

PSY427: Media Psychology (Spring 2016)

Time: Tuesday 12-3 pm

Location: SS1072

Course Prerequisites: PSY201 (or equivalent), PSY220, PSY230/240

Course Website: <http://www.psych.utoronto.ca/users/tafarodi/psy427>

Instructor: [Prof. R. Tafarodi](#)

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Required Text: Harris, R. J., & Sanborn, F. W. (2013). *A cognitive psychology of mass communication* (6th ed.). New York: Routledge. (available at U of T Bookstore)

Additional Required Readings: A complete set of additional required chapter readings will be available for purchase at Print City (Krishna Copy), 180 Bloor St. West, 416-920-3040, as of January 12. Any required journal reading can be downloaded by clicking on the article reference as it appears in the reading schedule below.

Overview

"All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered....Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without knowledge of the way media work as environments." Marshall McLuhan wrote these words in 1967, shortly after the CBC

began colour television broadcasts. Media have evolved considerably since then, but the validity of McLuhan's claims about their transformative power remains undiminished. This course examines how we come to understand ourselves and our world, and learn to feel, judge, and act, through the simulative mediation of personal and mass communication technologies. The aim is to provide students with a deeper understanding of the highly commodified symbolic environment that surrounds them and in which they participate as audience and, increasingly, producer. Although the focus is psychological, the history, sociology, political economy, and technology of various media will be discussed in relation to the changing forms of public and private life in the 21st century.

Evaluation

Evaluation is based on two 2.5-hour in-class tests (February 23 and April 5 from 12:10 to 2:40 pm) and a formal paper (due in class at 12:10 pm on March 29). The first test accounts for 36% of the course mark, the second test for 25%, and the paper for 39%. The second test will address only those topics covered since the first test. Study notes will *not* be allowed during either test. Students should visit the course website to examine tests from previous years. These will provide familiarity with the sort of broad and encompassing questions that can be expected. Both tests will consist of three such questions, with each worth one-third of the test mark. Students will be given considerable latitude in bringing together, interpreting, and integrating content from the lectures and readings to respond to the questions. The focus of evaluation will be on the overall substantiveness, coherence, and logical force of the arguments given, not on the particular position taken or the presence of select details. Students are expected to "make a case" in answering each question and will be judged on how convincingly they do so. Each response will be evaluated holistically, as a unified argument. Quality will be assessed according to three equally-weighted criteria. These are: 1) comprehensive inclusion of relevant content from both lectures and readings; 2) sound interpretation and effective integration of that content; and 3) clear articulation of a summary position based on (1) and (2). According to this scheme, there are no categorically "right" or "wrong" responses, only better and worse arguments for various positions that might be taken. Few important questions in the study of mind, media, and society can be approached otherwise.

The tests will be marked by the TA. Marking of the term papers will be split between the TA and the instructor. Any concerns or questions about individual marks should be taken up with the *marker*. Only if there is a well-founded allegation of bias/prejudice or obvious error of judgment should the instructor be approached about a mark assigned by the TA. In such cases, the instructor will evaluate the test or term paper independently and decide on a final mark. This final mark may be lower than,

higher than, or the same as the original mark and is not open to further appeals to the instructor.

A similar frame of evaluation applies to the term paper, which must directly address some aspect of today's mediated world. The paper will be judged on its merit as a carefully researched, well conceived, cogent, and clearly presented argument. The extent to which empirical "findings" (the results of formal scientific studies) are cited should depend entirely on their relevance to the argument. Consider the question, "Does heavy viewing of television contribute to the development of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children?" Clearly, the results of research aimed at testing this supposed causal connection are directly relevant as *evidence* for or against it and, as such, should be incorporated into the argument (even if only to be criticized and discounted). But now consider the second question, "How has television coverage of ADHD since 1987 shaped the way we understand and respond to the disorder?" Here, the causal contingency is simply assumed on the basis of television's widely recognized power to shape public opinion. What is at issue -- the *meaning* of the representations that informed the public's understanding of ADHD -- is really a historical and interpretive matter. It is much less amenable, if at all, to scientific testing. The appropriate strategy for answering this kind of question would be to describe and critically *interpret* the changing representations of ADHD on television and in popular discourse since 1987, and provide a well-reasoned argument supported by historical data (e.g., notable broadcasts, epidemiological statistics, drug prescriptions, support group statements, legal decisions, policy changes) for connecting the latter to the former. Finally, consider the question, "What is virtual reality?" Scientific tests and results will not provide an intelligent answer to this question. Nor will the standard encyclopedia entry for virtual reality make for a very good term paper. Rather, the question invites *conceptual analysis* and engagement with the profound psychological, sociological, and even metaphysical concerns that issue from that analysis.

It should be clear from the above examples that there are many kinds of questions in media studies -- and as many approaches to answering them. Students should feel free to pose and answer any question that is of special interest to them within this wide spectrum of possibilities. The only restriction is that the question must directly address some aspect of our contemporary mediated world. In writing the term paper, students should begin by identifying a phenomenon that concerns them deeply and posing an investigable question about it. After a few weeks of sustained reading and thought on the question, an answer in the form of a position or claim should take shape. This position or claim will form the central argument of the paper, and should be reflected in its title. The next step is to select a real-world example or instance of the broader phenomenon to use for developing and presenting the argument. For example, a student claiming that the popular appeal of singing competition reality television is based as much on the specific moral logic of success and failure that is

promoted as on the aesthetics of vocal performance might choose to make the case by focusing on *The Voice* (in one of its national incarnations) as a representative example. Similarly, a student arguing for the reality and distinctive form of video game addiction in young adults may choose to explore *World of Warcraft* and its player community as an illustrative context. Finally, a student claiming that "attack" ads in electoral politics have a specific context-sensitive profile of advantages and limitations/risks may choose to examine a particular party's online ad campaign in the *2015 Canadian federal election* as a case in point. Note that in all three of these examples, the theories, perspectives, research findings, etc., that are adduced to make the argument may not (and in most cases will not) themselves narrowly and specifically address the real-world example focused on in the paper. Rather, broader theory and distinct but related evidence and analysis must be sought out in the literature and applied to the chosen example.

This should give you some idea as to what is expected. Keep in mind that the question you choose to investigate should above all reflect your personal interests and concerns. The answer to that question is yours to freely develop through self-directed research and reflection. To confirm that the *question* you have chosen is appropriate for this course, please email it to either the TA or the instructor by February 9. Although this confirmation is not a credited requirement, it is *strongly* recommended. Students who do not bother to gain approval of their question run the risk, however slight, of choosing one that is ill-suited to the aims of the course. A poor choice of question will be reflected in the term paper mark. N.B.: As we all know, email is not the most reliable medium of communication. Accordingly, do *not* assume that your question was received and approved until you receive a reply from us. Normally, this will occur within a few days.

A few additional pointers on writing a good term paper:

- begin reading and organizing information early; this is a *long-term* project and the quality of your argument will reflect the time you devote to conceiving and developing it
- feel free to approach the TA or instructor if you need advice in developing your ideas
- outline your argument in capsulized form near the beginning of the paper so the reader has a map for where you intend to go
- state and defend any debatable assumptions that are crucial to your argument
- do not include material that is not directly pertinent to your central argument; do not digress
- present your argument as a logical and well-ordered progression of ideas
- argue in as clear and convincing a manner as possible
- avoid circular logic
- be specific about which mediated phenomenon or phenomena you are referring to; do not write in vague generalities (for example, do not write loosely about "the media")

The term paper must be word-processed, conform to APA format (refer to *Publication Manual of the APA*, 6th ed.), and consist of 10-15 single-sided (1" margins, 12-point Times Roman font), double-spaced pages excluding the title page, references, and

any tables/figure/appendices. If at all possible, please use duplex printing (both sides of the page) to conserve paper. Do *not* include an abstract. Do *not* insert unnecessary space between paragraphs or sections to increase the number of pages. Also, please don't ask us "how many" bibliographic references your paper should have. That is a misguided question. The number of works cited is not an indicator of quality one way or another. Moreover, some kinds of argument invite more extensive citation than others. If you spend the term earnestly researching your question, as is expected, you should have no reason to worry about how many references you end up including in your paper.

Late papers will be accepted with a 5%-per-day penalty if delivered in person to a staff member in the General Office of the Department of Psychology during office hours (9 am to 5 pm on weekdays). Weekends are not included in the calculation of penalties. Claims of "lost" submissions that are not supported by office records will not be recognized. Emailed papers, incomplete papers, and papers that do not meet any of the above requirements will not be accepted. Unlike the tests, the paper is a long-term project requiring sustained effort over many weeks. Therefore, requests to submit late papers without penalty because of chronic or acute illness will in most cases be denied. Please plan and work accordingly. Papers will be graded within four weeks of their submission and the marks posted on the course website. Graded papers will be available for pick-up from the TA during prearranged hours announced in class on the day of the second term test.

Marks for the first test will be posted on the course website within two weeks. The tests will be returned to students in class on March 8. Tests not claimed on that day will remain with the TA and should be claimed during his regular office hours. Marks for the second test will be posted on the course website within three weeks. The tests will be available for pick-up from the TA during prearranged hours announced in class on the day of the test.

Make-up tests will *not* be offered, with the exception noted at the end of this section. Students who miss a test due to illness or other adversity beyond their control must submit a formal letter of petition to the course instructor (mailbox located in SS4016) within one week of the missed test. The petition must be accompanied by a properly completed U of T Verification of Illness or Injury Form (<http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca>). The form must verify that the student was unable to take the test because of a clearly debilitating or otherwise disabling condition. Claims that illness or adversity prevented adequate preparation for the test will not suffice in most cases. The petition should be type-written and must include the student's phone number, U of T number, and a working e-mail address to which the instructor's decision can be sent. Late petitions will *not* be considered. Successful petitions will result in re-weighting of the remaining test and term paper. In the case of exemption from the first test, the second test will be re-weighted to 43%, and the term

paper to 57%, of the course mark. In the case of exemption from the second test, the first test will be re-weighted to 49%, and the term paper to 51%, of the course mark. Unsuccessful petitions will result in a test mark of zero. In the unlikely event that a student is granted exemption from both tests, a make-up test will be offered in the second instance so that the course mark does not depend solely on the term paper. The make-up test will be cumulative, addressing topics covered before *and* after the first test. Please note that missing a term test is a serious matter. Exemption will be granted only in clearly legitimate and properly documented cases, in accordance with the guidelines of the Faculty of Arts and Science.

Lectures

PowerPoint slides used in lectures will be posted on the course website within a few days after each lecture. Please note that there are no prepared lecture notes for this course. It is strongly recommended that you arrange a notes partnership with a fellow student in the class. You and your partner should rely on each other for the details of missed lectures. As the overlap of lectures with required readings will vary considerably across topics, you must complete all the readings *and* attend lectures to perform well in this course.

Readings

Some of the readings are challenging and require close and patient attention. The effort invested will be repaid with a deeper understanding of the symbolic environment that surrounds us. Allow yourself sufficient time to read and consider the material. The assigned readings must be completed *before* each lecture, which will be difficult to follow otherwise. Finally, note that this is not a course you can "coast" through or "cram" for overnight. If you fail to keep up with the reading schedule and attend lectures, you are bound to end up frustrated and disappointed with your performance in the course. Please plan accordingly.

Lecture and Reading Schedule

January 12 - Introduction

January 19 - Studying Media

January 26 - Representation

Harris & Sanborn - Chapter 4

Hall, S. (1997). The work of representation. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (pp. 13-64). London: Sage.

Croteau, D., Hoynes, W., & Milan, S. (2012). *Media/society: Industries, images, and audiences* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (pp. 185-215)

In-class film: Jennifer Siebel Newsom's (2011) *Miss Representation*.

February 2 - Advertising

Harris & Sanborn - Chapter 5 & 11

Stewart, D. W., & Pavlou, P. A. (2009). The effects of media on marketing communications. In J. Bryant & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (3rd ed., pp. 362-401). New York: Routledge.

Lury, C. (2011). *Consumer culture* (2nd ed.). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. (pp. 137-164)

In-class film: Frontline's (2004) *The Persuaders*.

February 9 - News and Public Opinion

Harris & Sanborn - Chapters 7 & 8

Iyengar, S. (2010). The state of media-effects research. In J. Curran (Ed.), *Media and society* (5th ed., pp. 273-289). New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Jones, A. S. (2009). *Losing the news: The future of the news that feeds democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press. (pp. 177-195)

In-class film: Alex Cooke's (2004) *California Recall: How Arnold Won the West*.

February 23 - Test 1 (no lecture)

March 1 - Violence

Harris & Sanborn - Chapter 9

Huesmann, L. R., Dubow, E. F., & Yang, G. (2013). Why it is hard to believe that media violence causes aggression. In K. E. Dill (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of media psychology* (pp. 159-171). New York: Oxford University Press.

[Barlett, C. P., Anderson, C. A., & Swing, E. L. \(2009\). Video game effects -- confirmed, suspected, and speculative. *Simulation & Gaming*, 40, 377-403.](#)

In-class film: David Van Taylor's (1992) *Dream Deceivers: The Story Behind James Vance vs. Judas Priest*.

March 8 - Pornography

Harris & Sanborn - Chapter 10

[Owens, E. W., Behun, R. J., Manning, J. C., & Reid, R. C. \(2012\). The impact of internet pornography on adolescents: A review of the research. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 19, 99-122.](#)

Paasonen, S. (2010). Repetition and hyperbole: The gendered choreographies of heteroporn. In K. Boyle (Ed.), *Everyday pornography* (pp. 63-76). New York: Routledge.

In-class film: Frontline's (2002) *American Porn*.

March 15 - The Psychology of Digital Media

Carr, N. (2010). *The shallows: What the internet is doing to our brains*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. (pp. 115-143)

Hayles, N. K. (2012). *How we think: Digital media and contemporary technogenesis*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (pp. 55-79)

Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. New York: Basic Books. (pp. 171-209)

In-class film: Hilla Medalia & Shosh Shlam's (2013) *Web Junkie*.

March 22 - Digital Media and Society

[Thompson, J. B. \(2005\). The new visibility. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 22, 31-51.](#)

Rainie, L., & Wellman, B. (2012). *Networked: The new social operating system*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (pp. 275-302)

Taylor, P. (2014). *The next America: Boomers, millennials, and the looming generational showdown*. New York: PublicAffairs. (pp. 139-156)

In-class film: Frontline's (2014) *Generation Like*.

March 29 - Retrospective (term paper due)

Harris & Sanborn - Chapter 12

April 5 - Test 2 (no lecture)
