

## Social Media and Censorship

*Barbara Prillaman*

*Censorship is saying: 'I'm the one who says the last sentence. Whatever you say, the conclusion is mine.' But the Internet is like a tree that is growing. The people will always have the last word - even if someone has a very weak, quiet voice. Such power will collapse because of a whisper.*  
– Ai Weiwei<sup>1</sup>

Come into our school and you will see a variety of things – educational materials such as books and posters, teachers, and students – lots of students. If you look more closely at these students ranging from ages 11 – 18 you see them loosely following the dress code – the older they get the more liberties they take with it. Look even more closely and you see them – no, not the students, but the phones. Smartphones are everywhere – in fact, they have taken over. There are just as many phones as students. These phones appear to be the most important possession that they own. They are tucked into bras, squished into pant pockets, and – more commonly – in their hands...rarely is one put away in a backpack. How convenient, one might say, literally a computer for every child – information is always at-hand. The Smartphone provides a way for students to access information on the web to further their education. Hah – I would argue that they could be considered the demise of our society, or so it seems when I seem to be in competition with a phone for a student's attention! Students are constantly on their phones but from what I have observed it is not for educational purposes but – instead – to tweet and post on social media sites – Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, among others NOT for academic purposes but for personal ones such as what color is a prom dress or what he said about her or what time does the party begin.

### **Rationale**

Through my involvement with YNI/DTI, I have produced six units to date to use with my dual-enrollment Sociology course. My goal in writing this unit is to add to my collection. With the help of the readings, research, and participation in the *Varieties in Censorship* seminar, I will create a seventh unit that helps students to understand the sociological concepts of deviance and conformity and how they are connected to censorship – what is censored and what is not on social media. Students, as part of our Sociology course, need to learn about the ideas of deviance, conformity, and social control. I believe the text chapter will interest students on a basic level because it is the strange and/or unusual – the deviant part. Most in my psychology courses do find this deviant behavior fascinating...now, imagine it on a societal level! Conformity is a confusing subject for them. In reality, they don't understand yet how the term relates to them in regard to the big picture (their role in society). They are more apt to understand the term as it relates to them now on a basic level; for example, with their peer group. Lastly, they just get mad about social control! Who should be able to control them/tell them what to do – no one! Our textbook emphasizes mass surveillance. The textbook offers the example of the Cultural Revolution in China in which people within the same community – neighbors – needed to “tell on” one another. It also offers the tidbit that the U.S. National Security Agency

(NSA) has access/records of all Verizon customers' phone and text messages. This intrigued me and I believe will do the same for my students. I thought it would be more interesting to students if I connected the material to something that is very important to them – their Smartphones and social media platforms. In doing so, they might also begin to understand the importance of what they upload/post and what it means – short-term and long-term – for them and others – that the information may be censored and by whom.

## **Objectives**

There are a number of Delaware Technical Community College Wide Core Course (CCC) Performance Objectives that I follow as I plan my units of instruction. In this unit I will be using the CCC *Relate sociological concepts, principles, and processes to daily life*. In doing so students will: (1) employ relevant sociological concepts and principles to describe how they are applicable to understanding social interactions (deviance, conformity, and social control and how they are related to social media platforms) and (2) formulate and evaluate personal reactions to these sociological concepts, principles, and processes (articulate their understandings and concerns about the subject matter as they are personally affected).

This unit also addresses two History/Social Studies Common Core Standards: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Integration and Ideas/CSSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem

Integration and Ideas/CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Students will be able to synthesize multiple texts (written and film) about the role of censorship on their lives – in particular, in relation to the social media platforms they use. They will individually read many different texts such as our textbook, Supreme Court cases, on-line articles, and Terms of Agreement policies. While reading and viewing, they will take copious notes to use during the communal Socratic Seminar in which they will debate the three scenarios noted below.

As stated above, I thought that there was no better theme than social media to connect to the sociological concept of censorship. Students are obsessed with Twitter; Snap chat, Instagram, and even Facebook. They spend an inordinate amount of time uploading photos and posts and responding to each other. I'm fascinated by what they are choosing to share with the "world" although they may believe it is just with their friends. Last year when we were in the midst of the beginning stages of talking about changing our mascot ("Redskins") there was a lot of banter on Twitter – I was traumatized by most of it that I read. I could not believe the horrible things they were writing to/about each other. Their comments were just mean and they did not provide any support for their opinions. It seemed to me that students do not know how to censor themselves in what they post on social media platforms. Maybe if they look at some examples of

what has happened to others as they posted items that might be considered deviant to certain audiences, they might think twice before uploading something about themselves.

I want to use a news story about each of the social media platforms commonly used by my students, and have them look at why/how it may have been censored and the repercussions of the posts. The first article has to do with a “personal” post on Facebook. In 2013, an Idaho girls’ basketball coach was fired for a vacation photograph that was posted on her Facebook account of her boyfriend (also a coach at the same school – who was NOT fired) grasping her breast while she wore a bikini. Two, Justine Sacco’s (a public relations executive) tweet that went viral while she was on an international flight. It was considered racially hurtful. Three is Instagram photographs that have caused legal issues for those who posted them. Having students view these examples, determine why the behavior might be considered deviant, who are the decision-makers determining if the behavior is deviant, and the sanctions that were established.

The **Enduring Understandings** are taken from the Core Concepts of our textbook’s chapter on Deviance, Conformity and Social Control. After the unit, students will understand that *the only characteristic common to all forms of deviance is that some social audience challenges or condemns a behavior or an appearance because it departs from established norms.* Additionally, they will know that *ideally, conformity is voluntary. That is, people are socialized to accept the norms of the society in which they live as right and good. When socialization fails to produce conformity, other mechanisms of social control such as censorship, surveillance, and sanctions may be used to convey and enforce norms.* **Essential Questions** to guide the unit include: *What is deviance and conformity and how are these sociological concepts related to censorship? What are the established norms of social media, who determines them, and why? What are the types of sanctions that are used to convey and enforce norms on social media sites? and In my use of social media how do I conform, to whom, and why?*

## **Demographics**

Conrad Schools of Science is a school that has finally completed its transition, changing into a science/biotechnology magnet school serving a little over 1200 students in grades 6 – 12. It is considered an urban school, situated on the outskirts of the most populated city in the state of Delaware, Wilmington. CSS students come from all over our state’s largest county. The school’s increasing popularity is obvious as many families complete the *Choice* application process seeking admission to our school. At the high school level, students can choose to focus on a variety of learning “*strands*” such as biotechnology, physical therapy/athletic healthcare, biomedical science, animal science, and computer science. Our high school is the only one in the state that is not a vocational-technology (vo-tech) school to offer a Delaware Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program.

Additionally, a variety of Advanced Placement (AP) courses are offered as well as multiple courses that are in conjunction with our local community college and university. I am the teacher of one of these courses, *Sociology*. This dual-enrollment course in which students (juniors and seniors) are enrolled at the local community college and receive credit from that

institution upon successful completion of the course with me on the high school campus. Moreover, it is a *distance-learning course* in that some of my students are at my school while others are at a sister school in our district. The course happens real-time – at the different locations – same teacher (me!), curriculum, activities, etc. This is my fifth year teaching in this manner. I am continuing to try to master this type of teaching/learning environment as well as the content that I had not interacted with in many, many years.

## Content

The content of this unit is divided into a few parts which we will piece together to form the big picture. Students will first learn about the chapter's information on deviance, conformity, and social control. Then, they will learn the details of the most common social media platforms. While they use the platforms, most do not know the historical information about each of them. Afterwards, they will delve into a short history of social media through the ages giving them the context for how and why we are *social* and how this has looked over time. Lastly, we will look at how censorship, a form of social control, affects social media – and my students!

### Deviance, Conformity, and Social Control

“Deviance is any behavior or physical appearance that is socially challenged or condemned because it departs from the norms and expectations of a social audience.”<sup>2</sup> It is based on the violation of norms – folkways and mores. Folkways, the customary way of handling daily routines, such as how one eats (fingers or utensils), personal space (minimal versus quite a distance), and how we greet one another (kiss on the cheek, a hug, a bow, or a handshake). These are things that we learn about through the socialization process. We practice them over and over within the context of our families, schools, society, culture, and place/space. Mores are the norms (rules) that one must follow that are “essential to the well-being of the group”.<sup>3</sup> Mores are the “right” way to do things and if they are violated there are severe consequences such as ostracism, imprisonment, commitment to an institution, physical punishment, or death. Turning your back on the Amish way of life after participating in Rumspringa, murdering another person, or stealing from others are a few examples that have severe consequences.

“The only characteristic common to all forms of deviance is that some social audience challenges or condemns a behavior or an appearance because it departs from established norms.”<sup>4</sup> This statement is considered **Core Concept 1** and is one of the main foci of this unit. The true question here is who is the audience? Sociologists refer to the audience as a group of people who have some vested interest in how others act. The audience watches others to determine whether their behavior is considered deviant or not. There are issues with this concept. Deviance is difficult to define at times as it changes over time and culture. It can even change in regard to the age of a person. For example, I show a video in my Psychology course about Abnormal Behavior/Psychological Disorders. In the video, there are a few really good examples of “deviant” behavior. One, a woman walking bare-breasted down the street in our society is considered deviant behavior. But in other areas of the world, on the beach in St. Maarten for instance, it is not. Additionally, a three-year-old taking off his clothes and jumping

around in a fountain is fine but if a 35-year-old man does the same thing his behavior would be considered deviant! Moreover, homosexuality is no longer termed a disorder or disease so it is not considered deviant as it was in the past. Or, even the idea of marrying someone from another race. All of these examples demonstrate a change in culture, time, and age.

**Core Concept 2** states, “Ideally, conformity is voluntary. That is, people are socialized to accept the norms of the society in which they live as right and good. When socialization fails to produce conformity, other mechanisms of social control such as censorship, surveillance, and sanctions may be used to convey and enforce norms.”<sup>5</sup> Socialization happens over one’s lifetime through the interactions with the institutions in our society – family, school, religion, government, and culture for example. One learns about what one’s gender and race signify within the society. Each person develops a sense of self or social identity and to which groups they belong. Through this process one recognizes what is expected of them – it is a form of social control. When one does not abide by expectations, violating them in some way, they may feel guilt. This is the sign that one understands they have done “wrong”; it is the sign that the system is working. However, there are some who do not feel this guilt. They do not follow along with what is expected of them so there needs to be other ways to maintain conformity.

One of these ways that has been established is censorship, “a method of preventing ideas and other information from reaching some audience. That audience may consist of children, the general public, voters, employees, prisoners, or others.”<sup>6</sup> Censors are those whose job it is to look at information and ideas in books, movies, etc. and remove any material that is deemed “unsuitable or threatening.”<sup>7</sup> Parents could be considered censors! I hear young teens arguing with their parents about being able to see a certain rated film in the theater. The education system also is considered a censor. For example, my school required a special permission for students in this course (a Dual-Enrollment course with the local community college) to view a few R rated films – even though they are all at least 17 years old. And, governments also engage in censorship to protect sensitive materials.<sup>8</sup>

There are sanctions used against an individual for when a folkway or more is not followed. They are the reactions – approval or disapproval – towards a behavior or appearance. Positive sanctions are those that demonstrate approval such as smile, applause, or some type of award. Negative sanctions are those that demonstrate disapproval such as a fine, banishment, ridicule, imprisonment, and death. Informal sanctions are those that are not upheld by a law. Making fun of someone for what they are wearing – a man wearing a skirt, for example, might be seen by some as unusual, not the norm. Formal sanctions are those that are backed by laws in the society. There are “rules or policies (usually in writing) what behaviors or appearances should be rewarded or punished and the procedures for allocating rewards and administering punishments. Some positive formal sanction examples include trophies and diplomas. Some negative formal sanction examples include fines, imprisonment, and death.

**Core Concept 4** delves into an explanation for describing deviant behavior. It suggests that Labeling theorists maintain that an act is deviant when people notice it and then take action to label it as a violation and apply sanctions. Labeling theorists make two assumptions--that people

create rules and they are not reinforced uniformly. Deviant behaviors vary over time, place, and culture. They are constantly changing and one behavior can be considered deviant in one place but not another. One of my favorite examples of this is a short animated video in which a youngster of three years old takes off all of his clothes and jumps into a fountain. A middle-aged man does the same thing. Due to age, one behavior is considered not deviant (toddler) versus the other is deviant (middle-aged man). Additionally, some people are not caught when they break a rule. This being written, it means that one must be caught in a “deviant” act for it to be considered deviant and action must be taken. For each rule created for a behavior or appearance, there come to be four groups of people: conformists (those who follow the rules), pure deviant (those who break the rules, are caught, and punished), secret deviants (those who break the rules but are not caught or are overlooked), and the falsely accused (those who have not broken any rules but treated that way).

All of these concepts will be viewed in relation to social media platforms.

### Social Media Platforms Today

“Social media is a form (or variety of forms) of online communication – usually via a website or app – that allows users to create virtual communities, share information, network, and connect with one another.”<sup>9</sup> It is the principal means of communication for many young people today. Selfies galore posted on the platforms allowing acquaintances/friends to see you (your actions and/or whereabouts) at that very instant. So, it does help one to share personal information such as homecoming, birthday celebrations, and graduation photos. It organizes people into groups to fight for a cause or come together for an event. It also is used now by businesses as a marketing strategy – to connect with customers.<sup>10</sup> It helps people by engaging those who may be isolated or promoting social justice and political protests (think Arab Spring here), find missing people, and gain access to multiple educational venues.

The top ten social media platforms include: Facebook (900 million monthly users), Twitter (310 million monthly users), LinkedIn, which has a professional network focus, (255 million monthly users), Pinterest that allows people to create virtual boards of any interest (250 million monthly users), GooglePlus resembles Facebook but definitely not as popular (120 million monthly users), Tumber, a blogging platform, (110 million monthly users), Instagram sharing images (110 monthly users), VK – Russia’s social media platform (80 million monthly users), Flickr, an image hosting site that is now an app – first geared towards photography buffs and now owned by Yahoo (65 million monthly users), and Vine, owned by Twitter in which people can share up to six-second videos (42 million monthly users).<sup>11</sup> I’ve found that most of my students are interested in Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Additionally, many are using Snap Chat.

As the number one social media platform, Facebook provides users with the opportunity to tell others (“friends”) what you are doing, post items including videos and photos on their profile pages, and show appreciation towards others by “liking” their updates. This is now all done through a newsfeed so that your access to your friends is easy. In 2004, Mark Zuckerberg

created the website TheFacebook.com that was based on earlier work on a site entitled FaceMash. At first, the site was for Harvard students only, where Zuckerberg was attending. Students were able to create personal profiles and make connections with each other. It soon became very popular and was opened to universities in North America. By 2005 the site became Facebook and in 2006 anyone over the age of 13 with an email address could create a profile page and connect with others. Now, businesses also use the platform as advertising.<sup>12</sup> Most recently, there have been some disgruntled users (although that does not deter them from using it – one billion of them) due to changes in the terms (this will be looked at further in the censorship portion of this unit).<sup>13</sup>

Evan Williams and Jack Dorsey founded Twitter. They believed there should be a way for people to post information without being near a computer. This idea was based on phone text messaging versus the Internet.<sup>14</sup> It allows for people to upload status updates that are 140 characters or less. Direct messaging between parties is allowed as well as adding a hash tag sign (#) to use as metadata in which users are alerted to a “big idea”. Going to this, people can see where many people have merged sharing their information. Sharing requires less time for users. This platform is used for a news source as well as “as it’s happening” updates.<sup>15</sup> Advertising has also infiltrated Twitter. This platform’s controversy is due to its immediacy.

Instagram lets users upload photos. Established in the fall of 2010, Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger created an online photo sharing network in which users can access it as an app or by phone to share photos on Facebook, Twitter, etc. Users have access to photo effects and can follow their friends and family members in a newsfeed fashion. By the end of the first two months it had over one million followers. After three years it recognized 150 million followers. In 2013 Facebook purchased the company.<sup>16</sup>

Snap chat, the latest in what is used, was developed by Evan Speigal, Reggie Brown, and Bobby Murphy. In a 2011 conversation, Brown commented that he wished the photos he was sending would just go away. Speigal thought this was an interesting idea. It was a wealthy one too, now worth 15 billion dollars! First known as Pictaboo (reason for the ghost emblem), it was launched in July of 2011 and after two months only had 127 followers. However, they analyzed data and were able to determine that high school students were using the app. Users can record videos, upload photos, and text (33 character spaces) which can be seen for anywhere from 1 – 10 seconds. There is the appeal that the photos disappear – deleted from the server forever. During this time, there was also a disagreement amongst the three founders and Speigal and Murphy locked Brown out of all abilities to access the platform. A lawsuit ensued and was finally settled in 2014.<sup>17</sup>

### *Social Media Over Time*

“Each month people collectively spend around three hundred billion minutes, or the equivalent of six hundred thousand years, on Facebook.”<sup>18</sup> Why? According to Dunbar, there are three reasons. First, we are “inherently social animals. Primate brains appear to have evolved specifically to process social information, to enable primates to function more effectively in

groups.”<sup>19</sup> Second, through the exchange of gossip we exchange information, form our social networks, advertise our status and demonstrate our trustworthiness and expertise. Third, beginning with writing we were able to use media technology to “extend this exchange of information across time and space to include people who are not physically present.”<sup>20</sup> We are able to draw connections between primates and ourselves. They are social in nature just as we are. They live in groups and have complex social systems/networks. We know that we benefit from living together – safety in numbers. But with groupings, issues do arise. One must learn how to cooperate and manage others’ expectations, for instance. One activity that primates engage in allowing for them to “connect” is to groom one another. Dunbar’s research relates this primate information to humans by using social media/Facebook as an example. Most members have somewhere between 120 and 130 friends. Most are really acquaintances. Looking more closely at the information, we have about five intimate friends who are much like a grooming circle.<sup>21</sup> Today’s “grooming” takes place on social media enabling those participating to accomplish other things at the same time – eating, cleaning, etc. It provides an opportunity to strengthen bonds (between parties) and shows this bond to others as well. Gossip is a “vital social glue”<sup>22</sup> – a form of social intelligence in which people can find out what is going on, make judgments of others’ trustworthiness. Dunbar states, “The most plausible starting point of the evolution of language is as a bonding device based on the exchange of social information concerning relationships within the social network.”<sup>23</sup>

So, from the beginning we have loved engaging in behaviors that help us to connect, whether that’s grooming or gossiping! In Roman times, the *acta* (Gazette), which is equivalent to a newspaper, was produced each day. However, only one copy was made! Speeches were recounted; senators’ votes noted; gift, divorce, and funeral announcements were recorded. Trivia was later included as well. Since only one copy was made available readers distributed the information. Friends passed on the news of interest adding their own comments or background information via letters added. Think replies on any of the social media platforms today – a person is “far more likely pay attention to something if a friend said it was important or expressed an opinion about it.”<sup>24</sup>

During the reign of English King Henry VIII, his niece, Margaret Douglas secretly married Thomas Howard. However, due to unforeseen incidents (disowning of his daughter and the beheading of his alleged adulterer wife, Anne Boleyn) Margaret was then considered the next in line to be heir to the throne. When King Henry found out about her secret marriage he accused Howard of wanting to overthrow him so he had the couple arrested and imprisoned. To keep in touch, they wrote in and exchanged a book that is known today as the Devonshire Manuscript. Approximately 19 courtiers (young people at the court) passed it around their circle and wrote each other notes, poems, and coded messages. They were able to share how they felt about each other and the times and to offer each other support. For example, Margaret and Thomas wrote love poems to each other while they were separately imprisoned. Today, teens engage in this type of behavior on the social media platforms “beyond the gaze of the outside world.”<sup>25</sup>

The printing press, telegraph, radio, and television have all added to the ability for people to connect. Each one of these technologies allow for connections more efficiently and quickly. But

nothing has made such an impact as what happened in the 1980s when a small group of intellectuals had the ability to connect to each other using what was known as ARPANET. Bob Taylor (an employee at Advanced Research Projects Agency/part of the US Defense Department) worked with Charley Kline (a 21 year old UCLA student) and his professor, Leonard Kleinrock, to create the platform in which computers could be linked up to each other so that ideas/work could be exchanged and improved upon. In 1990, Tim Berners-Lee wrote the program, WorldWideWeb that made the connections even easier. The exchanged texts “could be highlighted and turned into a clickable link to another page or document, either on the same computer or on a remote machine.”<sup>26</sup> In 1991 it was freely available over the Internet. He persuaded the company he worked for it to remain royalty-free in 1993. Social-networking sites emerged with SixDegrees.com (1997) in which people created lists of friends and could look at each others' profiles, Friendster (2002), a dating site in which people could match up with friends of their mutual friends, and MySpace (2003) where profile pages were created by individuals and made public.<sup>27</sup>

Why does all this matter and how is it related to sociology? Many issues arise that are related to our seminar topic, Censorship. “Anyone can now publish his or her views online, whether on Twitter, on blogs, or in comment threads, this has led to a coarsening of public discourse. Racism, sexism, bigotry, incivility, and ignorance abound in many online discussion forums. Twitter allows anyone to send threats or abuse directly to the other users.”<sup>28</sup> I have personally felt this on Facebook, in which a “friend” but which Dunbar would consider more of an acquaintance, told me that I should be ashamed of myself for supporting a mascot change at my school. I had shared a link from a Native American website supporting the non-use of indigenous mascots. While I did not comment on it, one could assume that I agreed with the article/commentary. How are items censored and why? I know that students have also experienced this type of “shaming” and worse.

### Censoring Social Media

Social Media is a natural form of communication among young people today. A 2012 Pew study indicated that 95 per cent of 12 – 17 year olds had access to the Internet, 37 per cent had a smart phone and 80 per cent owned a computer. Also, 81 per cent of them regularly used some type of social media platform.<sup>29</sup> This is a territory that we have only recently entered as a society. Young people are communicating more regularly via these platforms. With this type of communication comes the positive as well as the negative. As Facebook states, “Our mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.”<sup>30</sup> A positive factor if handled with care!

I began to look at each of the social platform’s rules and regulations and to think about these from a censorship viewpoint. To obtain a profile, a person must agree to the “terms of service.” Facebook’s Warnings & Blocks section describes what you are not allowed to post on Facebook, stating a “few of the things” that include: nudity, sexually suggestive content, hate speech, anything inferring self-harm or excessive violence, and bullying. If a person does not follow the Statement of Rights and Responsibilities they face the consequence of having their post being

removed, being warned or having their account being disabled. Facebook's censors determine what is acceptable within each of the categories. Controversy arises here. In a response to Ammori's New York Times article, The "New" New York Times: Free Speech Lawyering in the Age of Google and Twitter, Heins agrees that it is private companies that are running social media sites and therefore, determining – censoring – what information is being distributed. Should it be that a private entity determines what should/should not be censored? How does this fit into keeping young people safe? Within the government, the process of determining this is transparent. However, in regard to the social media platforms, it is not. Instead, it seems to be a secretive process in which no one has access to an explanation of why. Heins again agrees with Ammori in that social media sites do not have to censor anything. Ammori points out that "section 230 of the CDA immunizes all Internet users who disseminate content not have their creation from liability for defamation, invasion of privacy, and virtually everything except the violations of intellectual property."<sup>31</sup>

Throughout our seminar, we discussed the idea of censorship in relation to young people. We spoke of the need to keep them safe and what they should be exposed to and when according to their age/maturity levels. Social media poses quite a number of issues for keeping young people safe – including them!

The incidences of cyber-bullying have dramatically increased. Students taking nude photos of themselves and/or others and posting them are just a few examples. These types of behaviors then play themselves out in administration offices at school and district levels as well as in the court systems at state and Supreme Court levels. The Supreme Court has left it up to local decision-making when it comes to if/how a student could be punished for off-campus online activity. Local courts have not been consistent in how to address this issue. For example, in Pennsylvania, they have been using the *Tinker v. Des Moines* case as their guide. The 1969 Supreme Court Case decision indicated that school officials could not suppress student expression unless it "materially and substantially disrupts the work and discipline of the school."<sup>32</sup> This decision refers to on-campus speech/expression. However, this case's decision predates the Internet. With the Internet, things are posted off campus yet do have an effect on students while they are on campus. There are issues with the decisions that are being made at a local level even with the 1969 case as a guide. For example, in *Layshock v. Hermitage School District* (2010), the 3<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of a student instead of local Pennsylvania school district officials. The student had ridiculed the principal on-line. Citing *Tinker v. Des Moines*, the court decided that the school district officials had breached the student's First Amendment rights. However, in 2010, the same court favored the Blue Mountain School District's administrative decision regarding a suspension for a student who had "mocked the principal with a fake MySpace profile" in which the student had "insinuated that the principal was a sex addict and pedophile."<sup>33</sup>

Should schools get involved in students' use of social media? Students do not forfeit their first amendment rights when they enter schools. But, they can be curtailed. For example, in the 1986 *Bethel v. Fraiser* case, it was the Court's decision that free speech could be curtailed if it caused a major disruption within the school environment. But, does this also mean extending

surveillance to outside of school/off of school grounds? It seems that is the direction that we may be heading. Recently, the Glendale School District located on the outskirts of Los Angeles, California signed a contract with a tech firm to monitor their students' use of social media – the content they post. Those in favor argue that it helps to reduce cyber bullying as well as indicate students who may display signs of depression or suicidal thoughts, as well as those who suffer from “serious emotional distress.” The reasoning indicates that remarks made outside of school can have a major impact on what happens within the school building as well. On the other hand, opponents believe that schools are overstepping their boundaries and censoring student speech – a fear of *Big Brother* is watching.

## **Strategies**

Students come into our Distance Learning Laboratory with varying skills – technological, conversational, writing, and reading. All of these skills are essential to their academic success – in our classroom and beyond. I need to employ teaching strategies that work towards strengthening these skills throughout the school year. One can talk with a number of my school colleagues to know that while my conversational, reading, and writing skills were strong I still needed to improve upon my technological skills! Immersing myself in this Distance Laboratory helped me to improve upon these skills. I searched out multiple opportunities to learn from my colleagues, district personnel, and spent numerous hours working with different types of practices such as Video Chat or Google Docs. My ultimate goal is to ready these students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning that will be expected of them when they leave high school to pursue higher education or enter the workforce. This unit is later in the year and students must be working towards mastering the following strategies at the very beginning of our course to be successful throughout the year.

### **Collaborative Learning/Groupwork**

Students need to learn how to work together to accomplish goals – those set by the teacher and themselves. This is a basic requirement for many positions or jobs that they will hold in the future. Working together, relying on each other helps to build team-working skills. This strategy is somewhat challenging for us in that there are two groups of students at three different high schools. For the intense conversations that follow the readings of important concepts such as gender, race, or religion a facilitator must be certain that there is a strong sense of camaraderie, trust, and willingness to work with and listen to others in the group. In collaborative learning, each group member is accountable to each other, dependent upon each other and contributes the established goals. Everyone has some strength to share.<sup>34</sup> Together, more is accomplished. Opportunities to learn about each other before and while working help to promote the collegiality and cohesiveness necessary to work well together. Individual and group evaluations are necessary to monitor the group's work (product) and their progress in teamwork. This is essential especially for our environment of bringing students from three schools together via cameras and technology.

### **Google Docs**

Technology is an essential part of classrooms today, especially at the university level. I see part of my role, obviously in this Distance Learning Laboratory with thousands of dollars of technological equipment, to use it with the students so that they become proficient in this new language of technology. Google Docs is one of the ways we have to provide students with a collaborative opportunity to participate in a joint writing process. Students will work with their peers to complete a piece of writing in response to a film, summarizing the key points to a lecture or reading, amongst others. I tell students that this skill they are perfecting in the classroom today will be beneficial to them at the university level in which they can work with their classmates across campus in completing group assignments without even meeting once! As an instructor, you can create and assign a Google Doc to group members. Also, feedback can be easily given even while a student (or students) is working on an assignment. Additionally, it is easily monitored through the Revision History, so that an instructor can keep track of who has completed what. Furthermore, for my teaching situation it helps to build partnerships between the students in three different schools. Students will be grouped together – individuals from all three schools – to collaborate on understanding, summarizing, and synthesizing multiple sources.

### Blogs/Discussion

Another technological feature used in this unit is the blog known as a Discussion on Edline (the learning management system that our district chooses to use). We are currently switching to Schoology, which also has a very similar tool. A blog is an interactive site in which posts occur usually on a daily basis. Using a question or statement, I can preview what will be discussed and/or looked at that day or review or clarify something from the previous day's lesson. For an instructor and the students, this is an invaluable tool. For the instructor, it enables you to see what students understand and may have misconceived in addition to what they think. I like to have them write about the why of what they think, helping me to better understand their viewpoints. This also enables them to think before they speak as we use their blog posts as a means of conversation as well. For students, they are able to see their written conversations and leave multiple comments as well as questions for each other. This is a great pre- and post-activity for the day's lesson in which the same question or statement is added to at the end of the day's lesson helping all parties to see individual and group progress in regard to comprehending a point or concept.

This year I will continue to take the use of this strategy even further. Schoology has ways in which you can embed a video and/or questions for students to respond. Many college courses are now using this feature. Students post on-line outside of class and are scored/graded on the quality of their posts. I will work with the students at the beginning of our time together to establish a rubric that will be used for them to be graded for their posts. I have noticed from teaching this course before that students need to cite the evidence within their work as reflected in the rubric (to score well). They need to identify this evidence in their work so that they can truly "see" it to understand why or why not they receive credit. As much as possible, I want to emulate what they will experience next or the following year at college.

### Socratic Seminar

I have noticed that my students tend to talk before thinking and are more interested in hearing themselves than their fellow classmates. Being able to think critically about a text before discussing it and then listening to others are important skills necessary for academic success and life-long ability to understand better another person's viewpoint. The weight of the conversation is left to the participants – in this case the students. They must critically look at and read the texts before coming to class and be prepared with questions and comments they would like to focus on. This is vital to the conversation's success. I want them to experience what it is to be in college in a small seminar-type atmosphere. Additionally, I believe if they are made responsible for this it will help them to better comprehend the content of the text which they are expected to master and be able to do well on the exams mandated by the local community college will lead to the grade that will determine if they receive college credit or not.

## **Activities**

### **Social Media Platforms: What I Use, Why, and How am I Being Censored?**

The National Archives has a variety of document analysis guides for students to use when they read and analyze a document. Specifically, I will modify the Document Analysis Worksheet for my students to use so that it captures the details of the Terms of Service of each of the Social Media Platforms and so that it also reflects the Common Core standards that I want them to achieve. I will also incorporate a compare and contrast section for students to visually understand the commonalities amongst the platforms in relation to what could be termed as censorship. Additionally, there will be a section that reflects/has them write down what they want to share with others in the class during Socratic Seminar as I am also trying to have them develop their speaking skills.

### **Reading of Court Cases: Censorship, Students and Social Media**

As in my unit, *Your Spot or Mine?: Affirmative Action in Education*, students will participate in collaboratively reading about a court case and reporting out to others in the group. Students will read one of the three cases: *Tinker vs. Des Moines (1969)*, *Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser (1986)*, and *Layshock vs. Hermitage School District (2010)*. Each of these cases is distinct yet similar in that it focuses on censoring student expression – what they are wearing (arm bands), and what they are saying in and out of school. Using an on-line Discussion Board, they will write a description of what they have learned so far – their understandings – in regard to censorship. Next, they will present what they have written and compare and contrast each other's responses having them pay attention to their prior knowledge – of what do they think and where do they think they learned this information. Afterwards, they will be divided into small groups and read multiple sources about one of the three court cases. In these small groups using Google Docs, students will collaboratively take notes about their assigned court case. Afterwards, they will present their court case to the whole group – teaching everyone what they now know from their readings. Lastly, with this new information, students will return to their Discussion Board entry and add details/update what they now know about Censorship.

*Tinker vs. Des Moines (1969)*

Five young people met to discuss a plan to attend their public school in Des Moines, Iowa wearing black armbands demonstrating support for a moratorium on fighting in Vietnam, a national suggestion by Robert Kennedy. The principal found out about the planned silent protest. An announcement was made that students who participated would be suspended. Despite this warning, the students attended school and were sent home. A U.S. district court sided with the school stating that the wearing of the armbands could disrupt learning although later, in 1969, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the students stating, "Students don't shed their constitutional rights at the school house gates."<sup>35</sup>

*Bethel School District vs. Fraser (1986)*

At a school assembly, Fraser made a speech in support of his friend's vice-president candidacy which lewd innuendos and gestures but not obscenities. It is as follows:

"I know a man who is firm - he's firm in his pants, he's firm in his shirt, his character is firm - but most of all, his belief in you the students of Bethel, is firm. Jeff Kuhlman is a man who takes his point and pounds it in. If necessary, he'll take an issue and nail it to the wall. He doesn't attack things in spurts - he drives hard, pushing and pushing until finally - he succeeds. Jeff is a man who will go to the very end - even the climax, for each and every one of you. So please vote for Jeff Kuhlman, as he'll never come [long pause] between us and the best our school can be. He is firm enough to give it everything."

Bethel High School disciplinary code included that action should occur when comments/actions "substantially interferes with the educational process . . . including the use of obscene, profane language or gestures."<sup>36</sup> Fraser was suspended for two days for the incident. When the case reached the Supreme Court, it was decided that there was a distinction between that of political speech (that was protected in *Tinker*) than that of a sexual content that was not prohibited by the First Amendment.

*Layshock vs. Hermitage School District (2010)*

High school senior, Justin Layshock, was suspended for ten days because of the on-line parody that he created of his school's principal. Additionally, they ordered him to attend an alternative school to complete his high school degree and would not allow him to participate in the school's graduation ceremony. Later, he was allowed to return to his regular classes. This case was seen in a variety of courts. In 2007, a federal judge ruled that the school had violated Justin's rights and that the case should go to trial to determine what compensation he might be afforded. In 2010, Justin's case was reviewed by a three-judge panel of the Third Circuit of Appeals. The decision was upheld that Justin's First Amendment rights were violated. When the school district tried to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, it was denied.

## Analysis of Commonly Used Social Media Platforms: Should This or Should This Not Be Censored and Why?

In this activity, students will look at three examples of what was posted on Social Media and what were the repercussions. First, Justine Sacco's tweet on Twitter that read, "Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white!"<sup>37</sup> The tweet went viral as she slept on an eleven-hour flight. When she landed she had no idea what was going to hit her. The tweet caused her South African family, long-time supporters of racial equality, embarrassment and she lost her job as a public relations executive. Second, a Facebook photograph of Laraine Cook, an Idaho high school basketball coach, will be examined. While on vacation with her boyfriend, someone took a photo of the two of them in which he is cupping her breast. They are both in bathing suits (no nudity). She was fired from her position. He was the football coach at the same school and was only reprimanded. Third, students will view a variety of Instagram posts in which people faced consequences. These include people sleeping at work, using others' children as examples, photos of racial slurs, amongst others. Students will determine what they believe should and should not be censored and why? Then, they will look at why there were issues with censorship in these examples, even though perhaps according to law, they should not have been.

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This project based out of the Chicago-Kent College of Law focuses on the work of the Supreme Court. There are multimedia resources.

<http://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources/supreme-court-landmarks/tinker-v-des-moines-podcast> This website has a variety of information regarding federal court cases.

## Appendix A

Since this is a Dual-Enrollment Course, the unit follows the Delaware Technical Community College Wide Core Course (CCC) Performance Objectives. This unit addresses:

CCC *Relate sociological concepts, principles, and processes to daily life*. In doing so students will: (1) employ relevant sociological concepts and principles to describe how they are applicable to understanding social interactions (deviance, conformity, and social control and how they are related to social media platforms) and (2) formulate and evaluate personal reactions to these sociological concepts, principles, and processes (articulate their understandings and concerns about the subject matter as they are personally affected).

This unit also addresses two History/Social Studies Common Core Standards: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Integration and Ideas/CSSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 *Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem*

Integration and Ideas/CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9 *Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.*

Students will be able to synthesize multiple texts (written and film) about the role of

ensorship on their lives – in particular, in relation to the social media platforms they use. They will individually read many different texts such as our textbook, Supreme Court cases, on-line articles, and Terms of Agreement policies. While reading and viewing, they will take copious notes to use during the communal Socratic Seminar in which they will debate the examples from Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/censorship.html#ODrxzz6itt7EYg6w.99>

(accessed October 7, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Joan Ferrante, *Sociology: A Global Perspective*, 128.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>9</sup> Mark McKinnon (Editor), *Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, and the Modern Revolution*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Tom Standage, *Writing on the Wall*, LOC 3870.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, LOC 3897.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, LOC 3926.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, LOC 3980.

<sup>16</sup> <http://wersm.com/the-complete-history-of-instagram/> (accessed October 7, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> <http://techcrunch.com/gallery/a-brief-history-of-snapchat/slide/66/> (accessed October 7, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, LOC 101.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, LOC 4559.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, LOC 45.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, LOC 194.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, LOC 209.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, LOC 210.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, LOC 516.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, LOC 1095.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, LOC 3736.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, LOC 3737.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, LOC 4104.

<sup>29</sup> <http://lawstreetmedia.com/issues/education/should-schools-have-jurisdiction-over-student-activity-on-social-media/> (accessed October 7, 2015).

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/> (accessed October 7, 2015).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.wired.com/2012/01/scotus-student-social-media/> (accessed October 7, 2015).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.studygs.net> (accessed July 13, 2009).

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources/supreme-court-landmarks/tinker-v-des-moines-podcast> (Accessed December 12, 2015).

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1985/84-1667> (accessed December 12, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> <http://nyti.ms/1zaehJD> (accessed October 15, 2015).

**Curriculum Unit Title**

*Social Media and Censorship*

**Author**

Barbara Prillaman

**KEY LEARNING, ENDURING UNDERSTANDING, ETC.**

The only characteristic common to all forms of deviance is that some social audiences challenges or condemns a behavior or an appearance because it departs from established norms.

Ideally, conformity is voluntary. That is, people are socialized to accept the norms of the society in which they live as right and good.

When socialization fails to produce conformity, other mechanisms of social control such as censorship, surveillance, and sanctions may be used to convey and enforce norms.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) for the UNIT**

What is deviance and conformity and how are these sociological concepts related to censorship?

What are the established norms of social media, who determines them, and why?

What are the types of sanctions that are used to convey and enforce norms on social media sites?

In my use of social media how do I conform. to whom. and why?

**CONCEPT A**

Social Media Platforms: What I use, Why, and How am I Being Censored?

**CONCEPT B**

Court Cases: Censorship, Students, and Social Media

**CONCEPT C**

Social Media Platforms' Analysis

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A**

What is deviance and conformity and how are these sociological concepts related to censorship?

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B**

What are the established norms of social media, who determines them, and why?

What are the types of sanctions that are used to convey and enforce norms on social media sites?

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C**

In my use of social media how do I conform, to whom, and why?

**VOCABULARY A**

Deviance  
Conformity  
Censorship

**VOCABULARY B**

Social control  
Mechanisms of social control  
Sanctions  
Norms

**VOCABULARY C**

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/MATERIAL/TEXT/FILM/RESOURCES**

Textbook Chapter on Deviance  
Court Cases  
Social Media Examples

