

News Combing Project

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Overview of Story and Identification of Theory

I selected an article from The Wall Street Journal titled “Rand Paul Interview Sparks Dustup Over Abortion Rights.” The article is about Rand Paul, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, abortion, and the 2016 presidential election. Rand Paul is running in the 2016 presidential election for the Republican Party. “In a dustup that played out in the press, Mr. Paul (R., Ky.) was unwilling to answer specific questions on which exemptions to abortion bans he supports, while Democratic National Committee chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz wouldn’t comment on which, if any, restrictions she favors on the right to get an abortion.” (Byron Tau, Wall Street Journal). Both Paul and Schultz attempted to dodge the topic of abortion, but Schultz does a better job of not addressing the topic.

When Paul was asked by an Associated Press reporter what his thoughts were on abortion he said; “I think the most important thing is the general concept of: Do you support the sanctity of life? Do you think there’s something special about life?” Now when Schultz responded to his statement she said: “I support letting women and their doctors make this decision without government getting involved. Period. End of story.” I think Paul is dodging the question because he doesn’t want to lose votes to the issue of abortion.

The Mass Communications theory I selected is the spiral of silence theory. I picked this theory because it stood out to me the most; I find it the most interesting theory. Some of us avoid certain topics when we are with certain people, also we don’t comment on these topics when we knew our views differ from other people’s views. It’s interesting to see idols and inspirational people that we look up to get caught in this theory. People are afraid to speak their mind because they think everyone is constantly judging them.

Description of the mass communications theory

The spiral of silence theory was developed by Noelle-Neumann, she said “Observations made in one context [the mass media] spread to another and encourage people either to proclaim their views or to swallow them and keep quiet until, in a spiraling process, the one view dominated the public scene and the other disappeared from public awareness as its adherents became mute.” (pg. 268 Baran & Davis). To sum up what Neumann said, if people don’t think an issue or topic is popular they don’t talk about it. I think they don’t want to talk about it because they are scared people will not respect their opinion. The book defines spiral of silence as “the idea that people holding views contrary to those dominant in the media are moved to keep those views to themselves for fear of rejection.” (pg. 268 Baran & Davis). It’s more than ok to have an opinion, or a belief on a topic, but sometimes some people are afraid to speak their mind because of how others will react, or how others will think of them.

In class we discussed the possibility of being on a train and people you don’t know start to talk about a topic you have strong opinions on, what do you do? We talked about this in class, and it was also in the PowerPoint. You could answer this by saying you will do nothing because you don’t know the people, and it’s not your place to say anything about the topic. You could also speak your mind because you have every right to. I know I would speak my mind because what do you really have to lose? They might not like you, but who cares if they are strangers? You will probably never see them again. I always think people should speak their mind no matter what because without conversation how can you learn to grow, and respect other people’s opinions?

“There is a climate of opinion in which some opinions enjoy more general public support than others. Individuals have a “quasi-statistical” sense that enables them to assess the level of

support for various issues.” (Chapter 9 PowerPoint). I think it’s interesting that people have a sense to know the level of support there is for different issues. With the news media repeating the same news over and over again across the country, they definitely influence people’s opinions.

Explanation of news story utilizing the mass communications theory.

My reasoning on why I believe this article is an example of the spiral of silence theory is because both Paul and Schultz try to avoid telling the public their views on certain abortion bans. Since Paul is running for president he doesn’t want to get into the issue because that may turn some voters off, and a good percentage of the country falls into the middle on the abortion issue. “Republicans, for instance, aren’t eager to answer questions about whether they support exemptions on abortion restrictions in the case of rape, incest or to save the life of the mother. Democrats aren’t keen to talk about late-term abortions, which have been banned in many parts of the country.” (Byron Tau, Wall Street Journal).

“In a dustup that played out in the press, Mr. Paul (R., Ky.) was unwilling to answer specific questions on which exemptions to abortion bans he supports, while Democratic National Committee chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz wouldn’t comment on which, if any, restrictions she favors on the right to get an abortion.” (Byron Tau, Wall Street Journal). I believe that they are holding views contrary to those dominant in the media because they have a fear of rejection. Abortion has always been dominant in the media because it’s a controversial topic. You are most likely either pro-choice or pro-life. They are pretty self-explanatory, but in these categories of pro-choice and pro-life are smaller issues. If you are pro-life and against abortion, but support exemptions in case of rape, incest, or to save the life of the mother are you really pro-life? The same goes with pro-choice. This is relevant because of what is dominant in the media.

When Paul was asked about the issue in an interview last week he didn't answer the question. He made a statement about life, and then noted his support for antiabortion bills that have both included and not included exemptions in the past. "When pressed further, he said: "Sometimes I think putting it in neat categories is a mistake. So I gave you about a five-minute answer. Put my five-minute answer in." when taking questions after a speech in Milford, N.H., he challenged reporters to put the question back to Democrats: "Is it okay to kill a 7-pound baby in the uterus? ... You go back and go ask Debbie Wasserman Schultz if she's okay with killing a 7-pound baby that's just not born yet." (Byron Tau, Wall Street Journal). So instead of answering the question he responded with asking a question to the other political party. I think the spiral of silence theory applies here because Paul doesn't address the issue because he's scared of losing votes.

Schultz responded with: "Here's an answer. I support letting women and their doctors make this decision without government getting involved. Period. End of story. Now your turn, Senator Paul. We know you want to allow government officials like yourself to make this decision for women — but do you stand by your opposition to any exceptions, even when it comes to rape, incest, or life of the mother? Or do we just have different definitions of 'personal liberty'." (Byron Tau, Wall Street Journal). Schultz does defend herself here, but does not in the next section.

'After Republicans noted Schultz seemed to be calling for abortions without restrictions, the Democratic Party declined to clarify if her statement meant that she favored no restrictions at all on abortions.' (Byron Tau, Wall Street Journal). This is a prime example of the spiral of silence theory because the party doesn't want to respond to the question. If she was to respond to the question her views may be unpopular, and she can fear rejection.

Analysis of corresponding reflective practice.

This process has had an impact on the way I think because I now see the importance of mass communications theory, and how it is applied to news sources. At first I was really worried about this project because we went over so many theories in class, and there were so many to choose from. I looked through almost all of the slides, and the one I remembered the most was the spiral of silence theory. I liked this theory because it's relatable to everyone. No one usually brings up the topic of politics on the holidays when my family is in, except for me. That's a rough topic to talk about, especially when your family's all democrats, and you're a republican.

I understand how the theories are applied now that I had to comb through different news sources and pick the theory I thought best fit. I would have never thought how many different theories could be applied to one article. I also didn't realize you can relate the theories to actual news articles. This will change how I view things from now on, every time someone doesn't want to talk about a controversial topic, I will remember the spiral of silence theory. I don't have to worry about the theory because I always say what's on my mind.

This process has had an impact on my career because knowing how to apply these theories to actual news sources will increase my chance of getting a job. I know how a theory can be applied to a news source, which can only help me be more marketable than the student at Wilkes interviewing for the job. This is helpful for me to learn since I want to go into the news broadcasting world once I graduate.

I enjoyed this assignment because it allowed me to think about how I witness the spiral of silence theory in my everyday life. So many people I know don't say what's on their mind because they are scared of rejection and having a view that's different from the crowd. I look forward to seeing the other class members topics.

References

1. <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2015/04/09/rand-paul-sparks-dustup-over-abortion-rights/>
2. Baran, S. Davis, D. (2015). *Mass communication theory: foundations, ferment, and future*. (7th ed.). Boston Cengage.