

Essay 1

Prompt: *During the first two weeks, I will be explaining a range of concepts key to the kind of Cultural Studies we will be undertaking this semester.*

Your first assignment is to analyze how Jennifer McCrory Calarco's December 2020 essay "The Real Problem with the 'Naughty List'" raises key Cultural Studies concepts such as ideology, hegemony, and childhood as a cultural construct. When writing your essay, make sure you are including explicit citations/quotes from class reading, lecture, and Calarco's essay.

Jennifer McCrory Calarco's essay on "The Naughty List" raises key concepts such as ideology, hegemony, and childhood as a cultural construct in many ways. This article shows concepts of counter-hegemony because she is opposing and challenging this childhood societal construct of "the naughty list" that favors kids in the upper classes. "The naughty list" constructs childhood culture by showing that if a kid gets a lot of presents and good ones, they are being good and deserving of them. This a societal construct built into many children's lives meanwhile Jennifer is stating that lower classes that may not be able to afford these gifts are no less deserving than the upper class. Jennifer states that when it comes to her children "If they do get the toy they want for Christmas, we have to tell them it's because we have the resources to buy it, and not let them assume that it's a reward for being "better" or, in Santa's terms, "nicer" than the kids who didn't get what they wanted"(Calarco).

She challenges this childhood construct that does not benefit all children in society. Children with the same behavioral tendencies in the lower class are told this "naughty list" story and are forced to accept that this is the reason for their lack of gifts or reinforcement, meanwhile it is just because of class/economic differences. She is challenging one dominant cultural ideology of Santa and "the naughty list" because of the way it constructs childhood. Through ideological analysis, some can see that Jennifer's essay challenges cultural power dynamics when

it comes to economic class and she does this by showing how she does not follow this childhood construct built into society about what childhood means and what it should or can be like. This ideology may be present in some children's lives and childhoods like it is portrayed in the tale, but not all.

Childhood in society is “constructed and childhood is discursively produced and historically and socially specific” (Mazzarella). This idea of “naughty” and “nice” is specific to kids in the upper class who have parents that can afford to give them presents and represent this idea of being “good” and getting rewarded. This construct only applies to one specific dominant group/ideology (upper class) surrounding the power of the upper class/their wealth while this constructed childhood eventually teaches the lower classes that because of the lack of wealth/presents they were bad and belong on “the naughty list” even if they don't.

She supports this idea specifically when she states “It seems safe to say that kids’ presents are more contingent on their families’ resources than their behavior—but the Santa myth says the opposite”(Calarco). Jennifer is calling out the tale that does not live it up to its storyline and affects childhood as a cultural construct. Jennifer writes of her challenge against this ideology so that her kids understand that this is not what childhood is and that they are getting presents from others that got them themselves. She states that she does this so that if her kids “don't get the toy or the game or the trip to Disney World that other kids get, they won't come away blaming themselves for not being as “good” as their friends”(Calarco).

Ideologies make inequalities and subordination seem natural (Kellner) and this “naughty list” childhood construct makes the underprivileged kids that don't receive gifts for being “bad” natural and correct even though it's not. For example, “In the past, this socio-historical legacy of childhood innocence has worked to support dubious social policies (like “the naughty list”),

particularly when related to race and class inequalities” (Mazzarella). The innocence of “the naughty list” that further pushes discipline and childhood labels of being good and bad supports the further ideologies that involve class inequalities.

Essay 2

Prompt: *This assignment gives you two options to reflect on your own experiences with social media and to teach me about those media. While I’m primarily interested in learning from you about TikTok, I know not all of you use that platform, which is why there is a second option. For this essay, and only this essay, include a heading identifying whether you are writing Option A or Option B. Option A: As a Baby Boomer, I’ve been trying to learn more about TikTok, and recently came across an early 2020 article in Forbes magazine (Taulli) offering explanations for its “enormous success.”*

The article quotes tech executive John Holdridge (a Millennial) as saying:

TikTok’s success can simply be attributed to how it flips what we think of as social media on its head, while at the same time returning us all to roots of the original appeal– the ability to go viral. We’ve all gotten so caught up in maximizing reach by growing a massive fan base through subscribers or followers, so it’s refreshing to have a platform with an algorithm that rewards content above all else. Because of that, it’s pushing meme culture to new heights, giving Gen Z a visible place to be themselves while allowing brands to inspire their fans in authentic, entertaining ways. They are also making real moves to grow user trust, which will ultimately determine the future of the platform.”

Grounded in your own experiences as a TikTok user and/or creator, reflect on the claims made by Holdridge. What is he getting right? What is he missing? Why do you use TikTok?

Option A

I am obsessed with TikTok and go on it at least once a day. After reading this prompt many statements are correct but could be further explained to get a full understanding of this groundbreaking app. As stated in the prompt “TikTok’s success can simply be attributed to how it flips what we think of as social media on its head, while at the same time returning us all to roots of the original appeal–the ability to go viral”(Holdridge/Taulli). This fully emphasizes the atmosphere that is created in this app. Tiktok has no boundaries, (unless deemed inappropriate by the app) and it provides people with an outlet to share things that people wouldn’t usually share

on social media in the past. It helped build a comfortable atmosphere for people to relate to each other without judgment. People will post the videos about their experiences and people in the comments will relate and not realize people believe or do similar things as them.

Also, the idea of going viral is on everyone's mind. Friends comment on my posts “FYP” to help the “algorithm” which is the way TikTok puts videos on people's "for you" pages. People comment on these things and share videos so that these memes and videos get onto the “FYP” and go viral so they can make money with a creator fund or just be famous. The idea of viral videos is heavily praised among gen z. This idea of a refreshing platform with an algorithm that rewards content above all else is helpful and makes TikTok more entertaining when it comes to media (Holdridge/Taulli). People get to see small creators get famous/viral and relate or laugh at videos. It gives people a sense of belonging even if they aren't like some of the big TikTok stars like Charli D'amelio.

Holdridge/Taulli state that “Because of that, it's pushing meme culture to new heights, giving Gen Z a visible place to be themselves while allowing brands to inspire their fans in authentic, entertaining ways”. They are correct with the fact that meme culture is being pushed further into the media but the idea that Gen Z is pushed to be themselves is only partially correct. Gen Z on Tiktok is sort of split into micro generations. There are the younger generation “little zs” born from 2003-2010 and “big zs” for the older generation born between the late 90s and 2002(Seemiller et al). Sometimes it seems like certain ages are judgmental of other people's videos and compare experiences a lot which could be considered going against this freedom to be yourself/authentic idea that is being shared.

Some people have a lot of trust in TikTok and some don't. When Holdridge/Taulli says “They are also making real moves to grow user trust, which will ultimately determine the future

of the platform” it can go either way. Many people trust this app because it gives small creators a chance to go viral and share their content without being closed out of people's FYP. On the other hand, there have been rumors of the government taking information or TikTok shutting down which has led a lot of people to be skeptical about this app. Once politics got involved in 2020 and articles were released saying Trump wanted to shut it down, a lot of people lost trust in TikTok and the power they had. Many big creators started to lose faith and advertised other apps like “Triller” just in case of a shutdown.

Overall TikTok is an entertaining app that has revolutionized the social media and entertainment industry. I go on it when I need a break from work or just need a laugh, but it can be dangerous because an hour later I realize I have been sitting there on my FYP for too long. Simple and regular everyday people will blow up in a blink of an eye and have their careers set for life. It has expanded artists' music to a variety of audiences and has helped people raise money for great causes. There have been problems in the past but this article/ prompt pretty much nails Tiktok's ideas and values on the head.

Essay 3

Prompt: *During one of the first classes of the semester, I will be explaining how to do a framing/thematic/ ideological analysis of news stories. Your third essay assignment is to compare the ideological strategies/themes used by three high-profile news outlets when covering Generation Z during the early weeks of the pandemic versus how National Geographic magazine covered the same topic six months later. In doing so, you should refer to specific quotes and other information from the news articles to back up your analysis as well as to our class readings & lectures such as those on Cultural Studies and Generations.*

There are many similarities and differences with the ideological strategies/themes used by three high-profile news outlets when covering Generation Z during the early weeks of the pandemic versus how National Geographic magazine covered the same topic six months later.

Through ideological/framing/thematic analysis, one can see the extensive use of words like Gen-Z, certain interviews/quotations, certain words to shape the opinions of a generation.

Framing essentially involves selection and salience (Entman) and using it one can see the identity that Smith, Bella, and Boston Herald Editorial Staff created for Gen-Z. First off, they quoted words like Millennial, and Gen-Z and repeatedly mentioned these words while not mentioning other generations. They framed these generations as the problem in their articles. Also, they ALL quoted a college student named Brady who stated in an interview “If I get corona, I get corona,” a shirtless Sluder told Reuters. “At the end of the day, I’m not going to let it stop me from partying. ... We’ve been waiting for Miami spring break for a while”. They specifically quoted this student and other comments showing neglect of rules and CDC guidelines. This was the one quote that showed the dignity they were trying to portray for Gen-Z

They selected aspects of reality involving gen z- not caring about the pandemic and people not following guidelines. This further pushed power dynamics because it is framing Gen-Z into being the cause/spread of the pandemic while other generations “are not”. Through framing one can see how they used one person to represent the reality and picture of Gen-Z. Unlike these three articles, National Geographic discussed Gen-Z but did not bring up this spring break aspect as the cause of the spread. They discussed economics and labor. They took this representation of reality with Gen-Z and showed other reasons why they could be transferring the virus.

They state that “while younger generations are being blamed, in some quarters, for the pandemic’s spread, they are bearing the greatest burden of poverty and the brunt of the transmission risk that comes with keeping the economy going, all with little help insight”(Renner). Instead of quoting a typical spring breaker that many other articles used they

quoted a doctor/student struggling to get by who experienced a story that showed the labor impacts on the coronavirus and younger generations. Through thematic/framing analysis, one can see another side of reality in this piece by quoting a college student (Jackson) who finally got another job after losing one which paid for her college expenses.

They state “what worried her more than her safety was the chance that she might become an asymptomatic carrier and unknowingly infect her grandmother, with whom she lives”(Renner). They show a different side of this generation during the virus in National Geographic instead of the same spring break quote continuously used. They also state that “Younger generations are blamed for the pandemic’s spread, but also face the brunt of the transmission risk that comes with keeping the economy going”(Renner). The doctor spoke with a pregnant woman who had been very sick and affected by corona. They stated that her husband, who had to work, unknowingly brought Corona home to his wife and unborn child(Renner). They stated that this news recalled the impossible choices the pandemic is forcing young adults to make every day(Renner).

Like the other three articles, they used certain words to show a present reality, and through framing one can see the differences in what both sides were portraying to the public. The first three articles framed their pieces in a way to point the finger at Gen-Z and their lack of empathy during the pandemic. National Geographic framed/ used themes involving economy and labor to explain the transfer of the virus among Gen-Z. Through ideological analyses/framing and thematic analyses, one can see both of these articles showed a reality but did it through different lenses.

Essay 4

Prompt: *Over the past decade plus, YouTube has turned numerous “ordinary” teens and young adults into celebrities through a process called “celebrification.” These young microcelebrities and influencers are particularly popular with teens and young adults, often more popular than traditional celebrities (actors, singers, athletes, and so on).*

Select a current YouTuber who is no older than 21, with at least 3 million subscribers and who was not a celebrity prior to their role on YouTube. Your YouTuber can have any kind of channel such as make-up, gaming, pop culture commentary/reviews, unboxing/hauls, social issues, and so on. They can be someone you already follow or someone you’ve never watched before. Watch 2-3 of their videos posted since July 2020, and discuss how Berryman & Kavka’s (2017) concepts of intimacy and authenticity play out in these 2 videos. Provide specific quotes and descriptions to back up your analysis

Emma Chamberlain is a 19-year old American Internet personality with over 9.99 million youtube subscribers. She posts videos surrounding fashion, vlogging, cooking, taste testing, or concerts like Coachella. After watching her three videos: *24 HOURS IN MY HOUSE CHALLENGE*, *21 OUTFIT IDEAS*, and *MAYBE I CAN COOK?*, there were many signs of Berryman and Kavka’s concepts of intimacy and authenticity present in each one.

In Emma's *24 HOURS IN MY HOUSE CHALLENGE* video, she initially talks about her sponsor with *Crocs* and why she loves wearing them. She talks about their mission statement “Come As You Are” and describes how she relates to their brand mission. She further talks about *Crocs* Jibbitz that represent who she is/relates to her, specifically the one that said #ad and the coffee-related one connected to her coffee brand. She said “It's like they know me” further advertising the brand. Concepts of intimacy and authenticity further explain that “because YouTube celebrities promote both products and themselves as commodities, vlogs are ultimately employed by these individuals to establish their branded personas *as truth*, thus channeling the affective impact of authenticity into the economic impact of consumer trust in ‘influencers’” (Berryman et al.). Emma relating to the brand further creates her persona, intimacy, and authenticity with the *Crocs* ad and developed trust with the viewers.

She also says “if you are out and about and it's raining, these will be completely fine” which relates to the temporal register of “evoking immediacy” (Berryman et al.). She is increasing involvement, brings the audience into the conversation, and provides a viewpoint for the viewers to put themselves in her shoes. She also is sitting in her bed criticizing her face and how she has no makeup on before an interview. This point connects to the idea of the spatial register of closeness, authenticity, and ordinariness. Specifically how “ordinariness works to reinforce celebrity— “this is a ‘real person who has been celebrified’”(Berryman et al.).

In the *21 OUTFIT IDEAS* video, Emma showed concepts of the social register that is “produced by patterns of direct address and self-revelation” (Berryman et al.). She tried on multiple outfits for her fashion goals in 2021 and said things like “If you guys are like me, and want to up your game I'm here to help”. She was directly addressing the audience, disclosed her motives, and related them to the people watching her. She said things like “You might be thinking Emma you look like a librarian”. This quote relates to the spatial and social registers that evoke closeness, create intimacy, and have direct address (Berryman et al.). She is talking to the camera (social) in her bedroom (spatial) as if they are a close friend with her that is thinking about what the video was portraying/what she was doing.

Lastly in the *MAYBE I CAN COOK?* video, Emma is describing her experience with cooking and making Buddha Bowls with the audience. She says “ I’m vegetarian” and how she likes to cook the vegetables she works within the video. This relates to the author's emphasis on oblique autobiography described as “by inventorying the mundane – what we eat and what we read – we leave a trail that can say as much about ourselves as a more traditional diaristic approach, leaving room enough for the reader to connect the dots and construct the narrative in a plethora of ways”(Berryman et al.). Her talking about vegetarianism allows the audience to

connect ideas and views they have on her. She said, “I hope you guys give cooking a try” and end with a forehead kiss like every other video she does. She once again is treating the audience like a close friend and this relates to the previous spatial and medial registers mentioned. The Medial intimacy register involved being “evinced by small-screen techniques such as cinematography, mise-en-scene, and editing rhythms”(Berryman et al.). Using a different camera angle, screen frame, and kissing the top of the lens like she is kissing the forehead of a family member creates intimacy and authenticity.

- Emma Chamberlain -24 HOURS IN MY HOUSE CHALLENGE, March 21, 2021
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScWXi59imGI>
- Emma Chamberlain -21 OUTFIT IDEAS, January 3, 2021,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euyEnvzVxmo>
- Emma Chamberlain -MAYBE I CAN COOK? January 10, 2021
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4oLWt06YT4E>

Essay 5

Prompt: *The youth movement to fight climate change is both global and diverse, yet the news media tends to focus its coverage on Greta Thunberg. Your assignment is to follow a different youth (age 25 or younger) climate activist on Twitter and/or Instagram starting in January of this year. While you can select any youth climate activist other than Greta Thunberg, some potentials with active Twitters include Xiye Bastida, Jamie Margolin, Vanessa Nakate, Licypriya Kangajam, and Isra Hirsi, but there are numerous others. A quick Google search will find many for you.*

Identify and discuss the key issues raised by your activist during this time frame and the strategies they use in reaching their publics. (For strategies, you could look at their use of emojis, photos, retweeting, hashtags, memes, links, etc.)

Vanessa Nakate is a 24-year-old climate justice activist that is very active on Twitter. From January to April, she has retweeted important climate issues and has used a variety of hashtags, links, photos, and emojis to help get her point across about climate change. With over 13.9k tweets, she has used Twitter to speak out about this issue with many other activists. She is an activist that is constantly communicating online. She tweets likes and retweets pictures of rallies and signs supporting climate activism every day at least five times a day. The first thing I noticed about her feed was her one hashtag repetitively used called #fridaysforfuture. On Fridays, she retweets other kids that tweet about climate change. She seems to try to create connections with other activists that have reached out to her to share their feelings and help; some famous and others not.

From January on, she has repeatedly retweeted and tweeted saying “we cannot eat COAL” while using #savemollem which has to do with climate change and saving forests in Mollem and Goa. She uses a repetitive strategy and the reuse of phrases to have her feed see the same ideas and activism multiple times throughout the month. She relates topics to other issues that directly affect people now like food insecurity so people can see the impact of the issue she is tweeting about.

In March, she was discussing the topic of facing the climate emergency that faces the planet and was very active with others on social media. She tweets about coal and how it is hurting our planet and is tagging big names of companies/organizations/governments like the British High Commission in Uganda. She uses her social media to target and get others to talk to big corporations and people to get her message out there. She retweeted many other climate activists like Greta Thunberg using the #nomoreemptypromises. She retweeted other activists spreading the word onto her feed for her followers to see.

Now in April, Vanessa has incorporated other hashtags involving other justice movements like environmental and racial. She is incorporating these other topics to show how they impact one another which is a strategy that is helping her reach larger audiences. She is retweeting other users in the other movements which are building connections between her and other activists. She also promoted a panel that she did with other activists like Greta Thunberg which has helped her reach other activists' audiences as well and has gotten her message to them through this event. She shared a link to this event as well as other events. It involved the idea of building power through organizing and had to do with climate change. It was a virtual event her followers could watch.

Overall, Vanessa is a very active activist who uses Twitter as her main platform to reach her desired public. She used hashtags involving climate change and interacted with followers and activists to spread her message regarding climate change to the world. Retweeting, quoting, and tagging specific organizations and followers was a way she reached her desired audience because she ended up on more timelines and was connecting with more people virtually.