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MESSY MEDIA.

TUMBLR • COM

NOW SHOWING: GENDER

Catalyst for Change

BY LAURA NAVA

IT WAS my last quarter at UCLA and I was on the steady path toward becoming a lawyer. Then I took Communication Studies 178. Not only did it change my career path, it also changed my life. Although I had taken another class with Dr. Rhonda Hammer, this class was completely different because it not only challenged me to become media literate but also to create a project that reflected my newly developed media literacy. My group's project, [Now Showing: Gender](#), was created with the intent to explore the role media plays in the socialization of femininity and masculinity, focusing on advertisements and reality shows.

The project soon became my baby. Like a first-time parent I learned, through trial and error, how to make my baby better. With every shot I became more conscious: of the angles of the shots in pre-production to the music I chose in post-production. As I became aware that a viewer would be receiving the content, I realized, in true media literate manner, that

everything in a shot is used to convey a message. I felt as though I fully grasped the lessons of the course.

During the making of the final project, I experienced one of the most trying times of my educational career. Unfortunately the hard drive (an external mass-storage device), which seemed to have a will of its own, revolted against my group and decided to dump all of the edited video, visual, and audio material we had saved on it. We had lost at least 80 hours of our time, and we were devastated. Although Dr. Hammer was very understanding and told us we could simply present some of the rough footage, my love for this project drove me to try to reconstruct it, from scratch, in a day and a half, using some of the original video relying heavily on the editing logs, and scrambling for images and audio. Although missing much of the content of our nearly completed initial project—which we had spend months researching, shooting,

and editing—we miraculously managed to complete a new version. Despite this disaster, which as I later learned is not uncommon within the fields of media production, my love for, and commitment to, decoding and analyzing media was strengthened. [Now Showing: Gender](#) showed me my true calling and I quickly changed my career path.

As my college career came to an end, I had managed to network with some people in the film industry. Although I made the contacts myself, the confidence I had was founded in the knowledge and, albeit limited, experience I had gained from the class in media literacy. Also, I learned how to “pitch,” or present my skills. Shortly after graduation, I landed my first job—as Set Decorator Coordinator on [The Blind](#), a feature film. Since then, I have not looked back and have worked consistently on projects from commercials to feature films, in positions such as Second Assistant Director and Talent Coordinator.

Not only did this course enable me to achieve success in the highly competitive field of entertainment, especially for women but also it also enabled me to become involved in new media activism. In particular, developed an interactive project, MessyMedia.Tumblr.Com, a blog that applies the conceptual and practical skills of media literacy. MessyMedia.Tumblr.Com was created to encourage my generational cohorts—along with any other interested people who feel compelled to analyze and filter the media—to share their insights with others in a public interactive forum. Though this medium, I involve myself and my immediate community in deciphering and decoding the media that affect our everyday lives.

This blog allows me to engender awareness and to politicize my generational community with regard to industrial media culture, which is so powerful because it operates largely at an unconscious level. Moreover, in itself and its role in giving voice to so many to share their concerns, actions and practices, this site celebrates and makes apparent the importance of alternative media and new media, which are becoming far more accessible.

The site is focused on politics and pop culture in the media. Also, I had a particular audience in mind, both privileged and marginalized, so that it is not limited to academic readers. Hence, proper grammar, punctuation, and paragraph structure are “out the proverbial window”; their usage is in a constant state of renegotiation (and translation), which is often the case with the development of new (emergent)

forms of discourse that are especially appropriate for new technologies. Here is an example from one of my blog posts: “...but sadly ‘Professors’ who are thisclose to being above the student they are teaching in terms of education, do not cut it.” I purposely removed the space between “this” and “close” to create a single word, which, I believe, better demonstrates the proximity I wanted to emphasize. I also consciously employ a writing style that is similar to, and representative of, the way I believe most people, especially tech savvy people—who are part of a new media generation—communicate. I also try to infuse the content with a bit of satire and dry humor for an easy read:

Because if you put down the fear and think about it, all it really is....

Quick! Look over there! -> A distraction.

Indeed, to paraphrase communication luminary Marshall McLuhan, new media creates a novel way of looking at the world and a new environment in which to live. Decades ahead of his time and close to half a century before the digital revolution, McLuhan’s “insights made the concept of a global village, interconnected by an electronic nervous system, part of our popular culture” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marshall_McLuhan). This description, I would argue, is an apt expression of the importance of blogging, even though too many regard it as a hobby or narcissistic endeavor, rather than a necessarily cooperative and highly significant mode of interactive communications that al-

low the voices of those who are often excluded from mainstream media to be heard. It is these voices that, I believe, will invoke change.

It is within this context that I was very involved in the creation of the aesthetics of the site. I wanted Messy Media to be “messy,” represented by a messy border filled with ink splatter and different color and font types. However, the area in which I write is the antithesis; it is clean with black type on a white background. This format is designed, in part, to provoke the reader’s participation, and many have begun to join me in filtering the media and becoming media literate.

In sum, I firmly believe in the wise words of Mahatma Gandhi: “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” Without Dr. Hammer, her guidance, and this class I do not think I would have found the manner in which to accomplish this great task that Gandhi has inspired me to undertake and be part of a progressive community of others who also share his vision. Developing an understanding of critical media literary theory and skills in production have empowered to develop an oppositional, alternative medium through which I can change, and in turn help change the world.

Laura Nava graduated over a year ago from UCLA. She graduated with B.A.s in Political Science and Women’s Studies.