

Construction of knowledge



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Throughout this course, we have been exposed to various fields of literature that revolve around a specific theme portraying the argument and point being made. It is possible, however, that two very opposite articles with unrelated topics can and may revolve around a similar theme. Beginning on page 239 of Katherine Ann Ackley's *Perspectives on Contemporary Issues*, author Jean Kilbourne describes the impact that advertising has had on our society in her write *Advertising's Influence on Media Content*. This article shares a close connection Lois Lowry's Newbery Medal-winning novel, *The Giver*.

In this dystopian society, a society characterized by human misery (Dictionary. com), officials regulate what the members of the Community know and experience. In addition to Kilbourne, published in *The Atlantic* in 2008 is writer David Carr's article *Google Making Us Stupid?* Carr explains that the use of the internet and web browsers such as Google has altered the process in which we perceive information. Although these articles discuss very different issues, from contradicting advertisements to the perception of information, one can take notice to a striking resemblance.

The construction of knowledge is affected through both the impact of advertisements in society as well as our recent exposure to the luxury of the internet. The regulation of information and the modern, instantaneous method of attaining knowledge contribute to the deterioration of our construction of knowledge. Author Jean Kilbourne describes in her article *Advertising's Influence on Media Content* the misrepresentation of information provided by the media through magazines and television.

The media exerts their content in two major ways: via the suppression of information that would harm or offend the sponsor and via the inclusion of editorial content that reflects the product in a positive light (Kilbourne, 239). The line between advertising and editorial content is blurred by advertorials, product placement, and video news releases. Strikingly, up to 85% of the news we get is bought and paid for by corporations eager to gain positive publicity.

It is startling to see the control that the media has on what advertisements we as a society are exposed of, and how information is being filtered and regulated for the open public. In 1998, a scandal surfaced concerning the working conditions in foreign factories that supply Nike. Nike's sponsorship of CBS' Olympic coverage was rewarded when correspondents delivered the news wearing jackets emblazoned with Nike's symbol. The president of CBS News denied that this sponsorship had anything to do with the investigative 48 Hours segment that had been released just before.

The editor of The San Francisco Examiner likewise denied that Nike's co-sponsorship of their annual promotion was in any way related to kill a column by a reporter that was highly critical of Nike (240). It is clear that corporations such as Nike have a way with advertising and have mastered the technique of masking their scandalous ways. Nike's influence on the media and filtering of information is frightening, and its control over the construction of knowledge has deterred society from questioning its actions.

In connection to the concealment of truths, Lois Lowry's novel *The Giver* is based upon the construction of knowledge of civilization. The novel revolves around Jonas, a twelve-year-old boy living in a dystopian society, where

people lead dehumanized and often fearful lives (Lowry). He is chosen among his community to serve as the "Receiver of Memory" where he will maintain the past memories of a time before Sameness filled with pain and suffering, and the training for which will isolate him from his family and friends forever (Lowry).

He learns through the previous Receiver, known as the Giver, about true knowledge and is exposed to a world shunned from the others of that society (Lowry). Jonas experiences a life full of love, color, choices, and knowledge, but consequently with hatred, suffering and misery (Lowry). The members of his community are content because they do not know of a better life, and the knowledge of what they are missing out on could create major chaos (Lowry). This is relative to Kilbourne's argument that major corporations are releasing selected advertisements that expose only what they want the public to see.

In the case of the Nike Corporation, the concealment of their horrid working conditions is relevant to Sameness in *The Giver*. By suppressing information from society, a higher power is in charge of regulating what the community is exposed of, and therefore interfering with their construction of knowledge. One of the main strategies that Kilbourne targets is the contradicting placement of advertisements within women's magazines. Kilbourne points out the contrasting views within a magazine, from the front cover, through the context of the magazine, all the way to the advertisement appearing on the back page.

The various headlines included on the cover appear to be along the lines of weight-loss advice, how to make the perfect chocolate cake, hair-styling tips,

and numerous ways to avoid aging. Once you make your way to the pages within the magazine, numerous articles feature luscious cakes and pies juxtaposed with articles about diets. This, Kilbourne writes, is an invitation to pathology, fueling the paradoxical obsession with food and weight control that is one of the hallmarks of eating disorders. Women's Day once offered an article on "Special Report on Deadly Appliances".

Lest we think this is not a serious problem, 80 people died and 370 were injured by these killer appliances. On the back cover of the exact magazine, however, there is an advertisement for cigarettes, a product that kills over 400,000 people a year. In 1996, an informal survey was conducted of popular women's magazines that covered stories varying from countless health issues. These issues include skin cancer, Pap smears, and leukemia, as well as outstanding claims such as how breast cancer can be held off with aspirin and the possibility that dry-cleaned clothes can cause cancer.

The back covers of all of these magazines contained an advertisement for cigarettes, and not a single mention of lung cancer and heart disease caused by smoking. The contents within these magazines contradict themselves, and it is obvious how major companies have played a role in regulating the news we receive through the media. The construction of knowledge is interrupted by the filtering of information by these companies paying off the media, restricting exposure to the real problems and issues in our society.

Similarly to Kilbourne, David Carr expresses his concern for the construction of knowledge, although through a dissimilar issue. In his article *Is Google Making Us Stupid*, Carr expresses the influence that the internet has made

on how we perceive information. Carr himself has personally been affected by the speedy resource that Google has provided for him (Carr). There has been a change in Carr's perception of information, where he claims to have lost a sense of focus and that he feels he is literally dragging his way through a piece (Carr).

Now, with the assistance of Google, research that once required days in the library can now be done in minutes (Carr). Instead of reading thoroughly the context of an article, Carr finds himself scanning headlines and blog posts, watching videos and podcasts, or just tripping link to link to link (Carr). In his words, Carr describes his own personal spectacle: "Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski" (Carr). Further research has been conducted to explore the phenomenon.

A recently published study of online research habits, conducted by scholars from University College London, suggests that we may well be in the midst of a sea of change in the way we read and think (Carr). The scholars examined computer logs documenting the behavior of visitors to two research sites over the course of five years. People using these sites exhibited a "form of skimming activity", hopping from one source to another and rarely returning to any source they had already visited (Carr). It is apparent that our society has experienced a huge deterioration in the construction of knowledge.

The perception of information has been influenced by the fast-paced and ever-expanding internet. Because we cannot fully absorb the content before us, our construction of knowledge has worsened and eroded. At a first glance, the articles Advertising's Influence on Media Content and Is Google Making Us Stupid, written by Joan Kilbourne and David Carr, respectively,

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have nearly nothing in common in terms of their surface context. Kilbourne's article relates to the impact of advertisements within the media, while Carr's piece explains the deteriorating perception of knowledge.

In addition to these two articles is the novel *The Giver* written by Lois Lowry, describing a dystopian society and the effects of regulating information. These pieces, while covering a vast p of topics and issues, commonly cover a deeper meaning: the construction of knowledge. All three sources explain the influence of media and other outside sources on how we perceive and stimulate knowledge based on our exposure. The regulation of information and the modern, instantaneous method of attaining knowledge have in fact contributed to the deterioration of our construction of knowledge.

Works Cited

1. Carr, David. " Is Google Making Us Stupid? " *The Atlantic* Day July/August 2008.
2. Kilbourne, Jean. " Advertising's Influence on Media Content. " *Perspectives on Contemporary Issues: Readings Across the Disciplines*. 6th ed. Ed. Katherine Anne Ackley. Boston: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2012. 230-233. Print.
3. Lowry, Lois. *The Giver*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1993. Print.