The magic of social control: Governmental media control and deviantisation

Abstract

The media is used by governments to disseminate approved discourses surrounding target groups, people and behaviours, creating and perpetuating marginalisation. Within the magical world of *Harry Potter*, the governmental mechanisms are no different to the real world. The *Harry Potter* series of books are part of the web of cultural texts that structure and maintain social constructions, and as such can provide insights to the workings of a governmental facility in the role of social control through the media. The Ministry of Magic uses the wizarding media in an attempt to control the public through deviantisation. This study focuses on sociological theories of social control and deviantisation through the media, and how the Ministry of Magic produces and reproduces discourses. There is an exploration of how the Ministry, through the media avenue used, rely upon a deficit of alternate information to ensure acceptable behaviour. An inductive content analysis is used to explore the actions of the Ministry in the framework of social control and deviantisation. This study demonstrates the methods and discourses generated, and how these are reflected in the real world.

Keywords: social control; media; deviantisation; government; Harry Potter.
The magic of social control: Governmental media control and deviantisation.

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Introduction

The media is frequently an instrument of social control by disseminating dominant ideologies through a large audience (Rushkoff, 1994:5, Faulkner, 2007:5-6, Hinds, 2009:7) and ideological hegemony-creation (Dotter, 2004:19-20, Richardson, 2007:36). According to Hinds (2009:4), the media is the ‘primary indirect source’ for the public’s access to news: the audience for the media’s discourses. This is demonstrated in the Harry Potter world through one of the wizarding newspapers. There are three wizarding media outlets; the first is the Daily Prophet. The second is The Quibbler, a site of resistance to the Ministry of Magic, the governmental organisation in the wizarding world, and is typically a target of ridicule for the wizarding public; the third media avenue is a women’s gossip magazine. The wizarding public are subject to the ideologies of the Daily Prophet simply through an insufficiency of other meaningful information avenues, and are subject to the ideologies of the Ministry of Magic once the Ministry gained control of the Daily Prophet. Evidence that the Ministry of Magic substantially controls the Daily Prophet begins in the fifth book, Order of the phoenix (Rowling, 2003:88-89). Previous to this, the Ministry of Magic do not have an overly powerful influence over the Daily Prophet, which is evident in the negativity levelled towards the Ministry in the pages of the Daily Prophet (Rowling, 1999:33-34, 307, 2000:132, 137, 179-180).

Deviance is surrounded by conceptualisations of difference and classifications of acceptability (Aggleton, 1987:4, Dotter, 2004:4). The production and definition of deviance is situated within rule-creation and perceptions of rule-violation; it is socially constructed and involves social punishments (Becker, 1963:9, Ben-Yehuda, 1990:6, Dotter, 2004:4, 18). The
ability to define deviance is embedded in power relationships (Aggleton, 1987:9, Ben-Yehuda, 1990:13, Dotter, 2004:10) which entails consensus-building regarding the status of an out-group arranged to gain audience consensus and out-group control (Mason, 2009:20-21). A society that has value-consensus is a society that can be controlled: deviations from the norm are either self-controlled or attached to social punishments (Becker, 1963:27). The power to define deviance requires legitimisation of one set of societal values (Ben-Yehuda, 1990:6-7) and the de-legitimisation of another set of values (Curran, 2002:77). This is not to say that there is only one set of legitimised values; there is, in fact, a range of value sets with varying degrees of legitimation that negotiate for power (Ben-Yehuda, 1990:13). It is the case that conceptualisations of deviance shift as different value sets gain prominence (Ben-Yehuda, 1990:13).

The media production of deviance occurs through definition and identification of deviance, creation of public concern surrounding an out-group, and simplistic portrayal of the issue (Thompson, 1998:8). These methods shape and reshape the emotions of the audience, constructing indignation, shock, and hostility (Atkinson and Young, 2002:57) which serve as a boundary line between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Parallel to the identification of deviance and the rise of concern surrounding societal threat is a reactionary response: insistence that there is ‘greater social regulation or control and a demand for a return to “traditional” values’ (Thompson, 1998:8-9). This response is an organised reaction that occurs when the in-group perceives some advantage (Becker, 1963:122) by audience-polarisation, generating negativity towards, and further deviantisation of, the target (Cohen, 2002:66, Mason, 2009:9). One function of this response is to guarantee the maintenance of heightened outrage which, by virtue of creating and sustaining a collective enemy, ensures in-group solidarity (Mason, 2009:9). Additionally, this response solidifies societal rules, reduces infractions, and thus controls more effectively (Becker, 1963:27). Social institutes that surround this response,

**Methodology**

Using an inductive content analysis (Burnard, 1991, Dey, 1993, Elo and Kyngas, 2007), open coding was conducted by writing notes and headings into the text. This process was directed by the theme of media avenues in the wizarding world, and all direct references to, and allusions to, Muggle and wizarding media were highlighted. Categories were generated from these headings, and any similar groupings were collapsed into broader higher order categories. The categories generated were: deviantisation of Harry Potter; deviantisation of Albus Dumbledore; Evidence of Ministry of Magic control over wizarding avenues of media; Muggle media relations; awareness of the wizarding public that the *Daily Prophet* does not publish the truth; awareness of the wizarding public that the Ministry of Magic does not tell the whole truth to the *Daily Prophet*; evidence that wizarding people believe what the *Daily Prophet* publishes; evidence of deviantisation by association with people who are deviantised by the *Daily Prophet*; and conceptualisations surrounding Harry Potter being ‘The Chosen One’.

**Analysis**

Discourses of deviance in the media are powerful in shaping the attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours of the audience (Gamson et al., 1992:374, Germov and Freij, 2009:359, Hinds, 2009:4). These discourses marginalise the target person, group or behaviour (Dyer, 1993:1, Sercombe, 1999:51, McKee, 2000:88-90), and create an appearance of solidarity of perspective (Becker, 1963:9, Curran, 2002:77) through creation of hegemonic ideologies that naturalise inequalities and positively display acceptable behaviours (Atkinson and Young,
Deviantisation by the media does not involve the creation of new discourses; particular and previously socially constructed discourses are employed in order to cohere with the perspectives of sections of the audience (Cohen, 2002:7).

It is not a given that the audience automatically accept the ideologies and discourses of any particular media avenue. Through selective reporting, discourses in the media tend to strengthen the perspectives of their audience when those discourses correspond to the conceptions of the audience (Sercombe, 1999:51, Curran and Seaton, 2010:46). In addition to this, the *Daily Prophet* has an advantage in the wizarding world, as it generally relies upon the idea stated by Sercombe (1999:51) of the powerful effect of limited avenues of information simply due to a deficit of available serious alternate discourses. When we are first introduced to the *Daily Prophet*, there is no mention of other news avenues in the wizarding world (Rowling, 1997:51, 80, 105), and it could be assumed that the *Daily Prophet* is the only wizarding newspaper. A women’s magazine exists, *Witch Weekly*, however the implication is that it appeals to a more gossip-driven audience rather than a journalistic news avenue, (Rowling, 2000:443-445) and there is no evidence that the Ministry of Magic controls it at any point. There is an alternative newspaper, *The Quibbler*, however we are not introduced to it until the 5th book in the series, and it enjoys a poor reputation at this point (Rowling, 2003:175). *The Quibbler* does enter a period of being a serious contender and site of resistance to the *Daily Prophet* and the discourses of the Ministry of Magic, however it is brought into the dominant ideology through questionable means by the Ministry under the Voldemort-led administration (Rowling, 2007:340). Voldemort is the evil overlord of the *Harry Potter* series; this character and his followers have been based upon conceptualisations of the Nazis (de Rek, 2007). This leaves the *Daily Prophet* as the main news avenue for the wizarding population through wizarding outlets.
A Muggle is ‘non-magic folk’ (Rowling, 1997:43), and there is no explicit evidence that a majority of wizards do not access Muggle media at all. However, Wizardkind have a tendency to not involve themselves in the Muggle world. This tendency to not engage with the Muggle world is evident in that many wizards do not understand Muggle modes of dressing (Rowling, 2000:70, 77), Muggle money (Rowling, 2003:115), Muggle lifestyles (Rowling, 2003:53) or even how Muggles manage without magic (Rowling, 1997:53). At Hogwarts, the school for wizards, one of the classes available to students is Muggle Studies (Rowling, 1999:45), suggesting that wizarding people are so far removed from Mugglespace that it is necessary to educate wizards on Muggle life. This suggests that most wizards would be reticent to, or lack the knowledge of how to, access Muggle media and thus the only media avenues accessed are those created within Wizardspace, the *Daily Prophet, Witch Weekly* and *The Quibbler*.

A major factor in media-led social control is that people believe what is written. Some members of the wizarding public do believe what the *Daily Prophet* says. During the Triwizard Tournament, the magical equivalent of an inter-school athletic carnival in the fourth book, *Goblet of Fire*, the reporter Rita Skeeter creates a discourse surrounding Harry Potter of self-aggrandisement, expectation of worship, expectation of sympathy, derangement, and dangerousness (Rowling, 2000:276, 531-532). The father of one of the other competitors in the tournament deliberately antagonises Harry, asking him: ‘Bet you’re not feeling quite as full of yourself now Cedric’s caught you up on points, are you?’ (Rowling, 2000:536). It is pointed out to Harry that the father not only reads, but believes what Rita Skeeter has said (Rowling, 2000:536). Even those in influential positions are prone to the discourses of the *Daily Prophet*. The first Minister of Magic we are introduced to, Cornelius Fudge, is told by Harry that Voldemort has returned after the death of Cedric, a Hogwarts student, at the Triwizard Tournament, and admits that the reason he does not
believe Harry is that an article by the *Daily Prophet* reporter Rita Skeeter claimed that Harry was possibly dangerous and mentally unstable (Rowling, 2000:612). On a number of occasions, Harry Potter is faced with other people discussing him; these discussions have been fuelled by articles both negative and positive in the *Daily Prophet* (Rowling, 2000:276-277, 532, 622, 2003:73, 167, 226-227, 752, 2005:130). Rufus Scrimgeour, the second Minister for Magic we see admits that what he personally believes does not matter, it is what the wizarding public believes; in this instance, what the wizarding public believes is the discourses in *Daily Prophet*: that Harry Potter is the Chosen One, the person who will ultimately kill Voldemort (Rowling, 2005:323).

There are, of course, those who do not believe the *Daily Prophet*. The evidence for this is not only in the existence of a rival, and resistant newspaper, *The Quibbler*, despite its reputation, but various people state clearly that in those times that the *Daily Prophet* is deviantising Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore, they do not believe a word read in the *Daily Prophet* (Rowling, 2003:98, 198, 2007:246). In addition to this, there are people who once they have access to alternative information through *The Quibbler*, alter their perceptions of the *Daily Prophet* and the situation (Rowling, 2003:511-514).

Creating and defining deviance is intimately linked to societal power structures: those in dominant social positions hold the power of deviancy-labelling (Becker, 1963:9, Aggleton, 1987:9, Simpson, 1997:10). Deviantisation is a normative social process (Cohen, 2002:8, Dotter, 2004:129, Furze et al., 2008:423), expresses dominant ideologies (Cohen, 2002:4), and is surrounded by rules and punishments that are socially and historically dependant (Aggleton, 1987:4, Cohen, 2002:7). Moral value is attached to an individual’s social position (Becker, 1963:9, Tuggle and Holmes, 1999:46, Furze et al., 2008:425), thus when the media aim to deviantise a target, the most effective manner is through morality. In this manner, the media report on issues that create distress and moral indignation (Cohen, 2002:7). According
to Cohen (2002:7), if these emotions correlate with anxiety over loss of values or morals, then the target or behaviour is deviantised in order to remove it from any association with normality. The mechanics of deviantisation involve use of stereotypes and over-simplification of the issue to highlight negative aspects (Rushkoff, 1994:23). Rushkoff (1994:23) states that deviantisation equates the target with negativity, and deliberately distracts the audience away from the core of the issue.

One perspective of deviance is that the creation of a common enemy is necessary to ensure cohesion in uncertain times (Cox, 1995:29, Simpson, 1997:11, Mason, 2009:7). Faulkner (2007:5) cites the example of the ‘endless demonization of Islam as being the Western world’s method of cohesion-creation’. Those who are deviantised have not necessarily broken the rules of society however (Becker, 1999:8); they may have simply raised the ire of a person in a socially powerful position. Two people in particular are deviantised by the Ministry-controlled Daily Prophet: Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts School, and Harry Potter. During the Cornelius Fudge administration of the ministry of Magic, both Albus and Harry are deviantised out of Cornelius’ fear of losing his position, his fear of Albus Dumbledore, and his fear of admitting that Voldemort has returned (Rowling, 2003:88-89). Albus is discredited by the Ministry of Magic and the Daily Prophet by using Albus’ age against him, claiming he is senile (Rowling, 2003:226-227), ‘losing his grip’ (Rowling, 2003:90) and a liar (Rowling, 2003:481-482), and Albus is removed from a variety of powerful positions he held (Rowling, 2003:90). There is acknowledgement from some of the wizarding public that they do not believe what the Daily Prophet says about Albus (Rowling, 2003:198) however, there are others who do believe the discourses of senility and foolishness (Rowling, 2003:196).

Cornelius Fudge believes the negative discourses surrounding Harry Potter before the Ministry of Magic begins to exert more control over the Daily Prophet (Rowling, 2000:612),
thus it is not difficult to continue those discourses once the Ministry does control the paper (Rowling, 2003:167, 226-227). At one point, the *Daily Prophet* engages in subtle ridicule of Harry: “... they just slip you in, like you’re a standing joke.” (Rowling, 2003:73), and this ridicule is noticed by the wizarding public (Rowling, 2003:464, 499). After Voldemort takes control of the Ministry of Magic, the demonization of Harry Potter continues, albeit in a different guise: he is now hunted as the murderer of Albus Dumbledore, thus associating him with serious crime and deviance (Rowling, 2007:170-172). As Remus Lupin, a friend of Harry Potter, states: “... by suggesting that you had a hand in the old hero’s death, Voldemort has not only set a price on your head, but sown doubt and fear amongst many who would have defended you.” (Rowling, 2007:172). Remus is correct, as it is soon discovered that Harry is being sought ‘everywhere’ (Rowling, 2007:310) and that there is reward money offered for his capture (Rowling, 2007:340). In its efforts to control the entire wizarding public, eventually, the Voldemort-led Ministry of Magic controls the other newspaper in the wizarding world, originally a resistance paper, *The Quibbler*, which then prints the discourses and ideologies forced upon it by the Ministry (Rowling, 2007:340).

According to Rushkoff (1994:23), the Bush administration in the United States used deviantising tactics to create and maintain support for the war in Iraq; the slogan used was ‘Support our Troops’, which simplified the issue into the one point that excluded the concept that it was possible to support the troops without supporting the war itself. In addition to this, if one did not ‘Support the troops’, one was associated with the enemy: ‘You are either with us or against us’ ('Bush says it is time for action', 2001, 6 November, 'Bush urges anti-terror allies to act', 2001, 6 November). Rushkoff (1994:24) states that ‘anyone remaining against the proposed policy needs to be minimalised, sidelined, or marginalised’. This method is designed to create feelings of isolation to force people into non-action through accusations of ‘contamination’ (Prinzi, 2009:282). In other words, if one does not agree with the dominant
discourse, then one is contaminated by association with the ‘enemy’. In the wizarding world, the effectiveness of deviantisation is evident in an instance of deviantisation by association (Rowling, 2003:197). Ron Weasley, Harry’s best friend, is labelled as insane because he not only believes Harry Potter despite what the *Daily Prophet* says, but he is willing to defend his stance.

**Conclusion**

The Ministry of Magic, through the *Daily Prophet*, uses deviantisation in an effort to control the public. To some extent, this method works, as many people allow their perspective to sway with the ideologies of the paper. However, there are those who are not convinced by the discourses published. An alternative newspaper introduces new information, and sows the seeds of resistance to the dominant ideologies of the Ministry of Magic-led *Daily Prophet*. This accords with conceptualisations of audience control by the media (Rushkoff, 1994, Cohen, 2002, Hinds, 2009): that whilst the media has some control over the perceptions of the audience, that control is dependent upon the previous perceptions and attitudes of the audience; there are always some who are resistant to the ideologies of the dominant media. In addition to this, the existence of *The Quibbler* and its role in providing an alternative news avenue, albeit temporarily, concurs with Sercombe’s (1999) proposal that ideologies and discourses from a media source are more powerful when there is no alternative avenue of information; once *The Quibbler* provided different discourses, public perspectives shifted. In real world terms, these concepts translate to governmental attempts to control the public through deviantisation.
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