/11 patriotism. It capitalized on the social protest of a war that was gaining popularity at the time the album was released and coincided with the re-election media and public dissatisfaction with the Bush Administration's

handling of the alleged War on Terror" (O'Neil, 2004). Green Day's framing of the narrative using an "everyman" (the Jesus of Suburbia character) as the narrator and aligning with a popular social ideology (anti-Bush Administration) was done with persuasive intent, yet the central message is just as much about understanding life and self as it is about not supporting American idiocy like the War on Terror.

To date, only one rhetorical analysis of Green Day's music has been published in a communication journal. Chuang and Hart (2008) analyzed the second track on *American Idiot*, "Jesus of Suburbia," using Sellnow and Sellnow's (2001) Illusion of Life perspective, showing how the music and lyrics of this complex, five-movement track work together to identify with the band's audience. Building from their study, this paper widens the scope of analysis to the entire album, considering both how its overarching narrative works rhetorically and how its music shapes audience reception of that narrative message.

Music and narrative both pursue the same ends, especially "the expression of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and meanings," (Eyre, 2007, para. 1). While music is primarily seen as a nonverbal medium and narrative as a verbal medium, both are able to affect the listener's emotions. Music, acting on its own "lacks the precision of verbal language and is limited in conveying particular details" (Eyre, 2007, para. 4). When music and text are combined, the ability each has to influence emotion and create meaning is enhanced by the other. This study provides an analysis of *American Idiot* from two critical angles. The primary approach is narrative analysis based on Rowland's (2009) description of narrative criticism, and the supporting approach is Sellnow and Sellnow's (2001) Illusion of Life rhetorical perspective, which examines both music and lyrics as they seek to create meaningful, persuasive arguments using music, understood as virtual time, and lyrics, understood as virtual experience. Using these perspectives as a framework, I sought to explain the meaning of the album, its rhetorical significance, and whether it was successful in accomplishing its goal both narratively and musically. Because *American Idiot*, unlike most albums, is a "rock opera" telling a single story, I applied the narrative approach first, followed by the Illusion of Life perspective.

## NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE ■■■■

The narrative perspective was first introduced by Walter Fisher (1984, 1985, 1989). His initial examination of human communication-as-narration led to the proposition of a narrative approach to rhetorical criticism. Because of the importance and prevalence of narratives in human communication, a narrative perspective is helpful in analyzing and interpreting many contemporary and historical texts. Narrative can be understood as a form of persuasion, and narrative criticism is useful for evaluating effectiveness in terms of persuasion as well.

A narrative analysis includes many general elements, but narrative paradigm and narrative rationality are two important concepts. The narrative paradigm is the conceptual framework that places

narration and storytelling at the core of all human communication (Rowland, 2009). Narrative rationality refers to the implicit, value-laden ideological arguments embodied in a narrative. Two standards of narrative rationality are coherence and fidelity. Coherence refers to the degree to which the story holds together internally. Fidelity is the degree to which the values offered in a story resonates with what audience members understand to be true.

There are three steps when conducting a narrative analysis. First, one identifies the features of the narrative, such as character, plot, narrator, and audience. Then, the function of the narrative is identified. Finally, the narrative is assessed in terms of coherence and fidelity, and whether the goal is appropriate, good, and ethical.

## NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN IDIOT ■■■■

### NARRATIVE FEATURES

The first step in conducting a narrative analysis is to examine the features of the narrative. *American Idiot* is an artifact that aims to have social impact through the power of a single overarching narrative—i.e., a rock opera. This album is not the first or only one of its kind. Comparable pop culture artifacts include rock concept albums like The Who's *Tommy* and *Quadrophenia* and Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, as well as musicals like Weber and Rice's *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Laurents, Bernstein and Sondheim's *West Side Story*, and Schwartz and Tebelak's *Godspell*. All songs on *American Idiot* were written by lead singer Billie Joe Armstrong (except for movements III and IV of the five movements in "Homecoming," written by band members Tre Cool and Mike Dirnt, respectively). All music was composed by Green Day.

When analyzing a narrative rhetorically, it is essential to consider its audience. *American Idiot* was intended to have multiple audiences. Green Day intended this album for past fans of the band who enjoyed and supported previous albums. They also appealed to a new fan base, especially the disenfranchised American people who were tired of the war effort and negatively viewed the Bush Administration. The album resonated deeply with American youth.

*American Idiot* takes place in the United States, which is especially important to the political aspect of this album. Two main settings exist: the small suburb where the protagonist begins and ends the narrative, and the city, where the main character spends most of his time during the progression of the album. There are three named characters in this narrative. The protagonist, Jesus of Suburbia, is the center of the story and the observer of action. Track 2 of the album, named for the main character, opens with "I'm the son of rage and love/the Jesus of Suburbia." Rage and love are a central dyad in this narrative, and influence Jesus' actions and desires throughout the story. Jesus is dissatisfied with his town, his life, and his broken family. Jesus spends most of his time being bored and restless, drinking, and doing drugs. Unaware at this time that there are alternate ways to deal with his apathy and dissatisfaction, he states "And there's nothing wrong with me/this is how I'm supposed to be me/in a land of make believe/they don't believe in me" (Green Day, 2004). Jesus decides to escape his surroundings and find meaning elsewhere. "To live and not to breathe/is to die in tragedy/to run, to run away/to find what you believe" becomes his goal (Green Day, 2004). After arriving in

the city, Jesus meets two additional characters. St. Jimmy is a wild rebel who has always lived in the city. He exists to be “the needle in the vein of the establishment” (Green Day, 2004). St. Jimmy describes himself as a “product of the war and fear that we’ve been victimized” by, and takes pride in rebellion for the sake of rebellion. Later, Jesus meets Whatsername in the second half of the album. Whatsername is Jesus’s love interest. She embodies a softer and more authentic side of the rebellion that Jesus desires. Intoxicated by her allure, Jesus starts a relationship with Whatsername, but it is not an easy relationship.

Understanding the narrator is an important facet of narrative analysis. Billie Joe Armstrong creates and shapes the Jesus of Suburbia character. However, within the narrative, Jesus of Suburbia is the one telling the story. The audience comes to understand all things from his perspective. From Jesus’s early struggle with apathy to his alienation and disenchantment with the city, the audience witnesses Jesus’s journey through his voice. He is as reliable as other first-person narrators. He possesses biases, personal feelings, opinions, and experiences that are his own. His expressed conflict and struggles show that Jesus has a good and bad side, providing the audience with an authentic, often introspective look, into his life. This intimate, journal-entry style narration creates an identity for the narrated perspective of *American Idiot*.

In a narrative analysis, the plot is of central importance. The plot of *American Idiot* is Jesus’s journey, very much like a modern-day Pilgrim’s Progress (Bunyan, 1839). Bunyan’s 1839 story follows a single protagonist through an allegorical life journey. As “Christian,” the main character, journeys along the path of righteousness, he encounters people and places that both help and hinder his progress toward the end of his journey. His journey ultimately ends in self-actualization and he is welcomed into the Celestial City. The story of Green Day’s hero and his epic journey contains many parallels to this devotional classic, yet turns the religious journey toward a holy otherness on its head. In Green Day’s album, the protagonist goes back home to where he started his journey, ultimately leading him back to self.

“Jesus of Suburbia,” the album’s second track, introduces our protagonist in five distinct movements. We learn that he is planning to run away from his

pain and his broken home and the track closes with howls of “You’re leaving home!” With Jesus now out on the road, Track 3, “Holiday,” brings political tone and narrative framework together, simultaneously advancing the Jesus narrative while negatively referencing the Bush Administration and encouraging fellow rebels by asking them not to simply retreat to their Camp Davids (Blum, 2014). This track is about Jesus opening his eyes and seeking deliberate freedom. He shouts, “I beg to dream and differ/from the hall of lies/this is the dawning of the rest of our lives/this is our lives on holiday” (Green Day, 2004).

Continuing through the album, Track 4, “Boulevard of Broken Dreams,” showcases the brokenness and loneliness Jesus feels upon arriving in the city. The lyrics of the chorus, “my shadow’s the only one that walks beside me/my shallow heart’s the only thing that’s beating/sometimes I wish someone out there would find me/until then I walk alone,” typified the alienated feelings of a generation, and carried this single at the top of the Alternative charts for 16 weeks (Payne, 2014). “We are the Waiting,” the album’s next track, expands upon Jesus’ experiences in the city and captures the overwhelming loneliness of his experience. Alone and facing the unknown, Jesus is in need of a friend and a plan. Thus, St. Jimmy is introduced. St. Jimmy is described as a punk rock freedom fighter (Spitz, 2006). This self-proclaimed insubordinate radical springs into Jesus’ life and befriends him, helping Jesus find an outlet for his rage. Not fulfilled with these antics, Jesus descends into numbness on the next track, “Give Me Novocaine.” His quiet desperation is evident from the lyrics, “Give me a long kiss goodnight/and everything will be all right/tell me that I won’t feel a thing/give me novocaine” (Green Day, 2014). Jesus is only halfway through the album yet dangerously close to suicide.

There is a positive shift in Jesus’s narrative when Whatsername arrives on the next track, saving Jesus and energizing the second half of the album. “She’s a Rebel” is Jesus’s description of the woman that saved him and offered him an alternative path to the mindless rebellion of St. Jimmy. The lyrics chronicle the charisma and rebellious magnetism that causes Jesus to fall for Whatsername. Whatsername is the mindful, informed rebel that Jesus has always wanted to become, a contrast to St. Jimmy’s attitude. The following track,



“Extraordinary Girl,” is a second look at the Jesus and Whatsername relationship, and examines its underlying problems. The lines “she’s all alone again/wiping the tears from her eyes/some days he feels like dying/some days it’s not worth trying/now that they both are finding/she gets so sick of crying,” chronicle the slow dissolution of their relationship based on their self-destructive flaws (Green Day, 2004). The relationship is finally over when the next track, “Letterbomb,” begins and Whatsername sends Jesus a letter. Far from an explosive package, this letter is a harshly worded breakup letter written by Whatsername to Jesus. The song begins with a female voice chanting the words, presumably in the letter that Whatsername wrote, “Nobody likes you/everyone left you.” This childish attack makes Jesus feel insecure and devalued. As the story continues, Jesus comes to realize that he failed as a rebel. Tired of existing as “Jesus of Suburbia,” Jesus seeks to become like the rebellious St. Jimmy, but his attempt to become someone else leads him to lose his identity in the process. This powerful revelation comes to him and he discovers, “You’re not the Jesus of Suburbia/The St. Jimmy is a figment of your father’s rage and your mother’s love” (Green Day, 2004). Jesus is surrounded by lies and self-deception, and the war within himself strained his relationship with Whatsername, who grew tired of his instability and leaves Jesus and the City behind, closing her letter with “I can’t take this town/I’m leaving you tonight.”

The following track is the chart-topper “Wake Me Up When September Ends.” It would seem the obvious connection in this song is the 2001 terrorist attacks. However, Jesus is not mentioned and the track emphasizes healing after a loss. This loss could be Whatsername’s exit from Jesus’s life. The nostalgic character in this song could also be Jesus looking back on his life, family, and friends and remembering good times from his past. This memory tugs at his heart and he begins to realize that the city is not where he is supposed to be. This influences him in his decision to return home on the next track, “Homecoming.” The penultimate song on the album, “Homecoming” is another five-movement suite chronicling the salvation and eventual return of Jesus to his former suburbia. The song opens with Jesus working in an office job, wholly dissatisfied with life. On self-reflection, Jesus makes the final decision to go home. Jesus realizes that

he is incapable of changing the world and he no longer has the desire to try. He leaves the city behind and begins moving towards the safety of home, leaving the mess he made and his ruined self behind in the city.

At this point the album has come almost full circle. Much like real life, Jesus’s narrative does not neatly end. The listener never knows if Jesus made it home or if he chose another path. Essentially he drives off “into the sunset” and the audience is left to create their own conclusion. The final track on the album is entitled “Whatsername,” and it does not lend any finality to the ending of Jesus’ story. It does serve as a kind of distant-future epilogue, telling us that Jesus is still alive and that he still remembers his transformational journey well. During the chorus, Jesus contemplates how he “made a point to burn all of the photographs/she went away and then I took a different path/I remember the face but I can’t recall the name/and now I wonder how Whatsername has been” (Green Day, 2004).

Causal relationships are also important elements in a narrative analysis. There are several simple causal relations in the narrative, and they serve to advance the plot. Jesus is fed up with his broken home, so he flees his pain and drives to the city. The city is not what he thought it would be and he is lonely. Jesus is befriended by St. Jimmy, but when that excitement wears off, Jesus is lower than ever. The appearance of the rebel Whatsername saves Jesus from suicide. Yet, his shallow personality and inauthenticity drives his savior away, which causes him great pain. This painful awakening allows him to re-consider his life, accept his fate, and return home. These cause-and-effect scenarios drive the story toward its conclusion.

There are three main themes in this narrative. The first and most dominant is the powerful dichotomy between rage and love. This dichotomy is introduced on the second track of the album, when Jesus begins his autobiographical introduction. “I’m the son of rage and love/the Jesus of Suburbia.” Again on Track 5, Jesus reflects on his situation saying, “The rage and love, the story of my life/the Jesus of Suburbia is a lie.” Rage is the common element in Jesus’ rebellion against his broken life and society. Left without other options, leaving home seems the only beneficial avenue to pursue at this point in his life. The introductions of St. Jimmy and Whatsername illustrate the rage and love themes in two opposite characters. Lead singer

Armstrong spoke to this point, saying, “you can go with the blind rebellion of self-destruction, where Saint Jimmy is. But there’s a more love-driven side to that, which is following your beliefs and ethics. And that’s where Jesus of Suburbia really wants to go” (di Perna, 2012, p.132). St. Jimmy’s metaphorical suicide, occurring near the end of the album, is a sign that Jesus is progressing towards maturation and departing from his youthful rebellion. At this point, the listener may understand that St. Jimmy was a creation of Jesus’s imagination, and is actually Jesus himself, an alter-ego created to cope with his hopeless feelings.

The second theme is loss of innocence and the consequent journey towards maturity. While Jesus entered the city with enthusiasm and eagerness to fit in, a course of events causes him to realize that the rebellion he chose and his newfound freedom is actually destroying him. On “Holiday,” the album’s third track, Jesus enters the city on a rainy night and likens the sound of the pouring rain to an “Armageddon flame,” or a salvo of rocket fire. This is a sign of his eagerness and enthusiasm. By the end of the album, his vigor and energy has dissipated. “Here comes the rain again/falling from the stars/drenched in my pain again” Jesus says, after the pain of heartbreak and personal incongruity have left him wounded and broken. Jesus is thinking intentionally and deliberately now, growing up, and Jimmy’s metaphorical death symbolizes a movement towards newfound maturity.

The third theme is in the album’s anti-political agenda. Paralleling Jesus’ waxing and waning enthusiasm for rebellion and disobedience, the album begins on a harsh and brash tirade against established government, specifically the Bush Administration. The lyrics of “American Idiot” and “Holiday” challenge the president and his attempts to prolong the War on Terror. These songs also challenge political supporters and protestors who are not informed or intentional. As the album continues, the political agenda is less noticeable. It seems as open to interpretation as the conclusion to Jesus’s story but it can be argued that the message of *American Idiot* is that, as people mature, they begin to accept the idiocy of life and move on, as Jesus did by coming to terms with his boring job and life and his lost love. The anti-political barrage that opened this

album gives way to a softer and more personal tone, tying into the dominant theme of the album by the end. di Perna (2012), noted, “...while *American Idiot* begins in righteous political anger, it ends on a note of personal nostalgia for bygone youth and the reconciliation of rage and love. Like the Who’s *Tommy* and *Quadrophenia* before it, Armstrong’s rock opera ultimately seems to be about the maturation process” (p. 134). In this way, Jesus’s journey serves as a cautionary tale for those who leave home hoping to find meaning in political rebellion as things may not go as planned.

### NARRATIVE FUNCTION

The moral of this narrative is that everyone grows up, and that maturation is often a difficult and painful journey. This narrative presents society and its institutions as corrupt and oppressive and young rebels as having flaws that undermine productive change. For these rebels, society is seen as a constraint, presenting barriers and obstacles to self-actualization and happiness. Society is resistant to change because it is not one large institution, but an unwieldy combination of government, social conventions, and individual actions. While punk music strives to be both authentic and revolutionary, the blind rebellion that *American Idiot* examines could potentially do more to prohibit real change than enact it. Yet, there is hope for these young rebels. That hope is illustrated through the journey of Jesus toward his personal revelation and salvation.

The relationship between Green Day and the band’s audience, as constructed in this album, is one of identification. The Jesus of Suburbia could be anyone from anywhere so the story is for those who identify with the narrative. Fans of punk rock are often anti-society, anti-establishment, and opposed to social convention. Punk fans, commonly fueled by dissatisfaction and rebellion, are the primary target demographic of this album. This group is able to reconcile their lifestyles with Jesus’s lifestyle and may gain perspective through his journey. In the same way that Jesus of Suburbia matured, people of the world mature. The band evidences maturation as well by departing from a more classic punk sound. The story examines identification as *American Idiot* uses a narrative framework to transport listeners into the

world of Jesus of Suburbia and uses his journey as a model for those feeling like they have no options.

### NARRATIVE ASSESSMENT

Arguably, *American Idiot* achieves both narrative probability and narrative fidelity. Narrative probability speaks to the internal coherence and consistency of the narrative. Jesus of Suburbia's journey in *American Idiot* is entirely consistent. The situations he faces are realistic. The journey and the pitfalls of his trip are all reasonable and understandable given the situation. There is also narrative fidelity in the story, which speaks to the way the story "rings true" to the world as the audience knows it (Rowland, 2009). Jesus' journey parallels the life experiences of others who suffer pain and loss as they mature and become more self-aware. Desperate for purpose, people leave home in search of a cause. At times, this journey is worthwhile and,

at other times, the journey ends in disappointment, but with additional wisdom about life. *American Idiot* depicts situations that may be true.

While narrative criticism provides insight into the rhetorical power of *American Idiot*, to fully understand how the album's progressive story has managed to resonate so widely, we must consider the rhetoric of its musical elements as well. Music may or may not "ring true" for audiences familiar with particular genres. Narrative rationality can be understood as comparable to the aesthetic requirements for the music we prefer. A compelling text set to music that is uninteresting or off-putting could be perceived as less persuasive because the music was not granted emotional power by the listener. The success of *American Idiot* indicates that the music must have enforced the rhetorical force of the narrative. This invites the investigation of its musical form.

### ILLUSION OF LIFE ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

*American Idiot* sends a poignant message with its lyrics. That message is further enhanced by the use of dynamic music that creates a structure on which the lyrics can then take shape. Because music can be understood as a legitimate form of communication, rhetoric can take place through music (Langer, 1953; 1957). Music can add meaning to the lyrics in the same way that lyrics can enrich the music. Eyre (2007, para. 6) calls this union of text and music an "intricate dance in which the music expands the primary semantic function of words beyond the realm of their connotative and denotative meanings to intensify their message." The songwriter is able to stimulate the emotions and the subjective associations of the listener using the inherent qualities in words and language to enrich the psychological aspect of the text, achieving an emotional connection between words and music and creating greater overall meaning.

The Illusion of Life perspective posits that when taken together, music and lyrics offer messages comprised of both conceptual and emotional content (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2014). Through intensity release patterns and congruity, stemming from the calculated

relationships between virtual time and experience, persuasive arguments take place that challenge or reinforce common beliefs and behaviors. Sellnow and Sellnow argue that "didactic music communicates as an aesthetic symbol by creating an illusion of life for listeners through the dynamic interaction between virtual experience (lyrics) and virtual time (music)" (2001, p. 399). The specific interaction between the virtual elements of experience and time create congruence or incongruence, through which rhetorical meaning can be created and expressed.

Virtual experience, which deals with the lyrics of the artifact, can be either a poetic or a dramatic illusion (Chuang & Hart, 2008). Poetic illusions look back at the virtual past. Suspense is not a factor in these illusions and therefore they represent a more relaxed human emotion or release pattern. Dramatic illusions look into the virtual future. The tension of the unknown is present, and this suspense is represented by an intensity pattern. Within each illusion, either a comic rhythm or tragic rhythm is emphasized. Comic rhythm is "a positive outlook, a determined process" (Sellnow &

Sellnow, 2001, p. 401). This rhythm is characterized by positivity and self-preservation, and corresponds with intensity patterns in human emotion. Tragic rhythm lies in opposition to comic rhythm, and is characterized by pessimism and conflict. “Tragic rhythm . . . is a fulfillment, and its form is often closed and final. The protagonist is aware of his or her fate and must discover a way to deal with it” (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001, p. 401). The use of tragic rhythm represents release patterns in human feeling (Chuang & Hart, 2008). Virtual time deals with the music of the artifact. The same intensity and release patterns that are present in lyrics exist within the harmony, melody, rhythm, and instrumentation of the musical score. Emotional meaning is created through these musical choices, wherein “intensities symbolize instability, and releases symbolize resolution” (Chuang & Hart, 2008).

The concept of congruity is also central to the Illusion of Life perspective. Sellnow and Sellnow explain that “music’s rhetorical significance lies in the degree of congruity or incongruity that exists between virtual experience (lyrics) and virtual time (music)” (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001, p. 395). When the music and lyrics work together to make an argument, this is known as congruity. The opposite occurs when the music and lyrics send contradicting messages.

Rage and Love are central themes in *American Idiot*. Rage can be understood as an intensity pattern and love as an intricate combination of intensity and release. Both share the stage in Jesus’ story, influencing his decisions and ultimately his self-worth. The band’s use of congruity between music and lyrics throughout the album is powerful and both methods generate meaning for Jesus and for the listener.

Opening the album in a frenzied rush of political energy and controversy. The title track “American Idiot” sets a congruent tone for the album, one of intensity. The lyrics, boldly declaring anti-governmental political sentimentality, go hand-in-hand with the high-tempo drums and frenetically-paced guitar riffs, which reach a rapid 186 beats per minute (BPM). The lyrics emphasize a dramatic illusion, a forward-looking critique of the present and future practices and policies of the nation. The comic rhythm is exemplified with a self-preservation mentality, as the singer proclaims his avoidance

of American idiocy and the decline of the nation. The song lacks a bridge, a musical convention that is often intended to serve as a break or change of pace. The song even mentions a mounting tension in the chorus: “Welcome to a new kind of tension/all across the alienation/where everything isn’t meant to be okay” (Green Day, 2004). While this tone permeates through most of the album, with most songs exhibiting congruence between music and lyrics, the band does add incongruity throughout the album, both softening and intensifying the message.

The following track, “Jesus of Suburbia,” begins Movement I with an incongruity: musical intensity and lyrical release patterns. Chuang and Hart (2008) speculate that this choice was made so as to distract audiences from the controversial lyrics involving alcohol, drug use, and the profaning of religious artifacts. This is a prime example of the way incongruity can be used not only to create a message, but also act rhetorically even in the communication process between the listener and the artifact.

The marriage of congruity and intensity patterns continues throughout much of the album. The songs “Holiday” and “St. Jimmy” occupy the same rhetorical space as “American Idiot,” exhibiting both dramatic illusion and comic rhythm while promoting a similar agenda and worldview. On “Holiday,” Jesus is claiming independence from the system, singing “I beg to dream and differ from the hollow lies/this is the dawning of the rest of our lives” (Green Day, 2004). St. Jimmy is lyrically similar, and both songs have a brisk, driving tempo near 140 BPM.

Incongruity is also present on this album. “Boulevard of Broken Dreams” and “We are the Waiting” tell the story of Jesus entering the city and finding that it is much less appealing and much lonelier than he expected. The lyrics focus on his present plight and the uncertainty of his future there: “Sometimes I wish someone out there will find me/until then I walk alone,” Jesus claims (Green Day, 2004). As he becomes more familiar with the city, Jesus finds people that are like him and he asks, “Are we the waiting unknown?” In both instances there is uncertainty faced in the lyrics (dramatic illusion) and a contemplative musical character and slow pace (tragic tempo). This incongruity creates a feeling of helplessness in Jesus’ situation and creates an opportunity for the listener

to connect further with the protagonist. While the lyrics never clearly state that Jesus is lacking direction, Green Day's use of musical incongruity adds more gravity to the protagonist's situation.

Congruent release patterns also occur in the album. The music and lyrics of "Wake Me Up When September Ends" are a good example of this pattern. The lyrics of this song rely heavily on allusions to things that have gone on in the past, and the effect those past events have on Jesus's current situation. This poetic illusion and tragic rhythm draw the listener back into the past. The slow tempo and descending chord progression on the song's music create a release pattern in the music as well, creating a congruity between the music and lyrics. A congruent pattern of release is also present on "Whatsername," the album's epilogue. Retrospective lyrics and references to the protagonist's memories complement the slow, nostalgic musical tone. The concept of finality construed through this congruent release adds closure to both the narrative and the actual music of the album.

## DISCUSSION

This paper presented a rhetorical criticism of Green Day's *American Idiot* album. This analysis was conducted from two perspectives. First, a narrative analysis was used to illustrate the rhetorical significance of the album's predominant story. Then, an Illusion of Life analysis was conducted, which explores how the music of *American Idiot* shaped and enhanced the audience's reception of the message. Klein explains musical narrative as "an emplotment of expressive states rather than a sequence of actors and their actions," (2004, p. 23). As narrative emplots the thoughts and actions of actors, music emplots emotional states. The Illusion of Life perspective identifies various elements that composers and songwriters can use to evoke thoughts and emotions. Additionally, the Illusion of Life considers lyrics, relating them to the broad narrative and dramatic categories of tragedy and comedy. While comic and tragic patterns are not part of the standard narrative analysis, they are common narrative categories.

On a more basic level, an analysis of the two major tensions in this album provide a basis for the intensity and release patterns in the narrative. The dyad of rage and love exemplifies the intensity/release dyad. Rage is primarily seen throughout the album as the blind rebellion of the protagonist, stemming from his dissatisfaction with all things suburban and related to his broken home. This rage is enacted as political unrest and societal rebellion. Tracks illustrating or characterizing this rebellion typically exhibit congruent intensity patterns. As the album progresses, a shift occurs, and congruent tracks become more release-oriented songs exemplifying the death of Jesus's old self and the new, mature self gaining control. His consequent introspection and growth lead him to a newfound self-worth, which could be described as love of self and a more positive life outlook. Jesus's final reconciliation of rage and love brings him freedom from the city and his broken relationships. This informed the release patterns that dominate the congruent conclusion of the album.

This paper has shown that narrative analysis and the Illusion of Life approach complement one another and illustrate the complex and meaningful relationships between narrative and music.

This combination of critical approaches is especially appropriate for artifacts such as music albums, particularly those with an overarching story or a dominant message. Contemporary music combines the two most central components of these analyses: lyrics and music. "Concept albums" or "rock operas" add a third component, the central narrative. The story and accompanying messages are not told exclusively through either music or lyrics, but are expressed through an intricate combination of the two, woven together to create deeper meaning than either could separately create. Critics should consider utilizing these two approaches together when analyzing musical narratives to assist in uncovering the rhetorical motivations and significance of lyrical and musical interplay.

There are many benefits to conducting narrative and Illusion of Life analyses in tandem. Narrative criticism is an evaluation of the story focused on how credible, believable, and compelling it is. The Illusion of Life perspective offers meaningful interpretations of musical and lyrical combination. Music may or may not “ring true” aesthetically, influencing the subjective perception of the listener. Taken together, both perspectives evaluate effective methods of persuasion. Lyrics and music have their own persuasive power; however, incongruity and different intensity release patterns add significant meaning to an overarching narrative, especially one that so deliberately identifies with a certain group or people.

Some of the most compelling stories told throughout history follow a young person on a journey to adulthood and maturity. The genre of *bildungsroman* literature is devoted to coming-of-age stories and the transformation of youth to adulthood (Bakhtin, 1986). Gearing *American Idiot*

to a punk rock audience, Green Day conveyed a timeless message to a new generation in a unique and poignant form, the rock opera. The addition of music to narrative, in the case of *American Idiot* specifically, both deepens the meaning of the story and presents this important tale to an audience that may not connect with an inspiring literary tale. Though *American Idiot* may not be the most eloquent articulation of what it means to be a young person finding their way in the world, the album is poignant, telling the important story of being true to self and leaving inauthenticity behind in favor of maturity and acceptance. The combination of persuasive lyrical and musical techniques adds emotional meaning to *American Idiot*. The album is a musical journey that captures the complicated rhetorical situation of a broken suburban youth coming of age in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through the use of lyrical and musical persuasiveness, Green Day left their mark on musical history with their rock opera, *American Idiot*. ■

## REFERENCES ■■■■

- BLUM, J. (2014). United states of rage and love: Green Day—'Holiday.' *PopMatters*. Retrieved from <http://www.popmatters.com/post/185768-united-states-of-rage-and-love-green-day-holiday/>
- CHUANG, L. M., & HART, J. P. (2008). Suburban American punks and the musical rhetoric of Green Day's "Jesus of Suburbia". *Communication Studies*, 59, 183-201.
- "Critic reviews for American Idiot". *Metacritic*. Retrieved from <http://www.metacritic.com/music/american-idiot/critic-reviews>
- DI PERNA, A. (2012). *Green Day: The ultimate unauthorized history*. Minneapolis, MN: Voyager.
- ERLWINE, S. T. (2004). *American Idiot*: Overview. *AllMusic*. Retrieved from <http://www.allmusic.com/album/american-idiot-mw0000387172>
- EYRE, L. (2007). The marriage of music and narrative: Explorations in art, therapy, and research. *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*, 7.
- FISHER, W. R. (1984). Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument. *Communication Monographs*, 51, 1-22.
- FISHER, W. R. (1985). The narrative paradigm: An elaboration. *Communication Monographs*, 52, 347-367.
- Fisher, W. R. (1989). Clarifying the narrative paradigm. *Communications Monograph*, 56, 55-58.
- GREEN DAY. (2004). *American Idiot*. [CD]. Hollywood, CA: Reprise.
- Klein, M. (2004). Chopin's Fourth Ballade as musical narrative. *Music Theory Spectrum—the Journal of the Society for Music Theory*, 26(1), 23-55
- LANGER, S. (1953). *Feeling and form*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- LANGER, S. (1957). *Philosophy in a new key* (3rd ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- O'NEIL, T. (2004). Green Day: American Idiot. *PopMatters*. Retrieved from <http://www.popmatters.com/review/greenday-american/>
- PAYNE, T. (2014). "Green Day's 'American Idiot' turns ten: Classic track-by-track album review." *Billboard*. Retrieved from <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/6258971/green-days-american-idiot-turns-10-classic-track-by-track-album-review>
- RIAA: Searchable database. *RIAA: Representing music*. Retrieved from <http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php?artist=%22Green+Day%22>
- ROWLAND, R. (2009). The narrative perspective. In J.A. Kuypers (Ed.), *Rhetorical criticism: Perspectives in action* (p. 117-142). Lanham, MD: Lexington.
- SELLNOW, D. (2014). *The rhetorical power of popular culture: Considering mediated texts*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- SELLNOW, D. & SELLNOW, T.L. (2001). "The "Illusion of Life" rhetorical perspective: an integrated approach to the study of music as communication" *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. 18, 395-415.
- SPITZ, M. (2006). *Nobody likes you: Inside the turbulent life, times, and music of Green Day*. New York: Hyperion.

**Celeste Zatarain-Alsina**

Denison University  
Delta Upsilon Chapter



# Redefining *Latinidad:*

EXPERIENCES OF SPANISH NON-FLUENT  
LATINOS IN THE UNITED STATES



Immigration has reshaped modern day America. The influx of immigrants to the United States has steadily increased since the Immigration Act of 1965, which opened the border. In 2011, immigration reached an all-time high of 40.4 million (Pew Research Center, 2013). About half of this population is made up of the arrival of immigrants from Latin America (Pew Research Center, 2013, p. 1). Over the years, the Latino population has grown not only from the influx across the border, but from the generations of Latinos being raised in the United States. Currently Latinos make up the largest minority population, accounting for 17% of the United States population (United States Department of Commerce, 2014). Latino immigrants bring their families, culture, and language with them, but not all of these individuals pass traditions onto to their offspring. The Spanish language is one key example.

In 2012, the United States Census found that 26.1% of Latinos ages five and older did not speak Spanish in the home (United States Department of Commerce, 2014). This includes children who are young immigrants to the United States as well as first and second generation Americans. Spanish is known as the dominant Latino language but Latinos in the United States range in their knowledge about and fluency of the language. This study sought to understand how Latinos who are not fluent in Spanish accommodate their language barrier by viewing the issue through the lens of Communication Accommodation Theory and Identity Negotiation Theory.

Growing up, I witnessed firsthand the difficulty of not speaking Spanish but also belonging to the Latino community. In my home, there was a differences in how my brother and I were encouraged to speak Spanish and the reception and perception of our speaking Spanish. I was taught being bilingual was important to retain culture, while the same value was not instilled in my brother, who is five years

older. When my family went to community events or visited family in our home country, where Spanish is spoken, it was apparent that there were differences between how my brother and I interacted with others. My brother felt uncomfortable with his accent when speaking Spanish and hesitated in his interactions. Meanwhile, I was comfortable and at ease when interacting in Spanish.

In my time as a college student, the topic of Spanish language fluency presented repeatedly in interactions with other students, conversations in the classroom, and discussions in the multicultural Latino campus organization. Many peers expressed a frustration with the assumption that if someone is Latino they must speak Spanish. They also have felt a pressure to justify their lack of fluency in the language. Some of these students shared that they had attempted to learn the Spanish language through courses in high school and college. These students expressed that they received skeptical looks from teachers and students when they appeared to be a Latino/a but were not fluent in the language associated with Latinos.

Reflecting the demographics of the United States, the university's largest minority population is Latino or Hispanic. Latino and Hispanic students currently make up 8.9% of the population, a percentage that is steadily on the rise. By 2060, it is projected that one in three Americans will be Hispanic or Latino and that as early as 2018 this number might be reflected in the population of children in the United States (Yen, 2012). This change in demographics will redefine not only what it means to be an American, but also what it means to be a Latino or Hispanic. As the population of the University begins to mirror that of the nation, it is in the university community's best interest to identify how language shapes the Latino identity, whether language can be used as a classification system, and what classifications characterize the shifting identity of Latinos.

Three themes have been identified in the literature about this topic. First, I discuss the perception of Latinos and the Spanish language. Second, I explore the tension Latinos face between assimilating and remaining authentically Latino. Lastly, I consider the emergence of a new Latino identity in the United States.

### **PERCEPTIONS OF LATINOS AND SPANISH LANGUAGE**

In the United States the Latino community is viewed as “one unitary group regardless of nationality, race, and class” (Avila-Saveera, 2011, p. 137). Previous research has explored the issue of grouping Latinos into one stereotype. In the United States, Latinos of different national and cultural backgrounds are often thought to fit a specific description. A Latino pan-ethnicity exists to generalize national identities based on Spanish fluency and “Ibero-Latin American heritage” (Correa, 2010, p. 429). While there are Latino representatives of different languages, cultures, and nationalities, there is a specific stereotypes attributed to the identity of Latinos.

Research has explored how Latinos are perceived in American society. Specifically, research found that stereotypes of Latinos are not only maintained and spread by non-Latinos, but are held by Latinos themselves. Cultural stereotypes are not brushed aside but instead are internalized by Latinos, which follows the notion that “people might apply stereotypes to perceive and depict their own community, especially if they are members of a minority group” (Correa, 2010, p. 437). Various studies explore how language and identity are perceived in the Latino community. In a critical study of five television corporations, Piñón and Rojas (2011) found there is a widespread portrayal in American society of Latinos being “the foreign other or the Spanish-speaking other” (p. 132). Therefore the impression is that Latinos are different, difficult to communicate with, and do not belong. Carter (2014) explored this phenomenon in a middle school in North Carolina and found that there was a “Latino Threat Narrative,” which meant that because of immigration, demography, language, and ethnicity, Latinos were deemed a risk to the United States society (p. 212). These studies explore how American society perceives Latinos, and how these identifiers can serve to dehumanize and marginalize those that are stereotyped (Carter, 2014). This collectivist picture

of Latinos indicates the need for studies on Latino subgroups that have been marginalized, such as English monolingual Latinos, a people often unrecognized because of the assumption that “real” Latinos speak Spanish (Piñón & Rojas, 2011). In the past, language has served as a unifying characteristic in the Latino community; however, as more generations of Latinos establish themselves in the United States there is a need to explore the characteristics that tie the Latino community together.

### **TENSION BETWEEN ASSIMILATION AND SEPARATION**

Because the Latino community is a collective of diverse people, language serves as a commonality throughout the identity group and not speaking the language can be a reason for group exclusion. Spanish language fluency is just one of many criteria for being authentically Latino. Language affords the opportunity to communicate with the in-group and showcase one’s Latino authenticity while those who do not speak Spanish are delegitimized (Shenk, 2007). Avila-Saveera (2010) adds that language as a construct might hold more power in creating a sense of collectivity than economic and political motivations. For example, individuals may belong to different political parties, but still feel connected to one another because they speak the same language. Hence, language is weighed as heavily important in the Latino community and has become a measure for Latino purity.

A competition is noted within the Latino community of who upholds and represents Latino tradition best. In a study that observed the conversations between a friend-group of Mexican Americans, Shenk (2007) draws a connection between authenticity and purity in relation to the Latino identity. The discourse of the friend-group shows that, inside the friend groups, the students aim to prove their Latino heritage. As these students are far from their nation of origin, importance is placed on conserving the language and culture of their country. In these conversations, authenticity was based on three specifications: “purity of bloodline, purity of nationality, and Spanish linguistic fluency” (Shenk, 2007, p. 195). These specifications are negotiated during typical conversations and it was difficult to identify one person who had all three specifications. Through their conversations it was evident that “The

speakers agree upon, invoke, and explicitly mobilize widespread socio-historical ideologies of purism” (Shenk, 2007, p. 196). Hence attitudes of purity within the Latino community were validated through the students’ group conversations.

Along with the social pressures to preserve the Spanish language there are also demands to let go of the language. The reality is that attrition of Spanish in second and third generation Latinos is on a decline (Carter, 2014). This could be due to a linguistic dilemma discussed in a study by Avila-Saveera (2010) that focused on the television show, *Ugly Betty*. This study demonstrated that United States Latinos were faced with choosing between embracing the “ethnic pride” that is found with having Spanish fluency or taking up “the social power that is embedded in the use of English” (Avila-Saveera, 2010, p. 145). Carter (2014) adds to this argument as he reflects on a particular middle school student, Montana, who is Guatemalan but does not speak Spanish. Montana expresses that she feels like an outcast from her school’s Latino community because she does not speak Spanish. She even trying to validate her Latino identity by saying she just did not understand the “big words” in Spanish. Because Montana struggled with connecting to the Latino community she found herself identifying more with African-American students and adopting their dialect.

Montana’s story demonstrates the difficulty of navigating between multiple cultures and languages. Carter (2014) goes on to explain that, for Latinos, “Spanish becomes the discursive ground on which polarized identities are articulated. ‘Authentic’ Latinos speak Spanish, while ‘authentic’ non-Latinos do not; ipso facto, Latino crossers are ‘inauthentic’ by virtue of their English monolingualism” (Carter, 2014, p. 232). This study illustrates the tension monolingual Latinos face in desiring to be “authentically” Latino but also to fit into western culture and master the English language. There is a need for research on how language serves as an authenticating measure within the Latino culture. Studies might focus on the experience of individuals, such as Montana, who are marginalized because they lack Spanish fluency and find other non-Latino groups to assimilate into.

## NEW LATINO IDENTITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION

Chavez (2013) and Correa (2010) recognized the growing presence of Latinos in the United States and the development of a new Latino identity. This new identity is due to more Latinos identifying themselves as multiethnic. Correa (2010) examined an English newspaper and its Spanish counterpart to find how Latina women are represented and whether the publication’s identification with Latinos made a difference in how the Spanish newspaper depicted Latinas. The study states that “Latinos are the hottest new market and those who target them will not regret it,” which emphasizes the recognition of Latinos as influential consumers in the nation (Correa, 2010, p. 438). Chavez (2013) also stresses the importance of Latinos to media and society in a study of articles, press releases, and promotional advertisements of the television network mun2. In this study, Chavez (2013) found that media acknowledges the biculturality of Latinos in the United States and the many subcultures within the Latino identity. This research also emphasizes the Latino as a consumer and contributor to the United States by saying “the new Latino, [is] an acculturated consumer-citizen who navigates easily between two worlds” (Chavez, 2013, p. 11). Thus, Chavez highlights that Latinos of today represent the perspective of someone who is traversing between Hispanic and American culture.

Previous research highlights how bicultural individuals, and more specifically Latinos in the United States, are in a position of teetering between two cultural worlds due to their hyphenated identity status (Shenk, 2007; Avila-Saveera, 2011; Chavez, 2013; Toomey, Dorjee & Ting-Toomey, 2013). Toomey, Dorjee, and Ting-Toomey (2013) explored communication accommodation and identity negotiation relative to the bicultural identity of Asian-Caucasian individuals. Participants having a double-swing identity, where they did not feel split between their two identities, but instead felt they were able to enter in and out of both (Toomey, Dorjee, & Ting-Toomey, 2013, p. 129). There was recognition of a “double jeopardy,” where participants reported not

being mainstream enough to blend in with their White peers, but might not completely fit in with their Asian peers because of a language barrier (Toomey, Dorjee, & Ting-Toomey, 2013). This study demonstrates a need to explore how language non-fluency can automatically place some individuals in out-groups.

The bi-cultural nature of Latinos in the United States has been explored as well (Shenk, 2007; Avila-Saveera, 2011; Chavez, 2013). Avila-Saveera's 2011 study explains how *Ugly Betty* showcases the experiences of English speaking Latinos in the United States. She says these individuals encounter "A tension between ethnic 'otherness' and cultural assimilation that symbolizes current negotiations of individual and collective identities among young, English-speaking Latinos" (Avila-Saveera, 2011, p. 134). The characters in *Ugly Betty* are representative of a new generation of Americans who are working to

preserve traditions and learn new ones. The program highlights a Mexican-American family in New York City. Shenk (2007) speaks specifically of Mexican-Americans explaining, "People who have hyphenated American identities (e.g. Mexican-American) must negotiate at least two ideologically polarized reference groups" (p. 200). Because Mexican-Americans are choosing to identify with both Mexican and American cultures, the balance between the two forms their identity. Chavez (2013) discusses how this hyphenated identity, of Latinos in general, has made it difficult to generalize an ever-changing Latino population. Chavez (2013, p. 11) states, "Latinas are a heterogeneous group with different levels of assimilation in the USA, dissimilar cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and diverse physical builds." Hence the choices Latinos make in choosing how and whether to how they assimilate differ from person to person.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

*Latinidad* is defined by Piñón and Rojas (2011, p. 131) as an "analytic concept functioning as an identity category" for people of Latin-American and Caribbean decent living in the United States. *Latinidad* is constructed through institutional discourses in places such as the government and media (Piñón & Rojas, 2011). Research distinguishes between Hispanidad and Latinidad. Hispanidad is a term to encompass all native Spanish speakers and Latinidad is a term that signifies people of Latin American origin in the United States (Avila-Saveera, 2010, p. 137). Studies highlight a rise in bilingual and bicultural networks, which create a greater awareness of "hyphenated identities and a long

forgotten and excluded hybrid/border culture" (Piñón & Rojas, 2011, p. 140). Rather than represent the Latino as someone who is foreign, Spanish monolingual networks like *mun2* are affirming a middle ground and offering alternative discourses about Latinidad (Piñón & Rojas, 2011). Guided by these understandings, I posed two research questions for study.

RQ1: How have Latinos who are non-fluent in Spanish been publicly perceived for their lack of fluency in the Spanish language?

RQ2: How do Latinos who are non-fluent in Spanish experience *Latinidad*?

## METHODOLOGY ■■■■

This research focuses on Latinos living in the United States who are non-fluent in Spanish. Fluency is defined by four factors: ability to talk at length without pauses, mastery of the semantic and syntactic resources of the language, verbal ease in diverse contexts, and capacity to be creative and imaginative with language (Fillmore, 1979, p. 92–93). In this study, some participants could comprehend Spanish variations but were unable to write or speak the language well. Other participants were unable to comprehend or communicate in Spanish at all.

### RESEARCH PARADIGMS

Qualitative methods allow for the researcher to learn from participants' experience and permit participants to organically discuss how they make sense of complex concepts and experiences (Moreman, 2011; Halualani, 2010). The participants answered questions and were asked follow-up and clarifying questions (Halualani, 2010, p. 309). Due to the personal nature of the stories connected to non-fluency, respondents answered questions in a one-on-one, private environment.

An interpretive analysis was used to identify common themes in the interviews. Zhang and Wildemuth (2005) explains that this method of analysis is frequently used when considering in-depth interviews. Following the examples provided by Zhang and Wildemuth (2005), themes arose naturally with descriptions for each theme evidence from the data.

### PARTICIPANTS

In-depth interviews were conducted with ten students who attended a midwestern liberal arts college and identify as both Latino/a and non-fluent in Spanish. Interviewees consisted of five seniors, two juniors, two sophomores, and one freshman. Participants included five males and six females and ranged from mixed Latino heritage (where one parent identified as Latino) to full Latino heritage (where both parents identified as Latino). Participants represented four states, including Texas, Massachusetts, Illinois, and Ohio.

A snowball sampling was used to recruit participants to the study. Participants were asked for recommendations of other participants who might identify as Latino and non-fluent in Spanish. This is a good sample method to use when there are hidden samples that are difficult to access. As the Latino

population at the university is 8.9%; therefore, the percentage of students who identify as non-fluent in Spanish is very small. In addition to this, there is not a particular group on campus that these students are involved with. Also, language and Latino identity do not always physically manifest. Thus, snowball sampling makes it possible to identify individuals who fit the criteria for this study.

### PROTOCOL

Participants were asked to provide informed consent prior to participating in the interviews. Interviews were audio recorded and notes were taken during the interviews. Pseudonyms were used to ensure participants' confidentiality. The author conducted three initial interviews as a pilot study, which began with 30 questions ranging from demographic to experiential questions. Experiential questions explored cultural practices, community interactions, and identification. The final interview questions were created using Communication Accommodation Theory and Identity Negotiation Theory as theoretical frameworks. Communication Accommodation Theory guided the interest in how participants made sense of their non-fluency in Spanish and whether they sought to learn the language. Identity Negotiation Theory helped uncover how participants negotiated their identity within different contexts, and the effect Spanish non-fluency had on shaping their identities.

In conducting the initial interviews, suppositions made in creating the interview questions were taken into account. While interviewing Maureen, a senior who identifies as having Puerto Rican and European ancestry, she pointed out her hesitancy in identifying as a Latina because she felt to identify as such meant that she was connected to activism in the Latino community. This comment motivated the addition of the question, "how would you identify yourself in terms of race/ethnicity in the United States?" This enabled participants to choose the category they preferred. Leila, a student who identifies as having Italian and Mexican ancestry, noted towards the middle of her interview that in addition to understanding Spanish, she was exposed to Italian. Her experience motivated the addition of the question: "Do you have exposure to any other

languages?” In interviewing Elizabeth, a junior who identifies as half White and half Mexican, I recognized that participants’ family members Spanish fluency might vary, which resulted in the addition of the question, “Do you have siblings?” as well as the follow up question, “If yes, what is your siblings’ fluency in Spanish?” These additional questions combined for a total of 33 interview questions.

Interviews ranged from 30–45 minutes in length and were conducted in classrooms that were reserved beforehand. The demographic questions served as

an introduction to the interview before going into narrative questions. Students detailed their experiences in conversational interviews. The initial three pilot interviews showed emerging themes. The three students had taken Spanish in college and felt a need to acquire the language. There were also overlapping experiences with reports of being feeling inadequate as a Latino for not knowing the language. Students’ definitions of what it means to be Latino demonstrated commonalities, attributing *Latinidad* to ancestry and cultural tradition.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF LATINOS WHO ARE NON-FLUENT IN SPANISH

*Interacting with Two Worlds.* Latino students recognized the linguistic complexity of United States Latinos that results in students having difficulty finding a place of belonging. Students had difficulty finding which community they belonged to, thus making them representatives of the “fish out of water” metaphor offered by Avila-Saavedra (2010). Participant non-fluency made it difficult to interact with those from the Latino community; yet, they still felt separate from the typical English-speaking American students. Participants, like Alicia, asked themselves, “Where do I fit in?” Having felt like an outcast, Leticia verified this sentiment describing that no matter where she was she felt that she “Didn’t really belong.” Leticia sensed that she was a “White girl” to Latinos and that she “popped out” when she was with White people, contradicting Chavez’s (2011) claim that the new Latino “navigates easily between two worlds” (Chavez, 2011, p. 11). Students shared the sentiment that they are dissimilar to those in their associated communities.

Participants expressed that despite being American, they often felt a need to prove their heritage to others. Marcos explained a tension he experienced with his family, “They think of me as Salvadorian and I don’t think of myself as [only Salvadorian].” Marcos considers himself more American than Salvadorian because he grew up in the United States, practicing American traditions. He described feeling pressured

by his family to identify more with his Salvadorian heritage and, therefore, he found he struggled to prove his Americanism to others. Alicia echoed Marcos’ sentiment, explaining that she felt a need to demonstrate her Americanism, as she is often perceived as a foreigner. Chavez (2011) points out problem of having “Latino” and “American” as two mutually exclusive categories in the United States, and these participants represent an intersection of the two nationalities. Similar to Betty character in the program *Ugly Betty*, a television sitcom, which follows the experiences of a young Mexican-American woman in Queens, New York, participants represented the current dilemma faced by the United States “Betty is a fish out of water because her Latino background makes her an outsider in mainstream Anglo society but also because she is too ‘Americanized’ to function properly in her traditional world” (Avila-Saavedra, 2010, p. 143). Navigating between two ethnic groups is more complex than previously assumed.

*Non-Fluency in the Classroom.* Eight of the 10 students took Spanish courses as a way to reclaim their culture, but identified aspects of their Spanish learning experience that delegitimized them as Latinos. Students expressed having taken steps to make up for their Spanish non-fluency by enrolling in Spanish courses or taking on a Spanish minor at the university. Alicia explained her motivation for taking on a Spanish minor, “I have family members who don’t speak Spanish and I want to do this for them.”

Maureen, who also has a Spanish minor, said, “I do think that [Spanish non-fluency] hindered me in my communication, and that’s why one of my goals is to go to a Spanish speaking country to be immersed.” Therefore, participants were motivated to study Spanish because they noted a strain in communication with Spanish speakers in their communities.

Students who grew up exposed to the language expressed a confidence in the classroom because their accent was not as poor as others. Those students who had little to no exposure to Spanish in the home expressed moments of discomfort in the classroom. Maureen, Leticia, Justin, and Alicia described having to explain their non-fluency to their teachers in a one-on-one setting. When their teachers saw their Latino last name, the teachers made the assumption that these students might have a higher level of Spanish fluency than other students. Educators failed to recognize the diversity of the Latino speech community, “who are bilingual, multilingual, monolingual in Spanish, monolingual in English, and all points in between” (Shenk, 2007, p. 200). Leila said that learning languages was not an area of strength for her and that despite having a sincere desire to learn Spanish she failed a Spanish course in high school. Her teacher’s response to her faltering grades was to compare her to a White student in the class who was mastering the course work, “You’re not trying, if Sherry can do it you can do it, I know you can do it. You’re not trying.” Because Leila is Latina, her teacher’s expectations of her were higher than what Leila was capable of as a Spanish student. Maureen also described feeling inadequate in the classroom when taking upper-level courses in which there were more and more students who identified as fluent. When conversations in her courses are more conversational, “I feel left out of the conversation, I understand words here and there, but especially when they use slang or cultural references, I laugh but I have no clue what they are.” Thus, although students have found Spanish courses to be helpful in expanding their cultural and linguistic Spanish knowledge, there are areas in which students felt singled out due to higher expectations in spoken language and comprehension.

#### *Spanish Non-Fluency as a Point of Scrutiny.*

Participants shed light on the intricacies of a diverse Latino population. Due to variety in the ethnic group,

there are systems of authentication and hierarchies in identification (Shenk, 2007). The responses participants received from community members, regarding Spanish non-fluency, demonstrated classification within the group. Participants experienced a range of responses to their lack of Spanish fluency. Most experienced reactions of surprise and questions about their cultural identity. Leticia, a second generation Puerto Rican, described individuals’ first response to her non-fluency as being shocked and confused. She stated that she had received questions such as “What’s wrong with you?” Marcos, a first generation Salvadorian, said that he could sense disapproval by the facial features of those with whom he interacted. Logan said that he is often asked, “How do you communicate with your family?” Many participants had grandparents who do not speak English. These participants sensed they were considered inferior to other Latinos who could communicate in Spanish.

A number of participants experienced others questioning their Latino and national identity. Alicia, a fourth generation Mexican student stated, “I’m delegitimized as Hispanic, or a Mexican, or a Latina because I don’t speak the language.” Most students expressed feeling that others rejected the “realness” of their *Latinidad* due to their lack of fluency. Alicia went on to share that some of her friends felt they had to acclimate her to Latino traditions when they found that she was not fluent, “They feel like they have to teach me or show me certain things when I already know them.” Participants experienced moments in which others considered them to be an ethnicity other than Latino, and their Spanish non-fluency was viewed as a sign of not being Latino.

Communication was strained with family and community members due to participants’ lack of fluency. Participants described difficulties when performing tasks in their neighborhood, such as ordering food and visiting the salon. In these situations, participants were faced with the realization that they could not communicate their needs due to a language barrier. A number of participants experienced instances of frustration with their family. Maureen and Leticia shared that individuals expressed disappointment in their parents for not having taught their children Spanish. Students voiced a desire to communicate with family members who only spoke Spanish. Maureen

stated “It frustrates me too when I can’t communicate with my great grandmother.” There are times in which participants feel left out of conversations with family and friends because they are unable to understand or contribute to the interaction.

Participants expressed that when others discovered they were not fluent in Spanish, they were categorized as being outside of the Latino identity group. Participants of mixed heritage were often categorized as non-Latino. In other cases, interviewees were identified as solely American or in the words of Alicia, “White-Washed” or “Gringa.” Comments from community members reflected the ideological constructs of “purity of bloodline, purity of nationality, and Spanish linguistic fluency” that Shenk (2007, p. 195) points to as authenticators of the Latino identity. Although some students identified with one or two of Shenk’s constructs, their identities did not meet all three qualifications, thus making participants more vulnerable to inquiries about their *Latinidad*.

Participants used the criteria of *Latinidad* to evaluate their identification as a Latino/a (Shenk, 2007). The less authenticators the interviewee possessed, the more likely they were to struggle with their Latino identity. These negative self-evaluations indicate that United States Latino communities are being negatively affected by generalizations of the Latino community (Shenk, 2007; Carter, 2014). Participants detailed instances in which they delegitimized their own identification with Latino culture due to their lack of Spanish fluency. Leticia expressed feeling guilty for not being fluent in a language she is “supposed to know” and recognizing that other Latinos “speak the language that I should be able to speak.” Her comments demonstrate feelings of shame when individuals speak to her in Spanish and she is unable to understand. Leticia served on the executive board of the Latino organization on campus and she often questioned her capabilities in the position because of her lack of Spanish fluency. She stated, “There were times when I felt I shouldn’t be president, I don’t speak Spanish- I’m fake.” The doubt Leticia felt

in her leadership role within the Latino community on campus speaks to her questioning the authenticity of her *Latinidad*.

Students recognized a difference between their home life and that of students who were raised speaking Spanish. Leila, who is of Mexican and Italian heritage, said “I didn’t get firsthand exposure [to the Latino culture] from my parents. I got it through secondhand exposure through friends and community.” Leila’s “secondhand exposure” made her feel that she was lacking in her knowledge of the Latino culture. When around other Latinas, Leila felt a need to prove that she was knowledgeable about the culture. Jessica, who identifies as European-American and a quarter Puerto Rican, said she did not feel that other Latinos were deeming her inauthentic. Instead, she felt inadequate through personal realizations she experienced while spending time with Latinos who strongly identified with the Spanish language and their Latino heritage. Jessica recognized differences between her upbringing and the upbringing of other Latinos. She stated, “I so strongly throughout my life wanted to identify with being Puerto Rican, but it wasn’t really enough because if I wasn’t getting the same traditions and culture and language in my household, it didn’t really feel the same as [how] they grew up.” In her interactions with friends, Jessica noted a difference between her household and her friends’ homes. She sensed that the distinction in the way her friends were raised made them more Latino than she feels.

These students’ devaluation of their *Latinidad* is a result of United States discourse surrounding *Latinidad*. “Regimes of governance,” according to Foucault (2003) are a result of this discourse and “produce ‘subject types,’ such as ‘Latino’ or ‘Mexican’ or ‘immigrant,’ which, in turn, limit the types of identity work available to United States Latinos” (Carter, 2014, p. 210). Regimes of governance create a struggle for acceptance when individuals’ characteristics fall outside these identified categorizations. Participants indicated that they expanded typical identifications and sought a social identity in which they could feel legitimate.



## NEW NOTIONS OF LATINIDAD

*Definitions of Latinidad.* Subjects defined *Latinidad* in ways other than just being fluent in Spanish. Definitions emphasized heritage, ethnic roots, and knowledge about *Latinidad*. Shenk (2011, p. 200) found that “Most individuals who identify with this broad group are multi-ethnic and often multi-racial... [And are] considered to include white, Indigenous and African heritage.” As the identity group becomes more racially and ethnically diverse, the amount of knowledge and exposure varies. Leila argued that Spanish fluency is not synonymous with identifying as a Latino. She stated, “Somewhere down the line there was a member of my family who was [Latino].” Leila attributed being Latino to “Ancestry and lineage, where you come from.” She felt that familial connection, rather than the practice of the culture or the language created Latino identity. The participants’ definitions of *Latinidad* was synonymous with Avila-Saaverda’s definition that a Latino is someone with “A sense of regional identity in Latin America and a sense of group identity for people of Latin American descent in the United States” (2010, p. 137). Thus, having community and ancestral ties to Latin America is a characteristic of this new *Latinidad*.

The majority of participants found it difficult to articulate what it means to be Latino. Some shared that Latinos are knowledgeable about issues pertaining to the Latino community. Jessica stated that being Latino is “the ethnicity more so than the national connection.” Her connection to Puerto Rico is far removed from the region but she has found ways to keep in touch with the culture. Jessica believed that being Latino means “being able to hold on to whatever I could learn.” Marcos explained that although he does not identify as primarily Salvadorian, he still feels a connection to being Latino stating, “I’ve done enough to know about history, Latino communities, Latino experience, and can speak about certain issues.” Because *Latinidad* is so engrained in who participants are, they found difficulty in characterizing who or what a Latino is. Michael elaborated on the Latino identity:

[It’s] carried in everything, it’s not limited to certain things like what you eat or what you listen to, I think it’s who you are and knowing where

you come from. It can even be that you’re seen as Latino and you go through things automatically, especially in this country being labeled as a Latino. It’s going through that and being aware of your history and your culture.

The students’ reflections demonstrate that *Latinidad* is deeper than the language one speaks. *Latinidad* is also present in the experience of being a Latino and in having a curiosity about the experience of Latinos, both modern and historical.

*An Americanized Identity.* Students identified with both Latino and American traditions. A number of students felt that their Latino culture was so engrained in their day-to-day activities that it was hard to identify specific practices. Participants indicated that food was a tradition that kept them connected to their culture. Michael, a student of Mexican heritage, described in detail the meals of his home. Simple dishes such as rice, beans, tortillas, and eggs resonated with him as representative of the Latino culture. Although Jessica does not practice Latino traditions in her household she was proud that her grandfather taught her how to make traditional Puerto Rico dishes.

Many students felt their household traditions were very “Americanized.” For example, they celebrated holidays such as Thanksgiving and Independence Day. Maureen shared that there were aspects of her family get-togethers that could be connected to her Puerto Rican heritage, such as “parandas” during the holidays, where Spanish songs are sung and music is played. Alicia shared that her grandmother made piñatas for birthday parties and that practices like this one made her feel in touch with her culture. Although Alicia practiced traditions connected to her Mexican heritage and was a part of a predominantly Mexican community, she stated, “I celebrate the same traditions and do all the same things, but I don’t speak the language, so that kind of sets me apart.” All subjects, regardless of their involvement in Latino practices, identified as being in touch with their Latino heritage. Their language deficiency, though, made them feel as if they were on the outskirts of their community.

Participants interacted with Spanish language and *Latinidad* through media texts. Eight subjects said they listen to music that could be categorized as Latino/Hispanic. For many this included willingly listening

to music such as reggaeton, bachata, and to Mexican-American artists like Selena. Participants also came in contact with Spanish texts through memes and posts by their friends on social media. Jessica pointed to an interest in listening to podcasts and radio programs in Spanish to become more familiar with the language. A number of participants said there was more consistent exposure to Spanish texts when they were younger. Marcos and Leila said that they watched novelas, Spanish soap operas, with older family members when they were younger. Marcos also stated that he was forced to listen and dance to Spanish music when he was younger, but now he does not identify with Latino music or dances. Students who had taken a Spanish course pointed to these classes as places in which they were exposed to artifacts they consider to be Latino. Although participants identified media texts they interacted with, it was evident that these were often purposefully sought out in an effort to stay in touch with their ethnic culture.

*Ethnic and Linguistic Stereotyping.* Participants experienced instances of stereotyping, discrimination, and prejudice. These occurrences involved assumptions of language, but were also related to ethnic identity in general. Both Latinos and non-Latinos make assumptions of a person's language fluency (Correa, 2010). Leila explained, "If I went up to a person and asked them do you think I speak Spanish? They would say yes." Alicia added, "Strangers assume that I speak Spanish or that I'm really Mexican, and I'm like the last person born in Mexico was my great-great grandpa, really far down the line." Despite participants' families living in the United States for many years, sometimes generations, assumptions were made about their citizenship and dialect. Leticia described an instance

in which she entered a restaurant through the wrong door. A restaurant employee responded by saying, "Guess I should've put that in Spanish for ya." Leticia described feeling horrified and shocked at this first encounter with discrimination. This confrontation is representative of an ongoing belief "that United States Latinos are unwilling to learn English" (Carter, 2010, p. 234). Michael shared that he had professors assume that English was his second language, and that, as a result, he struggled with writing. These reflections address a need for Americans to expand their understanding of what it means to be American and Latino and to acknowledge that the two identities intersect in a variety of ways.

Participants also described experiencing stereotyping of their ethnic identity. The majority of subjects experienced being framed by the "Latino Threat Narrative," which is the idea that due to differences and assumptions of Latino ethnicity, language, and citizenship the ethnic group is deemed a danger to society (Carter, 2014, p. 211-213). Michael and Leila explained, "I am automatically identified as Latino because of the way I look." Michael shared that he had a professor who would constantly mistake his name for Carlos, a typical Latino name. There were occurrences outside of the classroom as well. For example, Michael felt he was not allowed into certain college parties because of his ethnic identity. Alicia discussed a time where she dressed in Super Woman costume and wore an American flag. In response to her costume, a White student told her that she was not American and should not be wearing the flag. Although not all participants identified with their ethnic heritage prior to coming to college, they felt that stereotyping and their minority status made them more aware of their *Latinidad*.

## CONCLUSION ■■■

These interviews unveiled a lack of awareness in the United States of the diversity amongst Latinos in terms of race, upbringing, identification, and language fluency. Latinos in the United States who are not fluent in Spanish navigate between the world of Latino-Americans and Anglo-Americans, and are finding it difficult to find acceptance in either space. Whether in the classroom or in social interactions, participants experienced moments of discrimination due to their language difference. Participants demonstrated that when with Latinos, they wanted to identify with their heritage and people, but that their language barrier prevented them from doing so. Most students took Spanish classes as a way to compensate for these moments of perceived

inadequacy. One student was comfortable with his non-fluency because he identified more so with being American and wanted to diverge from Hispanic culture. Therefore, it can be inferred that for some non-fluency is a choice to accommodate the dominant discourse. Meanwhile, others struggle with the guilt of not being able to adapt their language to family and community members. Despite participants' affinity to American culture, they could realize they were perceived as cultural others in society due to their Latino roots. Students demonstrated a need for acceptance from both the Latino and the dominant American community but their bi-cultural identities made it so they had to seek respect and acceptance from each culture.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH ■■■

There were limitations to the study. The university has a small student population, thus the sample size is small. The time allotted for the project was the length of one semester. Future research could target a range of universities, both large and small, so the study could be more representative of Latino college students in the United States. A similar project could be carried out over a longer period of time, allowing for follow-up interviews or interviews with additional participants. Using focus groups as a methodology could bring Latino students together who are not fluent in Spanish. The method could lead to further insight into the implications of new social identities and additional themes in the experiences of participants.

New meanings of *Latinidad* emerged during this study, demonstrating that *Latinidad* exists despite Spanish language barriers. A person experiences being Latino when they have ancestral ties to Latin

America, a desire to learn about the history and culture of Latinos, and experience the consequences of being labeled "Latino" in the United States. This research demonstrates that some participants experience tension when Spanish language, and they attempt to acquire the language skills through coursework and immersion. Participants defended their *Latinidad* despite not being fluent in Spanish. The research contributes new understandings of the experiences of a bicultural population. The Latino identity group is rapidly growing and evolving in its characteristics. Participants in the study demonstrate that to be "authentically" Latino in the United States no longer requires Spanish fluency. It is of great importance to acknowledge the voices and existence of those who may fall outside the current understanding of *Latinidad*, as participants demonstrate identity can fall between two ethnic worlds. ■

## REFERENCES ■■■■■

- AVILA-SAAVEDRA, G. (2010). A fish out of water: New articulations of United States-Latino identity on Ugly Betty. *Communication Quarterly*, 58, 133-147.
- CARTER, P. M. (2014). National narratives, institutional ideologies, and local talk: The discursive production of Spanish in a "new" US Latino community. *Language in Society*, 43, 209-240.
- CHAVEZ, C.A. (2013). Building a new Latino in the post-network era: Mun2 and the reconfiguration of the United States Latino audience. *International Journal of Communication*, 7, 1026-1045. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=97544878&site=ehost-live>
- CORREA, T. (2010). Framing Latinas: Hispanic women through the lenses of Spanish-language and English-language news media. *Language & Communication*, 11, 425-443.
- FILLMORE, C. J. (1979). On fluency. In C. J. Fillmore, D. Kempler & W. S. Y. Wang (Eds.), *Individual differences in language ability and language behavior*. New York: Academic Press.
- FOUCAULT, M., & MACEY, D. (2003). *Society must be defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976* (Reprint ed.). New York: Picador.
- HALUALANI, R. T. (2010). Intercultural interaction at a multicultural university: Students' definitions and sensemakings of intercultural interaction. *Journal of International & Intercultural Communication*, 3, 304-324.
- MOREMAN, S. T. (2011). Qualitative interviews of racial fluctuations: The 'how' of Latina/o-white hybrid identity. *Communication Theory* (10503293), 21(2), 197-216. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2011.01382.x
- Pew Research Center. (2013). A nation of immigrants: A portrait of the 40 million, including 11 million unauthorized. Retrieved from <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/01/29/a-nation-of-immigrants/>
- PIÑÓN, J., & ROJAS, V. (2011). Language and cultural identity in the new configuration of the US latino TV industry. *Global Media and Communication*, 7, 129-147.
- SHENK, P. S. (2007). I'm Mexican, remember? Constructing ethnic identities via authenticating discourse. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 11, 194-220.
- TOOMEY, A., DORJEE, T., & TING-TOOMEY, S. (2013). Bicultural identity negotiation, conflicts, and intergroup communication strategies. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 42, 112-134.
- United States Department of Commerce. (2014). Facts for features: Hispanic heritage month 2014: Sept. 15-Oct. 15. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2014/cb14-ff22.html>
- YEN, H. (2012). Census: White population will lose majority in United States by 2043. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/12/census-hispanics-and-black-unseat-whites-as-majority-in-united-states-population\\_n\\_2286105.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/12/census-hispanics-and-black-unseat-whites-as-majority-in-united-states-population_n_2286105.html)
- ZHANG, Y., & WILDEMUTH, B. M. (2005). Qualitative analysis of content by. *Analysis*, 1(2), 1-12.

**Whitney Powel**

Denison University  
Delta Upsilon Chapter



# The Role of **Anger** in Democratic Deliberation and **Discourse**

THROUGH THE RHETORICAL STRATEGIES  
OF MALCOLM X

**T**here is a normative view that encompasses how we, as citizens, ought to act in a democratic society. According to Kuklinski, Riggle, Ottati, Schwarz, and Wyrer (1991), this view indicates that, “In a democratic society, reasonable decisions are preferable to unreasonable ones; considered thought leads to the former, emotions to the latter; therefore deliberation is preferable to visceral reaction as a basis for democratic decision making” (1991, p.1). This normative perspective emphasizes the need for decision-making and democratic deliberation based on reasonable, rational thought and devalues emotionally charged democratic communication.

Many, however, would argue against this normative view of deliberation and make the case that there ought be space for arguments and emotion in democratic deliberation (Allen, 2004; Kahn, 2012; Krause, 2008; Kuklinski et al., 1991; Lazarus, 1994; Smith, 1999; Stout, 2010; Wasielewski, 1985). Rather than understanding democratic deliberation as separate from emotion, there should be an understanding of these as virtues and their place in a democracy. Democratic citizens and citizen-leaders have an obligation to act, participate, and have a voice

in the democratic deliberation. I argue that the place of anger in such democratic deliberation is valid, as it enhances the American democratic experience. Although complicated, constructive anger is essential to democratic change, meditation, reflection, and communication.

In this paper, I will evaluate the definitions of deliberation in a democratic environment while reviewing the relevant literature surrounding democratic deliberation (Krause, 2008; Smith, 1999). I will review, analyze, and synthesize the literature of emotions, anger, citizenship, leadership, rhetoric, and ways in which these ideas relate to democratic deliberation. To do this, I will use a text delivered by Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1965), to frame this idea within the context of moral courage, emotion, anger, American democracy, deliberation, and social change. This text serve as a case study that demonstrates there is indeed a place for anger in public life, specifically in demonstrating democratic deliberation. Given that democratic deliberation is a crucial aspect to the efficacy of a democracy for the people and by the people, I argue that this central part of democracy is enhanced by anger evident in the rhetorical strategies of Malcolm X.

## LITERATURE REVIEW ■■■■■

### DELIBERATION

Deliberation is defined as a theory of democracy, wherein political systems that do not allow for deliberation are not democratic (Smith, 1999). That is to say that deliberation is the lifeblood of a democratic nation. Smith (1999) summarizes what it means to have democratic deliberation in the United States today as citizens come to understand the role of rationality and emotions. We tend to see these terms as semantic opposites or extremes. For example, political figures in the United States tend to walk the line between reason and passion. Abraham Lincoln, for example, would represent an extremely rational figure that used reason and logic to leverage his thoughts and ideas. Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey and *The Daily Show's* Jon Stewart, on the other hand, represent the more passionate side of the spectrum, given their likelihood

to publicly show and share emotions ranging from anger, fear, happiness, confusion, and disappointment. These examples of represent extremities along a continuum on which we must learn to strike an emotional balance to fulfill the values of a deliberative democracy.

Smith (1999) writes, “Conceptions of democracy centering on these alternative traditions, and privileging values such as courage and compassion over rationality, bring a richness and complexity to American political thought that contemporary democratic theory lacks” (p. 2). It is clear that democratic deliberation has not yet reached its potential. American society may focus too much on catering to either extreme instead of finding a balance in which to offer a productive voice to the “political life of the nation” (Smith, 1999, p. 8). Therefore, democratic deliberation become debilitating when we focus too much on reason or

passion in our rhetorical strategies. It is important to look at these crucial aspects of democratic life to explain this dichotomy.

While Kahn (2012) agrees that emotions are important in democracy, especially democratic deliberation, he does offer a counter argument. He writes, “Democracy cannot thrive if all of us simply embrace ‘freedom of expression’ as a guiding rule and all we do is find our soapbox and shout at each other” (Kahn, 2012, p. 2). Based on this understanding, and examples of Chris Christie and Jon Stewart, I argue that democracy would not survive if the nation were to be governed by only emotionally charged people. Governor Chris Christie might be an extreme example of a hyper-emotional figure, but given this contemporary example, Kahn (2012) asks a question that is central to the argument surrounding the role of anger in democratic rhetoric: “How are we to have a conversation between differing passions [and] concerns...?” (p. 2). How are we able to create a democracy that “[allows] us to come as we are—with our differing passions, concerns, and sacred expressed in whatever language we find most familiar” and make social progress (Kahn, 2012, p. 2)? I seek to answer these questions in a critical analysis of emotion, anger, democracy, and citizenship in Malcolm X’s speech “The Ballot or the Bullet.”

## EMOTION

Humans are the most emotional beings on earth and we are apt to emotionally respond to events that happen to us (Lazarus, 1994). Emotions range from “anger, anxiety, fright, shame, joy, love, and sadness, as well as other perhaps socially more subtle emotions, such as guilt, envy, jealousy, pride, relief, hope, gratitude, and compassion” (Lazarus, 1994, p. 3). Despite the range of emotions people experience daily, they seem to struggle to understand what the appropriate time and place to communicate through emotions. People may ask themselves when or if it is acceptable to lash out if someone causes them pain or if it is acceptable to engage in certain discussions with colleagues. Am I allowed to lash out if someone causes me pain? Quite simply, people often wonder when and how to show emotion.

Lazarus (1994) notes two myths that exist about emotions. The first myth is that emotions contribute

to irrational and unreasonable thinking. The second is that emotions “get in the way of our adaptation,” meaning our emotions may get us into trouble (Lazarus, 1994, p. 3). People often use the adjective “emotional” to criticize someone who does not appear to act or communicate rationally. Emotions and intelligence coexist and do not always have a negative effect on rationality of thought (Lazarus, 1994, p. 3). In addition, emotions give us the capability “of sensing subtle, abstract, and complicated personal meanings in situations in which we must decide whether we are in danger, safe, or in a position to capitalize on the opportunities these situations offer” (Lazarus, 1994, p. 3).

Additionally, Krause (2008) also comments on the connection between emotion and deliberation. She questions the “right combination of thinking and feeling, of reason and passion, of cogitation and affect” in deliberation (Krause, 2008, p.1). Krause also discusses ways in which, again, this normative view of democratic deliberation asks of the citizens to “excise passions from the deliberative process entirely” (p.1). Krause challenges the dominant view and suggests “passions *can* contribute in a positive way to the impartial standpoint that makes public decisions legitimate” (p.1). Therefore, while emotions may cloud judgment, utilizing our emotional intellect is key in dealing with the struggles and opportunities faced each day as participating members of a democratic society.

## EMOTION AND CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP

Given that emotions are complex and play a key role in everyday life, Aristotle reflected that we, as humans, are able to “intervene in them” (Allen, 2004, p.150). This means that we are capable of unpacking emotion to understand how we communicate. Wasielewski (1985) seeks to fill the gap in the literature on emotions and the role of emotion and charisma in leadership. After analyzing the various commonly used definitions of charisma, Wasielewski noticed a flaw in the relevant literature that frame charisma as an individual quality (1985, p. 2). Wasielewski (1985) then identifies the interactivity of charisma and its place in fostering a relationship between a leader and his/her followers, given the socially powerful nature of emotion and charisma. Charisma is a leadership trait is partly from our own understanding and view of the leader, making charismatic leadership and emotion a social

phenomenon. This explains, perhaps, why people are apt to follow leaders whose rhetoric is engaging, passionate, and energizing. Society views charisma as a strength and a virtue, especially in public rhetoric, but it struggles to find the words that explain passion-driven charisma crosses the proverbial line.

Wasielewski (1985) continues on to debunk the normative view of an emotionless, rational democracy put forward by Kuklinski et al. suggesting that emotions are a “fully social phenomenon” and their role in social organization as crucial (p. 219). Wasielewski (1985) recognizes the social nature of emotions and suggests that charismatic leadership, as a social construct, requires emotion as well. Through the use of excerpts from speeches by prominent Civil Rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, Wasielewski (1985) illustrates “how charismatic leaders manipulate emotion” (p. 214) and use emotion to their benefit in order to “establish legitimacy of the program of action” (p. 217). The literature makes it clear that emotions, charisma, leadership, and rhetoric are similar threads that relate to how individuals can communicate and deliberate in a democratic society.

### **LEADERSHIP THROUGH PUBLIC RHETORIC**

While leadership appears in various forms beyond public speaking and rhetorical strategies (de Vries et al., 2010; Lexa, 2010; Sharpe, 2008), this paper focuses on ways in which these threads illustrate discourse surrounding deliberation through emotional rhetoric.

According to O’Connor, Mumford, Clifton, Gessner, and Connelly (1995), organizations and groups of people organized around a common goal “rely upon their leaders’ vision to provide goals and strategies for effective organizational performance” (p. 550). More specifically, a leader’s vision “provides the mechanism by which organizational members are influenced and the influence of a simple vision should not be underestimated” (O’Connor et al., 1995, p. 551). This intersection between leader and follower is key in understanding how citizens publically address each other to communicate that common goal. In a list that declares what a speaker must do in order to generate trust from an audience, Allen (2004) writes, “be precise about which emotions are at stake in a particular conversation” (p. 157). Emotions play a role

in democratic rhetoric and deliberation and leaders must be aware of how their emotions influence beliefs, plans, and relationships with audience members. Given this connection between a leaders’ emotions and their public rhetoric, it is important to understand ways in which negative emotions, such as anger, are expressed in leadership rhetoric and how that anger enhances democratic deliberation.

### **ANGER**

Lazarus (1994, p. 13) writes that in addition to envy and jealousy, anger is “among the most powerful and socially troublesome emotions.” These emotions are “the nasty emotions” because all three emotions, to some extent, “share a desire to harm others, or oneself” and therefore lead to problems in the society in which those angry individuals communicate and act (Lazarus, 1994, p. 13). Despite this label of a “nasty” emotion, it is crucial to unpack how anger is socially significant in creating and understanding relationships and how anger acts as a common thread among “nasty emotions.”

Peters suggests that political anger stems from “a denial of freedom and/or a perceived injustice” (2012, p. 239). O’Connor et al. (1995) and Allen (2004) suggest that a leader’s emotions (i.e. emotional anger) affects that leaders’ audience. Therefore, those followers must be able to understand that the rhetoric in which their leader engages might be riddled with emotions such as anger. Allen (2004) writes, “Citizens must, then, cultivate their capacities to identify the particular emotions at play in respect to any given political question as well as refining their understanding of how particular emotions can be dealt with” (p. 151). While citizen-leaders have influence on followers’ emotions, there exists a responsibility of the followers to understand the presence of emotions in evaluating the leaders’ arguments.

The connections between anger, leadership, and public rhetoric are well defined, but what is less obvious, and less understood, is the difference between anger and rage. Authors seek to differentiate anger from the more irrational rage (Allen, 2004; Stout, 2010). Allen (2004) differentiates anger from indignation “in that the [anger] arises when one gets less than one thinks is one’s due; and the second, when someone else gets more than what one believes to be her due” (p. 150). Stout (2010, p. 65) also offers a key



differentiation between rage and anger. He writes:

While rage typically beings as a response to real injustices, and therefore can legitimately claim to have just cause, it shows little or no concern for focusing its emotional energies and actions in accord with justice. Rage is what anger becomes when justice, courage, temperance, and hope do not shape it into perfected response to a situation that merits anger.”

Both Allen and Stout emphasize the difference between these types of emotions and suggest that anger is a commendable and often a necessary virtue in leadership, especially when dealing with deliberation that concerns the well being of a democratic society such as the United States.

Chakravarti (2014) writes that anger is an emotion that depicts the passion for change without an agreement to follow a single prescribed political solution. Anger in the political realm is a significant emotion because it creates change and awareness to the current social, political, and economic environment. Angry revolutions, protests, and passionate professions about injustices have colored our national landscape throughout history. Without these emotionally charged calls for political change, such change would not have been possible. Peters (2012) also notes that the “expression of political anger in a democracy is perfectly legitimate and indeed even politically desirable as an antidote to the exercise of arbitrary or illegitimate power that involves the abrogation of freedom and unfair and unequal treatment before the law” (Peters, 2012, p. 239). Peters argues “the legitimate expression of political anger [can be an] engine of change aimed at the extension of existing freedoms and the generation of new freedoms” (2012, p. 239). This further indicates that anger can enhance the democratic experience and create the social change necessary in a democracy.

Frady (2002) recounts the way in which Martin Luther King, Jr. attempted to navigate his own rage, anger, and militant nature with his charge to move forward with a nonviolent civil rights movement. King said, “Somewhere there has to be a synthesis. I have to be militant enough to satisfy the militant, yet I have to keep enough discipline in the movement to satisfy white supporters and moderate Negroes” (as cited

in Frady, 2002, p.183). It is clear that even King was struggling to account for his own anger and frustrations while still acting reasonably enough that moderate supporters would find his arguments and beliefs rational. King himself was trying to function within the normative perspective described by Kuklinski et al. (1991). As Peters (2012) notes, King was able to successfully channel his philosophy of nonviolence to include his own anger and frustrations and promote change in the United States (p. 243). Thus, even within societies perpetuating ideologies that do not promote the irrationality often associated with anger or emotionally charged discourse, anger can be effectively channeled through means of nonviolence or civil disobedience to create change.

#### ANGER AND CITIZENLY RHETORIC

Anger must be specifically channeled to create the necessary and rational change that citizens and citizen-leaders seek to create. Allen (2004, p.151) laments that “only by addressing negative emotions with a view to generative goodwill can a citizen find the seeds of improved citizenly interactions and a more democratic approach to the problem of loss in politics.” Allen further challenges leaders and followers to work together to channel negative emotions for good and suggests the leader encourage any anger be channeled into a solution for a current problem. The responsibility of the “rhetorically angry” speaker must decide: how will the speaker use anger to generate goodwill and inspirational rhetoric thus reenergizing and giving emotional space to a given problem? Allen (2004) addresses this decision, writing, “speakers always have to deal with exactly how painful a given proposal *appears* to their audience, regardless of their own beliefs about how much suffering their proposals in fact inflict” (p.151). Political figures must consider ways to frame their rhetorical arguments when addressing an audience, whether supporters or critics. Therefore, when utilizing anger as a rhetorical strategy to gain support for a common goal, political leaders need to channel anger in a productive way that aligns with the views of the audience despite the presence of anger.

Using anger as a rhetorical strategy clearly has its pitfalls. Public figures must be aware of their emotions because of the inherent effect those emotions will have on an audience. Displaying anger, for example, can

be argued as portraying vulnerability. An audience may, however, respond to anger in a way that overcomes negative associations with vulnerability (Allen, 2004). Political figures who do not appear confident, especially in presenting political agendas or proposals, and who elicit signs of vulnerability may lose credibility. This complexity becomes problematic, however, when considering what is acceptable for emotion in the public setting.

### ANGER AND CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP

Just as emotions affect the audience, charisma is also essential to the success of citizen-leaders. O'Connor et al. (1995), writes, "a charismatic leader with a vision of the future, driven by the vision, and able to communicate implicitly or explicitly with followers also seeking such an organizational future, acted as a revolutionizing force whereby societal structures and processes could be altered" (p. 531).

According to Stout (2010, p. 64), the idea leader of the future,

"...is not someone possessed by blind rage, but rather someone capable, at least in the long run, of focusing anger on injustices and of achieving the emotional balance required to think clearly about what is actually going on, how wrongs can be righted, and how broken and distorted relationships might be repaired."

Stout (2010) again differentiates anger and rage and encourages leaders to strike a balance between strong emotions, such as anger, and the issues at hand in contemporary America. Stout argues the need for anger and passion in the face of injustices but challenges ordinary citizens to channel that anger productively, so as not to explode with the "blind rage" he suggests is unproductive.

As Allen (2004) writes, this ideal angry leader must be present to generate trust, a key characteristic for rhetoric. Allen writes, "people trust those who have the ability to make astute, pragmatically successful decisions in context of uncertainty and who can convey that practical levelheadedness through speech" (2004, p. 145). While Stout (2010) makes the case for anger as a necessary virtue in leadership, Allen (2004) offers a gentle counterargument. Allen insists that reason and rationality helps speakers gain credibility.

While it is important to recognize a place for anger in democratic deliberation and political discourse, Allen (2004) suggests that the most loyal and trustworthy audiences are those who see their leaders as both rhetorical and pragmatic decision-makers.

Madera and Smith (2009) discuss why certain audiences or followers look to leaders during times of crisis. During these times, the "impact of two negative emotions" often related to crisis and crisis response of a leader, anger and sadness, are prevalent in speech (p. 103). In explaining why people look to leaders during times of crisis, Madera and Smith write that followers "seek action from leaders that signal a quick resolution to the crisis and a demeanor that exudes confidence in their ability to respond to an event" (2009, p. 104). A leader's positive and negative emotions can influence the way in which followers come to understand, evaluate, and trust. The results of Madera and Smith's study "showed that the leader's response and the emotions the leader expresses do influence the manner in which a leader is evaluated" (2009, p. 110). Other key characteristics of angry rhetoric include a declaration of beliefs while, at the same time, understanding the complexity in making changes to the very system the angry speaker is criticizing. A rage filled rant would fail to create a trusting relationship with the audience and the speaker may not be content regardless who heard the rant. A ranting speaker may not accept responsibility and avoids suggesting sound solutions because the speaker is influenced by range that overpowers the original thought that sparked the discomfort, frustration, or anger.

How might we then judge the effectiveness and value of anger in public democratic deliberation, given the often-blurry line between an angry speech and a rant? Relying on the normative perspective of Kuklinski et al. (1991) and the various arguments both for and against this perspective, I evaluated Malcolm X as a public, rhetorical figure and his speech, "The Ballot or the Bullet" (1965), to argue that the normative perspective ought extend beyond simply "deliberation" and "reasonable decisions" and include the anger as an emotional focal point of democratic deliberation and public discourse. His speech highlights key characteristics of an angry rhetoric, rather than of a rant, to effectively motivate his audience to think about the oppressive socioeconomic and political systems of the time.

Malcolm X is one of the most influential historical figures. As a civil and human rights leader, Malcolm X used his powerful rhetoric to express his beliefs and passion for justice, becoming a relentless leader for marginalized groups. Malcolm X was a man committed to action in the name of “everything [he had] ever felt strongly about” (Benson, 1974, p. 6). This commitment to advocacy for Black rights is evident throughout Malcolm X’s rhetorical demonstration of virtues like bravery, wit, devotion, and passion. Novak (2006) writes that Malcolm X was “one of the most influential American public figures of the 1960s” due to the “unique flavor” of his rhetoric that “left many, mostly white, Americans disturbed” (p. 25). The discomfort was a result of Malcolm X’s use of anger in political rhetoric (Chakravarti, 2014). This political anger contrasted the passion-driven rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr., who was committed to nonviolence in response to injustice. The contrast between King and Malcolm X’s rhetorical strategies led history to place these men on opposite sides of this reason-passion continuum. Malcolm X is perceived as angry and King as deeply passionate when, in fact, both of these orators explored rhetoric along the entire spectrum.

In Malcolm X’s public rhetorical appearances, we are able to see how anger might be a democratic virtue. This unique type of rhetorical confrontation, full of honesty and anger, proves necessary in our current understanding of democratic deliberation (Chakravarti, 2014). Malcolm X fought recognized the racial injustices that plagued the country. His relentless oratorical style and fearlessness present key frames through which we ought can investigate political discourse and democratic deliberation and the usefulness of passion-infused angry rhetoric today.

Despite various reactions to Malcolm X’s influential rhetoric, his continued fame and

influence demonstrates his successful ability to lead and his rhetorical skills attributed to his inherent ability to lead through his passionate rhetoric and public speaking skills (Novak, 2006; Terrill, 2000). Terrill (2000) asked various authors about their thoughts on Malcolm X and how he is remembered today. Terrill says authors remembered Malcolm X in similar ways, with one stating that Malcolm X was “a remarkably gifted and charismatic leader” while another remembered “an eloquent orator and street-corner spell-binder.” Still another eulogized Malcolm X as “America’s most thorough and relentless revolutionary dissident of the 1960s” and another claimed Malcolm X to be “indisputably an orator of the first rank,” while another reminded that Malcolm X was “declared by the Oxford Union Society to be one of the greatest living orators” (Terrill 2000, p. 67). His speeches were more than merely an opportunity to debate, refute, and discuss key topics. Rather, his rhetoric also “fulfill[ed] its revolutionary purpose through its performance” to evoke feelings that create change (Terrill, 2000, p. 68). Malcolm X remains in our public memory as an angry public figure who’s “unrelenting truth-tell[ing]... declared that the mainstream civil rights movement was naïve in hoping to secure freedom through integration and nonviolence” (Malcolm X, 1964).

His assassination left a legacy as a “much-publicized but little-understood leader” whose influence was quickly extinguished (Benson, 1974, p. 2). Despite this, Malcolm X’s rhetorical use of anger in democratic discourse suggests that emotion, specifically anger, must be valued in public discourse. Malcolm X’s rhetorical influence is still relevant today and provides an illustration of the value of anger in democratic deliberation, both in the past and today.

The speech that best represents the rhetorical strategies of Malcolm X is 1964's "The Ballot or the Bullet," as it is perhaps the "fullest declaration of his black nationalist philosophy" as the speech expressed Malcolm X's (1965) commitment to taking "action on all fronts by whatever means necessary" to fight racial injustices. By creating trust with the audience and expressing beliefs and agency while simultaneously offering criticism of, and solutions for, the government and the Civil Rights Movement, Malcolm X's angry rhetoric is less rant than it is a lens through which we can understand communication and deliberation.

### **CREATING TRUST WITH THE AUDIENCE**

"The Ballot or the Bullet" is unique due to the creation of an equal relationship between Malcolm X and his audience. While blaming the government and White oppressors, Malcolm X relates to the audience by reflecting on the oppression, injustice, and racism he and his fellow citizens faced throughout history. Malcolm X (1965) makes this connection most clearly when he says:

We're all in the same boat and we're all going to catch the same hell from the same man. He just happens to be a white man. All of us suffered here...political oppression at the hands of the white man, economic exploitation at the hands of the white man, and social degradation at the hands of the white man."

This immediate connection with the audience is intentional. It is crucial to create a connection with the audience especially given the amount of anger in this significant speech. Chakravarti (2014) suggests Malcolm's immediate connection with the audience is a strong rhetorical strategy because it allows the audience to reflect on Malcolm X's anger and to feel those same emotions. The audience acts in accordance with the emotions of the leader, helping generate a stronger, more cohesive body of followers. In Malcolm X's speech, he creates an egalitarian spirit through intentionally relating to his audience while, at the same time, evoking emotions of brotherhood and harmony

in the United States (Allen, 2004, p.167). Malcolm X's commitment to establish this trust in "The Ballot or the Bullet" is notable.

### **DECLARATION OF BELIEFS AND AGENCY**

In addition to establishing credibility and trust with the audience, Malcolm X clarifies who he is and for what he stands. He says, "I myself am a minister, not a Christian minister, but a Muslim minister; and I believe in action on all fronts by whatever means necessary" (1965, p. 24). This declaration of self, attitude, and beliefs immediately shows Malcolm X as a different rhetorician than other speakers of that time. Malcolm X in an active, rather than reactive, leader and activist. His declarations differ from other methods of rhetoric because he immediately calls for action, no matter the cost or means, to achieve what is necessary. Malcolm X also says, "I'm nonviolent with those who are nonviolent with me. But when you drop that violence on me, then you've made me go insane and I'm not responsible for what I do" (1965, p. 34). Malcolm X promotes his image of a fighter when met with resistance to the cause for equality and justice.

In the early paragraphs of his speech, Malcolm X dictated his way of action and situated the future state of the nation as binary. He calls on the nation, specifically Blacks in the United States, to either cast a ballot or cast a bullet. Malcolm X charges the nation to act on the politics of the nation while providing an ultimatum. He declares, "...it's time now for you and me to become more politically mature and realize what the [presidential] ballot is for, what we're supposed to get when we cast a ballot, and that if we don't cast a ballot, it's going to end up in a situation where we're going to have to cast a bullet" (Malcolm X, 1965, p. 30). Malcolm X called for the nation to rise up and invest in their future as citizens of the United States. Malcolm X argues that anger is central to political advocacy and change. Without anger, citizens merely support a democracy without truly participating in one. Malcolm X charged the nation, using his anger-filled rhetoric, to do more than cast a ballot.

## **CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

Malcolm X is particularly critical of the United States government (Novak, 2006). Malcolm X (1965) writes:

In this present administration they have in the House of Representatives 257 Democrats to only 177 Republicans. They control two-third of the House vote. Why can't they pass something that will help you and me? Don't you ever think they're not in cahoots together. One of them makes you believe he's for you, and he's got it fixed where the other one is so tight against you, he never has to keep his promise.

Malcolm X points his finger at the government for the nation's racism, injustice, and inequality. His rhetoric is angry and he is critical of the inaction, ignorance, and inadequacy of the United States government. By pointing out the inconsistencies in the government and places where the government is failing the Black citizens, Malcolm X uses his anger to incite emotions within the audience so they may begin to understand the inconsistencies of the government as well.

Malcolm X also criticizes the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement during his speech. His public disagreement of the nonviolent efforts of Martin Luther King Jr. is another way in which Malcolm X uses his emotionally charged rhetoric to portray his disparagement with the current methods of spurring social change. Malcolm X (1965, p. 34) said,

Civil rights keeps you under his restrictions, under his jurisdiction. Civil rights keeps you in his pocket. Civil rights means you're asking Uncle Sam to treat you right. Human rights are something you are born with. Human rights are you God-given rights. And any time any one violates your human rights, you take them to the world court.

Here, Malcolm X is critiquing the current progress of the Civil Rights Movement and how it fails to protect, or demand, equal human rights in the United States. This speech is not the first time someone has spoken out about ways in which the fight for equality should not stop at civil rights. Martin Luther King, Jr. also eventually shifted his rhetoric to include his fight for human rights. In this specific speech, Malcolm X passionately debunks any current myths about civil

rights and, as Smith (1999) notes, seeks to evoke the same emotions in his audience that he felt during delivery of the speech.

This public criticism of the Civil Rights Movement in this speech is amplified when paralleled with Malcolm X's autobiographical sentiments about the March on Washington in 1963. Malcolm X writes, "Not long ago, the black man in America was fed a dose of another form that was weakening, lulling and deluding effects of so-called "integration." It was that "Farce in Washington," I call it" (Haley, 1964, p. 278). Malcolm X criticized the March on Washington by declaring that the event was something that weakened the Civil Rights movement (Haley, 1964). Malcolm X was looking forward to this March, as it was a way in which to get all of the "angry blacks" together in one place to demand equality, justice, and human rights for all (Haley, 1964). Instead, to Malcolm X's dismay, the March that was meant to be "an angry riptide" became a "gentle flood" as a result of the "chartered jet planes, railroad cars, and air-conditioned buses" replacing the "rickety carloads of angry, dusty, sweating small town Negroes" among the crowd in Washington (Haley, 1964, p. 280). Malcolm X saw an opportunity to make widespread the significance of anger in mobilizing as a nation and demanding change. The March on Washington was the space to do so; yet, Malcolm X makes clear that the March itself was a failure, perpetuating the issues against which the March sought to alleviate. Malcolm X concludes his thoughts on the March with a question that mirrors his disappointment in the Civil Rights movement: "Who ever heard of angry revolutionists swinging their bare feet together with their oppressors in lily-pad park pools, with gospels and guitars and 'I Have A Dream' speeches? (Haley, 1964, p. 281).

### **MALCOLM X'S RHETORIC AS A COUNTER-LENS**

This profound denouncing of the goals and results of the March on Washington and various initiatives of the Civil Rights movement as a whole illustrate how Malcolm X saw this movement fail as a revolution. Therefore, Malcolm X's emotionally charged speech following this seemingly disappointing March provides a counter-lens through which anger is displayed as an essential democratic virtue and the use of anger is seen as a rhetorical strategy for inciting change

and dismantling power structures. Public memory of Malcolm X remembers him as a temperamental rhetorician in a society that devalues passion and exalts reason, logic, and rationality.

### MALCOLM X AND HIS RELEVANCE TODAY

It is clear Malcolm X understood the importance of using anger and passion in democratic deliberation. This is not to say that there is no room for reason and logic. Rather, Malcolm X allows us to see value in both reasonable argumentation and angry deliberation. Malcolm X understood the power of public address and how his passion, relentlessness, and anger deserved a place in democracy in order to create change and shed light on the trials and tribulations of fellow citizens. Novak writes that Malcolm X remains relevant because “he remains an influential voice in the quest for racial equality” (2006, p. 26). Terrill agrees about Malcolm X’s relevance and notes, “one reason that Malcolm X’s rhetoric continues to resonate culturally, for example, is that many African-Americans may find themselves in a position similar to that which he occupied and see his rhetoric as offering a viable model for confronting that situation” (2000, p. 79).

Malcolm X’s rhetoric allows his followers and readers to “pick up where he left off” (Benson, 1974, p. 9). “Malcolm X shares [his] motive with his readers, giving him a principle of action they can carry into the confrontation with racism as it conditions their own lives” (Benson, 1974, p. 9). These sentiments align with those of Novak (2006) and Terrill (2000) in understanding Malcolm X’s influence as extending far beyond his leadership to create “rhetoric of human purpose and brotherhood” using emotionally charged and angry oratorical strategies (Benson, 1974, p. 9). Malcolm X continues to offer the oppressed citizens in the United States a framework with which they can work to channel anger and passion into social change.

Terrill (2000) captures the importance of such public rhetoric. He writes, “close attention to public address becomes ever more important, then, for it is through such criticism that rhetoric is made available as equipment for living” (p. 80). Without public rhetoric, words and ideas remain stagnant among those who use words, ideas, and power to mobilize, assemble, and create change together. Public address is crucial to our development as a democratic nation.

### CONCLUSION

Kuklinski et al. (1991) situates emotions far from intellect, reasonable communication, and decision-making. However, after reviewing and synthesizing relevant literature on emotions, specifically anger, charismatic leadership, and citizenly democratic dialogue and an analysis of Malcolm X’s “The Bullet or The Ballot” speech, it is clear that emotions are closely tied with the intellect and rationale we use each day in democratic deliberation.

Humans are emotional beings; tapping into this emotion allows us to react in situations. Feeling reminds us about the world in which we live and prompts us to think in ways to create changes for the betterment of society. This is not an irrational process; rather, this is a process that brings together emotion and intellect, allowing for the expression of these emotions in decision-making and deliberative

communication. Anger does not always have negative outcomes and Malcolm X utilized this emotion to channel his frustrations about the state of the government, the Civil Rights movement, and the country at large. This allows for the public to see their world through a more critical lens. Today, we look at Malcolm X’s example as one that suggests how anger may assume democratic form.

Given the recent notions of injustices and examples of violence in places like Ferguson, Missouri, Malcolm X’s rhetoric of anger and passion is a useful rhetorical strategy. His rhetoric prompts questions: How are we to respond to incidences of gun violence, police violence, violent rioting, violent protesting, and unfavorable grand jury decisions? How do we respond with reason, logic, and lack of emotion, when a civil police force, responsible for maintaining the law, is

causing violence in neighborhoods? Is there a response that would be deemed appropriate according to Kuklinski et al. (1991) normative perspective? Do such parameters cease to exist when violence, racial discrimination, and injustice continues long after the Civil Rights movement ended? Do our words, full of passion and full of reason, even matter?

To these extremely troubling yet relevant questions, Malcolm X provided a framework with which we can begin to formulate answers. It is appropriate to place value on reason. Reason is an important part of argumentation and deliberation.

Reason is rooted in facts, both historical and also logical deconstruction of knowledge. Malcolm X demonstrates the value of passion and anger in argumentation and deliberation. Emotions bring to light the injustices that riddle our political, economic, and social landscapes. Malcolm X's own rhetoric and passion provides an example of how leaders with deeply engrained passions and beliefs can be remembered in public memory as isolationist and angry rhetoricians. Anger not only has a place in democratic deliberation, anger is a virtue that enhances communication to affect social change. ■

## REFERENCES ■■■■

ALLEN, D. S. (2004). *Talking to strangers: Anxieties of citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

BENSON, T. W. (1974). Rhetoric and autobiography: The case of Malcolm X. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 60, 1-13.

CHAKRAVARTI, S. (2014, September). *Why Obama can't show his rage: Malcolm X, Key and Peele and the personal history behind his cautious Ferguson response*. Retrieved from [http://www.salon.com/2014/09/09/why\\_obama\\_cant\\_show\\_his\\_rage\\_Malcolm\\_X\\_x\\_key\\_and\\_peele\\_and\\_the\\_personal\\_history\\_behind\\_his\\_cautious\\_ferguson\\_response](http://www.salon.com/2014/09/09/why_obama_cant_show_his_rage_Malcolm_X_x_key_and_peele_and_the_personal_history_behind_his_cautious_ferguson_response)

DE VRIES, R. E., BAKKER-PIEPER, A., & OOSTENVELD, W. (2010). Leadership = Communication? The relations of leaders' communication styles with leadership styles, knowledge sharing and leadership outcomes." *Journal of Business Psychology*, 25, 367-380.

FONER, E., & GARRATY, J. A. (1991). *Malcolm X history: The reader's companion to American history*. Retrieved from [http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/Malcolm X-x](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/Malcolm-X-x).

FRADY, M. (2002). *Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York, NY: Penguin.

HALEY, A. (1964). Malcolm X on the March on Washington, 1964. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York, NY: Ballantine.

KAHN, J. (2012). The virtue of anger and democratic discourse. Mellon Inter-Institutional Workshop, Vassar College.

KRAUSE, S. R. (2008). Citizenship, judgment, and the politics of passion. *Civil passions, moral sentiment and democratic deliberation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

KUKLINSKI, J. H., RIGGLE, E., OTTATI, V., SCHWARZ, N., & WYER, JR., R. S. (1991). The cognitive and affective bases of political tolerance judgments. *American Journal of Political Science*, 35, 1-27.

LAZARUS, R. S. (1994). *Passion and reason: Making sense of our emotions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

LEXA, F. J. (2010). Leadership: Styles and structures. *Journal of the American College of Radiology*, 7, 301-303.

MADERA, J. M., & SMITH, D. B. (2009). The effects of leader negative emotions on evaluations of leadership in a crisis situation: The role of anger and sadness. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 20, 103-114.

MALCOM X. (1965). The ballot or the bullet. *Malcolm X speaks: Selected speeches and statements*. New York, NY: Grove Press.

NOVAK, D. R. (2006). Engaging parrhesia in a democracy: Malcolm X as a truth-teller. *Southern Communication Journal*, 7, 25-43.

- O'CONNOR, J. A., MUMFORD, M. D., CLIFTON, T. C., GESSNER, T. E., & CONNELLY, M. S. (1995). Charismatic leaders and destructiveness: A historiometric study. *Leadership Quarterly*, 6, 529-555.
- PETERS, M. (2012). Looking forward in anger. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 44(3), 238-243.
- SHARPE, M. (2008). Styles of large group leadership. *Eastern Group Psychotherapy Society*, 32(4), 289-301.
- SMITH, K. K. (1999). *The dominion of voice: Riot, reason & romance in antebellum politics*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999. Book.
- STOUT, J. (2010). *Blessed are the organized: Grassroots democracy in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- TERRILL, R. E. (2000). Colonizing the borderlands: Shifting circumference in the rhetoric of Malcolm X. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 86, 67-85.
- WASIELEWSKI, P. L. (1985). The emotional basis of charisma. *Symbolic Interaction*, 8, 207-222.



**Conor Delaney**

University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg  
Epsilon Theta Chapter



# Propaganda for the Common Good:

AN IDEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF  
MICHAEL MOORE'S *FAHRENHEIT 9/11*

In this paper I rely on ideological analysis to interpret multiple major scenes in the documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11*. A critique of the effectiveness and the ethics involved in the use of propaganda in the narrative, context, and cinematography of the film is also provided. This analysis answers the following

research questions: How might the cinematography, storyline, and context of the documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* be regarded as propaganda that supports a certain ideology? Are emotional appeals, logical appeals, and persuasive and propagandistic techniques applied ethically in the documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11*?

## DESCRIPTION OF TOPIC

Shabo (2010) explains in *Techniques of Propaganda and Persuasion* that propaganda is not always harmful. It is practical to visualize propaganda as a tool, like a worker's axe. Like many tools, propaganda is used in harmful, benign, and beneficial ways. By its very nature, however, propaganda is manipulative. Propaganda is intended to give someone else control over your thoughts and actions (Shabo, 2010). In other words, as Bernays and Miller (2005, p. 50) states, "propaganda becomes vicious and reprehensive only when its authors consciously and deliberately disseminate what they know to be lies, or when they aim at effects which they know to be prejudicial to the common good." Bernays and Miller further explains why it is wrong to stigmatize propaganda by saying, "to deplore the existence of such a mechanism is to ask for a society such as never was and never will be. To admit that it exists, but expect that it shall not be used, is unreasonable," (2004, p. 44). Essentially, propaganda is a controversial but necessary tool that government, mass media, and individuals use in order to relay information to the public. Although propaganda is sometimes used for negative purposes, with the right intentions and agenda, it can be used for the betterment of society. Filmmaker Michael Moore arguably demonstrates the right

intentions in his counterpropaganda documentary about the Bush Administration, *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

*Fahrenheit 9/11*, released in 2004 and written, narrated, and directed by Moore, critically investigates the presidency of George W. Bush, the War on Terror, and its coverage in the news media. The film debuted at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival, where it was unanimously selected to receive the festival's most prestigious award, the Palme d'Or. *Fahrenheit 9/11* is also the highest-grossing documentary of all time. Despite these honors, *Fahrenheit 9/11* created controversy. It was dismissed as untruthful propaganda by former mayor of New York City, Ed Koch, and was compared to "an al-Qaeda training video" by conservative political action group Move America Forward (Gensler, 2004). *Slate Magazine* columnist David Edelstein, though supportive of the film, wrote *Fahrenheit 9/11* "is an act of counterpropaganda that has a boorish, bullying force," (2004, p. 2). Edelstein concluded that the film represented a legitimate abuse of power. By applying the rhetorical lens of ideological criticism to an investigation of the propagandist and persuasive functions within film *Fahrenheit 9/11*, I sought to determine if Moore's response to the government's untruthful war propaganda was ethical and beneficial to the public.

## JUSTIFICATION OF TOPIC

This is an important topic to research for several reasons. First, *Fahrenheit 9/11* achieved popular and controversial status after its release. The level of exposure this movie had in the American media warrants the examination of potential effects of the film. Learning about respected films that are intimately connected with our society is crucial. Films can affect people who take sides regarding the issues presented, and learning about the controversial outcomes can only bring about a better understanding of the complex mass media and government relationship.

This topic is also important because being manipulated by a governing body is something of which people should be aware. Not knowing when one is being manipulated can lead to unethical

control and power, which can lead to situation similar to that in Nazi Germany, where German citizens supported the murder of millions of Jews. It is incredibly important that all of us have the ability to understand targeted propaganda so we are able to make intelligent, rational, and ethical decisions.

Finally, recognizing and acknowledging how government produces propaganda and counterpropaganda is important because citizens make up society. The more people who recognize Moore's call for attention to his counterpropaganda documentary, the more likely action will take place that sways the governmental agenda. Without the knowledge and passion of society, a nation would be only blindly obeying orders. In this way it is an incredibly significant topic of research.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Ideological analysis was applied to the analysis of major scenes in the documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Ideological analysis is an appropriate method for an analysis of *Fahrenheit 9/11* because its objective is to reveal the underlying ideologies of the film's director. This method helps uncover whether or not the propagandist applies persuasive elements in an ethical way. Foss (2009, p.209) provides a concise definition for ideology: "Ideology is a pattern of Beliefs that determines a group's interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world." Essentially, it is a collective perception of the world around them. White (1992) provides a more detailed explanation of analyzing ideologies stating, "[Ideological criticism]... is concerned with the way in which cultural artifacts produce particular knowledge's and positions for viewers," (p.136). In this chapter, White (1992) also stresses the importance of historical contexts that surround cultural artifacts. White explains that artifacts produced in a society "express and promote values, beliefs, and ideas that are pertinent to the contexts in which they are produced, distributed, and received," (1992, p.136). Indeed, the reason *Fahrenheit 9/11* was so impactful for Americans was because of the context in which

it was released. The documentary was released during a time when both the government and mass media provided faulty emotional reasoning to gain support for an unjustified war with Iraq. The application of ideological analysis to the artifact *Fahrenheit 9/11* is justified because it is a film that, due to historical context, blatantly promotes a certain ideology while creatively and humorously attacking opposing ideologies.

According to Foss (2009), there are four steps to formulating an ideological criticism (p.215). The first step is to identify the presented elements. Presented elements are elements that are visually presented in the artifact at the center of study. These may be signs, symbols, actions, or anything that is visually noticeable. Once elements are found and recorded, the second step of ideological analysis is to identify suggested elements. Suggested elements are the values, ideas, or themes that are derived from the presented elements. It is recommended that one physically list the presented elements along with the suggested elements in order to show a clear and more easily understood representation of all elements in the artifact. The third step is to formulate an ideology by categorically grouping suggested elements

together by type of ideology. There can be overlapping ideologies, depending on the variety of number and type of elements found in the presented elements. Finally, the last step is to identify the functions of the presented ideologies. In this step, there is a focus on the audience's perception of the ideologies. During this step, audience effects and emotions are considered.

## ANALYSIS

Four major scenes in the documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* were analyzed. These scenes chosen correspond to four of the twenty-eight chronologically ordered scenes in the scene selection menu of *Fahrenheit 9/11*. These scenes are entitled “Scene 1—Start (Just a Dream?),” “Scene 16—The Real Plan,” Scene 18—Trust,” and “Scene 28—Congressional Recruitment.” These four scenes comprise the introduction scene, two middle-film scenes, and the closing scene. Analyzing scenes throughout the film provides for a more comprehensive understanding of Moore's intentions. I analyzed these particular scenes utilizing the four steps of ideological analysis described by Foss. In addition to this structured analysis, common ideological concepts such as hegemony, power, and naturalization were considered.

### SCENE 1—START (JUST A DREAM?)

The first scene is the 3.5 minute introduction of *Fahrenheit 9/11* entitled “Start (Just A Dream?).” Moore's narrative as well as various news clips and historical footage in this scene firmly underscore the controversial and potentially unethical behavior of George Bush and his campaign staff during the 2000 presidential election. The majority of the presented elements in this introduction suggest that there is a power structure and hegemonic influence present in American society. Hegemonic influence, generally referred to as hegemony, is the privileging of one ideology over another. It is a form of social control, a type of symbolic coercion, and a form of domination where more powerful groups overpower the ideologies of those with less power. When a hegemonic ideology is present in a culture, certain interests are deemed

By applying the four steps of ideological criticism, I analyzed the major scenes in the film *Fahrenheit 9/11* to expose overarching values and themes constructed by the film's director. I also uncovered possible viewer perceptions and evaluated the ethics of Moore's persuasive and propagandist techniques in *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

more important. A hegemonic ideology provides a sense that things are the way they have to be; it asserts that the hegemonic meanings are the only real, natural ones (Foss, 2009, p.210). It is inferred from the presented and suggested elements in the introduction to *Fahrenheit 9/11* that by establishing the ideology of the norm, hegemonic ideologies can be naturalized.

Moore depicts hegemonic ideologies in this scene by providing news images showing that Bush won Florida's electoral votes despite the fact that Gore received more popular votes in Florida. Moore uses past footage, credible sources, and historical news clips to show that FOX News Network was the first network to call the Florida vote in favor of Bush. When this conservative network made this claim, other news stations quickly retracted their previous statements that Gore was the election winner. Moore utilizes a satirical and playful narration in stating, “If FOX said it, it must be true!” He is being sarcastic in this remark in order to more vividly illustrate how power structures can spread hegemonic ideologies or perspectives without much opposition from alternative or competing ideologies. In this scene, Moore also provides information that questions the ethics of the Bush Administration. For example, it is revealed that Bush's first cousin, John Ellis, was the head of the decision desk at FOX News on the night of the election. It was also demonstrated, in another presented element, that the head of vote counts in Florida during the 2000 election was the Chairperson of Bush's presidential campaign, Katherine Harris. These examples allude to deceit and manipulation by the Bush Administration. Moore presented many public discrepancies that

existed in response to the 2000 election. Using this evidence as support, Moore contends that it is clear that “the dominant perspective that emerged and functioned as hegemonic was that of the president and his cabinet members,” (Foss, 2009, p.210).

The introduction scene of *Fahrenheit 9/11* is intended to formulate the ideology that the major power structure during the 2000 election and the War on Terror was the Bush Administration. The scene also suggests that power structures used deception, manipulation, and its powerful position as hegemon to unethically deliver the presidency to Bush. The ideologies presented by Moore in this first scene function as an illuminating discovery. By taking his viewers behind the scenes of a timely and controversial election, Moore gives the audience the feeling that they are getting a glimpse of the real truth, which ultimately inspires viewers to intellectually understand and challenge the hegemonic ideologies present. It is also important to note how Moore’s use of editing in certain situations strongly highlights Bush as a very conniving and manipulative man. An example of this being when Moore narrates “How can someone like Bush get away with something like this?” directly followed by a clip of Bush laughing. Moore’s intention with this style of editing is to illustrate that Bush and his administration are a power structure that utilizes deception, manipulation, and media to disseminate hegemonic ideologies that fulfill powerful agendas at the expense of the public.

#### **SCENE 16—THE REAL PLAN**

The next scene is 6.5 minutes long and is entitled “The Real Plan.” The scene title, “The Real Plan,” perpetuates the notion that the Bush Administration consciously deceives the masses only to fulfill their own financial and power-based ends. The information in this scene discusses the events surrounding the time when the United States military first invaded, occupied, and attacked Iraq on March 19, 2003. The presented elements in this scene suggest elements of deception, unjust violence, and the naturalization of violence. The suggested elements are shown through Moore’s editing techniques and the provided footage of the war in Iraq.

The first section of “The Real Plan” features footage of Bush’s television address on March 19,

2003 in which he notifies the public that “American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq” to ultimately “defend the world from grave danger” and “to undermine Saddam Hussein’s ability to wage war.” Interspersed throughout the audio of Bush’s television address is footage of Baghdad, Iraq in March of 2003. Life in Iraq appears normal with adults and children getting haircuts, couples marrying in beautiful settings, kids laughing and playing with kites on playgrounds, and people chatting while walking through busy marketplaces. These clips contradict one other and perpetuate the ideology that the Bush Administration is deceptive and untruthful about what is really happening in Iraq. It may lead audience members to believe the intentions for the war are unethical and unjust and that the United States is interfering with a stable and peaceful culture. Moore edits footage of carpet bombings over Baghdad only seconds after clips of Iraqi citizens enjoying their lives. Along with deception, the presented elements and film techniques also suggest unjust violence on a peaceful society to be a prevalent element in the ideology Moore is perpetuating. Unjust violence is inferred as a formulated ideology in Moore’s narration dubbed over the footage of Baghdad being destroyed by the United States. Moore states, “On March 19, 2003, George W. Bush and the United States military invaded the sovereign nation of Iraq – a nation that had never attacked the United States. A nation that had never threatened to attack the United States. A nation that had never murdered a single American Citizen.” This narration undoubtedly positions the U.S. to be the perpetrator rather than the Iraqi people.

The other major suggested element discovered in this scene is revealing of unjust violence that takes place during wartime. This unmasking of unjust violence is underscored in a scene in which two U.S. soldiers in Iraq are discussing their ability to connect their CD players to the communications system of the tank so they can hear music through their helmets. The soldier inside the tank states, “...When we kill the enemy, Drowning Pool, ‘Let the Bodies Hit the Floor,’ is just fitting for the job we’re doing.” Footage of a soldier singing “we don’t need no water, let the motherfucker burn, burn motherfucker, burn...” is cleverly interspersed with shots of Baghdad on fire

as well as shots of dead and maimed Iraqi civilians. Moore intends for these editing techniques to convey the desensitization of violence that occurs during such invasions, especially in the context of the War on Terror. The music and technology is shown to disconnect or shield the soldiers from the truth of the unjust violence done to the Iraqi people. Moore also adds relevant news clips to the end of this scene as a means to perpetuate the idea of deceptive and hegemonic ideologies held by the Bush Administration during the War on Terror. In these clips, Bush's Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, is on television discussing how "the targeting capabilities and the care that goes into targeting is as impressive as anyone could see." The targeting he mentions is the precision bomb drops by the U.S. onto Iraqi land. He continues to discuss the "humane" process of targeting places where no innocent lives will be taken. These news clips are in juxtaposition with shocking and gory footage of a young child having her head stitched together without anesthesia and footage of an Iraqi woman hysterical with grief standing in the debris that once was her home shouting "They have no conscience! They slaughtered us! We're all civilians! There is no militia here!" The juxtaposition of this footage emphasizes the notion that the power structure uses lies and deceit in order to perpetuate their political agenda and encourage the public to support war efforts, and emphasize that there is no care or humanity in the bombings of innocent lives.

As previously explained, Moore uses effective emotional appeals by illustrating the gore and brutality enacted upon the Iraqi people by the U.S. military and the Bush Administration. This shock effect paired with the visual evidence of this scene effectively bolsters Moore's ideological claims that the Bush Administration naturalizes violence using a false agenda it spreads through the public via media and that it uses deceit and unjust violence to fulfill its own purposes.

### **SCENE 18—TRUST**

The third scene analyzed, "Trust," is less than three minutes long. This scene promotes the ideology that a majority of American citizens during the War on Terror were blinded by deceptive information, or misinformation, disseminated by mass media and government entities so consistently that the

public trusted what they were told simply because of repeated exposure to the message. To illustrate this phenomenon, Moore provides a clip featuring Britney Spears in an interview with CNN about the state of politics at the time. Britney states, "Honestly, I think we should just trust our President in every decision that he makes and we should just support that, you know, and, uh, be faithful in what happens." This scene is directly followed by video footage of Bush at the podium during the State of the Union Address as Moore narrates, "Britney Spears was not alone. The majority of the American people trusted the President, and why shouldn't they? He had spent the better part of the last year giving them every reason why we should invade Iraq." The last part of Moore's quote reveals uses his sarcastic signature tone to express his points.

Preceding this narration is a montage of news clips and clips from television programs between 2002 and 2003 that highlight repeated phrases by Secretary of State Colin Powell and President Bush, including phrases like "Saddam Hussein," "nuclear weapon," "nuclear bomb," "chemical weapons," "chemical munitions," and "he's (Saddam Hussein) got 'em (weapons of mass destruction)." Moore shows over three different clips of Bush saying 'he's got 'em' to emphasize the ideology that the Bush Administration continued to blind the public with deceptive and vague information about what was happening and why it was happening. This idea is similar to one discussed in Kellner's 2004 article that suggested that Bush appealed to the fear of his audiences by using dichotomous words such as faith, we, great nation, Evil Other, terrorists, and evil-doer (p.45). Moore implies that the Bush Administration deceives the public with verbal propaganda by showing footage of Bush during various speeches while making statements such as, "This is a man who hates America," "This is a man who cannot stand what we stand for," "He hates the fact—like al Qaeda does—that we love freedom," and, "After all, this is the guy that tried to kill my dad at one time." By including these examples, Moore attempts to show that the Bush Administration, in the year before the War on Terror, consciously delivered public emotional appeals and propagandistic information that was not supported by credible sources. The intent is to use dichotomous language to demonize the enemy and glorify America.

To emphasize this point, Moore adds a clip of an interview with Congressman Jim McDermot saying, “[The Bush Administration] simply got people to believe that there was a real threat out there when in fact, there wasn’t one.” This clip is strategically placed amongst the clips of the Bush Administration deceiving the public about the real truth. Moore adds another sarcastic remark over footage of a Senate session that suggests the Democrats do not have anything to be proud of because they did nothing to oppose the Administration. This is supported by a clip of Democratic Congressman Tom Daschle saying, “I will vote to give the President the authority he needs.” These elements also imply that American citizens are complicit in the events taking place during the 2000 election and the War on Terror; despite being good people, bad things happen when nothing is done to stop them. Due to American support of the Bush Administration, only the hegemonic ideologies prevailed, despite the plethora of alternative and opposing ideologies that were possible.

Essentially, the ideologies formulated in this scene largely suggest the American public was blindly deceived by the hegemonic ideologies the Bush Administration successfully disseminated via media to further their interests. It seems Moore is attempting to unmask and deconstruct the dominant perspectives of this timeframe while simultaneously articulating a new ideology of awareness and informed choice. Therefore, this ideology can function as a motivation or incentive for viewers to avoid following claims that are not supported by sufficient evidence.

#### **SCENE 28—CONGRESSIONAL RECRUITMENT**

The scene entitled “Congressional Recruitment,” is nearly five minutes long and is the last scene of the film. This scene is different from most in this film in that instead of being comprised of historical, political, and military news clips and footage, this scene is filmed on Capitol Hill with Moore in the foreground of most clips. In this last scene, Moore approaches members of Congress to convince them to enlist their children in the war effort in Iraq. Moore is interested in this specifically because only one of the 535 congressional representatives had an enlisted child. In this scene, Moore is shown attempting to have a discussion with a total of six congressmen. Four of them either blatantly

ignored Moore or increased their walking pace to avoid his questions. The other two shook his hand and allowed him to state his claim. While one of these congressmen stared shocked and dumbfounded at Moore after he stated his cause, the other said he did not disagree with Moore, though he did not agree to the challenge. These scenes further Moore’s suggestion that the dominant power structure is working toward its own selfish interest at the cost of others. Moore suggests that these congressmen illustrate the hypocrisy that exists among the nation’s most powerful in that they support a war they do not let their children fight. It is more convenient for those with power and resources to compel less dominant groups to enlist in the war effort. After the conclusion of these scenes, Moore narrates:

Of course, not a single member of Congress wanted to sacrifice their child for the war in Iraq, and who could blame them? Who would want to give up their child? Would you? Would [President Bush]? I’ve always been amazed that the very people forced to live in the worst parts of town, go to the worst schools, and who have it the hardest are always the first to step up to defend that very system. They serve so that we don’t have to. They offer to give up their lives so that we can be free. It is, remarkably, their gift to us. And all they ask for in return is that we never send them into harm’s way unless it’s absolutely necessary. Will they ever trust us again?

This narration could be considered an emotional appeal. Moore uses words such as you, us, and we. Moore is using propagandistic methods to convey his messages to mass audiences but that does not necessarily mean it is harmful. Shabo’s 2008 *Techniques of Propaganda and Persuasion* supports this claim: positive propaganda, with evidence to support it, evokes sympathy, inspires generosity, and promotes civic responsibility. On the other hand, negative propaganda provokes fear and hostility, dehumanizes the enemy, and promotes discrimination and violence. Moore’s narration evokes sympathy and promotes the civic responsibility of those who served in Iraq. His use of documentary and the footage with Congressmen on Capitol Hill suggests that Moore is chipping away at small pieces of the

power structure and attempting to reveal the truth about the Bush Administration. However, this system is the foundation of American politics. Moore's directorial efforts reveal the hypocrisy and unethical behavior in the power structure during this time, but it does not change any of it due to the overprotective nature of the power structure. Essentially, while others suffer the true burden of war for the Bush Administration, the powerful remain powerful and the less privileged remain less privileged.

After Moore's narration, news footage is shown of Bush, Rumsfeld, former Vice President Dick Cheney, and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice perpetuating their deceptive propaganda without sufficient support, using phrases such as "He had used weapons," "We know where they are, they're in the area around Tikrit, and Baghdad, and...and east, west, south, and north," "There is a tie between Iraq and what happened on 9/11," "The struggle can only end with their complete and permanent destruction," and "We waged a war to save civilization itself. We did not seek it, but we will fight it, and we will prevail." Interestingly, all of these statements have the features of negative propaganda as explained by Shabo in that these statements provoke fear and hostility, dehumanize the enemy, and promote discrimination and violence. These clips depict the consistent espousing of American patriotism and other dichotomous propaganda by those in power.

The last clip shown before the credits appear is footage of Bush at a podium, stumbling with his words. Bush says, "There's an old saying in Tennessee, I know it's in Texas, probably in Tennessee, that says: Fool me once, shame on...shame on you... Fool me, you can't get fooled again." Moore uses this embarrassing and comedic footage to suggest that Bush is a comic fool. This is not the most professional or evidence-based attack Moore made in the film;

however, comedic relief is an effective way to evoke reactions and emotions in an audience. Right before the credits, a message is displayed that reads, "This film is dedicated to Michael Pederson, Brett Petriken and all the soldiers from the Flint area who have died in the Iraq War, Bill Weems and the 2,973 who died on 9/11/01, and the countless thousands who have died in Afghanistan and Iraq as a result of our actions." This could be viewed as an attempt by Moore to emphasize the idea that American's are in the war together. Instead of solely blaming the Bush Administration, Moore uses the phrase "...as a result of our actions," implying that others are complicit in supporting the war. Essentially, Moore adds this powerful last scene to suggest that death is the ultimate consequence of our support of the power structures' subjugation.

To conclude, four major scenes of *Fahrenheit 9/11* present elements that suggest the presence of a power structure in America, the Bush Administration. The Bush Administration takes advantage of the resources and influential capabilities it has to disseminate deceptive stories and claims that benefit its own interests. The administration also manipulates those in less powerful position by using patriotic, deceptive, and dichotomous propaganda. Highlighting instances of unethical power structures, Moore articulates the complicity and indifference of many during the Bush era. In essence, Moore is trying to both articulate and deconstruct identities and ideologies in an era he knows is dominated by media. Through his articulation and deconstruction, Moore demonstrates how the public and representatives in Congress allowed the 2000 election to be stolen and how thousands of innocent lives were unjustly lost in the Iraq war all because America is a complicit, comic fool much like Bush. Like Bush, citizens who fail to act help to maintain a corrupt and broken system that does not serve the interests of the common good.



In order to examine the effectiveness of the film, I will address the rhetorical appeals that exist in *Fahrenheit 9/11* in three separate categories: ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos refers to appeals to credibility and authority, pathos refers to appeals to audience emotions, and logos refers to appeals to logical facts and figures.

### ETHOS

Michael Moore has created, produced, and directed films since the late 1980s. These films focus primarily on American political, social, and economic issues. Through the years, Moore accumulated a watchful audience of Both supporters and critics. His supporters know him as a director that sets positive and ethical goals for his works. He desires to present his claims in a way that is upfront and genuine, absent of deception and alternative motives. In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Moore uses a mixture of documentary film, archival footage from media and news sources, and relevant narration to illustrate his belief that the Bush Administration deceived its way to power during the 2000 election, as well as disseminated deceptive information to gain public acceptance and support for invading Iraq. What makes this film credible and authoritative is Moore's liberal use of historical footage and credible sources for claims made during the film.

### PATHOS

Moore cleverly reveals the Bush Administration's appeals to fear and patriotism with some appeals of his own. For example, Moore uses footage of an innocent Iraqi woman crying because United States bombers destroyed her house. Additional clips show bloody and dying men, women, and children. In juxtaposition with these clips of the war in Iraq are news clips from American media sources boasting of the military's humane and precise ability to bomb certain targets without harming innocent lives, as well as speeches from George Bush promoting a polarizing rhetoric of us versus them. These choices in editing reveal Moore's attempts to appeal to both the sympathy of the American people as well as their anger, because it explicitly reveals lives lost and the deception of the Bush Administration. Moore also uses appeals to patriotism by explaining that the Bush Administration's motive is un-American and only results in the unjust deaths of American and Iraqi soldiers.

### LOGOS

*Fahrenheit 9/11* provides logical arguments for Moore's claims. While many critics contend that Moore promotes lies and conspiracy theories, this is not actually the case. Moore provides a variety of credible sources to back up each claim made in the film's narration. In fact, Moore released a book to coincide with the film, titled *The Official Fahrenheit 9/11 Reader*. In addition to literary sources, most of *Fahrenheit 9/11* is comprised of real archival footage. There is archival documentation of George Bush's personal history as well as the Bush Administration's political history. In addition to this evidence, Moore provides numerous testimonies from those Americans most affected by the War on Terror. It seems that Moore constructed a foundation of supporting materials on which he can firmly state his claims. These logical proofs evoked a mixture of Both positive and negative reactions in the audience. Although Moore supports his claims with credible evidence, not everyone accepted his arguments.

The reaction to *Fahrenheit 9/11* was controversial. There were attempts by conservative organizations like Move America Forward to ban the film from entering American theaters. There were comments criticizing the film for being an "Al Qaeda training video" and a "crass anti-American jihad," (Gensler, 2004, p.1). For some, like former Newsweek writer Michael Isakoff, banning the film from the public was too rash a decision. Instead, he criticized the film as nothing more than a plethora "of investigative journalism, partisan commentary and conspiracy theories," (Bleifuss, 2004, para.2). Writer Ed Koch believes that Moore is attacking the President and his own country by "sapping its strength and making its enemies stronger," during a time when America was under attack by fundamentalist terrorists (Koch, 2004, p.1). Writer Natalie Stroud (2010) stated that she believes the film will only further the polarization of the nation because of the rapidly progressing technology/media environment and ample opportunities for people to selectively expose themselves to news sources that best suit their interests and ideologies. Other evidence that points to a backlash against *Fahrenheit 9/11* include films produced in response to it, including *Fahrenhype 9/11* directed by Alan Peterson, and *Michael Moore Hates America* directed by Michael Wilson. These films

demonstrate the strong impact *Fahrenheit 9/11* had on writers, directors, and producers who felt a counter response to Moore was necessary.

There was also an abundance of positive praise for *Fahrenheit 9/11*. The documentary won the 2004 Cannes Film Festival's Palme d'Or and the film received a rare standing ovation after screening. The film is also the highest-grossing documentary of all time. Writer David Edelstein deemed the film an act of justifiable counterpropaganda while journalist Joel Bleifuss believes Moore created a work of propaganda that reveals truths that were being hidden during the Bush Administration. The very fact that this artifact evoked such an extreme and diverse spectrum of public responses supports the conclusion that the film indeed impacted audiences who viewed it.

Regarding the first research question, there are multiple ways *Fahrenheit 9/11* can be regarded as propaganda perpetuating a certain ideology. Through presented and suggested elements in the four scenes of this film, I found that Moore perpetuated the idea that Americans were complicit in allowing manipulation by the Bush Administration to occur, and that the Bush Administration, during the War on Terror, used deception and hegemony to lead Americans into war. These ideologies are spread through forms of propaganda described by Shabo (2008), including pinpointing the enemy, plain folk, and testimonials. By the use of editing and narrative techniques, Moore consistently perpetuated the notion that the Bush Administration was the real enemy rather than terrorists in the Middle East. Moore also used words such as we and us in narrations, as well as notably commending U.S. soldiers from places like his hometown of Flint, Michigan. This may have been an effort to make himself more like one of the audience. His emotional and powerful testimonials from families affected by the war provide biased, yet passionate and real, support for his ideologies. There are many ways to view *Fahrenheit 9/11* through a propagandistic lens, as both supportive and critical opinions of the film predominantly consider it to be some form of propaganda. This claim leads to the examination of the second research question.

After careful ideological investigation of several major scenes in the film *Fahrenheit 9/11*, I conclude

that it is an ethical form of propaganda. To reiterate a quote from Bleifuss (2004, para. 25),

Yes, *Fahrenheit 9/11* is propaganda, in the same way the nightly news is, or the front page of your daily paper. It's just that Moore is more upfront with the point he is trying to make. Critics contend that Moore is framing the president. Not quite. He builds his case with the president's own words, numerous damning facts and the testimony of those most affected by the war.

This quote reveals the weakness in the claim that Moore's film is nothing more than investigative journalism and partisan commentary. Although those opposed believe the information in this film is partisan and biased, the information is actually supported by evidence. Moore's book, *The Official Fahrenheit 9/11 Reader*, contains a transcript of the film along with hundreds of credible sources that support the claims Moore made in the film. This debunks the claim that Moore's information is untruthful and partisan. It is interesting to note how similar Shabo's (2008) definitions of positive and negative propaganda resonate in both Moore's narration and the Bush Administration's actions. Shabo defines positive propaganda as propaganda that evokes sympathy, inspires generosity, and promotes civic responsibility. With inference to the presented elements in the film, Moore attempts to evoke each of these feelings. On the other hand, she describes negative propaganda as propaganda that provokes fear and hostility, dehumanizes the enemy, and promotes discrimination and violence. These characteristics are mirrored in the actions of the Bush Administration in the archival footage presented in the film.

Overall, it is clear that Moore attempted to influence people to think for themselves and to not let unethical hegemonic ideologies maintain dominance. As Bernays and Miller (2005, p. 50) said, "propaganda becomes vicious and reprehensive only when its authors consciously and deliberately disseminate what they know to be lies, or when they aim at effects which they know to be prejudicial to the common good." Moore is not intentionally disseminating information he knows to be lies; rather, he is being logical and ethical in conveying a well-developed argument supported by evidence. Unlike the Bush Administration's

perpetuation of the 'evil other' needing to be permanently destroyed, Moore is disseminating information that may lead to fewer deaths and the common good of Americans. Information sources like *Fahrenheit 9/11* should not be banned or removed from the public eye because "Moore has a right to make his film and others have a right to complain about it, ridicule its content, debate its merits or avoid it all together (frequently all four)" (Gensler, 2004, p.1). Attempting to keep a documentary from the public

seems suspicious. Ideologies are constantly in flux. To work toward a future that benefits society, we cannot suppress or disregard different ideologies just because they are not appealing to the dominant hegemony of the time. Therefore, though this film did not appeal to the Bush Administration, it disseminates claims that evoke sympathy for others, inspire generosity, and promote civic responsibility. It is because of this that *Fahrenheit 9/11* can be considered an ethical source of information and propaganda for the common good. ■

## REFERENCES

- BERNAYS, E., & MILLER, M. C. (2005). *Propaganda* [Kindle Paperwhite version]. New York, NY: Ig Publishing.
- BLEIFUSS, J. (2004). *Framing Michael Moore*. Retrieved from [http://inthesetimes.com/article/800/framing\\_michael\\_moore](http://inthesetimes.com/article/800/framing_michael_moore)
- EDELSTEIN, D. (2004, June 1). Proper propaganda: Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* is unfair and outrageous. You got a problem with that? *Slate*.
- FOSS, S. (2009). *Rhetorical criticism: Exploration & practice*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- GENSLER, H. (2004). Moore controversy over '9/11 Fahrenheit'. *Philadelphia Daily News*.
- KELLNER, D. (2004). 9/11, spectacles of terror, and media manipulation. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 1, 41-64.
- KOCH, E. (2004). Koch: Moore's propaganda film cheapens debate, polarizes nation. Retrieved September 11, 2014 from [http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2004/guest\\_koch\\_6\\_28.html](http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2004/guest_koch_6_28.html)
- SHABO, M. (2008). *Techniques of propaganda & persuasion* [Kindle Paperwhite version]. Clayton, DE: Prestwick House.
- STROUD, N. (2007). Media effects, selective exposure, and *Fahrenheit 9/11*. *Political Communication*, 24, 415-432.
- WHITE, M. (1992). Ideological analysis and television. In R. Allen (Ed.), *Channels of Discourse* (2nd ed.). Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.