

“Displacements and Transformations of Concepts”: Reclaiming Discursive Power through Interpretive Systems of Identity and New Media in the Daisy Coleman Case

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Background

Virtually everyday in the news there is a story involving an adolescent girl being sexually exploited.

The day I created this power point the story was about a 14 year old girl who was contacted through Facebook by a predator posing as a talent scout for a modeling agency who convinced the girl to send nude photos of herself to him and meet him at a mall in Lubbock, TX.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2015

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Lubbock man gets 15 years for child porn in fake modeling scheme using Facebook

Torres lured 14-year-old girl to South Plains Mall

Posted: October 9, 2015 - 1:37pm | **Updated:** October 10, 2015 - 12:15am



By Adam D. Young
A-J MEDIA LOCAL NEWS EDITOR

A Lubbock man who pleaded guilty to a child pornography charge connected to a fake modeling scheme via Facebook has been

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Background continued

- Sexual exploitation of adolescent girls in the United States is fueled by what Pipher (1994) referred to as a “girl poisoning culture.”
- More recently researchers have also referred to this phenomenon as the “pornification” of girls in popular culture (e.g., Ringrose, 2009)
- Lloyd (2011) estimated “between 200,000 to 300,000 [primarily female] adolescents are at risk for sexual exploitation in the United States each year” (p. 11).
- New Media has added a compelling ingredient to this phenomenon.

Does New Media offer Tools of Empowerment for Adolescent Girls?

- New media as a vehicle for entrapping girls
- New media as a means for creating a commercial, consumeristic identity for adolescent girls (e.g., gURL.com website) predicated on stereotypic gender roles (Duncan & Leander, 2000; Lesley, 2012)
- New media as an instrument for allowing adolescent girls to “talk back” to oppressors
- New media as a site where adolescent girls’ online identity representations and offline enactments of identity compete (Ringrose, 2009)

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Heyyy! I called you like 10 times today, where were you?

Are you there?

Hey! Sorry I missed your calls, I was busy cleaning my room and I had the phone on mute.

Here's What 9 Texts Introverts Send Actually Mean



from the boards

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Purpose of the Study

- This study examined the ways Daisy Coleman and her supporters used new media to construct fluid Discourse communities, mobilization, and Internet Activism as a means to reframe the identity of Daisy Coleman as a victim of sexual exploitation.
- Daisy Coleman is a rare example of an adolescent girl who stepped forward from the shadows of legal anonymity to “talk back” (hooks, 1989) to her oppressors through new media.
- I examined the discursive moves Daisy Coleman and her supporters made through new media to draw new boundaries around her life, as she reclaimed “social goods” (Gee, 2005), positioned herself differently in relationships with others, and constructed a new identity.

Discourse

- This study is predicated on a view of Discourse as a social-cultural practice where relations of power are examined through language and what is left unsaid and unspecified is questioned along with what is stated. In particular, I drew on Gee's (2005) view of language where "*language has meaning only in and through social practices, practices which often leave us morally complicit with harm and injustice unless we attempt to transform them*" (p. 8).

Research Questions

- How did Daisy Coleman and her supporters use new media to reconstruct Daisy's identity from the one of "slut" that she had been labeled with to one of "innocent victim" as a sexually exploited adolescent girl?
- In what ways did new media shape the interpretive system surrounding her identity?
- How were Gee's (2005) building tasks of language (Gee, 2005) portrayed through Discourse and distributed in the new media contexts?

Methodology

- I examined numerous online texts including videos about the case, but focused on four different texts surrounding the case for analysis in this study because they represented Daisy and her supporters' perspectives:
 - A press release by the Hacktivist group Anonymous on Twitter
 - A personal narrative posted by Daisy Coleman on *XOJane*, an interactive online magazine
 - Public debate through comments posted to an article about new evidence in the case on *Mommyish*
 - Updates posted on Facebook by Daisy Coleman and her supporters
- I engaged in Discourse Analysis predicated on Gee's (2005) Seven Building Tasks of Language to analyze these four texts.

Findings

- In this collection of texts, Daisy Coleman's identity as a sexually-exploited adolescent was constructed primarily through language tasks focused on significance, relationships, and politics (social goods) employed through an interpretive system
- The interpretive system was fluid—moving across time and involving several different speakers
- The interpretive system served to re-inscribe Daisy Coleman's identity as an innocent, typical adolescent girl—a victim of an insidious constellation of abuses of power—even though she did not win the case

Gee's (2005) Seven Building Tasks of Language

- Significance (Build relevance or significance for things and people in context)
- Practices (Enact a practice or practices in context)
- Identities (Enact and depict identities)
- Relationships (Build, sustain, change, destroy social relationships)
- Politics (Create, distribute, withhold social goods)
- Connections (Make things and people connected or relevant to each other or irrelevant to each other)
- Sign Systems and Knowledge (Used to privilege or disprivilege different sign systems and ways of knowing)

(p. 11-13)

Significance:

Gee (2005) asked the following questions about building significance through language:

- What are the situated meanings of some of the words and phrases that seem important in the situation?
- What situated meanings and values seem to be attached to places, times, bodies, people, objects, artifacts, and institutions relevant in this situation?
- What situated meanings and values are attached to other oral and written texts quoted or alluded to in the situation (intertextuality)?
- What Discourse models seem to be at play in connecting and integrating these situated meanings to each other?
- What institutions and/or Discourses are being (re)produced in this situation and how are they being stabilized or transformed in the act?

“Discourse Models” at work in Daisy Coleman’s Online Posts

Discourse Models are “largely unconscious theories we hold that help us to make sense of texts and the world” (Gee, 2005, p. 54.).

Discourse models underlie the building tasks of language.

Examples from:

- Facebook page profile
- Personal narrative posted on *XOJane*, an interactive online magazine

About

This page is to inform the public about the horrendous injustice committed by the town of Maryville, Missouri against the Coleman family.

Description

Please do not post any fundraisers to this page. They will be deleted.

About Me

At 14, My friend and I were drugged, and while unconscious, brutally raped by my small town's star football player while his friend recorded it. I was left for dead in sub-freezing temperatures on my front porch. Two weeks later my mothers employment was terminated by her boss (a friend of Matthew Barnett's Family). Despite overwhelming physical evidence, the prosecutor dismissed the case after two months. My house was mysteriously burned down two months after the dismissal. My family has been driven out of our small Missouri town and the boys who ruined our lives prosper.

I deserve justice.

Education Info

High School:
Maryville High School '13

Significance Intertwined with Identity

- Language signals several references to death
- Oppressors referenced are the citizens of the town of *Maryville, MO*
- Situated meanings draw on a Discourse model of being a victim and a Discourse model of deserving justice. Both constituted a role/identity for Daisy where any previous Discourse about the case is rendered irrelevant and incorrect.

Excerpt from Daisy Coleman's Personal Narrative

Language Building Task: Relationships

Underlying Discourse Model: Trust

Stanza 1: My Older Brother's Friend Should be Trustworthy Like my Brother

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. I was <u>not interested</u> | 1. <i>She had no sexual intention</i> |
| 2. in <u>Matt</u> | 2. <i>Points to Matt specifically</i> |
| 3. <u>romantically.</u> | 3. <i>No inclination toward dating him, relationship is opposite</i> |
| 4. I <u>considered</u> him | 4. <i>Casual verb connoting no intensity in emotion</i> |
| 5. my older <u>brother's friend.</u> | 5. <i>Matt is not even her friend, creating relational distance</i> |
| 6. I <u>trusted</u> | 6. <i>Verb connoting ethical stance</i> |
| 7. my older <u>brother.</u> | 7. <i>Brother as guardian</i> |
| 8. I <u>trusted</u> Matt! | 8. <i>Comparison of Matt to brother and how he tricked her</i> 17 |

- The Discourse Model of her relationship with Matthew Barnett as that of a brother serves to make Matthew's behavior even more immoral and an even greater violation of trust. Taking romantic inclinations out of her depiction of the relationship deepened the violation of the crime.

Hacktivist Group Anonymous' Press Release

Language Build Task: Significance

Underlying Discourse Model: Political Corruption

Stanza 1: Social Injustice

1. Two young girls
2. have been raped
3. in the town of Maryville, Missouri.
4. Another
5. high school football star,
6. the grandson
7. of a Missouri state official,
8. has walked free.

1. Age of the victims places emphasis on their innocence
2. No use of the term allegedly, rape is asserted as fact
3. Emphasis on the town
4. Implies that this is a common occurrence
5. Stereotype of a popular adolescent athlete
6. Familial association
7. Political connection
8. Implies he is guilty and has walked away from conviction

Anonymous' Press Release continued

Stanza 2: The Community is Corrupt

1. The people of Maryville
2. turned their backs
3. on these victims
4. and one family
5. has been forced
6. to flee the town.
7. Their house
8. was later
9. burned to the ground.

1. *Implies every citizen in the town is involved*
2. *Figurative language conjures image of a collective action*
3. *Labels the girls as innocent victims*
4. *More than just the two girls victimized*
5. *Implies brutal means were employed*
6. *Conjures an image of the family running for safety*
7. *Possessive pronoun showing no one had the right to take*
8. *Events connected in time*
9. *Completely destroyed, conjures an image of no help putting out the fire by the fire department, neighbors, community*

Excerpt from Press Release continued

Stanza 3: Virtual Vigilantism

1. If Maryville
2. won't defend
3. these young girls,
4. if the police
5. are too cowardly
6. or corrupt
7. to do their jobs,
8. if the justice system
9. has abandoned them,
10. then we
11. will have to stand
12. for them.

1. The word "if" sets up a condition, an implied threat
2. Verb that denotes the need to protect
3. Emphasizes the girls' innocence in the crime
4. The word "if" sets up a condition, an implied threat
5. Referring to the police as not standing up to political pressure
6. Referring to the justice system and corrupt and dysfunctional
7. Possessive pronoun emphasizes the responsibility of the police
8. The word "if" sets up a condition, an implied threat
9. Verb conjures image of police not caring for innocent victims
10. Pronoun is referring to a different community
11. Standing as an image and metaphor of truth and strength
12. Preposition "for" positions Anonymous as protectors of the girls' rights

Significance

- In this press release, Anonymous' use of language emphasized the significance of the injustice surrounding the case through recurrent references to obvious political corruption and shaming the residents of Maryville.
- Anonymous also offered a threat of vigilantism in the town and an invitation for others to join the cause for justice with the repeated use of the word, "we" and the final statement, "join us."
- Anonymous used telegraphic, stark, ominous and threatening language throughout.

Press Release was Key Component in the Interpretive System

This act of virtual vigilantism led to the case being re-opened for investigation by an outside prosecutor and also served to construct an identity for Daisy that would garner national sympathy through an emphasis on the significance of the blatant injustice she suffered by the legal system.

The rape case, however, was never brought to trial because the outside special prosecutor found Matthew Barnett guilty of child endangerment but not rape.

After the Legal Decision Discourse about the Case Continued: Public Commentary on *Mommyish*, an Interactive Online Magazine

Language Building Task: Social Good

Underlying Discourse Model: Gender Equity

Stanza 1: The Double Standard for Male and Female Adolescents

1. A common
2. and deeply ingrained
3. social hypocrisy,
4. once a girl says yes
5. she can never
6. afterward say no.
7. Once a girl says yes
8. her body

1. *Common denotes universal appeal*
2. *Master Narrative*
3. *Establishing significance and relevance*
4. *Critiquing an antiquated logic*
5. *Emphasis on permanence*
6. *Relationships and voice and time*
7. *Repeated phrase to add emphasis*
8. *Possessive pronoun*

Commentary from *Mommyish* continued

9. becomes fair game
10. for abuse.
11. Would anyone
12. say that
13. her rapist
14. deserves
15. the same treatment
16. for providing alcohol
17. to another minor
18. in exchange for sex?

9. *The body is trivialized like a game*
10. *Dark turn from the concept of a game*
11. *Common social appeal*
12. *Casual verb*
13. *Possessive pronoun starts to shift the power ratio*
14. *Social justice and fairness connotations with this verb*
15. *Creating an equation of equity*
16. *Innocuous, helpful verb coupled with alcohol*
17. *The same, they're both minors, equal regardless of gender*
18. *Uses the word sex to inject a neutral tone to juxtapose consensual sex between two adolescents against rape*

Building Tasks of This Comment

- This comment drew on the social good of gender equity through an extended example of a role reversal.

Meme Reposted to Facebook to Show Bullying Daisy was Still Experiencing Two Years Later

After School
Albany

“ PITY ME PARTY @ DAISY
COLEMAN'S HOUSE!! ”

posted by anonymous

Discourse Model: Revoicing

Language Building Task: Relationships and Practices

Underlying Discourse Model: Revoicing Social Media Bullying

Stanza 1: Endless Peer Bullying

1. It's been tough

2. for our girl.

3. Comments and bullying

4. never stop.

5. Wish

6. she could have

7. some peace.

1. *Emphasis on the physical and emotional duration of bullying*

2. *Possessive pronoun denotes protective stance*

3. *Positions Daisy as a victim of bullying*

4. *Emphasis on the duration of the bullying experienced*

5. *Seems almost impossible or too good to be true*

6. *Possible, but not experienced yet*

7. *A simple request for a simple outcome from the case*

Building Task of this Post

In the original meme, Daisy was constructed as someone who was weak, manipulative, and a pseudo-victim. Daisy's family countered this depiction by re-posting the meme with a statement about how bullied she had been using language to highlight the practice of bullying. They also rallied around Daisy referring to her with the possessive pronoun, "our" to signify Daisy was part of a collective, protective community.

The Interpretive System as Displacements and Transformations of Concepts

- Taken together, the microblogging, narratives, memes, and interactive comments surrounding the Daisy Coleman case comprise an interpretive system played out through virtual communities and numerous forms of new media. In this context, an identity of Daisy Coleman as an innocent victim of sexual assault, and a corrupt judicial system was volleyed about and debated. Tacked together threads of consensus about the atrocities of the case also emerged through comments. Thus, the interpretive system in the Daisy Coleman case was fluid. The interpretive system functioned to transform Daisy's identity through persistent and collective action that imparted a moral code.
- The interpretive system functioned between online and offline interactions—the politics of sexual exploitation were played out in online and physical spaces.

Educational Implications:

- Literacy education in secondary schools needs to address gender equity in online and offline spaces for girls.
- Literacy education also needs to encompass curriculum that teaches girls to bring voice or “talk back” to oppressive social practices through new media.
- New media should not serve to replicate sexist ideologies and “pornification” of girls.