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300-word response

CDC’s “Banned Words” and Marcuse’s ideas on language and control

Last month, it was reported that the Trump administration advised the Centers for Disease Control to avoid using the words “vulnerable”, “diversity”, “transgender”, “fetus”, “entitlement”, “science-based”, and “evidence-based” in budget documents to increase chances of getting funding. The reasoning given was that use of these words might make people jump to conclusions about their research. Officials who spoke with the media were clear that the words are not banned in official documents, but that guidance for wording changes depending on who is in office. Scientists within the CDC have denounced these “recommendations” as “Orwellian censorship” and created the hashtag #ScienceNotSilence to protest (Cohen).

In Chapter 4 of *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse discusses the importance that language plays in societal domination. He argues that higher society, such as the government, has “the last word” in language use which “orders ... people to do, to buy, and to accept” (Marcuse, 86). I feel that had Marcuse lived to see today, he would criticize the reason given for the parsing of words in the CDC budget documents as being an “alternative technique of manipulation and control” (103). By claiming that these words would put people off from wanting to fund research, the words are demonized and the concepts become a negative, concrete image with “imposed truth and falsehood” rather than something that can be explored and developed through research (103). In addition, by restricting the language of the CDC, the chance of discussion and discourse about these concepts is closed, “unquestionable rights and wrongs” are established (101).

Despite this, I feel that he would be at least somewhat uplifted by the consciousness of and resistance against the system in response to this attempt at increased domination. The scientists who spoke out about this have revealed “a rigged game” in an attempt to make others more conscious about the censorship and create a greater involvement in the protest (257).

Cohen, Elizabeth. “The truth about those 7 words 'banned' at the CDC.” CNN, Cable News Network, 11 Jan. 2018, www.cnn.com/2018/01/11/health/cdc-word-ban-hhs-document/index.html.

Marcuse, Herbert. One-Dimensional Man. 2nd ed., Beacon Press, 1991.