



Figure 1.1

Model of communication



Mourning in the United States, 21st-Century Style



Mourning is a universal human communication process of celebrating the life of someone while grieving his or her death. Mourning rituals and traditions vary by culture and religion and change over time. So it is not surprising that mourning in the United States in the 21st century is adapting past practices to modern life.

Mourning rituals include norms for how the body of the deceased is dealt with, burial and commemorative rituals, symbols of mourning, and comforting practices. In the past, personally washing, dressing, and preparing the body for burial enabled mourners to present the deceased as they would like the person to be remembered. Burial and commemorative rituals gave family and friends an opportunity to gather, exchange memories, comfort those closest to the deceased, and receive comfort in return. Graves were places where those close to the deceased could go to "talk" to the departed and recall memories. Family members would often withdraw into their homes for a period of time to grieve. Those closest to the person who died often wore symbols of

their status as mourners. Mourning clothes and tokens served as signals that the person was grieving and should be accorded extra gentleness.

Today in the United States, most families do not personally prepare the body of loved ones for burial or wear special mourning clothes. Instead, many of the rituals traditionally associated with funerals and memorial services often take place online.

Increasingly, one or more family members may prepare a commemorative Web page that memorializes the life of the departed. Web sites such as Legacy.com, MyDeathSpace.com, and Memory-Of.com facilitate the creation of these interactive online memorials. An article in the *Boston Globe* recounted the story of Shawn Kelley, who created a "moving tribute" to his brother Michael, a National Guardsman killed in Afghanistan. The 60-second video features a slide show of images of Michael growing up while quiet classical music plays softly and a voice-over recounts Michael's attributes and interests. Shawn reported that it made him feel good to be able to "talk" about his brother, and over a year later he was still visiting the site to watch the video and to view the messages left by family members and friends (Plumb, 2006).

Interactive memorial Web sites also have become a “place” where mourners can “visit” with their departed loved one and connect with other mourners, activities that traditionally occurred at a funeral or memorial service. Today, for example, Legacy.com hosts over 50,000 permanent memorials and reports being visited by over 10 million users each month (Plumb, 2009).

The **somber** mourning clothes of past generations have also given way to newer ways of marking oneself as in mourning. Today family members and friends may wear T-shirts imprinted with pictures of the deceased. This practice is most common when the departed is young and died a violent death. According to Montana Miller, professor of popular culture at Bowling Green State University, the tradition of wearing commemorative T-shirts originated with West Coast gangs in the early 1990s (Moser, 2005).

Not only do people use T-shirts to signal mourning, but they also design **decals** to place on cars and bikes. In a highly mobile society, decals are visual markers that can not only memorialize a loved one who died but can also connect mourners to others who have suffered

a similar loss. When one 17-year-old was shot and killed, hundreds of people in his town put memorial decals in their car windows. Four years later the young man’s mother reported that seeing those decals continued to help her with her grieving process (Moser, 2005).

Although we may no longer personally prepare the dead for burial or wear somber formal mourning clothes, we still need to connect and communicate with others as we grieve, and we continue to evolve new methods for doing so.

Questions to Ponder

1. How did you/do you mourn when someone you care about dies?
2. Do you mourn differently today than you did when you were younger? Explain.
3. Do you mourn differently based on your relationship with the deceased (e.g., friend, family member)? Explain.
4. Do you ever mourn a relationship that ends (e.g., romantic relationship, friendship), and if so, why and how?



POP COMM!



From the moment she burst onto the pop music scene in 2009, Lady Gaga has been synonymous with outrageous performances and heavily stylized celebrity personas. From wearing a dress made of raw meat at the 2010 MTV Video Awards

to showcasing over-the-top music videos to arriving in a giant egg to the 2011 Grammys, Gaga has built her celebrity image not just on her musical talent but on her ability to draw public attention to herself.

But is it all just an act? We all socially construct the selves we present in certain situations. But is that the same thing as Stefani Germanotta turning herself into Lady Gaga? Is there a "real" person beneath this celebrity image? For Gaga, as with all celebrities, being in the public eye means negotiating

Self-Monitoring and Celebrity Culture

perceptions of who she "really" is outside of her public image as a pop singer. Such self-presentation is largely done through the media, and the most successful celebrities manage to present audiences a glimpse of an authentic or "real" self that does not appear to be stage-managed or constructed for the sake of fame. Lady Gaga readily admits that such self-monitoring is a necessary part of her celebrity image. "[P]art of my mastering of the art of fame," she explained in an interview on *60 Minutes*, "is getting people to pay attention to what you want them to, and not pay attention to the things you don't want them to pay attention to." But we tend to be drawn to celebrities who, despite their fame, glamour and fortune, successfully present this self as "just like us," or the self we would like to be, not those who are "faking it" for fame.

For Lady Gaga, at first glance, this "behind-the-scenes self" appears to be just as constructed as her public celebrity persona. At the same time, however, she consistently

frames this self as “real” in her songs and media appearances. Her celebrity persona is completely rooted in the idea that she is being her true self, even though that self is glamorous, constructed, extreme, over-the-top, and all the things that we already associate with her public image. She never takes off the makeup and fashion because being Lady Gaga is not simply a staged performance, but truly represents her sense of self. She told *Rolling Stone* “[B]eing myself in public was very difficult. I was being poked and probed and people would actually touch me and touch my clothes. . . . It was like I was being bullied by music lovers, because they couldn’t possibly believe that I was genuine.” Like all personas, what you see is constructed, but it is not “fake” or “inauthentic” just to be famous. But such careful self-monitoring also helps her protect some part of her private herself from the glare of the public eye. In the *60 Minutes* interview, she said, “[M]y philosophy is that if I am open with [my fans] about everything and yet I let art direct every moment of my life, I can maintain a sort of privacy in a way. I maintain a certain soulfulness that I have yet to give.”

Gaga’s “real” self remains self-consciously constructed in her physical appearance and

how she behaves in public, but is not intended to be an act or something distinct from her “authentic” self. Songs like “Born This Way” and the press she’s done surrounding the album of the same name foreground the idea that you should, like Gaga, be yourself no matter what, even if that self does not fit into dominant social expectations. In many ways, this consistent presentation of her public and private self has contributed to her success as a celebrity. She has become the icon of outsiders by claiming her outlandish identity as her “real” self. Anyone who has ever been on the outside can look to Gaga as someone who has been through the same ridicule and doubt that all outsiders experience. Gaga’s persona explicitly invites audiences to connect not just with the pop diva but with the “real” person who is “just like us,” even if we’ve never worn a meat dress.

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you believe Lady Gaga when she says her “public” and “private” selves are the same? Why or why not?
2. Do you think celebrities should maintain different public and private constructions of self? Explain.



One of the most successful movies of the summer of 2011 was also one of the most controversial. Set in the South during the pre-Civil Rights era, *The Help*, based on Kathryn Stockett's 2009 best seller, depicts the relationships between upper-middle-class white women and working-class black women who took care of their homes and families. On the surface, the film seems to challenge racism and offer a richer view of the lives of the black domestic workers. However, it sparked debate among film critics and audiences about its representation of race, questioning whether or not the black maids and their co-cultural experiences within a dominant white culture were accurately depicted or if the film relied too heavily on stereotypes about race and racism that have long permeated popular culture.

The Help: Race and Stereotypes in Popular Culture

The narrative of this film centers on the daily struggles of two black domestic workers, Aibileen (Viola Davis) and Minny (Octavia Spencer), employed in white households in Jackson, Mississippi, during the early 1960s. Their struggles as domestics are brought to light when Skeeter (Emma Stone), the white daughter of Aibileen's employer, writes a book based on interviews with Aibileen, Minny, and other black maids.

For many African American audiences, in particular, *The Help* resurrected negative stereotypes about black culture and life many have struggled to overcome. Prior to the release of the film, a statement issued by the Association of Black Women Historians challenged *The Help* on many levels, including its reliance on the "Mammy" stereotype that frames black women as "asexual, loyal, and contented caretakers of whites" who support the physical and emotional development of white children to the detriment of their own families. This stereotype, they argue, fails to recognize

the economic realities that historically forced black women into such low-paying and often exploitative domestic work, as well as racist political and social discourses that framed relationships between black domestic workers and white families. By framing the film as "a progressive story of triumph over racial injustice," they argue, "*The Help* distorts, ignores, and trivializes the experiences of black domestic workers."

These criticisms are rooted in the complexity of addressing and crossing the boundaries of cultural difference. Some expressed concern about the ability of a white woman (book author Stockett) and a white man (film director Tate Taylor) to tell the story of black women's experiences. Though both Stockett and Taylor grew up in Southern homes that employed black women as domestics, these critics challenge the assumption that their experiences as whites in the South match those of black women whose stories they try to tell. For example, black actor Wendell Pierce (*The Wire*, *Treme*) tweeted about taking his mother, who had worked as a domestic, to see the movie. He said they were both insulted by the film and its "passive segregation lite" that did not speak to the real experiences of black women in 1960s America. In other words, Pierce's mother's co-cultural experiences as a black domestic in the Jim Crow era did not resonate with the film's depiction, however well meaning, of those experiences. He tweeted, "Watching the film in Uptown New Orleans to the sniffs of elderly white people while my 80 year old mother was seething, made clear distinction."

This is not to say that all black audiences rejected *The Help*'s representation of race relations in the United States. Patricia Turner, African American studies professor and vice

provost for undergraduate studies at the University of California-Davis, suggests that because the film in fact tackled the complex issue of race in America, it does indeed represent an important step toward successful intercultural dialogue in this country. As a black woman raised in the era of Civil Rights by a mother who, like the women in the film, worked as a maid, Turner argues that *The Help* creates the opportunity for an important public dialogue about race ("Dangerous White Stereotypes"). She challenges audiences to recognize the underlying messages about race and racism called up by the film and compare its fictionalized representation of black and white relationships to historical realities. Similarly, *Entertainment Weekly* film critic Owen Gleiberman calls on audiences to engage with the film and its problems rather than simply condemning it as "racist." He "envision[s] audiences, black and white, watching *The Help*, all sharing a greater understanding of our past" ("Is 'The Help' a condescending movie for white liberals?"). He hopes that instead of simply rejecting the film as "racist," audiences will use the potential problems of the film as a starting point for discussion about how this depiction of race in America's past speaks to our understanding of race in the present.

Questions to Ponder

1. What do you think? Can films like *The Help* offer audiences a way to challenge our own co-culturally ingrained stereotypes or do they simply reinforce them in the name of entertainment?
2. What other stories about co-cultural experience could or should be told in feature films? Explain.

Richard Levine/Alamy Limited



The tabloids that line the checkout aisles claim to bring us the latest juicy details about the private lives of our favorite celebrities. Headlines pasted over photos of famous women like Angelina Jolie, Jennifer Aniston, and Jennifer Lopez often proclaim: "I'm having a baby!," "Yes, I'm pregnant!," or "Countdown to baby!" Yet more often than not, the featured celebrity isn't pregnant. Most of us understand that what is shouted in the headline of a tabloid will be a far cry from what is actually reported in the actual article. Because of the context, we question the accuracy of the headline and become curious about the "real story." This achieves the tabloids' purpose, which is to entice us to buy the magazine. Because of the pragmatics of tabloid speech acts, we're not surprised when the actual story turns out to be very different from what was touted on the cover. Still, we seek out the "truth" in the article because of our assumptions about the role of the press to present accurate facts.

Historically, the purpose of mainstream journalism has been to provide important unbiased information about substantial topics to a democratic society. Even if we are skeptical about tabloids' accuracy, we do expect "serious" news articles and stories to present facts that have been rigorously checked and editorial and opinion pieces that have been labeled as such. Given this context, when we view a headline in the daily paper or hear a news anchor's before-break-lead-in to the story, we trust that the headline is an accurate representation of the facts. As we read the item or listen to that news story, we assume that the facts presented are typical, accurate, unbiased, and can be trusted. In other words, we take the message at face value. So when a mainstream headline proclaims that Jennifer Aniston is pregnant, we have a context that

Blurring the Lines: The Pragmatics of Tabloid and Mainstream Journalism

prompts us to assume that the story will contain facts verifying that the actress is, in fact, "with child."

But celebrity tabloids and gossip blogs rely on language and pragmatic context more than facts to shape the meaning behind their stories. A candid photo of Jennifer Aniston touching her stomach does not, on its own, necessarily provide any proof that she is pregnant. But when captioned with the words "a baby at last?" or "is that a baby bump?" the magazine influences audiences to believe that Aniston is pregnant. Thus, the pragmatic goal of tabloids is to make a rumor seem true, even when the inside story doesn't contain any facts that validate the headline and may actually provide evidence to the contrary. Although most tabloid readers know that we should scrutinize photos and question headlines, we enjoy the entertainment value of them. The fun of these gossip magazines is the invitation to negotiate meaning and "truth" by judging the facts promised by the headlines against the information within the text of the articles rather than accepting them at face value.

Though we may expect such gossip-oriented reporting from tabloids and take such stories with a grain of salt, there is increasing concern about the "tabloidization of the mainstream press" and biased reporting from sources we historically turned to for facts and evidence. Driven in part by financial considerations, traditional media sources are reporting more sensational stories and using the same sorts of embedded sensationalism as the tabloids (Slattery, Doremus, & Marcus, 2001). Celebrity stories were once largely confined to the tabloids, but in this hyper-competitive media market, the so-called "serious" news outlets now spend more time reporting on celebrity deeds and misdeeds than in times past, and articles and stories in general focus more on rumors and

innuendos. For example, mainstream media frequently “report” stories that appear in tabloids without confirming the information reported in the original article (“The Star reports that Jen is pregnant”). Meanwhile, stories about political candidates increasingly use “facts” to speculate about the underlying motivation for a candidate’s position rather than digging up the facts that would reveal the validity of the position itself (e.g., speculating that Mitt Romney’s wealth puts him “out of touch” with middle-class Americans rather than examining his position and arguments or focusing on rumors about President Obama’s place of birth instead of his policy initiatives).

This blurring of lines between tabloid journalism and mainstream journalism has been going on for some time. In fact, in an article published in 1999, reporter Lynn Washington, Jr., commented on “the shallowness of mainstream media coverage of matters of public substances.” As evidence he cited “the increasing focus of political campaign coverage on polls and candidate faux pas rather than in-depth reporting of the difference in candi-

dates’ positions.” Further, he noted, “the intimacies of celebrity lifestyles receive wider coverage than the intricacies of public and corporate policies that affect quality of life issues.” It appears from recent campaigns and elections that Washington’s critique is still relevant today.

Questions to Ponder

1. Given these changes, how should we approach mainstream media stories?
2. Should we discount the headlines and expect the stories to be sensationalized as we do stories in tabloids, assuming the same pragmatics apply?
3. If we no longer can trust mainstream media to supply us with unbiased, fact-checked information (*Is Jen pregnant?*), how does this impact our understanding of substantive policy issues?
4. Where do we go for this information and how do we know that the sources we find can be trusted or believed?



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Since ancient times, people have been painting, piercing, scarring, tattooing, and shaping their bodies. In fact, there is no culture that didn't or doesn't use body art to signal people's place in society, mark a special occasion, or just make a fashion statement (American Museum of Natural History, 1999). The body art you see today is simply an extension of ancient human practice that has been adapted to our 21st-century definitions of status, ritual, and beauty.

Body painting is a temporary means of creating a different identity or celebrating a particular occasion. For centuries, Eastern cultures have used henna to dye hands and other body parts to celebrate rites of passage such as marriages. Traditionally in India, married women wore a *bindi*, a red spot or a piece of jewelry, between their eyebrows. Native Americans used a variety of natural dyes to paint their bodies in preparation for war. Today, women use cosmetics, sports fans decorate their faces and bodies before big games, and children have their faces painted at community festivals.

The Meanings and Messages of Body Art: Then and Now

Roman soldiers voluntarily underwent body piercings as a sign of strength. Some tribal cultures had a rite of passage calling for a person to hang from large piercings in the limbs or body trunk. Some societies used piercings as a sign of slavery, and others viewed them as signs of beauty or royalty (Schurman, n.d.). Today piercing is voluntary, and common parts of the body to be pierced are the ears and nose. Some people choose to pierce other body parts including eyebrows, tongues, navels, and genitals. Others practice stretching or gauging, the process of slowly expanding the size of a piercing to accommodate increasingly larger pieces of jewelry. Often, piercings are a rite of passage signaling some personal milestone. At a certain age, girls may have their ears pierced. Less traditional piercings or multiple piercings may be undertaken as a sign of rebellion or to express membership in a particular subculture.

Scarification is the deliberate cutting or burning of the skin in such a way as to control the scarring and create a pattern or picture. Sometimes the freshly made cuts are purposely irritated so that they form raised or keloid scars. Scarification was widely practiced in Africa, where facial scars could

identify a person's ethnic group or family, or just be an individual statement of beauty. The Jewish rite of circumcision practiced since the time of Abraham is a form of scarification. Today, scarification may be part of a fraternity or gang initiation rite. Some individuals use cutting to escape from feeling trapped in an intolerable psychological and emotional situation (Jacobs, 2005). The scars that result from this type of cutting are seen as badges of survival.

Tattooing is the oldest form of body art; tattooed mummies have been found in various parts of the world. Tattoos are permanent alterations to the body using inks or dyes, and they are symbolic in nature. Like other body art, tattoos can be either a statement of group solidarity or an expression of individuality. They can be sources of shame or pride. They can be public statements of outsider status or privately enjoyed personal symbols.

Like piercings, tattoos have also been used to mark people who were considered property or inferior in some other way. African American slaves were often tattooed. During World War II, the Nazis tattooed a five-digit number on the inner forearm of Jews and other "undesirables" in concentration camps to strip them of their individual identities. Unlike self-initiated tattoos, which are a source of pride for the wearer, these tattoos were a source of shame. For years after their ordeal, many Holocaust survivors covered their forearms and refused to talk about their experiences. The number on their arm was a grim reminder that they had survived while others had perished.

Today, tattoos are losing their outsider status. Celebrities, soccer moms, corporate executives, star athletes, and high school students sport tattoos as statements of individuality and personal aesthetic. Teenagers may "rebel" by having a small butterfly tattooed on their shoulder blade or a Native American-patterned band tattooed on their bicep. Some people have tattoos strategically placed so that they can choose to display them or hide them from view depending on the self they want to portray.

Shaping, another type of body art, is altering the silhouette or shape of the body based

on a culturally validated aesthetic (Australian Museum, 2009). Cranial shaping, neck stretching, foot binding, and corsetry have been practiced in various cultures at various times. Native American and African tribes practiced head shaping. In Africa, Burma, and Thailand rings or beaded necklaces are used to give the appearance of an elongated neck ("African Neck Stretching," 2008–2009). In a practice that lasted two thousand years, Chinese girls' feet were bound to achieve the ideal of tiny feet; this would help them to marry well (Lim, 2007). Corsetry began in ancient times as a means of protecting the wearer from hernias and other body damage that occurs during strenuous activity. By the time of the Romans, wearing a corset became a sign of lower status. Slaves, who did manual labor, wore corsets while their owners wore flowing garments. In the 16th century, fashionable French women cinched their corsets to achieve a 13-inch waist (Wilson, 2002). When Madonna donned a merry widow corset in the 1980s, she may not have realized that she was following a practice that is several centuries old. The Spanx undergarments that many women wear today have their origins in body shaping. Excessive exercising and weight lifting, cosmetic surgery addiction, and even eating disorders allow us to change our body and conform to current definitions of beauty. When it comes to body art, everything old is new again.

Questions to Ponder

1. At least in the United States, it appears that some types of body art have become extremely popular again. Why do you suppose this is?
2. Do you have any body art? If so, reflect on when and why you chose to do it.
3. When you see someone who has taken body art to an extreme, what do you think? How does this affect your interaction with this person?



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Eric Gay/Pool/Getty Images



Political debates have always been a key part of American democracy, exercising free speech in order to promote a national dialogue on important political issues. Though political debates are, ideally, moments of civil discourse intended to enhance a listener's understanding of a topic or viewpoint, the debates held in fall 2011 mattered more for what they revealed about the continuing decline of civil discourse in political culture.

For example, during a debate in September 2011, moderator Brian Williams asked Texas Governor Rick Perry about "the 234 executions of death row inmates over which Perry has presided," and the mere mention of the executions was met with loud cheers from some members of the audience before the governor could even respond (Greenwald, 2011). Though the cheers were clearly an instance of partisan support for Perry's position on the death penalty, many criticized this response as inappropriate; saying it shut down any meaningful public conversation about this difficult issue. *Salon* columnist Glenn Greenwald wrote, "Wildly cheering the execution of human beings as though one's favorite football team just scored a touchdown is primitive, twisted and base."

Similarly, in another debate that same month, when an openly gay member of the military asked former Senator Rick Santorum about his position on "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," members of the audience booed loudly at the question and cheered wildly as Santorum spoke of his opposition of the repeal of the policy (Wolf, 2011). Again, the crowd showed its support for Santorum and his views, but at the cost of shutting down a legitimate policy question from the soldier. Jesse Jackson argues that "a full and fair discussion is essential to democracy." Does limiting free speech on one side of the debate meet this standard?

Presidential "Debates": The Lost Art of Listening and the Future of Civil Democratic Discourse in the United States

The candidates themselves also participated in the debates using emotionally charged language and cutting one another off mid-sentence. Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney struggled to get his message out in the face of attacks and interruptions from the other candidates. Rick Perry labeled Romney's stance on illegal immigration as "the height of hypocrisy," claiming Romney had knowingly employed illegal workers at his Utah home. As Romney attempted to defend himself and his policy, Perry frequently tried to interrupt. During the same debate, Rick Santorum also continually interrupted and spoke over Romney's attempts to answer criticisms of the health insurance legislation he signed while governor of Massachusetts. Santorum declared "You're out of time. You're out of time" when Romney asked for more time to fully explain his views in light of the continued interruptions (Morrison, 2011). Are these the types of political debate that serve our democracy?

Professor Dale Harrison of Auburn University suggests emotion plays an important role in our political process, "Rants add passion to news events and inspire people to take sides on issues" (Johnson, 2006). This is certainly not a new phenomenon. As journalist James Maguire (2007) points out, as far back as 80 B.C., the Roman philosopher Cicero speculated that people are more convinced by pathos (emotion) than by logos (logic). But is the purpose of democratic dialogue lost when politicians refuse to listen to one another and instead interrupt and engage in emotional rants?

One research study showed that, in debates that are less than civil, viewers are less likely to remember the actual arguments underlying the positions than in more civil ones (Mutz, Reeves, & Wise, 2003). According to the National Institute for Civil Discourse, a bipartisan organization chaired by former presidents

George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, this has important consequences for our political lives. They suggest the decline of civil discourse in politics and the media's focus on the loudest and most extreme voices over rational and substantive debate "impairs the development of sound policy, making government less effective" and ignores "the multiplicity of opinions and approaches" needed to address the complex political problems facing our nation. In the midst of the political theater of debates and the media's focus on bickering, Americans are losing interest in the political process. Sur-

vey data from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2011) shows that Americans are becoming increasingly frustrated with elected officials for their poor performance and increasingly dissatisfied with the potential Presidential candidates.

Questions to Ponder

1. Given the decline of civil discourse in political debates today, should they be eliminated from the campaigning process?
2. What could be done to restore civil discourse in political debates?

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Michael Kemp/Alamy



Throughout history—in life, literature, and the media—people hoping to find love have solicited help from others. In Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "The Courtship of Miles Standish," the shy Miles asks his friend John Alden to plead his case with the beautiful Priscilla Mullins. John complies, but in a classic love triangle scenario, Priscilla asks John, "Why don't you speak for yourself, John?" And most of us remember at least one occasion in junior high when we asked a best friend to find out if that cute classmate was interested in us.

Today we've expanded our search for love to online dating services, but advanced technologies don't eliminate the need some of us have to seek outside help in expressing ourselves. A quick Amazon search produces several results promising online dating success: *I Can't Believe I'm Buying This Book: A Commonsense Guide to Successful Internet Dating* by Evan Marc Katz; *Online Dating for Dummies* by Judy Silverstein and Michael Lasky; *Fine, I'll Go Online!: The Hollywood Publicist's Guide to Successful Internet Dating* by Leslie Oren; and *Romancing the Web: A Therapist's Guide to The Finer Points of Online Dating* by Diane M. Berry.

Personal coaching for online dating is also on the rise. Online services such as DatingProfile.com, ProfileHelper.com, and E-Cyrano.com help singles write their profiles for a fee ranging from \$29 to \$2,000 (Alsever, 2007). Dating coaches claim their services are not aimed at helping clients lie, but rather, to more effectively communicate their true identities in a virtual dating world. On the ProfileHelper.com home page, the founder, Eric Resnic, says:

"Everyone has something unique that makes them special. Together we will figure out that special thing that attracts people to you and

"Why Don't You Speak for Yourself, John?": Using Ghostwritten Online Dating Profiles

exactly what qualities you are looking for in a partner. Then, I will create or enhance your profile so that it is one of a kind, charming, entertaining and impossible to resist."

Similarly, Laurie Davis, founder and CEO of eFlirt Expert, suggests online dating should be approached as "the same thing as a personal branding campaign" and encourages clients to use her site to help make "the ultimate virtual first impression and transition their digital selves into meaningful, in-person dating experiences." (Wang, 2011; eFlirt homepage). Her site helps clients create and manage profiles for online dating sites as well as for other social networking platforms, like Facebook and Twitter. According to the services page of the site, eFlirt coaches will even ghostwrite tweets, IMs, or e-mails for clients in order to "take your online flirtation IRL."

Opinions vary on the ethics of using such ghostwriting services on dating profile sites. Jenny Cargile, a Match.com user, says hiring someone to help write her profile would obscure who she truly is. "I'm not a person who is put together or always knows the right thing to say," she says. "I would feel like if I went out on a date with someone, I would have to be what they read instead of myself" (Alsever, 2007). Mark Brooks of Online Personals Watch warns that such misrepresentation and the use of ghostwriters can have even deeper impacts on the potential development of "real" relationships through these online sites. He says, "[I]magine if everyone started hiring proxies.... Then you'd just have virtual dating assistants chatting up other virtual dating assistants, and what a mess that would be" (Ianotti, 2010).

However, online dater Jim West sings the praises of ProfileHelper.com, where he learned to be more specific and inquisitive when communicating on online dating sites (Alsever, 2007). In his case, a profile-writing

coach stressed basic communication principles that helped West more accurately convey the kind of person he was, pinpointing the types of things he enjoyed, and what he was looking for in a potential partner. Likewise, eFlirt client Monica Astley says, "I only use [the ghostwriter's] stuff for the initial contact. After that, it's all me. . . . [S]omeone else just writes it up for you, and you approve it" (Ianotti, 2010). Given the busy lives of many of today's singles, such sites are seen by supporters as ways to save time and energy in the search for love, not as a way to trick potential suitors. Steve Zologa, founder of a similar company in Washington, D.C., looks at it as a simple matter of marketing: "My hypothesis is that there are many great men and women in the D.C. area who can't market themselves. You have about seven seconds to make a good impression, then you're done" (McCarthy, 2008).

However you feel about profile-writing coaches, most would agree that communication on online dating sites is tricky. An article

in *Skeptic* explores the pros and cons of self-disclosing when dating online (King, Austin-Oden, & Lohr, 2009): On one hand, information presented online is easy to manipulate and control, so people can present themselves in any way they like—even if what they present isn't 100 percent accurate. On the other hand, the relative anonymity of online communication "accelerates intimacy through increased openness about aspects of the self." When what we disclose about ourselves is true, self-disclosure is an important step in making a successful relationship.

Questions to Ponder

1. What do you think—is true self-disclosure encouraged or obscured by online dating?
2. Is it ethical to use a ghostwriter for your online dating profile?
3. Do you present yourself differently in online settings than "in real life"?


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For over a century, celebrities have complained that the media invades their privacy, but it was the death of Princess Diana in 1997 that focused worldwide attention on the extent to which some public figures are denied any right to privacy. Whether it's the paparazzi hounding Princess Diana to her death, or the media scrutinizing Republican presidential candidate Herman Cain's private life in 2011 following sexual harassment allegations, some might conclude that public figures can no longer expect even a basic right to privacy. Certainly, public figures such as Cain expect to be scrutinized regarding their professional lives and should be held accountable for misconduct, but the current cult of celebrity has created a situation in which the media also prys into their private lives—for reasons that often have little or nothing to do with their professional careers. The debate over invasive media coverage was particularly relevant in 2009 when the celebrity Web site *TMZ.com* posted a photo of pop star Rihanna after she had been assaulted by her then-boyfriend, R&B artist Chris Brown. The photo had been leaked by someone at the Los Angeles Police Department, and in embarrassment, the department opened an internal investigation saying it "takes seriously its duty to maintain the confidentiality of victims of domestic violence" (Itzkoff, 2009). *TMZ.com*'s executive producer, Harvey Levin, defended the publication of the photo, saying it helped put a face to the victims of domestic abuse ("TMZ Responds," 2009). Even people who fight for the rights of victims of domestic abuse hesitantly supported the decision to publish the photo. Chicago author and advocate for victims of domestic abuse Susan Murphy-Milano speculated, "Maybe it is a good idea, if it's her, if young girls see this." She added that she hoped it would make young women think

The Right to Privacy in a Mediated Society

"Is the next picture going to be of her in a morgue?" (McCartney, 2009).

But what about Rihanna's right to privacy? *PR Week* points out that typical standards of journalism prevent reporters and editors from publishing names of victims. However, in the case of Rihanna, David Hauslaib, former editorial director of the now-defunct *Jossip.com*, says, "We have this appetite for celebrity culture and it brings down any sort of safeguards we, as a media industry, have implemented to protect people" (Maul, 2009). Celebrity news blog *Gawker.com* added, "Critics say running the picture humiliates Rihanna at a time when she's already in emotional agony, that it pierces a zone of emotional and physical privacy already grossly violated in the apparent attack on her" (Tate, 2009). Nonetheless, profit-seeking publishers know that publishing such a shocking image will increase their traffic hits, and they simply choose to run the risk of exploitation accusations.

In the age of new media, celebrities are not the only ones who have to worry about such issues of privacy. Social networking sites, e-mail, and text messaging have made it easier and faster to communicate with others, but they also open some important questions about how we control our identities, protect our privacy and manage relationships online. A recent controversy has arisen regarding the Web site *IsAnyoneUp.com*, launched in 2010, which features thousands of explicit photos submitted by users. These amateur nude photos often began as private photos exchanged between partners, but are submitted to the site as a form of "revenge" by jilted exes or former friends without the consent of those pictured (Chen, 2011). The pictures are accompanied by the subjects' real names and screenshots of their Facebook profiles and Twitter feeds, further exposing the private lives of those pictured across the Internet. Even though they did not submit the photos nor consent

to having them posted, under current communication law, those pictured have little recourse. Site founder, Hunter Moore, defends his posting of the pictures by suggesting it teaches people a valuable lesson about privacy. “[I]t might sound rough, but how else are you going to learn not to do this again?” Moore says. “It’s like you’re playing Russian roulette like, oh, let’s hope this doesn’t get out” (Gold, 2011).

Questions to Ponder

1. Is the media justified in exposing the private moments of celebrities' lives, no matter how personal or painful, if doing so raises public awareness?
2. Do celebrities have a right to control their personal information and maintain a level of privacy? Why or why not?
3. Do different standards exist for “everyday people”? Why or why not?



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AP Photo/Eckehard Schulz

Imogen D'Arcy was only 13 years old when she hanged herself in her bathroom, because despite being described as fit and well-liked, she felt fat and ugly (Stokes, 2008). Laura Dunnegan developed an eating disorder at age seven. Sixteen years later, she sees her disorder as a

The Dark Side of Online Social Groups

"lifestyle option" rather than as a disease that may kill her (Croucher, 2008). What do these girls have in common? Both regularly visited Web sites where they received encouragement and reinforcement of their distorted self-images.

The Internet provides a new space for individuals to form social groups with others who share interests or concerns. However, these technological spaces do not necessarily demonstrate the characteristics of healthy groups. For example, the "pro-anorexia"

(promoting anorexia nervosa) sites, such as the types D'Arcy visited before she died and that Dunnegan frequently visits, are online spaces where people with eating disorders can find support and share their experiences without judgment. Although initially these sites may seem to provide a positive environment, they often encourage people to develop and continue dangerous behaviors. For example, pro-ana sites often feature advice on how to starve effectively or photos of extremely underweight women as "thinspiration" for members.

C.J. Pascoe (2008), a sociologist who studies teenagers and digital media at the University of California, Berkeley, explains that, before the Internet, anorexics had to check into a psychiatric hospital to find others like themselves. Now, they can find community without seeking treatment. In the *British Journal of Social Psychology*, David Giles (2006) suggests that pro-ana Web sites—and other sites that promote unhealthy behaviors such as unsafe sex, smoking, and self-harm—may have no offline equivalent, saying, "The Internet offers a perfect sanctuary for people with interests that are unacceptable to the general public. By serving as a counter-culture to official discourse around health and illness, the Web may serve to undermine the professionals so that more and more people find ways of opting out of conventional society (e.g., health care) if they can locate supportive communities online" (p. 2).

On the other hand, online outlets for co-cultural groups can be a good thing,

too (Pascoe, 2008). One example is the vast online community of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) teenagers. These teens, who can have a difficult time finding friends or dates in their physical communities, can easily find other GLBT teenagers online on sites like the It Gets Better project (<http://www.itgetsbetter.org>). Originally created by syndicated columnist and author Dan Savage in response to a rash of bullying-related suicides among GLBT youth, the site features over 30,000 user-created videos of support for GLBT teens facing harassment to "show young LGBT people the levels of happiness, potential, and positivity their lives will reach—if they can just get through their teen years" ("What Is the It Gets Better Project?"). It Gets Better provides a place where GLBT youth, adults, and straight allies can come together to share their stories without judgment and find support from other members, showing that the Internet can be a place where healthy groups can be created. "It's a double-edged sword when it comes to subcultures," says Pascoe. "For better or for worse, kids who are marginalized can find community online" (p. 2).

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you think the pros of online social groups outweigh the cons? Why or why not?
2. What online social groups have you or do you participate in and why?


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AP Photo/Eckehard Schulz

For some, mention of games like *Dungeons & Dragons* and *World of Warcraft* might conjure up the stereotypical image of a teenage boy typing away at his computer, alone. But role-playing games are actually social interactions that encourage successful group problem solving, incorporating the six steps we discuss in this chapter: identifying and defining the problem, analyzing the problem, developing criteria for evaluation solutions, brainstorming possible solutions, selecting one, and implementing it.

Dungeons & Dragons, the first modern role-playing game of its kind (Williams, Hendricks, & Winkler, 2006), is typically played among a group of friends at a table, without a computer. A Dungeon Master narrates and creates rules for a fantasy story, and people at the table act as the story's characters. Together, the players work to defeat monsters, find treasure, gain experience, and face other challenges. One of the creators of *Dungeons & Dragons*, Gary Gygax, said in a 2006 telephone interview, "The essence of a role-playing game is that it is a group, cooperative experience. There is no winning or losing" (Schiessl, 2008). *Newsweek*'s Patrick Enright remembers his own *Dungeons & Dragons* experiences as a boy (Ebeling, 2008):

If you suddenly wanted to attack your traveling companions with a broadsword or a Finger of Death spell, there was nothing stopping you. The amazing thing is how rarely that happened. Unless the neighborhood bully joined in (and almost never did those tanned, skinned-kneed fellas venture into our dank lairs), we all helped each other and together defeated whatever dragon or monster we were battling. Yes, I'll say it:

Problem Solving in Cyberspace: *Dungeons & Dragons* and *World of Warcraft*

Dungeons & Dragons taught me everything I need to know about teamwork.

Dungeons & Dragons inspired *World of Warcraft*, a popular MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing game). *World of Warcraft* differs from *Dungeons & Dragons* in that it is played online, and the game, instead of a human Dungeon Master, regulates the story and the rules. To advance in the game, players must still work with others to defeat monsters, find treasure, and gain experience, but they communicate with one another using text or voice chat programs (Newman, 2007).

In a *BusinessWeek Online* article, researcher John Seely Brown and business consultant John Hagel (2009) argue that many aspects of *World of Warcraft* encourage group problem solving and can even be applied as innovative workplace strategies. These aspects include

- Creating opportunities for teams to self-organize around challenging performance targets.
- Providing opportunities to develop tacit knowledge without neglecting the exchange of broader knowledge.
- Encouraging frequent and rigorous performance feedback.

Based on these benefits, some MMORPGs are actually being developed for a range of "real-life" applications. For example, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation recently awarded a \$3 million grant to the MIT Education Arcade to develop games that help high school students learn math and biology. Professor Eric Klopfer, director of the Education Arcade says, "This genre of games is uniquely suited to teaching the nature of science inquiry because they provide collaborative, self-directed learning situations. Players take on the roles of scientists, engineers and mathematicians to explore and explain a robust virtual world."

But beyond the application to real-life situations, many fans of role-playing find that the complexities of group problem solving make

things more interesting and more exciting. In *The Escapist*, an online magazine about video games, Ray Huling (2008) writes of *Dungeons & Dragons*, "Players can mitigate the chaos inherent in a game's dice by agreeing to ignore rolls, but they can also intensify chaos by pissing off (or on!) huge barbarians. The group decides whether encouraging mischief-makers adds to the game." He adds, "Group dynamics produce unforeseen complications, which often maximize fun."

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you think online gaming is a good teaching method? Why or why not?
2. What if any role-playing games do you play and why?

"MIT's Education Arcade uses online gaming to teach science" (2012, Jan 17). [Press release] Retrieved from: <http://education.mit.edu/blogs/louisa/2012/pressrelease>


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To Wikipedia or Not to Wikipedia?: That's a Good Question



The *Office*'s Michael Scott opined, "Wikipedia is the best thing ever. Anyone in the world can write anything they want about any subject, so you

know you are getting the best possible information." Funny, right? Not for John Seigenthaler, a well-respected journalist who was a friend and aide to President John F. Kennedy and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy in the 1960s. Seigenthaler was a victim of a hoax article posted to Wikipedia that falsely claimed he had been suspected in the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy. The hoax upset Seigenthaler not only because the article defamed his character, but also because Wikipedia editors didn't discover and correct it for over four months (Seigenthaler, 2005). Shortly after Seigenthaler published an article in *USA Today* about the incident, Wikipedia announced that it had barred unregistered users from creating new articles, and later the site enacted a policy that prevented the public from creating new articles about living people without editorial review (Helm, 2005; Cohen, 2009). These moves signaled a change from Wikipedia's initial desire to provide a free online encyclopedia that the public could create collaboratively.

Wikipedia is one of the top ten Web sites used worldwide, offering over 18 million articles in 279 different languages, with the English language section alone featuring 3.77 million articles (Cohen, 2011; Kirkpatrick, 2011) Nonetheless, the Seigenthaler hoax and other incidents have spurred a "credibility" backlash against the site. For example, U.S. courts have begun ruling that Wikipedia cannot be used as legal evidence. In April 2009, a New Jersey judge reversed an initial ruling that Wikipedia could be used to plug an evidentiary gap, saying that because "anyone can edit" the online encyclopedia, it is not a reliable source of information (Gallagher, 2009). In October of 2011, Wikipedia

member (or "Wikipedian") Sven Manguard reported the community was facing a huge backlog of editorial work with over 250,000 articles lacking even a single citation to support them (Manguard, 2011). Though Wikipedia and its community planned to take steps to address the problem and ensure more quality content in the future, these sorts of issues have led many educators to discourage their students from using Wikipedia as a research tool, and some schools have even banned access to it completely.

But some educators argue that to simply dismiss Wikipedia as a "bad" source misses the opportunity for students to think critically about how to do authoritative research. A study of Wikipedia conducted by Roy Rosenzweig for *The Journal of American History* actually found that many Wikipedia entries, while inconsistent overall, were "as accurate or more accurate than more traditional encyclopedias" (Jaschik, 2007). But, Rosenzweig stresses that despite these findings, Wikipedia should be regarded as a starting point, as college level students should be using more advanced, primary sources for research instead of relying on Wikipedia. Even Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales cautions against relying on the site as a primary source: "People shouldn't be citing encyclopedias in the first place. [Rather,] Wikipedia and other encyclopedias should be solid enough to give good, solid background information to inform your studies for a deeper level" (Helm, 2005).

Many university librarians suggest that instead of simply banning its use, today's college students need to be taught to develop information literacy skills that will help them navigate an increasingly complex information environment. Steven Bell, associate librarian for research and instructional services at Temple University, says students should be taught "how to 'triangulate' a source like Wikipedia, so they could use other sources to tell whether a given entry could be trusted" (Jaschik, 2007). For example, instead

of simply accepting the Wikipedia entry as "fact," students should, at the very least, verify the information by clicking on the sources in the "Notes" section at the end of an entry to see if it comes from a primary and trusted source, such as books, magazine, newspaper, and journal articles, original interviews, and court decisions. Darren Crovitz and W. Scott Smoot (2009) write, "Talking with [students] about how the site operates is essential in helping them move from passive acceptors of information to practicing analyzers and

evaluators." Many university libraries have answered this call and offer a range of online and offline options to help students move their research beyond Wikipedia. So before you click on Wikipedia, check out your library's Web site to see what they offer!

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you use Wikipedia? Why or why not?
2. Do you use it as a primary source? Or as the starting point for research?



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maid of honor's speech) is a traditional part of most wedding receptions in the United States and one of the most common "real-life" examples of public speaking. It's also a speech where a person's lack of public speaking skills becomes readily apparent. Many Hollywood films, particularly comedies, play off the awkward situations that arise from poorly delivered wedding toasts. While it is fun to chuckle at Alan's (Zach

Public speaking is not just for business events or classroom presentations. People are often asked to give short speeches at a variety of social events, including weddings, funerals, and even birthday parties. The wedding toast (often referred to as the best man's speech or

Raise a Glass: Giving a Toast

Galifianakis's) ridiculous "wolf pack" speech from *The Hangover*, cringe at the awkward one-upmanship between Annie (Kristen Wiig) and Helen (Rose Byrne) during the engagement party in *Bridesmaids*, or laugh at Steve Buscemi's drunken rant in *The Wedding Singer*, chances are you don't want to follow these models should you ever be called upon to give a toast. But how do you prepare for this sort of speech?

It may seem like a social occasion is not the place for a prepared and structured speech, but most experts suggest it's best to prepare your remarks ahead of time. This will give you a chance to gather your thoughts and help you manage your nerves when you actually give the toast. Practicing aloud in advance will also help you to sound more natural and conversational because you are less likely to simply read it. But that doesn't mean you need to prepare something lengthy. Renowned etiquette expert Emily Post says "[Y]ou can never go

wrong if you keep it short and sweet" ("Vermont Vows: The Toast!," 2010). The fundamental goal of the wedding toast is to honor the bride and groom, and some of the best toasts accomplish this goal in just one or two minutes.

When considering how to structure your toast, begin by writing down your thoughts about the bride and groom. Consider how you know them, how you would describe them, how you would describe their relationship, and any advice you might want to offer as they begin their new life together. You might also find inspiration from traditional toasts or famous quotes about love or marriage, easily found on the Internet. From this brainstorming list, you can begin to structure your speech by pairing your research with your personal experience and your personal knowledge about the bride and groom.

Having outside research is helpful, but ultimately a toast should focus on the personal and emotional. About.com Weddings writer Nina Calloway suggests beginning your speech by introducing yourself and indicating how you know the couple. Humorous or heartfelt anecdotes about the couple can be a great way to personalize the speech and keep your audience interested. In fact, including a joke or a poignant memory about the bride or groom can be an effective way to start your toast and set the tone for the entire speech. Most experts recommend keeping such personal anecdotes positive

rather than embarrassing. Lisa B. Marshall and Trent Armstrong (2010) say, "[T]his is not the time to bring up past relationships or the time she got drunk and lost her lunch in your backseat. That is a sure-fire way to lose a friend and sour a nice moment." Be mindful of your audience, too, as it's unlikely that Grandma wants to hear a raunchy story about the bride's single days. Choosing an appropriate anecdote can help you structure the entire speech, as the emotions brought out in the anecdote can set up the well-wishes you use to end your toast. You can end with your own words or turn again to popular quotations for traditional wedding blessings that exemplify the positive emotions you've expressed during your toast.

Weddings are meant to be joyous occasions, and your toast should ultimately be celebratory and focused on the couple, not on you. Slate.com writer Troy Patterson (2011) offers succinct and humorous advice: "[K]eep it brief. Stand up straight. In a wedding toast—unlike in marriage itself—love is all you need."

Questions to Ponder

1. If you have ever given a wedding toast, did you follow this advice?
2. How did it go?
3. What are some things you will be sure to do (and NOT do) if you ever find yourself responsible for giving a toast, and why?



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Ignite Baltimore/Mike Subelski

Ignite asks speakers, "If you had five minutes on stage, what would you say? What if you only had 20 slides and

ignite: The Power(Point) of eXtreme Audience Adaptation

they rotated automatically after 15 seconds?" ("What Is Ignite?"). Ignite challenges speakers to engage in what could be called extreme audience adaptation, sharing information in a timely and relevant manner so that audiences

can easily comprehend it. Created in 2006 by Brady Forrest, of technology publisher O'Reilly Media, and Bre Pettis, of DIY technology guide *Make* magazine, Ignite is an event featuring specifically styled presentations tied to the creators' roots in Seattle's "geek" culture. It started as a way to provide fun, free, informal conferences for people working in the technology industry, but was quickly adopted by other groups as way to "unite disparate communities of innovators in business, art and science" as a way to share creative ideas in a condensed form (Guzman, 2009). Since its 2006 inception, the events have spread to cities all over the United States and beyond, including Sydney, Australia, and Buenos Aires, Argentina (Guzman, 2009).

Speeches at Ignite events range from "Fighting Dirty in Scrabble" and "Causal Inference Is Hard" to "How I Learned to Appreciate Dance: Being Married to a Ballerina," "Geek Generation," and "How to Buy a Car Without Getting Screwed" ("Ignite Seattle 7," 2009; Guzman, 2009). The emphasis on extreme brevity as a way to share ideas is reflected in Ignite Seattle's tagline: "Enlighten us, but make it quick," and reveals the importance of well-designed visual aids to successful public speaking (*Ignite Seattle*, n.d.). Since Ignite presenters are given just 20 slides, each slide must be carefully crafted to concisely and creatively express an idea in only a few seconds. The organizers of Ignite Phoenix offer guidelines for creating better presentations, including focusing on one idea per slide, limiting the amount of text on each slide, avoiding animations and sound, and using pictures instead of words when appropriate ("Tips," n.d.).

This condensed yet creative use of visual aids is part of what makes Ignite a great model for public speaking. Event organizer Jason Prothero says, "[Ignite is] a deliberate attempt to avoid what sucks about presentations. They're boring" (Neznanski, 2008). An online review of Ignite Seattle recommends that "all presentations should be five minutes long," explaining: "Anyone who knows PowerPoint presentations knows that a 'five-minute presentation,' after including setup time, switching between

applications, waiting for your Web browser demo to respond, etc., lasts a half hour but feels like an eternity. Ignite's presentation style is a slap in the face to convention" (Weill, 2006). Another online reviewer wrote, "The messages were succinct and powerful because the speakers knew they didn't have time for the clutter that normally pops up in conferences" (Raybould, 2007).

Another part of Ignite's success has been its ability to adapt to the interests of its various audiences. For example, cocreator Brady Forrest attempts to balance the gender of the speakers and to keep topics only moderately tech-oriented so that more audience members can relate (Guzman, 2009). Ignite Bend, in Oregon, has applied the established presentation style to community organization; Ignite Change, in Boston, focuses on social justice; and Ignite Phoenix includes a group dedicated to presentations about food (Guzman, 2009; IgnitePhoenix.com). Ignite presentations are even finding their way into college classrooms. Journalism and mass communication professor Greg Downey won a teaching award in 2010 for his use of Ignite assignments as part of his Information Literacy courses at the University of Wisconsin–Madison ("Digital Media Assignments," n.d.). Tailoring assignments to Ignite's short presentation style helps students develop as speakers by honing their ability to analyze and distill research into its most important points as well becoming comfortable with creating and delivering presentations using digital media.

Extreme audience adaptation? Perhaps for now—sounds like pretty soon *everybody* will be doing it. If you'd like to see for yourself what Ignite is all about, visit the Ignite Seattle Web site at www.igniteseattle.com.

Questions to Ponder

1. What do you think about the role of presentational aids in public speaking?
2. Do you think the Ignite approach takes it too far? Why or why not?
3. Do you think public speeches that don't use presentational aids are becoming a thing of the past? Why or why not?

Web 2.0 is the term used to describe the quickly evolving information exchange on the Internet that is replacing the old Web 1.0, in which the status quo dictated that Web site content changed more slowly and was strictly controlled by Web masters. The advent of Web 2.0 has been heralded as a democratizing force that not only opens up access to knowledge and information to everyone with an online connection, but also expands the range of individuals who can contribute to the body of knowledge that defines our world. From editing a *Wikipedia* entry or writing a book review on Amazon.com to creating a blog about any topic imaginable, more of us are becoming "prosumers" in that we not only consume Web content but share in producing it as well. However, critics argue that this "collective intelligence" phenomenon has diluted true expertise without any sense of distinction between facts and opinions or recognition of the validity of a piece of information.

The idea of collective expertise is rooted in the belief that knowledge is a shared resource, that "[N]o one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity," according to cybertheorist Pierre Lévy (1997, p. 20). By collectively, and largely anonymously, pooling our intellectual resources, no single individual is the master of any set of knowledge; rather, we all utilize and contribute to a global knowledge community and Web 2.0 has greatly accelerated our ability to share.

However, drawing from a multitude of voices does not automatically improve the quality or truth-value of information, accord-

ing to digital theorist Jaron Lanier (2006). Lanier says, "[Y]ou get to include all sorts of material without committing to anything. You can be superficially interesting without having to worry about the possibility of being wrong. . . . [T]he collective can be stupid, too." Furthermore, given that Internet search engines place the most popular sources at the top of a search, rather than the most authoritative, those with the most popular viewpoints are often held up as "right" without scrutiny of their information. Although *Wikipedia* frequently comes up as a top result in an Internet search, does that make it the best and most authoritative source?

The problem is not the broadening of the knowledge base to include more perspectives, but the fact that certain voices, both online and off, are using their place in the public sphere to act as experts despite having little claim to such a title. For example, media watchdog group *Media Matters* reported that during the height of the debt-ceiling debate in July 2011, only 4.1 percent of the 1,258 guests on Fox, CNN, and MSNBC news programs were actually economists "with an advanced degree in economics" or who have served as an "economics professor at a college or university level." Cable news programs have the ability to reach a large number of people and frame our knowledge about current events. The lack of actual experts hinders rather than helps our understanding of issues, and in the case of the debt-ceiling issue, it resulted in much of the public adopting beliefs that differed from most economists ("Economists shut out of debt-ceiling debate").

Ultimately, there are pros and cons to this practice of collective intelligence. On one hand, knowledge is generated through discussion among several sources rather than delivered top-down from a single source. On the other, holding up less informed voices as equal to those with more expertise can produce dangerous consequences, particularly when non-experts are afforded a larger platform to spread misinformation in the name of knowledge.

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you think the pros of collective intelligence afforded us via Internet technologies

outweigh the potential consequences? Why or why not?

2. As consumers, what should we do to ensure that the information we gain from various Internet sources are true, valid, and reliable?
3. Do you think fact-checking should be required before information can be posted on Internet sites such as *Wikipedia*? Why or why not?

Politics, Politicians, and Public Speech Delivery



Jose Gil/Shutterstock.com

In political speeches, as with most moments of public speaking, delivery style is as important and sometimes even more important than the message itself. In other words, it is not always *what* you say that resonates with audiences, but *how* you say it. Politicians are often criticized

for exhibiting an overly rehearsed speaking style that rarely deviates from a pre-determined set of talking points. This leaves some audiences with the impression that the speaker is simply saying what he or she thinks we want to hear, rather than using the speech to convey his or her actual beliefs. For example, although President Barack Obama is often held up as an example of a successful public speaker, some criticize his use of a teleprompter. Republican politician Rick Santorum, a presidential candidate at the time, took a swipe at Obama, suggesting it "should be illegal" for candidates to read from a teleprompter as they deliver speeches "because all you're doing is reading someone else's words to people" (Cillizza, 2012).

However, presidents and candidates, including some of Obama's detractors, have been using teleprompters to deliver speeches since the technology's invention over 50 years ago. Presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin argues that many presidents have relied on teleprompters, particularly for important speeches, to ensure the clarity of the message when the stakes are high. She says, "if a president says something that is not what he meant to say, it could be an international situation" (quoted in Rucker, 2011). Skilled use of use of a teleprompter—or speaking notes—may not only help focus one's message, it may also aid in delivery because it allows the speaker to connect with the audience through eye contact and delivery style (Rucker, 2011). Therefore, even though President Obama may be critiqued

for *using* a teleprompter, such critiques rarely assert that he is just "reading" his speech. In fact, the president is often celebrated for employing an oratory style that uses emotional range and intensity to bring his carefully crafted speeches to life. Drawing on an African-American oratory style that recognizes the "power of the word . . . as a source of inspiration," Obama uses crisp articulation, a nimble sense of timing, and a musical presentation of his voice to arouse the emotions of the audience and convince them of his ideas (Dilliplane, 2012; Frenkel, 2011).

Another politician whose contrasting delivery style has helped elevate him to the national political stage is New Jersey governor Chris Christie. Christie is often celebrated for using a blunt and straightforward speaking style that contrasts with the scripted style exhibited by Obama. When Hurricane Irene was barreling down on the eastern seaboard in August 2011, for example, Governor Christie used a news briefing to call for those who had not yet evacuated to "[G]et the hell off the beach in Asbury Park and get out — you're done. . . . Do not waste any more time working on your tan" (Barron, 2011). He is well known for routinely using words like "stupid," "crap," and "insane" in news briefings, town hall meetings, and even more formal political speeches (*Ibid*). Christie supporters champion his spirited style as evidence of his real commitment to his goals of political reform and his rejection of political pandering. For example, when many prominent Republicans, such as Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich, decried the construction of an Islamic mosque and cultural center in New York City two blocks away from ground zero, Christie publicly warned that the party was overreacting. He said "We cannot paint all of Islam with that brush. . . . We have to bring people together. And what offends me the most about all this, is that it's being used as a political football by both parties" (Haberman, 2010). In an era when Americans are increasingly frustrated with Washington political bickering, Christie's straightforward style seems like a welcome alternative.

However, not everyone is a fan of Christie's frank and confrontational style. Some critics suggest that his combative delivery style makes him come off as a bully. For example, while speaking at a town hall meeting on education reform in New Jersey, Christie scolded a teacher who accused him of unfairly criticizing teachers and teachers unions. He said, "If what you want to do is put on a show and giggle every time I talk, well then I have no interest in answering your question" (Shear, 2012). At a different town hall meeting, Christie called a Navy veteran an "idiot" after the man questioned Christie's plan to merge two of New Jersey's public universities into a single school (Mandell, 2012). When the man interrupted Christie's explanation, the governor became agitated, saying, "Let me

tell you something, after you graduate from law school, you conduct yourself like that in a courtroom, your rear end is going to be thrown in jail, idiot" (*Ibid.*). Though both men were combative in their style during this exchange, some suggest Christie's tendency to allow his emotions get the better of him during his public speeches does not fit with the need for rational and measured debate within the political realm. But his supporters say it is exactly this heartfelt and authentic expression of his ideas that makes Christie appealing as a politician.

Questions to Ponder

1. Does a scripted and teleprompted or an extemporaneous style better serve our politicians and our democracy?
2. Which style do you prefer and why?



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NBCUniversal/Getty Images

When you watch a newscast or read an online news article, do you expect the information to be reported objectively? Or do you assume that the news media is biased in some way? If you do think the mainstream media is biased, you are not alone. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2011) found that 77 percent of Americans across political affiliations think news organizations "tend to favor one side" and 66 percent believe news organizations are politically biased in their reporting.

What makes us think that the news we receive is biased or unbiased? One of the factors is presentation. One journalist who personifies a professional, unbiased delivery—even almost thirty years after his final broadcast as a news anchor—is Walter Cronkite. Cronkite anchored and reported for the *CBS Evening News* from 1962 to 1981 and was so admired and respected that he was named "the most trusted man in America" in a 1972 poll. He delivered the news in a calm, straightforward manner no matter what he was reporting, betraying emotion only rarely, such as when he announced the death of President John F. Kennedy. He also took pains to ensure that he would be clearly understood by listeners, training himself to speak 124 words per minute, which is 40 words per minute slower than the average American speaks (Hinckley, 2009). And he always made it very clear when he was veering from reporting the news to expressing an opinion. A tireless advocate of objective journalism, he once said, "[The journalist's] job is only to hold up the mirror—to

Coloring the News: Is the Information Provided by the Media Biased?

tell and show the public what has happened" (Leopold, 2009).

Television newscasts remain an important news source in today's media culture. Research has shown that nearly two thirds of Americans name television as their main source for national and international news, and 63 percent of those surveyed suggest cable news outlets like CNN and Fox News are the outlets that "first come to mind when they think of news organizations" (Pew Research Center, 2011). These outlets clearly play a central role in Americans' knowledge of current events, but are they upholding the standards of journalistic objectivity that made Walter Cronkite the most trusted man in America? In an effort to fulfill cable TV's demand for 24-hour-a-day programming, even respected news organizations such as CNN must present not only the "hard news" but also news analysis, sensational graphics, and chitchat among program hosts. As a result, the news many people watch blurs the lines between opinion, entertainment, and the straightforward presentation of facts. In addition, some cable news anchors and show hosts have become the subject of controversy for their on-air rants, partisan attacks, and melodramatic grandstanding, including Bill O'Reilly, Keith Olbermann, and Geraldo Rivera—all of whom are reporters who were trained in the principles of fair reporting.

Another factor that makes us suspect that the information in news reports is biased is how events are covered. News coverage during presidential campaigns tends to generate a lot of interest and analysis. During the 2008 presidential race, some charged that the media was showing bias in support of

Democratic candidate Barack Obama. *The Washington Post's* Deborah Howell (2008) reported that during the first week of June 2008, Obama dominated political stories by 142 to Republican candidate John McCain's 96, a 3-to-1 advantage. Although she acknowledged that numbers weren't everything and that Obama generated a lot of coverage because he was the first African American nominee and initially less well known than McCain, she argued that readers deserved comparable coverage of both candidates.

Though many Americans agree that media bias is a problem, there is little consensus about how to determine the nature of such bias or which side it even favors. For example, National Public Radio (NPR) has long been accused of having a liberal bias in its reporting and some conservative critics have called for an end to federal funding of the organization. Some, like respected journalist Bill Moyers, have defended NPR as an independent news source that practices journalistic objectivity and balanced reporting because they don't take explicit stands on controversial issues like abortion and gay marriage (Moyers & Winship, 2011). Conservative critics, such as Bernard Goldberg (2011), counter that the partiality of NPR and other news organizations is rooted in ideological biases that shape what stories they choose to cover and how they are reported, such as the choice of sources and amount of time given to sources on each side of an issue. At times bias may be as subtle as the language used to describe people on different sides of controversial issues. For example, consider how the pragmatics of messages change depending on whether a reporter chooses to label opponents as pro-choice vs. pro-life, pro-choice vs. anti-abortion; anti-life vs. anti-abortion, or anti-life vs. pro-life. By choosing nonparallel labels to opposing sides, the reporter subtly colors the perceptions of unsophisticated audience members.

Whatever your thoughts about media bias, you'll be a better-informed consumer if you learn how to evaluate news source bias critically. Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) provides a helpful list of factors that can contribute to bias in news reporting ("What's Wrong with the News?," n.d.):

- Corporate ownership
- Advertiser influence
- Official agendas
- Telecommunications policy
- The public relations industry
- Pressure groups
- The narrow range of debate
- Censorship
- Sensationalism

FAIR also recommends asking the following critical questions when evaluating news information ("How to Detect Bias," n.d.):

- Who are the sources?
- Is there a lack of diversity?
- From whose point of view is the news reported?
- Are there double standards?
- What are the unchallenged assumptions?
- Is the language loaded?
- Is there a lack of context?
- Do the headlines and stories match?
- Are stories on important issues featured prominently?

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you think biased news reporting is a problem? Why or why not?
2. Do you think news satire programs such as *The Daily Show* and *the Colbert Report* are more or less ethical than those proclaiming to be reporting news objectively? Why or why not?



POP COMM!

AP Photo/Chris O'Meara



most effective exercise equipment ever, what do all these products have in common? They're the subject of infomercials. Infomercials are

Body by Jake, Body Dome, Bun & Thigh Max, and Smart Abs all promise that you can trim and tone your way to a better body in just minutes a day. Besides promising to be the

You Too Can Have Six-Pack Abs in Only Three Weeks!

television and online programs designed to look like 30- or 60-minute talk shows, but they're actually extended advertisements that focus on a product's extraordinary features and offer testimonials of its effectiveness.

Until 1984 the Federal Communications Commission banned program-length commercials, and the ban is still in effect for products that are marketed to children (Head, Spann, & McGregor, 2001). Although some view infomercials with skepticism and derision, others

view them as "an example of capitalism at its best" ("Billy Mays," 2009) and their presence and use is growing. In 2009, Fox Broadcasting chose to cancel its Saturday morning children's programming and give over two hours of that time block to "longform commercials" (Schneider, 2008). Though the network hopes to eventually attract "more traditional programming that weaves in advertising messages," the initial programs scheduled are infomercials (*Ibid*). While fringe candidates had used the infomercial format for several decades, in 2008 Barack Obama used the infomercial format extensively, culminating in his 30-minute advertisement, which played on seven networks and was watched by 33.55 million viewers (Carter, 2008). Democratic strategist Joe Lockhart defended Obama's strategy as wise: "The benefit is you get to make your closing argument in a dramatic way without the filter of the media. It gives you more context and texture than a 30-second or 60-second ad" (Cummings, 2008).

Infomercials have even become sources of entertainment. In 2008 and 2009, the Snuggie—"A blanket with sleeves!"—and a similar product, the Slanket, were frequently referenced in popular culture, from YouTube parodies ("The Cult of Snuggie") to *30 Rock* storylines (with Liz Lemon asserting, "It's not product placement; I just like it!"). When "infomercial king" Billy Mays passed away unexpectedly in June 2009, many were inspired to affectionately celebrate his influence. A "Billy Mays Gangsta Remix" grew to quick popularity on YouTube (Mastamokei, 2008), and a Facebook page "RIP Billy Mays" gained 175,000 fans, some of whom posted about their favorite Billy Mays product. Despite the fun we like to have with infomercials, they have come under criticism in recent

years. Many Americans put at least part of the blame for the economic recession on advertising, claiming that it often causes people to buy things they don't need and can't afford (Crain, 2009). But consumer suspicion of the ability of infomercials in particular to deceive is nothing new. For example, in 2002 Guthy-Renker, the largest producer of television infomercials, whose products include the popular Proactiv Solution acne treatment, became the subject of a class-action lawsuit, which claimed Guthy-Renker made exaggerated claims of profitability and promoted an Internet "shopping mall" that was simply a scam ("Timothy D. Naegele & Associates," 2002). The case is ongoing, but the online consumer complaint sites like complaints.com and pissedcustomer.com are full of testimonials from disgruntled customers who believe the products did not deliver what they promised.

Because advertisements are inherently persuasive, it's important to view them with a critical eye, although certainly not all ads and infomercials make false claims. If you suspect that an infomercial is making questionable claims, be careful before you buy. A good strategy is to first contact the Better Business Bureau (www.bbb.org) or other reputable consumer watchdog groups and see if there have been any complaints lodged about the company advertising the product. If there have, buyer beware!

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you think calling these advertisements "info"-mercials is ethical? Why or why not?
2. Have you or someone you know ever purchased a product based on claims made about it on an infomercial, only to discover later that the claims were false?