

Abstract

In the wake of a new decade, feminist-punk Riot Grrrls welcomed 1990 as a fresh era where women could demand that patriarchal society overtly address issues of female suppression including sexual harassment, domestic violence, and rape. Riot Grrrls worked through the outlets of the underground punk-music scene, the creation of 'zines, and confidential weekly meetings. This research project will critically analyze how the movement was portrayed in American entertainment news media from 1990-1995. In a preliminary analysis, I observed media framing devices that trivialized the movement by framing it as a trendy fad run by elitist college girls. This project will examine the image of Riot Grrrls presented by mainstream media sources, and compare this image with the messages presented by the Riot Grrrls themselves, and the alternative media. This analysis will lead to examining the relationship between Riot Grrrls and mass media, which will reveal how dominant ideological forces negotiate gender relations.

Media Analysis of Riot Grrrl Movement

Significance of Project

This research project explores how media has the ability to effect and define ideas, movements, and advancement within gender discourse by constructing the public's perception of what is taking place. Because this research project focuses on media surrounding a feminist movement, scholarly advancement will take place within the specific context of critical media and gender studies, while also contributing to the exploration of how media creates cultural resources for public understanding of all social ideas, movements, and events.

This project began as a media framing analysis paper for COM265 (Media Literacy). Upon completing this smaller scale framing analysis, I noticed a pattern throughout my selection of articles which seemed to stereotype the women involved in the Riot Grrrl movement as white, middleclass, sheltered college students provoking a battle of the sexes, while ignoring the Riot Grrrls stated purpose of the movement as providing a safe place for women to openly address and raise awareness of female oppression. Due to the content published about the Riot Grrrls, many dominant figures involved in the movement instated a media block, which could have contributed to the death of the movement due to the fact that some Riot Grrrls wanted to use the media to their advantage to gain a larger following, while others shunned the media. By studying the dynamic relationship between the Riot Grrrls and the mainstream media, I will develop further insights about the role of media in shaping the direction of feminism during the 1990s.

While research on the Riot Grrrl movement does exist, the vast majority of academic discourse focuses on aspects of the movement that are different from media analysis, such as the history of the movement, how the Riot Grrrls contributed to the 1990's pop culture symbol of girl power, along with the incorporation of Riot Grrrl into mainstream society (Jacques), the culture of 'zines (Corvid), and analysis of the movements role in the punk music scene (Schilt). In her recent book, *Girls To The Front: The True Story of the Riot Girl Revolution*, Sara Marcus, devotes two chapters to the relationship between Riot Grrrls and the media. While Marcus focuses on individual Riot Grrrls reactions to the media coverage by conducting her research through interviews, my purpose will be to analyze media framing devices employed in news and entertainment articles from an academic standpoint.

Within the sub-discipline of critical media studies, the concept of media framing has been applied to numerous protests and social movements such as the Million Man March (Watkins) and abortion-related protests (Husting). Todd Gitlin introduced the idea of media framing in *The Whole World Is Watching*, exploring how "mass media defines public significance of movement events or, by blanking them out, actively deprive them of larger significance," (Gitlin 3). Gitlin states that "Frames are principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theory about what exists, what happens, and what matters," (Gitlin 6). This research project will use Gitlin's scholarship as background for analyzing media coverage of the Riot Grrrl movement. "The mass media are a significant social force in the forming and delimiting of public assumptions, attitudes, and moods – of

ideology. They sometimes generate, sometimes amplify a field of legitimate discourse that shapes the public's "definitions of its situations," and work through selections and omissions, through emphases and tones, through all their forms of treatment," (Giltin 9). Recognizing the frames by which mass media construct social movements exposes the original message, along with the mass media constructed message, thus revealing social implications of media framing. By identifying framing devices employed in the coverage of the Riot Grrrl movement, a deeper understanding of the relationship between Third Wave feminist movements and mass media will be gained, which will work to answer questions surrounding ideological forces in our society.

Statement of Central Objective

How did the media framing of the feminist-punk Riot Grrrl movement by the mainstream press compare with the messages displayed by the Riot Grrrls themselves, and what does this tell us about the relationship between mainstream media sources and Third Wave feminist movements?

Methods

Central to this research analysis will be primary sources of national newspapers and popular magazines published during the time of the movement. For example, my preliminary research provided me with articles from *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Newsweek*, *Rolling Stone*, *Seventeen Magazines*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Chicago Reader*. I will first gather further primary sources predominantly through LexisNexis. My preliminary research has showed that the majority of Riot Grrrl news coverage occurred between 1990-1995, with the greatest concentration of material from 1992-1993, and a tapering off of material from 1993-1995. I will focus on mainstream media sources because they reach the largest audience. With these primary sources, I will interpret framing practices, such as the emphasis of specific characteristics of the movement over others, by looking for patterns to determine the overall meaning constructed by the media. After interpreting framing devices present in my primary sources, I can compare the overall media image presented with the Riot Grrrls declared purpose of their movement, along with the messages depicted in alternative media sources. Therefore, I can perceive any existing correlation between media framing and the success of the movement, along with what relationship this created between the media and the Riot Grrrls. To further my understanding of the movement, I will utilize academic secondary sources to understand more elements of the movement, and therefore, analyze, interpret, and compare the meaning constructed by both the Riot Grrrls and the messages present in primary sources. Secondary sources will be found through databases such as Communication and Mass Media Complete (EBSCO), GenderWatch, Women and Social Movements in the U.S. (1600-2000) (Alexander Street Press). Beyond databases provided through Butler University's Irwin Library, I hope to utilize other databases provided to Indiana college students by the IUPUI Library, such as Archives Unbound (Gale), and NewsBank (Access World News) to find both primary and secondary sources.

Progression of Project

I have already gathered numerous articles featuring the Riot Grrrl movement. I will continue to familiarize myself with media scholarship surrounding the concept of media framing analysis to better understand how to apply the concept to my case study. I will also begin the process of studying different historical aspects of the movement to gain a broader and more complete understanding of the Riot Grrrl movement before undertaking the project.

Weeks 1-2 - I will gather primary sources through databases previously described in "Methods." I will also continue familiarizing myself with the concept of media framing analysis.

Weeks 3-5 - I will review scholarly sources on the Riot Grrrl movement to gain a more complete understanding of the movement, and therefore, of the news coverage surrounding the movement. I will begin analyzing media framing devices utilized in the articles. At week five, I will begin assembling my research into essay form.

Weeks 6-9 - I will conclude media framing analysis, and will begin focusing on patterns found in the primary sources. This will lead me to draw conclusions on how media framing devices contributed to the construction of ideas surrounding the movement, and what implications these framing devices caused for the movement. I will finish assembling research into essay form, and at the end of the nine-week period, I will present my project to the BSI community.

Feasibility

Materials needed to complete this project will be limited to textual documents. I will use databases provided by Irwin Library, such as LexisNexis, Newspaper Source (EBSCO), GenderWatch, and Communication and Mass Media Complete (EBSCO). I also plan on traveling to IUPUI Library to utilize their databases such as Archives Unbound (Gale) and NewsBank (Access World News).

Working on Campus

I do not expect the need to spend any extended time away from Butler University during the duration of the nine-week period.

Personal

My personal interest in this research topic stems from the ways in which this topic allows my two areas of study, Media, Rhetoric, and Culture and Gender, Women, and Sexuality, to intersect. Exploring the ways in which media constructs prominent ideas within our society is astounding to me, and applying this concept to a feminist movement (who's ideals differ from those of greater society) allows me to explore two areas of great interest to me.

Course work which has prepared me to undertake this project include Media Literacy (COM265), which presented an introduction of media framing, Film Criticism (COM312), and Technologies of the body (MRC481). The latter courses both include coursework on analyses of gender roles and their representation within society. Currently, I am taking Intersections of Identity (GWS102), which allows me to explore how dominant ideologies (which are present in media) affect

the construction of one's gender identity. This GWS course enables me to explore how the actual construction of one's gender identity contrasts with the media portrayal of it. I am also taking Gender and Media: Global Views (JR418), which directly relates to my research topic in that it focuses on the media representation of disempowered groups, such as women. Further, I am taking Rhetorical Criticism (MRC352), which is helping advance my skills in the analysis of media rhetoric.

My educational goals are to provide and present written research on the role of media in our lives, and how it constructs' our perception of reality. This research project would allow me the opportunity to do exactly that, thus giving me a head start and providing me with the experience necessary to begin a successful career in media literacy research post-graduation. Through the completion of this project, I will be able to see exactly how massive scholarly projects are undertaken, which will help me execute related future projects with more ease and expertise. This project will allow me to advance my writing and presentation skills, along with providing an incredible depth of knowledge on the idea of media framing, which will allow me to explore and apply this same idea to movements, events, and ideas ranging far beyond the Riot Grrrl movement.

Presentation

I plan to submit my work for presentation at the National Communication Association annual conference or to the Central States Communication Association regional conferences. Subsequently, I plan to submit my work for publication in the *Women's Studies in Communication Journal*.

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