BRIGETTE PIAZZA
Ryerson University , Canada

SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION AND THE FILTRATION OF MEDIA

Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to identify common, daily occurrences of the filtration of media (i.e: news media, entertainment media), and how the practices of these filtrations influence society and our ideologies towards others. The research presented will demonstrate how by accepting these ideologies, we as a society are allowing victimized voices to go unheard and ultimately contributing to systems of oppression. This paper will analyze multiple media cases such as violence and racism, rape, mental illness, etc. and will contribute to the understanding of how oppression does not have to necessarily be considered physical and/or verbal acts, but also can be as simple as accepting the historical and evolutionary biases, representations and/or ideologies to be true.

Keywords:

Media, Filtration, Racism, Violence, Mental Illness, Rape, Oppression, Biases, Ideologies

One of the most powerful gifts humans are given is a voice. We as individuals were given a voice to articulate our emotions, express our own standpoints and ideas, and to communicate effectively. However, what happens when our voices are not heard? Who (and what) gets to determine whose voice takes precedence over somebody else? In most cases, the victim's voice is the voice going unheard. Often times, we stray towards the voice of the individual who is perceived as the 'dominant' social figure- whether that be racially, politically, authoritatively, etc. Using the notions of ideology, media and countercultural puzzles, I will examine the filtration of media, thus causing victimized voices to go unheard, and ultimately contributing to systems of oppression.

On Wednesday, March 18th, 2015, Martese Johnson was tackled and arrested outside of a local pub in Virginia. As stated by records, Johnson was charged with obstruction of justice after getting into a verbal and physical altercation with a police officer(Helsel, 'UVA Student Martese Johnson Bloodied in Violent Arrest' 2015). Whereas, Johnson's attorney and multiple UVA students rallied in protest, expressing that the police acted with unnecessary force(Helsel, 'UVA Student Martese Johnson Bloodied in Violent Arrest' 2015). This particular circumstance is comparable to the death of African-American Eric Garner, who passed away in 2014 due to the aggressive arrest of a NYPD officer placing him in a choke hold while Garner cried "I can't breathe" several times(Gentry 4). Like Johnson, Garner and other spectators claim that he "was just standing there [and] minding his own business"(The Guardian 'I Can't Breathe' 2014). These two instances show the existence of racial profiling and prejudice, which leads into the concept of ideologies.

An ideology is "a set of ideas or ideals that we accept to be true"(Professor, 'Ideology and Media 2', 2015). We as individuals, grow up exposed to the different types of ideologies that relate back to the historical representations of society for generations. However, are all ideologies considered good? One ideology that pertains specifically to this context is the concept of 'Deadly Ideologies' (Professor, 'Ideology and Media 2', 2015). It is within these ideologies that individuals are not willing to inquire or question, despite that these ideologies make life hard for us. There is no evidence for their truths, and believing in their truths is looked at as a sickness. Another way to look at deadly ideologies is to think of them as the "isms" of oppression, which connects to both stories of Johnson and Garner (ie: racism), and various other examples in the media I will now analyze (Professor, 'Ideology and Media 2' 2015).

By the same token, what is equally important to note was not just the unjustified arrests for both Johnson and Garner, but also the excessive force and aggression used in these arrests. For Johnson, he was slammed to the ground ferociously, while blood freely flowing from his head, sustaining 3 gashes (one which required 10 stitches), bruises on his body, a busted lip and face swelling(Johnson, "Martese Johnson Speaks Out" 2015). With Garner, it was again, forceful tackling to the ground (from behind) and his fatal

chokehold(Gentry 4). Both sets of officers appeared merciless, ignoring Garner and Johnson in their cries(Gentry 4 15). This is intriguing and critical to note as besides the fact that race affects the conclusion whether or not to arrest, "police are more likely to 'hassle' minorities without cause"(Browning, et al., 1). Johnson reports "Although it could never compare to a life of slavery, for those hours, I had no freedom, no autonomy and no say in what was happening to me…my lifelong vision of sanctuary in success was destroyed in seconds"(Johnson, "Martese Johnson Speaks Out" 2015)

Prejudice is "the prejudging of a situation and/or person based upon less than all the facts"(Barber 1142). For both Garner and Johnson, prejudice took place when authority figures (police officers) acted on no concrete evidence and substantial proof to instigate arrests. Racism ties in with prejudice as it is "the belief that one race is superior to another"(Barber 1188). What is critical to note about racism is that can be educated and taught, therefore emerging into a cultural ideology (Teaching Assistant, Tutorial 6, 2015). Racism comes into play in both Johnson and Garner's case as over the span of evolution, African Americans were portrayed as violent, unintelligent 'animals' who lacked morals, and who were susceptible to dangerous and/or criminal acts(Lemons, 104). Despite that society has made considerable developments in regards to the judgments and ideologies about different cultures and race-ethnicities, racial biases still reside in individuals today due to the evolutionary and historical representations that society has been exposed to for generations.

Furthermore, this ties in with the notion of different ways of seeing- specifically the term "violence as a lens"(Houghton, Lecture, "Black Lives Matter" Week 9). The phrase 'violence as a lens' depicts that there are distinct ways in which we as human beings, interpret people and/or situations, and that these ideas are "wrapped up in anti-blackness"(Houghton, Lecture, 'Black Lives Matter,' Week 9). This can be elaborated by explaining that violence does not always refer to the physical act of hurting someone. Violence can also be described as a way of perceiving and interpreting bodies. It is because of these perceived ideologies, that the black community has had to resort to the alteration and re-adjustment of their behaviours. Individuals of the black community do this in order to distance themselves as much as possible from the racial stereotypes that are executed in society(Houghton, Lecture, "Black Lives Matter" Week 9).

As an illustration, CNN's Don Lemon executed his very problematic five-point plan to 'end racism and to fix the black community' over television. The 'plan' entails that blacks must "(1) stop sagging pants and to dress appropriately, (2) stop and refrain from saying the N-word, (3) stop littering and respect where you live, (4) finish school, and to (5) stop having babies out of wedlock"(Clutch, "No Talking Points" 2013). This 'plan' raises bothersome, racialized stereotypes for multiple reasons. For one, it insinuates that this set of criteria strictly applies to the black community, when there are copious amounts of individuals (from an assortment of backgrounds) that DO act on these principles. Additionally, these

matters reinforce the ideologies that originated from black slavery- the idea that blacks are simpleminded, lethargic, and resemble animals (Teaching Assistant, Tutorial 6, 2015).

That being said, the media plays a pivotal role in determining what is important and what is considered 'criminal.' Multiple media channels such as newspaper articles, films, radio programs, TV series, etc., have a lot to do with displaying criminal acts and violence(Herzing 'What is the Prison Industrial Complex?' 2005). An example to illustrate this would be the consistent news segments communicating of rape occurrences executed by black individuals. In news media, we hardly ever come across segments of white rapist criminals. As an instant ramification, we as a society, create the generalization that individuals in the black community lack morals, and that this is a norm. However, according to 'The Myth of the Black Rapist,' there are actually more white rape convicts, than there are black(Aulette, Wittner 107). Furthermore, the authority and filtering of the media relates to the idea of slavery, racism and colonialism. Colonialism is when one country exercises to acquire full control over another and govern over it"(Loomba 20). By the media exploiting and filtering negative news segments specifically about African-Americans, (as opposed to various demographic groups), it exhibits that individuals of the racial majority still obtain these deadly ideologies that their race is somehow 'superior' over another and have not 'sunk to the level' of perpetrating such acts.

Be that as it may, there are still a large number of social activist communities that refuse to respect the societal stereotypes and stigma surrounding the African-American community. A popular example of this would be the social activist outlet 'Black Twitter' with the marketable and favored hashtag of '#blacklivesmatter'(Garza, 1). 'Black Twitter' is a channel for interaction, commentary and overall, a place for black thought where statements, values, and beliefs can go untouched(Florini, 2).

Correspondingly, the media plays a crucial task in how we regard scenarios and/or individuals. More significantly, the media obtains the deceiving skill of filtering voices that are *not* being heard. To illustrate would be the "Steubenville High School Rape Case" that resided in Steubenville, Ohio during August of 2012(Chai, Gordon and Johnson 2). A young teenaged girl who underwent severe intoxication, was publicly assaulted, and raped by two fellow peers, while having a naked picture of her posted on the popular social media outlet, Instagram(Chai, Gordon and Johnson 2). Unfortunately, the media managed to distance themselves immensely from the position of the victimized girl by posing sympathy and empathetic language for the boys who were convicted. The media did this by showcasing news segments of the boys feeling 'regretful,' explaining how they held 'such promising futures'(Chai, Gordon and Johnson 4). There was barely (if not any) mention of the girl who was victimized- no word of how the horrific event has shaped her and her family, follow up of her next steps or how she is presently coping(Chai, Gordon

and Johnson 4). Of greater importance, by media and news segments filtering these instances, it communicates to the public that it was the boys who were victimized, when they were the individuals perpetrating the assault, attack and overall humiliation of the girl.

Another popular instance of media filtration and victimization of voices would be depictions of mental illness. By far, entertainment media such as movies and TV series appear to be one of the highest contributing factors to mental health portrayals(Wahl, 344). These ideologies stem from the early 1900's as psychologist Charles Winick identified 152 films between 1919 and 1978 incorporating psychiatric themes(Wahl, 344). A more specific example of entertainment media would be the TV series of Criminal Minds. A first rate team of FBI profilers who analyze and overcome the country's most deviant criminals(CTV, 'About the Show' 2015). More than half of episodes played, the individual who suffers from a mental disadvantage is portrayed either as a rapist, robber or a murderer. A distinct case of this would be the mental condition of Schizophrenia. Many individuals have a belief that those who suffer from Schizophrenia are extremely violent and dangerous. However, according to Swanson et.al, in their "National Study of Violent Behaviour in Persons with Schizophrenia", 80.9% of individuals with Schizophrenia reported no violence whatsoever, following 15.5% reporting minor violence and 3.6% reporting serious violence(Swanson et al., 497). These examples exhibit that the media has the capabilities and deviant skill of portraying what is being said, who is saying it, and who is being heard- ultimately leading to the "prolonged cruel or unjust treatment of control," otherwise known as oppression(Barber, 1020).

Additionally, this now leads into the topic of the Prison Industrial Complex(PIC). PIC can be referred to as the use of policing, imprisonment and surveillance towards private investment in mass incarceration(Gordon, 147) Exercising such acts not only shifts away from the idea of prison being a space of amendment, but it is also benefits the government and other dominant social figures in society (whether that be racially, politically, or economically) as it feeds into the ideology that the majority population is 'superior' or 'better' over the minority. This is executed by creating dominant media images that prolong stereotypes of individuals of poverty, color, immigrants, members of the LGBTQ community, etc., by making them appear delinquent and/or unorthodox(Herzing 'What is the Prison Industrial Complex?' 2005).

Comparatively, these issues and ideologies portrayed in the media can be coupled with the theme of countercultural puzzles, specifically human rights. Michael Ignatieff discusses the concept of human rights in his article "Democracy and the Rights Revolution." It is on page 2 that he says, "Rights are not just instruments of the law, they are expressions of our moral identity as people"(Ignatieff, 2). In this context, Ignatieff explains that rights are in many cases, legal differences and expression of our longing to

live in a fair world, is a mission of struggle. Individuals of the minority, are always struggling for a right to be equal, and for a right to be on the same playing field.

Moreover, these are only some of the numerous examples where incidences in the media are filtrated and unexplained, thereby causing voices to go unheard. As previously mentioned, our voices are extremely powerful. Media filtration occurs on a daily basis; who (and what) we choose to listen to is up to us. By allowing the filtration of media to influence how we perceive the world and other human beings, we are subconsciously contributing to systems of oppression without even fully recognizing it. Cornell West once said, "justice is what love looks like in public"(Kurzwel, 201) If we as a society can show love, acceptance and attend to those whose voices are unheard, then that will be a true uprising to humankind.

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