

## Agenda-Setting Theory

“The press may not be successful in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.” (Cohen, 1963, pp.13)

# IGNORANCE IS BLISS

Paige Austin

The phrase, “**Ignorance is Bliss**”, has been used as a term, normally about being a child, meaning that having no knowledge of something means one less thing to worry about. As people grow however, they tend to start to believe the opposite of this phrase and that having the information on a topic is better, safer, and more sophisticated. What people forget however, is that one can be educated without knowing the negativity that wraps around a situation and sometimes more than not, *what you don't know, won't kill you*. With the craziness of COVID-19 the research of diseases in the media felt present and informative.

**Media may not tell you what to think but it most definitely tells you where to direct your thoughts.**

## TOURETTE SYNDROME (TS)

- A TS like outbreak occurred in Leroy, NY in 2013. Many students were “infected” by the TS symptoms and it spread like a disease through the Leroy high school.
- My study began here as I have TS and understand how it works. TS is a nervous system disorder that causes one to complete unwanted actions in order to satisfy the nervous system. TS, in comparison, is like an itch that must be scratched in order to stop the itching sensation from staying irritable.
- The outbreak was shown through the media of the students struggling with Tourette's on platforms like YouTube as well as being covered by the News and Reality TV. The media coverage forced people to think about TS. They were never told how to feel, but media showed about the information and society followed. Many people who followed the story weren't anywhere near Leroy; media is powerful and opinion leaders hold the reigns.
- The connection of disease and Agenda-Setting Theory? Simple. TS is triggered and even brought about when another person witnesses someone else ticking. If this is the case then just as watching TS causes you to act out and think about ticking, so does watching or reading something in the media. Interacting with media is powerful and whether you think you are being persuaded or not, you are still being told what to think about.

## EBOLA (EVD)

- EVD crossed into US territory for the first time in 2014. Up until this point, no one in the United States had thought EVD dangerous or even relevant. This may be because no information was given about it in the US; at least not until it crossed our borders.
- Only 11 cases were found in the USA, but people panicked. Why is that? The media, after EVD had officially been diagnosed in the US, brought it to the front... of the news. With everyone becoming so involved with media, most everyone knew what was happening and what wasn't. When Ebola was finally talked about in the media, wouldn't people have wondered why they hadn't heard much of it prior to 2014 especially since so many people had been sick with it in Nigeria? With all these questions in mind, one would have a right to think these remaining points:
- Why didn't we know of the disease and its dangers prior to exposure in the US? Is the disease worse than we thought because it had been hidden from our knowledge for so long? What business do we have in rummaging through the illnesses of other countries?
- What's happening? Agenda-Setting Theory is being proven. The media has yet again not told one what to think, but it most certainly has shoved what to think about down its viewers' throats.

## AIDS/HIV

- AIDS/HIV were in its time a very confusable disease. Media was limited in this time for sure, but media had no trouble giving out information that was misleading. AIDS/HIV definition was basically a disease that was very contagious and could spread rapidly; media took the already limited definition and slapped on the title of “gay-disease”. Clearly, today we understand that this was not the case and HIV/AIDS is an STD spread through most bodily fluids, but mostly through blood and through sexual activity.
- Where did the confusion happen? Most scientific information should be closeted until a solid piece of evidence is given to back a statement, but media didn't consider itself science. Media is about informing the people... whether it is wrong or not. This has not changed even today. A big hiccup in media is that it can't only be informative, but it also must be quick; immediacy is key in the media. That is the downfall. The media is so certain that they must be getting information out as quickly as possible, but this gets many people confused.
- People trust the news and many forms of media. To them it is authority that you can trust, and media again knows this. HIV/AIDS stereotypes could have been haltered if media had not pushed the information in our face. With stereotypes being developed simply by the media putting out that information, this proves again that the media gets us to think about a situation.

## CORONAVIRUS (SARS-COV-2)

- This brings us to Coronavirus. COVID-19 began in 2019 with many stereotypes, fears, confusions, and uncertainties attached to it. Media has won yet again. They have gotten us to focus yet again on exactly what they wanted us to.
- What good does this do for us as a society? Would not knowing be better? Would blame towards others cease? Would worry slow down? What you don't know, won't kill you, or rather what the media doesn't tell you won't kill you. Focus on the facts, not the fake news.