

The Consequences of Misogynistic Rhetoric in Public and Private Spaces

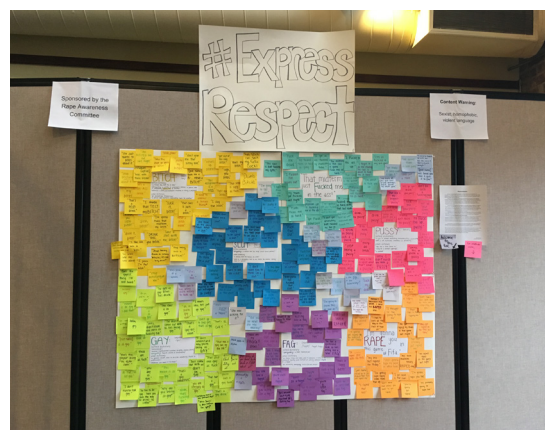
Jacob Hege, Sophie McHugh, and Joanne Suk

INTRODUCTION

The language we use in casual, everyday conversations has tangible consequences. Our words—whether we see it or not—have implications beyond the surface. With the current political climate in mind, we have created a Public Service Announcement that highlights the negative consequences of so-called “locker room talk” and follows the hypothetical storyline of a white male identity traitor. Ultimately, he observes the consequences of casually misogynistic speech journey upward to the Oval Office, where it has actual impact on social policy. Our aim with this PSA is to demonstrate the power behind everyday rhetoric—even when used in private spaces. Based on the theories of Social Learning, Priming, Cultivation, Parasocial Relationships, and Social Identity, we hope our project will inspire people to use gendered rhetoric more responsibly and prove the power of the PSA as an educational yet entertaining medium.

#EXPRESSRESPECT

The student quotes featured in our study were gathered by Gloria Fortuna '17 for her own project on the normalization of violent language on our campus. Her wish for the project was to “raise the collective consciousness for all of Davidson’s campus and prompt community members to be more aware of the language we use every day.”



Left: Gloria Fortuna '17; right: Fortuna's project, #ExpressRespect, on display in Alvarez College Union. Photos provided by Fortuna.

“I made that test my **bitch.**”

Overheard on campus

EDUTAINMENT & MEDIA LITERACY

PSA Style

Realistic representations of life and an explicit presentation of negative consequences in public service announcements has been linked to overall effectiveness (Fishbein et. al). Our script will depict real-life situations tied with the consequences of misogynistic rhetoric.

Underlying Theories Applied

By employing social identity theory, we intend to facilitate the development of a parasocial relationship between the target audience (young, college-aged men) and thus encourage identity traitor behavior.

Humor

Our script intentionally deals with serious material in a humorous and approachable manner. Studies have shown humor to be an effective tool in education (Morrison).

Interactive

By linking viewers of our PSA to a related website, we encourage a continuation of interactive dialogue.

SCRIPT

Scene II: Locker Room Talk

(Setting: Locker room. Will is washing himself with a towel after a rough and tumble game of tennis. His three friends, JOE, MO, and TIM are also washing up and chatting.)

JOE	(Sarcastic) Hey, nice backhand out there Moe.	.....	Real-life situation
MO	Oh, fight me bitch. (WILL looks a bit concerned.)	.....	Character presented in a way that promotes social identification and the development of a parasocial relationship
TIM	(Playful) I'll fight you, bitch.	.....	Real quote heard on campus (provided by Fortuna's study)
MO	Whatever, man.		
JOE	Ooh, sorry, didn't know you were such a pussy. (WILL looks up from tying his shoes or whatever. We see a slow-motion black and white flashback to MARGO leaving. Cut back to present scene. WILL stands up.)	.....	Real quote heard on campus (provided by Fortuna's study) Explicit presentation of consequences
WILL	Guys, cut it out.		
TIM	Dude chill, we're not really fighting.		
WILL	No, I mean with all this pussy-talk. Like, are you serious? Why is a pussy associated with weakness? Vulvas do so much. They bleed on the reg, they deal with us sometimes. I mean we all came out of a pussy! That is no insult.	.....	Identity traitor behavior
TIM	Okay--		
WILL	And for that matter, bitch? Really? (The guys all sort of take this in for a second.)		
JOE	Mo, I take it back. You're a dickwad.	.....	Encouragement of positive emotions through humor, leading to increased effectiveness of educational content (Morrison)

“Grab ‘em by the **pussy.** You can do anything.”

Donald Trump

THEORIES

Social Cognitive Theory (also known as Social Learning Theory) as adapted from Bandura's theory to media studies, this theory integrates specific aspects of media content with particular characteristics of the viewing audience and their social environment to address the mechanisms through which media may influence consumers. Includes observational learning based on rewards and punishments.

Priming Theory

refers to the effects of media content on people's later behavior or judgments related to the content that was processed (Bryant & Oliver, 2009)

Cultivation Theory

the effects of long-term exposure to media—particularly television—on people's conceptions of social reality

Parasocial Relationship Theory

media viewers' ability to form one-sided relationships with people in the media

Social Identity Theory

people derive a part of their self-concept from the social groups and categories they belong to. As such, the opinions of a viewer on a certain piece of media portraying persons in their in-group will affect the way they perceive the content.

RELEVANCY

Misogynistic speech proliferates public and private spaces alike and its consequences are more observable than ever given our current president's reputation for disparaging women publicly and using gendered insults. Outside the media, day to day conversations featuring the same speech—especially on college campuses, as demonstrated by Fortuna's project—are evidence of an underlying rape culture and the continued existence of gender norms and stereotypes. Taken together, the consistent use of this language in our surroundings and in the media highlights the potential for words to incite actual systemic harm, such as Trump's reinstatement of the ban on international abortion counseling.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bryant, J., & Oliver, M. B. (Eds.). (2009). *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Cohen, C. (10:01). Donald Trump sexism tracker: Every offensive comment in one place. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/politics/donald-trump-sexism-tracker-every-offensive-comment-in-one-place/>
- Fishbein, M., Hall-Jamieson, K., Zimmer, E., von Haefen, I., & Nabi, R. (2002). Avoiding the boomerang: testing the relative effectiveness of antidrug public service announcements before a national campaign. *American Journal of Public Health, 92*(2), 238–245.
- Morrison, M. K. (2010). *Using Humor to Maximize Learning: The Links between Positive Emotions and Education*. Blue Ridge Summit, US: R&L Education. Retrieved from <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10435076>