

Best Practices in Ethics in an Emerging Media Environment

Sponsored by
The Teaching Committee
of the Association for Education in Journalism
and Mass Communication

Thursday, August 4, 2016
10 - 11:30 a.m.

AEJMC 2016 Conference
The Hilton Minneapolis Hotel
Minneapolis, Minnesota



Best Practices in Ethics in an Emerging Media Environment

This booklet contains the winning entries of the Best Practices in Ethics in an Emerging Media Environment 2016 competition, sponsored by the AEJMC Elected Standing Committee on Teaching.

Booklets produced for the previous competitions can be found online at:
aejmc.com/home/2010/09/best-practices-in-teaching-booklets

2016 Winning Entries:

FIRST PLACE: *Social Media and Social Change: A Lesson in Biased Product Development and Collective Action*, Jennifer M. Grygiel, Syracuse University

SECOND PLACE: *Whose Link Is It Anyway? Crediting Curated Content*, Sue Burzynski Bullard, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

THIRD PLACE: *Ethics in Real Time – Using Periscope to Increase Accuracy, Truth and Transparency*, Jennifer Brannock Cox, Salisbury University

HONORABLE MENTION: *Ethics in an Increasingly Multicultural, Multiethnic, and Multilingual Media Environment*, Sherry S. Yu, Temple University

Members of the AEJMC Elected Standing Committee on Teaching (2015-2016):
Chris Roush, University of NC-Chapel Hill (Chair) • Charles Davis, University of Georgia • Leslie-Jean Thornton, Arizona State University • Catherine Cassara, Bowling Green State University • Earnest Perry, University of Missouri • Natalie Tindall, Georgia State University • Raluca Cozma, Iowa State University • Karen M. Turner, Temple University • Mary Rogus, Ohio University

Best Practices in Ethics in an Emerging Media Environment
Copyright © 2016 AEJMC

Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication
234 Outlet Point Boulevard, Suite A, Columbia, SC 29210
Ph.: 802-798-0271 | FAX: 803-772-3509 | E-mail: aejmchq@aol.com | www.aejmc.org

Contact Jennifer H. McGill at AEJMC for permission and reprints.
Sponsored by the AEJMC Elected Standing Committee on Teaching.



FIRST PLACE

Social Media and Social Change: A Lesson in Biased Product Development and Collective Action

Jennifer M. Grygiel,
Syracuse University

Abstract: Given recent growth in social media technologies, it is increasingly difficult for journalists, educators, and students to keep up with ethical issues that arise from product development. It is important to be critical of how technologies come to market, and to be aware of technological bias and its impact on journalism and mass media communications. This class activity explored bias in the development of digital technologies used to represent skin color. The activity draws on use cases from the early days of Kodak film to issues surrounding Twitter's new "racially diverse emoji," and how students can collaborate to make change.

Teaching Activity: The class activity was designed to expose students to the presence of bias in product development, specifically issues involving skin color and technology, and how bias impacts communications across various industries (e.g., journalists, marketers, advertisers, etc.). The activity draws on use cases from the early days of Kodak and biased color film, to issues surrounding Twitter's new racially diverse emoji (Chowdhry, 2015) ("diverse emoji"), and how students can collaborate to raise awareness of ethical issues in communications and make change.

The activity began with a discussion of how some products that come to market are biased and not inclusive of people of color, starting with Kodak color film. To process color film, the company created a Shirley card, which was a photo of a white woman, to assist color lab technicians with developing color film. Kodak did not have cards for people of other races, which made it difficult to correctly print photos of people of color (Ali, 2015). We then discussed contemporary issues around bias in facial recognition, such as web cameras that lack sufficient technology to properly work for people of color, to illustrate how biased product development is not just a thing of the past (Albanesius, 2009).

As the number of white-skin emoji increased (Newton, 2014), celebrities and influencers began to raise ethical issues around the lack of diversity in emoji (Perez, 2014). In response, Apple released diverse emoji in their iOS 8.3 update on April 8, 2015 (Chowdhry, 2015). These emoji are created by applying an emoji modifier based on the Fitzpatrick Scale—a well known scale for classifying human skin color based on how it reacts to ultraviolet light—to a default emoji (Warren, 2015). With this new release, the Unicode Foundation, which governs the release of emoji, has made efforts to standardize the default skin color as yellow, which caused some issues in the Asian community (Warren, 2015).

4 | Best Practices in Ethics in an Emerging Media Environment

On December 3, 2015, *232 days* later, Twitter still had not updated their desktop computer application (“desktop”) to display them correctly. I presented students with the observation that Twitter’s desktop application was not able to properly display the new skin tone emoji that Apple released (see Appendix, Figure 1).

The rollout of diverse emoji was not coordinated amongst major companies such as Apple and Twitter, which resulted in people of color being marginalized. When non-white people created Tweets with diverse emoji on their mobile phones, they were frequently represented by a white emoji (not only the new standard default yellow) plus the skin tone swatch that they chose, when viewed on desktop (see Appendix, Figure 1). For example, if an African American person selected a new diverse emoji on mobile, it would display a white emoji plus a new Unicode Fitzpatrick swatch of their selected skin tone on desktop prior to the new iOS release.

People of color were further marginalized beyond the Twitter desktop application as journalists frequently embed live Tweets in major publications. Due to the interconnectedness of Twitter and digital publishers, any publication that embedded diverse emoji would have displayed them incorrectly as a base white/yellow emoji plus a new Unicode Fitzpatrick swatch to their desktop audience.

The lecture portion of the class reviewed how product development roadmaps and timelines may differ due to what companies prioritize, as well as how social media companies and journalists are interconnected.

In this class segment I also covered how social media are used for social change and highlighted a new product called Thunderclap.it, which amplifies messages by allowing large groups of people to post messages on social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, etc.) at the same time. At the conclusion of the lesson, the class was invited to participate in an *optional* Thunderclap campaign where students had the opportunity to ask Twitter to prioritize updating their desktop application to display diverse emoji.

Rationale: As journalists and product developers in training, students should be aware of how social inequalities are reproduced in products that we use, how this marginalizes people, and how ethical issues in one industry can impact others and reinforce issues such as institutional racism and oppression.

Outcomes: Students developed critical thinking around biased product development and Twitter’s product development priorities. For example, one student raised the issue that during the time that Twitter did not address the skin tone swatch issue, they prioritized changing the Favorite button from a star to a heart, an arguably trivial change for users.

The Thunderclap campaign (see Appendix, Figure 2) called on Twitter to prioritize emoji equality and garnered more than 45 supporters, including many students

from the class, and achieved the potential to reach 56,928 users on social media with our message. Before the campaign ended, Twitter updated their product in line with the goals of the campaign.

References

Albanesius, C. (2009). HP Responds to Claim of ‘Racist’ Webcams. Retrieve from <http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2357429,00.asp>

Ali, M. (2015). A brief history of color photography reveals an obvious but unsettling reality about human bias. Retrieved from <http://www.upworthy.com/a-brief-history-of-color-photography-reveals-an-obvious-but-unsettling-reality-about-human-bias>

Brownlee, J. (2015). Apple Starts Adding Racially Diverse Emoji To The Mac. Retrieved from <http://www.fastcodesign.com/3042175/fast-feed/apple-starts-adding-racially-diverse-emoji-to-the-mac>

Chowdhry, A. (2015). Apple Releases iOS 8.3 To The Public, It Has New Emoji. Retrieved from www.forbes.com/sites/amitchowdhry/2015/04/08/apple-releases-ios-8-3-to-the-public-its-the-update-with-the-new-emojis/

Newton, C. (2014). Give your friends the finger when these new emoji arrive on your phone. Retrieved from <http://www.theverge.com/2014/6/16/5815558/give-your-friends-the-finger-when-these-new-emoji-arrive-on-your-phone>

Perez, S. (2014). Proposed Changes To Emoji Standard Would Allow For More Diversity, Increased Selection Of Skin Tones. Retrieved from <http://techcrunch.com/2014/11/04/proposed-changes-to-emoji-standard-would-allow-for-more-diversity-increased-selection-of-skin-tones/>

Warren, C. (2015). How the new Apple emoji got their skin tones: It's not what you think. Retrieved from <http://mashable.com/2015/02/26/diverse-emoji-explainer/>

Appendix

Figure 1: Twitter Skin Tone Emoji Issue on Desktop

Here is an example of a Black Lives Matter activist using a black fist emoji. Prior to the update, the black fist was displayed as a white fist plus a new Unicode Fitzpatrick swatch, as the desktop version was not configured to display diverse emoji.

6 | Best Practices in Ethics in an Emerging Media Environment

Tweets are frequently embedded in journalists’ digital work and the Fitzpatrick Swatch emoji was seen in top tier digital publications that were using Tweets as sources.

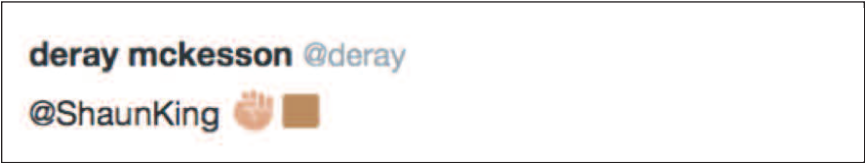


Figure 2: Thunderclap Campaign Page



SECOND PLACE

Whose Link Is It Anyway? Crediting Curated Content

**Sue Burzynski Bullard,
University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

Abstract: Curated content can easily confuse audiences who sometimes have a hard time identifying the material's source. In this assignment, students must clearly identify sources of curated material by creating a style and format for attribution in curated work. It's a matter of ethics. The assignment forces students to consider ethical concerns: How much credit is enough? How much material is appropriate to use before linking to the original source? Does material have to be rewritten or can it be used verbatim? The proliferation of curated content — in journalism and in public relations — makes addressing the ethics of attribution essential.

Explanation of the Teaching Activity: Students are assigned to curate news and information in a variety of ways. They create a weekly email newsletter, designed to bring the top stories of the week to a student audience on campus; they also curate content for a website that provides background information on topics in the news. As an example, they might curate news and information on college costs or an election to provide one-stop background information for audiences.

Regardless of the curation platform, a key component of the curation lesson centers on the ethics of sharing content created by another author or organization. Students are shown both good and bad examples of content curation. In a good example, the curator clearly labels the source of the information and links to the original site. The curator writes a brief summary but doesn't repeat verbatim the original information. In a bad example, a curator publishes a lengthy repeat of the original content, linking to the site almost as an afterthought. So much of the material is in the curated content, a reader has no incentive to visit the original site or source of the material. It smacks of plagiarism not curation.

Students also read and review ethics codes and style guidelines from various news organizations that address curated material. For example, the Chicago Tribune's guidelines say attribution must be bolded at the beginning of a curated summary. The Tribune's guidelines also spell out that no more than two to three sentences or no more than 15 percent of the entire article should be included in the curated summary. It is very specific. NPR's ethical code bans including material verbatim and starts with the admonishment to "attribute, attribute, attribute." Quartz, which curates a newsletter, calls for identifying sources clearly.

After reviewing examples of curation and discussing the ethics involved, students begin brainstorming. They work in groups to devise formats and styles for their

8 | Best Practices in Ethics in an Emerging Media Environment

curated newsletters or backgrounders. As a starting point, they identify reputable sources of information. They create Twitter lists to follow potential sources. But to avoid ethical problems, they create style guidelines that spell out how to attribute the source of information. They also spell out what other restrictions they'll use for curated material such as rewriting headlines and summarizing information in their own words. Groups then share their ideas with the entire class before they actually begin curating content. Following the attribution style guide becomes part of the assignment's rubric. In addition to creating curated material, students write a reflection paper on the experience at the end of the assignment.

This assignment can be used in any writing, reporting, editing, or ethics class. It can be adapted for journalism or public relations students. Students lose points, as spelled out in a rubric, if the source of their material is not clearly identified.

Rationale: Providing curated content on a variety of platforms has become common as news organizations realize the potential of being a one-stop shop for audiences. News organizations of all sizes link out to other sources to provide readers comprehensive coverage. Email newsletters of curated news are prevalent. Curation also is being used in public relations. A non-profit website, for instance, might provide a curated list of the latest information on its cause from myriad sources. Tools such as Storify have made it easy to curate material from social media.

Links can be a public service. As David Weinberger of Harvard's Berkman Center for the Internet and Society said: "Links create a public good. They create a Web that is increasingly rich, useful, diverse and trustworthy."

Although links can be valuable, clearly identifying the sources of information is simply a matter of accuracy and fairness. Without clear attribution, curation simply becomes theft. Establishing guidelines for attribution in curated content is essential.

Outcomes: The assignment reinforces traditional ethics — providing credit where credit is due — in today's digital environment. Students learn the pros and cons of curation, the pitfalls to avoid in creating such content, and the ethics of attribution. Students are actively engaged in learning: They create their own guidelines and formats for curation and appropriate attribution.

Ethical behavior is reinforced in the grading rubric. In reflecting on the assignment, students often address the difficulty they encountered in walking a fine line between sharing materials created by someone else in an ethical way and misappropriating someone else's work. Students admit it's a struggle to curate without copying. As one wrote, "I learned that it was easier to do so without the story right in front of me; instead, I read the story, hid the tab and tried to summarize it in my own words without using the original story for immediate reference." Students acknowledge curating with appropriate attribution is hard, but they agree it's a lesson worth following.

THIRD PLACE

Ethics in Real Time – Using Periscope to Increase Accuracy, Truth and Transparency

**Jennifer Brannock Cox,
Salisbury University**

Abstract: Mobile Journalism students divided into two groups – editors and reporters – to report and write a story in real-time. Reporters used Periscope to conduct interviews and live broadcast them online as editors fact-checked information and wrote stories. Editors communicated with reporters using the comments function on Periscope, and reporters got clarification and asked questions for editors live on video. The exercise proved effective, as some online information about the event conflicted with what sources said, prompting reporters to dig deeper. This practice in reporting and writing simultaneously encapsulates the demands of social media journalism, getting information out both quickly and accurately.

Explanation of the teaching practice or activity: Students in my Mobile Journalism class use devices, including iPhones, iPads and even GoPros, to report news. We explore different technologies for reporting, delivering and consuming news. Periscope is a new live-streaming tool available through Twitter. Using the social media app, students reported and wrote a story in real-time based on a live event.

Prior to the activity, students participated in a skills demonstration regarding the tool. They also engaged in discussions about the possible opportunities and implications of using the tool for reporting, including the ethics of accuracy, truth and transparency, teamwork and the potential for citizens to join in the conversation while they are live. Once they had a clear understanding of the technology and concepts, we put the lessons into practice.

The 75-minute class included 20 students, who were divided into two teams – reporting and editing. The reporting team went across campus to a food drive that was underway. Each reporter had a partner – a member of the editing team – with whom he/she would communicate directly throughout the class. While the reporters got into position, editors began writing a shell of their story based on Web information from a press release about the event.

The reporters were required to connect with a variety of sources – at least three – and conduct live interviews using Periscope. Editors listened in on the interviews, pulling quotes and information to insert into their stories. Editors also asked questions and got clarification using the app's comment function. Reporters read the comments and asked questions to sources on-camera. Editors

also directed their reporters to get particulars about the event to flesh out their stories. Once reporters completed their interviews, they checked back in with editors to make sure no additional information was needed. Editors finished and submitted their stories online.

Rationale: An underlying theme of the class is speed versus accuracy. Throughout the semester, students use various social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, Wordpress, Instagram and others, to report stories. With each assignment, we spend time learning skills and best practices alongside larger conceptual issues, such as ethics, law and management. We spend a lot of time exploring whether it is better to be “first” or “right.” Overwhelmingly, students agree it is best to be right. However, when it comes time to report on deadline, accuracy suffers.

Periscope allows journalists several opportunities to learn about ethics. The ability to have one reporter on-scene while another fact-checks information in real-time in the newsroom strengthens the organization’s chances of distributing accurate, vetted information. In addition to basic fact-checking, having editors check information instantly while reporters are with sources lends greater opportunity for truth. If sources give false or misleading information, the editor can check it and advise the reporter with follow-up questions to help drive at the truth of the issue.

Equally important, Periscope allows citizens a chance to participate in the reporting process. By broadcasting raw, live interviews online, reporters have an unprecedented opportunity for transparency in their reporting process. Viewers will be able to hear the questions and see the responses for themselves, enhancing reporters’ credibility and strengthening trust shared with the audience. Citizens can also participate in the reporting process, submitting their own questions for journalists to ask live. Reporters can open a new door for citizen participation that could enhance the story and help journalists better answer the “so what?” question in their stories.

As journalists, any opportunity to enhance accuracy, seek truth and be transparent should be embraced. Instead of gatekeeping – telling readers/viewers what we think they should know –, we have an opportunity to get instant feedback that could make news more appropriate for its audiences. If reporters can get audiences engaged in the reporting process, they can increase readership by producing stories that connect with readers/viewers. Involving citizens puts the onus on sources. If they attempt to distort the truth, they won’t just have to get it past the reporter; there could be an army of citizens with inside knowledge waiting to pounce.

Outcomes: With the interactions being recorded live, I had the opportunity to listen in and gauge the reporters’ interviewing skills, as well as their interaction with partners. Being able to add my comments provided a unique opportunity to share

my critiques with them and help them improve in real time. The editors were at first inclined to ask me what to do when inaccuracies arose or more clarification was needed, but they quickly adapted and began working one-on-one with their reporters to figure things out for themselves.

Students overwhelmingly enjoyed the activity, citing it in course evaluations as a favorite. The activity gave them the opportunity to do real reporting and experiment with ethical scenarios in a safe, instructional environment. Both reporters and editors felt they had a better understanding of challenges associated with practicing ethics online, which will aid them in their media careers.

There were also some unexpected learning outcomes from the activity that we were able to explore further in a follow-up debriefing during the next class period. Students remarked most of their sources were somewhat uneasy at first when faced with the prospect of being broadcast live, especially on Periscope, which was still a relatively new technology. This realization provided fodder for discussion on the ethics of explaining risks of live broadcasting to sources, as well as the legalities associated with recording sources. Because the app is connected with students' Twitter accounts, many were faced with interferences from citizens – usually their friends – who wanted more information about what was happening. Students had to focus on the task at hand while simultaneously corresponding with curious on-lookers. Several members of the local media also followed along during our activity, adding comments and granting students exposure that could lead to job and internship opportunities in the future.

HONORABLE MENTION

Ethics in an Increasingly Multicultural, Multiethnic, and Multilingual Media Environment

Sherry S. Yu,
Temple University

Abstract: The contemporary media environment is increasingly multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual, in which individuals of varying levels of cultural literacy and linguistic capacity produce and consume media content. New media technologies enable wider and farther-reaching production and distribution of alternative voices, yet simultaneously fragment audiences more than ever before and limit exposure to, let alone consumption of, diverse voices. The significant information void in the midst of plenty ironically widens a gap in public discourse and hinders, rather than facilitates, cross-cultural dialogue. This raises a pedagogical inquiry of how to teach ethics with respect to cultural diversity to students, in order for them to perform as culturally confident and ethically sound producers and consumers of multicultural storytelling in an increasingly multi-cultural/ethnic/lingual media environment.

Rationale: What is the “emerging media environment”? The focus of the discussion has been primarily on the transformation brought about by new media technologies with little attention paid to the transformation brought about by changing demographics. Increasing transnational migration has enabled the development of a strong multi-cultural/ethnic/lingual communication infrastructure in the U.S. According to New America Media, there are approximately 3,000 ethnic media outlets, serving over 50 language groups (see <http://news.newamericamedia.org/directory>).

What is new is the emergence of new communicative spaces initiated by young hyphenated Americans. Backed by new media technologies, news/magazine blogs such as *Angry Asian Man*, *KoreAm Journal*, *The Root*, and *Racialicious* have emerged to represent young ethno-racial voices. What is more, grassroots cross-ethnic news sites such as *Alhambra Source* (a multilingual news site in Alhambra) and *LA Beez* (a hyperlocal ethnic news aggregator in L.A.) have proposed new platforms for intercultural dialogue. In the commercial sector, major news networks also have launched *Fox News Latino*, *NBC News Latino*, and *Huffpost Latino* voices and provided new options not only for Latino audiences but also for a broader audience.

The question that remains is how far these voices reach a broader audience and contribute to pluralizing public discourse and enhancing “cultural literacy” of individuals in a multicultural society: that is, “the ability to read, understand and find the significance of diverse cultures and, as a consequence, to be able to evaluate,

compare and decode the varied cultures that are interwoven in a place” (Woods & Landry, 2008: 250).

A Pew Research Center study found that over 60% of adult Americans use Facebook and 50% of those users (who account for 30% of the general population) obtain news from Facebook (Holcomb, Gottfried & Mitchell, 2013). The question then is whether or not the Facebook news aggregator includes news produced by ethnic media, and if not, where does that 30% of the population obtain news about the rest of the society? In parallel with this is a growing distrust toward immigrants among the general public. Over 50% of adult Americans believe that the conflict between immigrants and people who were born in the U.S. is most serious—more so than the conflict between rich and poor, and Blacks and Whites (Pew Research Center, 2009). Given this context, an important pedagogical inquiry here is how to teach ethics with respect to cultural diversity to students and help them become culturally confident and ethically sound producers and consumers of multicultural storytelling.

Explanation of the Teaching Practice or Activity: Ethics with respect to cultural diversity can be taught in many ways, and connecting students to ethnic media is one of them. It can be a course of its own or a project within a course. The objective is to provide an entry point to multi-cultural/ethnic/lingual voices and improve cultural literacy. A set of sequential hands-on activities that aim to allow students to experience diverse voices can be considered in the following two phases:

Phase I Cognitive Activities aim to improve awareness of existing ethnic media outlets by mapping and archiving them into a database. Students map so-called *accessible ethnic media*, that is, ethnic media that produce content in English or bilingually. Unlike ethnic media in their respective ethnic languages, these media serve as an easy entry point to ethnic discourse and provide important resources for multicultural storytelling that students can use immediately.

- *Map accessible ethnic media* by using available media directories that include ethnic media
- *Develop a database of ethnic media outlets* including the name of publisher/producer, year of foundation, circulation size, media type, target audience, and contact information

Phase II Behavioral Activities aim to provide a reality check first by examining how the same story is told across communities, and later by writing a story about an ethnic community which students do not belong to. A pedagogical objective here is to understand the politics of representation—how a story is narrated when subjects are *represented* (by others) and *represent* (themselves)—and be able to demonstrate that understanding in students’ own writing.

- *Compare the day’s headlines* between ethnic media and mainstream

14 | Best Practices in Ethics in an Emerging Media Environment

media and understand similarities and differences

- *Write a news story about a cultural/ethnic/linguistic community students do not belong to.*

Outcomes: Phase I Cognitive Activities: Improved awareness of and change in perception toward ethnic media. Students' feedback suggests that ethnic media are no longer "foreign" or "*their* media," but are "just media, not ethnic media." Some students say: "I am going to continue to use these media. They are so cool." More comments are provided in the Appendix I.

Phase II Behavioral Activities: Improved cultural literacy. Students' news stories are critical (such as "*Acting White: It is more to it*" and "*Justice or Else*") and comparative in nature (such as "*Why wait: A look at marriage within the Arab community and everywhere else*" and "*All news are not created equal*"). A sample writing is provided in Appendix II.

Whether or not students remain culturally sensitive and ethically sound producers and consumers of multicultural storytelling is the decision of the students themselves. Nonetheless, without having the awareness of the existence and significance of diverse voices and knowing about the resources for multicultural storytelling they can easily access, such decision-making may happen much later, or may never happen at all.

APPENDIX I: Students' comments on Phase I

"Mapping different ethnic media outlets is essential. Prior to this class I had little knowledge of many ethnic media outlets, mainly because I was not aware. Also because mainstream media is so accessible and readily available. Not only are you exposed to different views and opinions of a different race or ethnicity but you get a look at what other races and ethnicity's find important. Not only is the homepage different but the content surrounding their culture is also different."

"Mapping accessible media was an interesting experience. I was surprised by the quantity of content out there. I often hear that journalism is dead but the sheer quantity of news outlets out there proves that statement wrong. There's plenty of opportunities out there for those willing to cover communities outside of their comfort zone."

"Having been through all of the accessible, ethnic news media, I've come to realize that there's a lot more news outlets out there, that have yet to be discovered and deserved to be. You'd think that in a day and age like today, where newspapers are slowly dying, that it would be incredibly limited of the choices we have. However, there are countless news outlets out there, that not only focus on certain ethnicities and cultures that have plenty of info to offer, for those who may be interested in broadening their horizons in any way, shape, or form."

"Searching for accessible ethnic media was a fun experience. I was introduced

to a world of outlets that I was not previously aware of. I focused on the Hispanic community.”

APPENDIX II: A sample of student’s news story writing for Phase II
Why Wait?: A Look at Marriage within the Arab American Community and Everywhere Else

In America as well as other parts of the world, women feel obligated to marry before they turn a certain age. An article written last year in the Arab American News titled, “Pressure on Arab American Women to Get Married Young Can Be Frustrating” explains how Arab American women are among this group of who feel pressured by cultural marriage norms.

According to Temple University Asian and Middle Eastern Studies Professor, Gordon Witty, a lot of the cultural norms of Arab Americans come from their country of origin. “In Arab countries women tend to marry early, and yes this custom follows when the families immigrate to other countries.”

A study done by the Population Reference Bureau, showed that more than half of women get married between the ages of twenty and twenty-four in most Arab countries. Some women may marry starting at the age of fifteen. In fact, almost thirty percent of women in the Arab country of Mauritania get married between the ages of fifteen and nineteen, but there are many factors that tie in to this.

“The main factors, I believe, are socio-economic and educational levels”, said Witty.

In America however, opportunity is greater and the chance of a woman to achieve her own success is extremely high. Also, there are some consequences that may make women want to wait until they have established their life before getting married.

Anissa, a single mother of three, who did not want to give me her last name, is an Arab American. She decided not to get married after she got pregnant with her first child, which caused problems between her and her parents.

“I got pregnant with my first child at eighteen and when my parents found out the first thing they said is I have to marry the guy who got me pregnant. I thought it was ridiculous that my parents were trying to make a decision that ultimately I felt was one of my own and even after time had passed, they still continued to press the issue almost like they were disgusted that I chose something different for myself.”

She does however explain that her story is not the common story for Arab American women. “I have plenty of friends whose parents have never pressured them

to marry and some are happily married, some are 40 and completely single. Some of my non-Arab friends have told me about them being pressured to marry too, I don't really think it's an Arab thing."

The idea that a woman needs a man to support her exists in every culture, it's not just an Arab thing. Women are still subject to being made to believe that they are not capable of supporting themselves and that is just not for one group to change, it is a job for all of us.

On the other hand, getting married definitely does not mean you'll be married forever. According to the CDC, "there is one divorce every 36 seconds in America."

***Note: The middle part of the story is removed to meet the page limit for the submission.
