

**CONNECTING THROUGH COMMUNICATION: SCRIPTS ENACTING
THREE THEORIES**

by

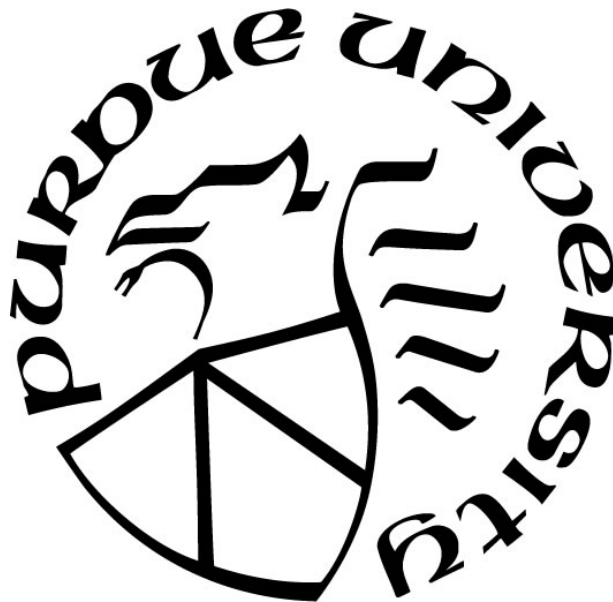
Stacy L. Walker

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**THE PURDUE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL
STATEMENT OF COMMITTEE APPROVAL**

Dr. Marcia Dixon

Department of Communication

Dr. Wei Luo

Department of Communication

Dr. Mary Ann Cain

Department of English

Approved by:

Dr. Marcia Dixon

Dedicated to My Committee, thank you! My cohorts in the communication department (Anthony, Cassey, Chelsea, C.J., Juliana, Olivia, & Tao) who helped me persevere. My family who missed me over the last nine years as I acquired my degrees, especially my sister who cheers the loudest. My friends who convinced me I was capable. My love who wiped the tears that came when I convinced myself I couldn't do it, I love you all the muches! All of my students over the years as a GTA who taught me more than I ever taught them. To Dr. Irwin Mallin who taught me that I could be in academia, and still be myself. To Kevin Stoller, who gave me the GTA job that changed my life. To the owners and managers at Chromasource (Jason, Doug, Shannon, Steven, Brad, and Kim) who allowed me to fit going to college full time into my work schedule. Thank you for helping me color my world.

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ABSTRACT

This creative non-thesis project includes three theories from communication studies. Uncertainty Reduction Theory, Cultivation Theory, and Cognitive Dissonance Theory. Each theoretical framework also includes a script written with the intent of filming in the future. Those videos could be shown in communication classes. These three theories cover a breadth of knowledge in the field as they pertain to interpersonal communication, media studies, and persuasion.

RATIONALE

While there were many options to choose from, I chose these three theories because I felt that they are compelling for the world we live in today. The new waves of technology such as streaming sites and dating sites have reignited my passion and understanding of these theories. With the world navigating a pandemic, staying inside, watching streaming services, and zoom dating, these theories seemed the most compelling to me.

According to Gibbs et al, (2011) over ten million Americans participate in online dating. In the face of the pandemic, I am all but certain that even more Americans are finding dates this way. Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) showcases how we reduce our fear from initial encounters by utilizing 7 qualities, or variables and 21 theorems discussed in the corresponding theoretical framework. I chose to highlight online dating for this theory because there would be much uncertainty in online dating, and again, I feel that more people will utilize online dating versus a more classic approach. Cultivation Theory which follows how people think about the outside world based on what they watch is important right now because so many citizens of the world are staying home and streaming shows. One could look to the uprising in Q-anon videos and the consequences of those engulfed in such conspiracy theories. Streaming sites have changed the way I view Cultivation Theory because, at its onset, it was built around standard television channels which only aired on-time material. The fact that you can now drown yourself in certain media at your disposal seems to amplify the need to understand it. While many global citizens were quarantined, the go-to entertainment was streaming services. Understanding the implications this can have could have helped some viewers to stray from videos that could impact them negatively.

I used Cognitive Dissonance theory to exemplify the guttural feeling one might have when finding out that their significant other, or in this case a person embarking on a new relationship, strongly aligns themselves with a different political party. The divide between parties has always been discernable, but in the current climate has become almost insurmountable. While I believe that in most cases, a person would have an idea of where the other person stands politically before the relationship develops (Non-verbal cues such as clothing choices, i.e. MAGA hats, or bumper stickers) a brand new relationship may provide enough uncertainty that the person would

avoid tougher questions in the beginning of a budding relationship which allows the story to unfold.

My intention in creating these scripts is to make these theories more accessible for beginning students, or individuals without an academic background who have an interest in communication theories. While at this stage they will just be scripts, the goal is to eventually turn them into videos that can be viewed on YouTube. Making these theories accessible could help generate a better understanding of how we communicate and offer a fun way to understand them.

UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

You walk into an elevator, there is already a person standing in the elevator; this person is the most attractive person you've ever seen. They smell amazing, and when they speak, it's as if angels are singing. You are suddenly nervous; you don't know how to act. Is this perhaps the start of a crush? Your palms start to sweat; you are suddenly more nervous than you've ever been. You are uncertain of what to do next. You begin to fantasize about every possible outcome that can come from you talking to this person, from forming an instant bond and getting married to being rejected and ridiculed and every possible outcome in-between. You are uncertain, and you need to reduce this uncertainty. How do you do it?

Berger and Calabrese (1975) discussed uncertainty saying "Relationships can be viewed as systems of information exchange that must reduce uncertainty to survive" (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 255). Uncertainty comes from having several possible alternative predictions or explanations and being unsure how to behave or how the other person will behave and unsure of what to think of the other person which causes this uncertainty (Knobloch, Satterlee, & Didomenico, 2010). There are two basic categories that uncertainty falls into, cognitive and behavioral. Cognitive uncertainty is caused from not knowing what the other person is thinking, (or what you should think) and behavioral uncertainty comes from not knowing how the other person will behave (or how you should behave). How you go about answering these questions that you've posed (how they will think or act) is the basis for URT. Upon meeting a person, we decide if we want to know more about the stranger or not. We gauge this in different ways, for example, if you like the other person or do not like the person. If you are interested, you will communicate to reduce this uncertainty. By allowing yourself to be incrementally vulnerable and receiving the same back, you'll slowly lose the relationship's uncertainty (Griffin, 2006). Once you start to build a foundation of trust, you will give more and more of yourself to the person and begin to create relational frames of understanding and expectations of the other person. You want to find out more about the person in the elevator. "Do you take this elevator often?"

URT showcases how we interact with strangers. Berger and Calabrese (1975) explain that we are uncertain how to proceed with strangers because we have no expectations built from previous

encounters. Therefore, we feel the need to gain information about the person to understand how to think, or behave, and how they might think and behave as well.

However, a person will only experience this if they are interested in or expecting to see the person again. The original theory was meant to encompass meetings with strangers, so if you were sitting on the bus next to a person, whom you likely will not see again, the likelihood you are interested in getting to know them is minimal. But, if a person rides the bus with you every day and someone with whom you are interested in creating a bond or relationship, you would be more likely to invoke strategies to get to know the person better.

The script will encompass this theory as a basis for understanding human interaction at the beginning of a relationship when participants are most unsure of how to behave or what to expect. The script will also utilize relational uncertainty, which happens during a relationship when one partner is uncertain. Because the original theory pertained to first encounters, more research was needed to determine that it is farther reaching than initial encounters. Later analysis concluded that our uncertainty could be broken down into three parts, self-uncertainty, partner uncertainty, and relationship uncertainty (Knobloch et al., 2010). Inside the realm of this script, both initial uncertainty and relational uncertainty will be present.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory (or URT) consists of seven qualities or variables that are used to minimize uncertainty:

- Verbal communication.
- Non-verbal affiliative expressiveness
- Information-seeking behavior
- Intimacy level of communication content
- Reciprocity
- Perceived similarities.
- Liking

Berger and Calabrese (1975) combined these seven variables to create seven axioms. An axiom can be considered a universal truth. For instance, "high levels of uncertainty cause increases in information-seeking behavior. As uncertainty levels decline, information-seeking behavior decreases" (Redman, 2015, p. 10). In other words, when you don't know a person you will be inquisitive. While the more you know about a person, the less you will wonder, or inquire about the person because you have come to know what to expect from them. There are seven original

axioms derived from the variables presented, each working in tandem to show how when one thing happens, you feel less uncertain, or gain uncertainty. Such as “Similarities between persons reduce uncertainty while dissimilarities produce increases in uncertainty” (Axiom 6 from Berger and Calabrese, 1975).

Three initial conditions are a part of every situation involving uncertainty reduction. The first is the ability to reward or punish, meaning if the encounter can be construed as a reward if it goes well or punishment if it does not. Can the person increase or decrease your popularity? Will you possibly be ridiculed for talking to this person, or maybe earn "cool points" with your friends by talking to this person? The second condition is the person's behavior being contrary to expectations because "expectancy violation increases one's desire to reduce uncertainty" (Dawkins, 2010). For instance, you meet someone you always thought was mean, but then they are especially nice to you. You would be more uncertain because they are no longer in the box you placed them in. The third is expecting future interactions (Dawkins, 2010). If you think you will never see the person again, there is no need to reduce uncertainty.

There are three strategies to reduce uncertainty: active, passive, and interactive (Lee, Shin & Yang, 2017). Passive strategies would be considered watching the person's behavior and making assumptions about future behavior. For instance, seeing a person interact with other people and treat a person, who is similar to yourself, would give you insight into how they react to you. Watching them across the room at a bar and seeing their reactions to things happening around them could also give you some insight. By gauging how they react or act, you can acquire an idea of how this person will respond to you, thereby lessening the uncertainty you feel.

Interactive strategies would be talking to the person involved. By asking them questions about themselves, you are creating frames by which to understand the person. Communication frames help us to understand the dynamic and can help guide us to desired outcomes. Asking questions can lower uncertainty. Gibbs et al., discloses that some participants are weary of disclosing information because of the risks of putting personal information online. Another concern in this format is deception.

Active strategies would entail seeking out information through mutual friends or social media sites for example. Although with online dating, this becomes much harder as you have less information to go on. On sites like Tinder, you only get the first name, while Facebook dating shows mutual friends whom you can ask about the person. Using a site that offers this

information can aid in your inquiry. Gibbs et al. (2011), discuss how the act of on-line dating can create a “selective self-presentation” which means the user picks and chooses the information they display in these sites, but users can dig deeper on certain social media to see how others talk to, or about them which can fill in these blanks created by the user. Online dating poses different issues than conventional dating; for instance, as mentioned earlier, you cannot always look the person up because there is a lack of information to draw on. It is easier to misrepresent yourself in an online format, so the fear of the unknown is even more significant in the participant. A study by Gibbs, Ellison, and Lai, (2011) showed that online daters utilized five specific methods for reducing Uncertainty when talking to new partners, including saving texts and emails to look for consistencies, comparing photos with provided information to determine truthfulness, and using multiple modes of communication to verify identity. Googling the person and asking questions on the phone is another way to reduce uncertainty. These measures lowered the uncertainty in the participants. They found that the greater the safety concern, the more they participated in these rituals.

I chose this particular theory because it can happen on any day, and most people are unaware of what to call the event that is happening. This script will be about online dating because of the rise in online dating to meet a partner and the anxiety that comes from uncertainty. "More than 10 million Americans participate in online dating by maintaining relationships or profiles on at least one dating website" (Gibbs, Lai & Ellison, 2011, p. 71). While we see Uncertainty reduction theory in action in many romantic comedies (the slow attraction, the measures which are taken to learn who a person is as we decide if they are a person we want to spend more time with), those who do not study these theories would not understand the underlying information being presented. A person unfamiliar with this theory, or any communication theory, may not be able to put a name to what is happening but would see the behaviors and recognize them as to how they would react. Dawkins (2010) suggests that popular films can be utilized as a pedagogical tool. She utilizes the movie *Hitch* to showcase how Uncertainty Reduction Theory plays out in that film. In this instance, she draws from an already established film which showcases these variables in action.

The script I am presenting, will show that the main character oversharing on first dates which she acquires from matchmaking sites online. While sharing personal information can decrease uncertainty, it is also a deterrent in getting to know someone when the person shares too much

too fast. Also, asking too many questions can feel like an interrogation instead of a first date (Gibbs, Ellison, & Lai, 2010). The second main character will teach her ways of being less nervous due to her prospective dates' uncertainty by implementing the strategies to reduce uncertainty. Because she is writing her thesis, she can utilize these articles to express the theory to her friend. She must also use her knowledge of relational Uncertainty to manage her fears about her relationship when she finds her boyfriend on a dating website. In the beginning, she thinks of many possible outcomes which increase uncertainty (Ayres, 1979) but then utilizes the strategies to reduce confusion by asking directly (Redmond, 2015). Both characters navigate the relationships and note that there will always be uncertainty in their relationships and when meeting new people, but they now have the tools to help reduce uncertainty. This script's overall goal is to help the viewer understand Uncertainty Reduction theory and communication interactions by describing it in a non-academic, relatable voice. Much like Dawkins uses an already established movie to showcase these variables, this script will showcase them in a digestible format which can produce discussion in the classroom.

Some changes have been made to this theory since its origination. "One of the most significant changes to uncertainty reduction theory is its application to contexts beyond initial interactions between strangers. The theory has been applied to interpersonal relationships to health communications and health research and organizations (Berger, 2011, cited in Redmond, 2015). Kramer (1999) discussed how employees could utilize URT during assimilation into careers. The basic principles stay the same, yet its scope is farther reaching. Some researchers have seen that the axioms relate only to U.S. Culture. Redmond (2015) discusses various studies that looked at multiple cultures and showed that they did not all relate across cultural boundaries. Because the theory has changed over time, and could produce more changes in the future, this script would have a shelf life, but more scripts could be made. Despite changes in axioms, the principles remain the same and are utilized whether the respondent realizes it or not. Bringing this into the classroom has the opportunity to help students and teachers alike.

UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION THEORY SCRIPT

Synopsis: This script offers a humorous look at online dating with two best friends, Clara and Susan. Susan has been dating the same man since they met in middle school and is acquiring her Master's degree in communications. Clara is trying to find love using internet dating. She finds she gives herself away too quickly, and she overshares, scaring her prospects away from a real relationship. By utilizing communications theories, Susan teaches Clara how to be a better dater. But as she teaches Clara, Susan finds her boyfriend on Tinder, which leads to relational uncertainty.

Clara is 22, upper middle class Caucasian woman who is acquiring her bachelor's degree in general studies. She is considered an average beauty by social standards. Blonde wavy hair, blue eyes, about 5'6" 130 lbs.

Susan is 24, upper middle class Caucasian woman acquiring her master's degree in Communications. Also an average beauty by social standards. Long dark hair worn up in buns mostly. 5'8" 145 lbs.

Both women are students at a local college and live together to help with expenses. The group of women invited to participate in the social dating experiment is cohorts from their communications classes. Most of the women are Caucasian in the 18-24 age range, while one woman is African American, and one is an international student from China.

Act 1

Interior: Clara and Susan's house. Clara sits on the couch, messaging with a man she just met on Tinder via her phone app.

The living room has a sizeable screen-mounted television, an oversized couch, and a loveseat.

Characters: Clara, Susan, Various Tinder dates, Will (Susan's boyfriend), the girls' friends, Gigi, Sui, Shelly, and Lisa.

Susan: Hello! Welcome to my home! Which honestly is kind of a shit show right now. My best friend is having a hard time connecting with a man. She spends a lot of time on dating sites trying to find the perfect guy and going about it perfectly wrong. I have been studying communications theories for a few years now, and I am writing my thesis specifically on Uncertainty Reduction Theory. URT, for short, was developed by Berger and Calabrese in 1975. They took note of specific ways people reduced that uncertain feeling people get when meeting for the first time. You see, people can feel unsure for a plethora of reasons, but at its core, it's because we don't know what to expect. When you meet someone brand new, you have no idea how they will react to your jokes or simply to you as a person. This uncertainty can cause a lot of uneasiness, but there are ways to reduce it. I'll explain as we go. I think I hear Clara calling me...

Clara: SUSAN!!!! Susan!! Come here quick!! He wants to meet!!!

(Susan runs into the living room)

Susan: Who wants to meet???

Clara: Timothy! The guy I started talking to on Tinder today!!

Susan: Well, that's a little fast, isn't it? Didn't you match like an hour ago?

Clara: Yeah, but that's how these things work now! You meet, you find out their favorite color, then you go to Starbucks and hope for the best!

Susan: I don't think that's how it works.

Clara: Well, I don't often know their favorite color; you are right there. It might make things easier if I knew. I wish I weren't so nervous! I hate these things. Like, someone just marry me already!

(Susan breaks the fourth wall; no one else is aware that she is talking to the camera. They pause)

Susan: "When strangers meet, their primary concern is one of uncertainty reduction or increasing predictability about the behavior of both themselves and others in the interaction"

(Griffin, 2006, p 130). Clara doesn't realize it yet, but I will teach her how uncertainty reduction theory works so she will stop rushing into these dates and become so anxious because she hasn't taken the time to learn about the men she is dating. We all get nervous when we don't know how things will play out; that's just human nature. But we can take specific steps to reduce that uncertainty by getting a clearer picture of the person and our thoughts about them. There are two types of uncertainty, behavioral uncertainty and cognitive. Essentially how should I behave or what does this person like.

(Clara un-pauses)

Susan: There you go jumping the gun again! Take a breath, girl! Relationships are tricky; there are steps to it, you meet, you feel a spark, you give a little bit of yourself, you are uncertain if they will like you, then if they do, you give a little more. You leave yourself a little bit vulnerable, but you become a little bit closer with each step. These back and forth are a dance that you do with your partner, which creates intimacy; it's called reciprocity. That's how you get a relationship you want to stay in—a relationship worth your time, and not one that is going to end in heartbreak. Clara, I adore you, and I want the best for you.

Clara: You met your boyfriend in the third grade, Susan. You've had one relationship your entire life. How do you think you are an expert when I've had loads of relationships? I have way more experience than you! Quit talking down to me!

Susan: Clara! I'm not talking down to you; I'm trying to help you! Don't you think the fact that I've maintained the same relationship for so long is a testament to the fact that I know what I'm talking about? Or maybe that I study interpersonal relationships? I mean, my thesis is about...

Clara: I have to meet Timothy. I'm already super nervous; I don't need you making it worse. I'll see you later, Susan.

(Clara leaves the apartment.)

Interior: Starbucks Coffee

Clara: Hi! Are you Timothy?

Timothy: Yes! Hi Clara! It's so lovely to meet you finally!

Clara: Yeah, it's been a long few hours since we met!

Timothy: You're funny! I like that!

Clara: Good! I am funny, so expect to laugh a lot! I grew up fat, and I got teased a bunch for a lot of different things, so I had to get a good personality or be fed to the wolves, you know?

Timothy: Oh! Well ok. So what kind of music do you like?

Clara: Oh, all kinds. I prefer the 90's alternative and hip hop, but I like all kinds. I like country and rap, and everything. Like, I am eclectic; I can listen to anything. I like opera and musicals, as I can sing along with every musical, *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, *The Best Little Whore House in Texas*. Basically everything. You?

Timothy: Same.

Clara: You like musicals? That's rare for a man, especially your age! It's hard to find a man who enjoys anything other than that screaming metal where it just sounds like they are screaming, "MY MOTHER DIDN'T HUG ME ENOUGH!" you know? I have no idea what they are saying, but that's what I hear.

Timothy:...

Clara: So what kind of books do you like?

Timothy: Oh, I'm not much of a reader.

Clara: Oh.

Timothy: Is that a problem?

Clara: Of course not! Who reads these days?

Timothy: My guess would be you...

Clara: Oh, I love to read! I read all of the Harry Potter's, the Chronicles of Narnia, the three towers, some Stephen King, I used to read all the time, but I guess now it's just Tinder bios primarily.

Timothy: Are you on Tinder a lot?

Clara: Yeah, that kind of made me sound like a whore, I guess. No, I have only been on it for a few months; I generally talk to one person and take my card out of rotation while I do that.

Timothy: How many people have you met? What are you looking for?

Clara: Not too many... I'm hoping to find love, but I realize that's not exactly the purpose of Tinder.

Timothy: Yeah, I suppose not. I think it's more of a hook-up site.

Clara: Is that what you are looking for?

Timothy: I'm not opposed to it...

Clara: Is that what you are after?

Timothy:...

Clara: Did you read my profile? I specifically said I was looking to date.

Timothy: Well, I told you I'm not much of a reader, and technically this IS a date.

Clara: Valid points.

Timothy: Don't let that ruin it.

Clara: I'm not letting anything ruin anything. I'm just getting to know you.

Timothy: So let's get to know each other than, babe!

Clara: You are so sweet!

Timothy: What can I say? You make my soul hard!

Clara: That's the sweetest thing anyone has ever said to me!

Interior: Clara and Susan's house.

Susan: You make my soul hard?!?! He seriously said that to you?

Susan: (Mouths "you make my soul hard??")

Clara: It was sweet!

Susan: You are ridiculous! Did you sleep with him on the first date for a line like that? Did you even discuss what you were looking for? How do you expect to find Mr. Right when you are so freely giving yourself to Mr. All wrong?? What do you even know about this guy?

Clara: Of course we discussed it!

Susan: And???

Clara: He said he wasn't opposed to a hook-up, but what he didn't say and what he implied was that he wasn't opposed to a relationship either.

Susan: How was that implied?

Clara: Well, he said he wasn't opposed to hooking up, not that he only wanted a hook-up.

Susan: Jesus, Clara. You have lost your damn mind!

Clara: What? He's going to call me. He told me he would.

(Susan breaks the fourth wall)

Susan: She was sort of on the right track by asking him questions. They had an exchange going which is how we reduce the uncertainty. But she also created more uncertainty. Will he call? Won't he? Does he always behave like this? She has no clue. I've met guys like this before,

though, and I can almost promise you he won't. He was looking for something specific, and he got it. He has no uncertainty because he doesn't need or want to see her again. Essentially, there are two things that we can be uncertain of, thoughts and actions. Now those thoughts and actions can be unsure about three things. Ourselves, others, and relationships. Sounds easy enough, right?

Susan: Why wouldn't he call you? He gets everything he wants with no commitment for the cost of a damn Frappuccino! I'm telling you, stop giving yourself away for free when you are worthy of so much more! You need to be learning about these men to see if they are worthy of you. Didn't you say you were super nervous before you met him? Why don't you try getting to know them? Then you won't be so scared, and you can make decisions from a rational place instead of one from anxiety. You deserve more than the guys you are giving yourself to.

Clara: You are my best friend; you are obligated to say and think that! But the very fact that these men don't give me a chance shows me how very unworthy I am.

Susan: You can be worthy of more and still have terrible fucking taste in men. Seriously, that's one of your most significant flaws. It's just awful! What do you type on your Tinder Bio? Looking for felons with mommy issues and commitment-phobes?

Clara: Hardy har har

Susan: No, I am serious. It's just dreadful! Why don't you call the girls, and we will put your choices on the big screen and discuss who your next date will be. Without your shitty input, we might find you a good guy! But here's the thing, even a good guy is gonna run away screaming if you keep oversharing. That's just facts, girly.

Clara: What does that mean?

Susan: You told me that you said the last guy about getting teased in the sixth grade. On the first date!

Clara: What's wrong with that? It was a traumatic time for me, and it still affects me today. He should know that!

Susan: Yes, he should know that, but not on the first date! You can push people away by telling them too much. TMI is a real thing, and it's an issue!

Susan: (reading from a notebook) "Uncertainty in initial interactions with strangers increases if they violate social norms... We expect a greeting, some casual banter about the common situation you are in, the weather, discussion of where each person lives, etc. Ending with pleasantries and goodbyes. When a person breaks these social norms, the other person might be inclined to simply end the conversation." (Redmond, 2015 p 14) (Susan looks up to the camera) We've all met someone who tells you every detail of their life, or day, without our asking. So I am sure you can all understand how unnerving it is when a person does this. You aren't going to want to get to know that person, right? Well, they aren't interested in more from you when you behave like that too. A person whom you know can make assumptions about how your day is going when you act like that, and maybe you are overwhelmed. But a stranger has nothing to draw from and will probably distance themselves from you. Who could blame them?

Clara: Why not? Shouldn't I lay all my cards on the table right out of the gate? Give him a chance to know what he's up against?

Susan: Against? Clara, you realize it's not a battle, right? You are looking for a teammate. These things you consider flaws about yourself are things you've decided are bad, but the right person isn't going to pick you apart and dissect every piece of you. They are going to love you as a whole person. But you have to let them start to like you before you shove all of these things in their face, especially when you coin them as flaws! Who on earth would jump headfirst into a hurricane? You've got to let them fall in love with living on the beach first, so they think the storm is worth living through.

Clara: I don't even know what to take away from that! Do you think I'm a natural disaster?

Susan: We are all a fucking disaster; what I'm saying is, don't come in with 90 mph winds; start with a cool welcoming breeze. But also, get to know these men before you jump into their storm! This is what I study, Clara; let me help you!

Clara: So lie? Be fake? That's terrible advice, Susan!

(Clara paces back and forth in the living room as Susan sits down on the couch.)

Susan: Listen, I'm not saying that! I think you are amazing just as you are; I don't think you should wear a mask and then, in a few months, take it off and be a completely different person! What I am saying is, give him pieces of you incrementally. Don't tell him every single detail of your life right out of the gate! Yes, he should know that you have to shower every day because the sixth-grade kids called you smelly for getting lice. It was traumatic and still impacted you, but that shouldn't come up over your first dinner. That maybe shouldn't come up until you're living together and he questions you about the water bill.

Clara: So what am I supposed to talk about then? My past is what makes me who I am.

Susan: Be who you are, talk conversationally, and as things come up, and you can feel vulnerable, and he can feel that way too. Then add to it. He gives a little, you give a little, and each piece builds and builds until each of you knows what to expect from each other and why. The thing about relationships is that you are building a foundation, and the whole time, you are unsure about how the house will look, what they want from a home, and what you want. Then by the time the house is built, if you both stay to do the construction, it's somehow exactly what you both wanted in a home.

Clara: Girl, what the fuck? First, I'm a hurricane tearing down houses; now I'm building a house? Pick an analogy and roll with it!

Interior: Susan and Clara's living room. They have airdropped Clara's tinder app to the big screen television. Four of Clara and Susan's friends sit around drinking mimosas and laughing, Lisa, Shelly, Sui, and Gigi.

Susan: Ladies, thank you for coming! As we all know, Clara has terrible taste in men and doesn't know how to date.

Clara: HEY!

Susan: Let me finish! Doesn't know how to date to find a relationship,

Lisa: Yeah, I was going to say, of course, she knows how to date, she does it all the time!

Clara: I didn't invite you guys over here to make me feel worse! I already have low self-esteem, you guys. Be nice!

Gigi: I got you, girl!

(Gigi walks over to hug Clara)

Clara: Thank you, Gigi! At least I have one friend!

Sui: You know that we love you! We just know you can do better! Let's get this going!

(All of the girls squeeze onto the couch and loveseats in preparation of the Tinder viewings)

Susan: Ok, First things first, let's start with your profile so we can see what you are saying to attract so many douchebags. You ladies are here to help her pick a good guy and set up her profile; I am here to teach her the seven principles of Uncertainty reduction theory, so she isn't so nervous, doesn't talk too much, and can determine who is worth her time! Let's get this going!

(Profile reads: College girl looking to date in the hopes of finding my life partner. I like guys who look dirty but smell clean. I'm not easy, but I can be had.)

Lisa: Ok, it makes sense now; you said I like bad boys and sex.

Clara: I'm not saying that at all! I want a good man who looks like a bad boy, that's different! Also, I said I am NOT easy.

Lisa: But you can be had...

Clara: I don't want them to think I am a prude! What's wrong with that?

Lisa & Susan: Everything!

Sui: You are presenting yourself all wrong! Clara, you are intelligent and beautiful and hilarious! Nothing about that says anything close to that. You are amazing; it sucks that you don't see it because you wouldn't put up with any of these men who match you if you did. You wouldn't be matching these slime balls.

(Gigi starts a slow clap)

Susan: Just by looking at this bio, we can see that she is creating a specific atmosphere that isn't what the type of guy she is looking for would be interested in. Uncertainty reduction is primarily about making sense out of something or being able to predict an outcome. The things she typed on her profile allude to the notion that she is looking for a bad boy and that she has sex on the brain, therefore not the outcome she is wanting or that they would be wanting.

Clara: I thought you were on my side!

Gigi: I am girl! That's why I agree with Sui. Do you remember that Communications class we all met in? That teacher was talking about presentation and representation. She showed us those pit bulls, one looked mad, and the other I just wanted to hug for the rest of my life. How you present yourself matters. I think she asked something like, "Which picture would you use if you were trying to convince everyone in the apartment complex to allow dogs" or something? You are presenting yourself as a pit bull in the shelter who will go home with anyone who will have them. Your ass is going to keep winding up back in the shelter that way.

Clara: How do you remember that? That was like four years ago!

Gigi: (She shrugs) I love pit bulls.

Susan: Ok, so what do we want to say here?

Lisa: Kind, caring, and compassionate, Strengths: excellent bullshit detector, Weaknesses: Good men who are also kind, caring, and compassionate.

Sui: Yeah, I like that!

Gigi: Sold!

Clara: But it doesn't say anything about my type!

Gigi: Can we all agree that your type isn't working?

(Murmuring from all the girls in agreeance)

Susan: Ok, let's start swiping! See what's out there!

(Single in shape guy looking for the love of my life. I am a very sensual man; I have a long tongue)

Clara: Awe! He's looking for the same thing I am! Like him!

Gigi: Uh, did you read the whole thing?

Clara: He's just showing his attributes!

Gigi: No, he's reeling you in with a fairy tale then being disturbing. It's a no from me, Dawg!

Sui: Hell no!

Lisa: Not a chance!

Susan: Nope. We swipe.

(Sup?)

Lisa: Sup? Really? The dude is 56; if he can't even take the time to write out a complete sentence, he doesn't deserve you.

Clara: Yeah, done.

(The picture is a shirtless man pulling his pants down as far as they can go without violating Tinder rules. Bio: Unemployed, so if we go out, you have to pay. I also don't have a car, so you'll need to pick me up. Latex allergy.)

All the Girls: NEXT!

(Joshua: My friends would say I love shoes, my friends wouldn't say that I am a generous soul that can connect on many levels because they're dudes, and guys don't talk like that.)

Sui: Awe! He's funny! I like this one!

Gigi: Yeah, that's cute,

Lisa: I'm in!

Clara: He looks like a serial killer...

Susan: You said you liked bad boys... We like him. SWIPE!

(It's a match)

Clara: Alright, well, I guess message him, and I'll turn my location services on now, so you guys know where to find the body.

Susan: Ok, moving on...

Gigi: Have you guys noticed that 50% of these dudes take pictures with fish? Is that a Midwest thing? What's up with that?

Lisa: I think they are trying to convey that they have hobbies? Maybe just letting you know they won't have a lot of time for you, and when they do, they will smell like dirty fish?

Sui: So basic rule, if their profile picture is a fish, we swipe automatically.

Gigi: sounds good to me!

Susan: Back to the task, girls!

(Picture of four guys standing together. No bio)

Susan: Not to sound shallow, but it's going to be the ugly one. He's either saying, "Look, I have friends! Or trying to reel you in with his hot buddy, then you're just going to be disappointed when you show up to meet, like, "Oh, I was hoping you were going to be the third guy from the right."

Sui: Look at the rest of his photos before you decide that.

(All of the pictures are with the same friends.)

Clara: Ok yeah, no good. He doesn't even have a bio. NEXT!

(Bio: Clint: Looking for a reason to delete this app)

Gigi: Oh, he's fine!

Sui: Looks aren't everything.

Gigi: But they're something! Look at the rest of his pics!

(Pictures include him with a dog, him with his mom, him holding up the leaning tower of Pisa)

Lisa: Well, he's well-traveled, has a dog, and loves his mom. And the bio is essentially saying he wants to settle down!

Susan: Five bucks says he's a player. He systematically devised the perfect profile to get girls and has no intention of deleting it; let's vote.

Lisa: I like him.

Gigi: Well, I did like him until Susan said all that.

Sui: I vote yes

Susan: Clara, you are the deciding vote.

Clara: I think he's hot. I'm in!

(It's a match)

(Looking for a reason to delete this app)

Susan: Called it! That must be a standard bio! We no longer accept men with that written.

Gigi: We got tricked!!

Clara: See you guys! It's more complicated than you think!

(Clara receives a message)

Lisa: Awe! Hot travel guy messaged!

Susan: Let's see what he said!

(Message: Clint: Wyd?)

Gigi: What the hell does that mean?

Clara: What are you doing, which can be construed in one of two ways. One, what are you up to?
Can we chat, or the more likely number two, let's bang.

Sui: You got all that from wyd?

Lisa: This isn't her first day.

Susan: I called the player thing! I should start a Tinder business! I got this thing down on the first day!

Gigi: So do we even respond, or are we all kind of resigned to Susan's theory now?

Sui: I mean, he didn't even take the time to write the whole thing out.

Lisa: Ok, English major, we get it!

Sui: It's twelve letters! How busy is this guy? I don't like him anymore.

Clara: Let's give him a chance! He's stunning!

Lisa: Well, if Clara likes him, we know he's a bad guy.

Clara: HEY!!!! That's hurtful and only mostly valid!

(Message: Clara: Nice profile! Why?)

Sui: Really? Are we just going to sink to his level?

Susan: It's called code-switching. Accommodation, we talk to people the way they speak to us.
We don't want to scare him off with complete sentences.

Sui: Is this what we are here for? I thought we were helping her find a good man, not learning the right way to talk to boys.

(Message: Clint: Thanks, girl! So whatcha doing tonight? Wanna hook up?)

Clara: Like hook up, or get drinks?)

Lisa: You kind of opened yourself up for this to be a hook-up; you realize that, right?

Clara: You guys are no better at this than I am.

Susan: I'm trying to establish a baseline. See what he responds to.

(Message: Clint: Girl, I'm down for whatever!)

Clara: Yeah, I'm looking to delete the app. Thanks for giving me a reason!

(Un-matches)

Clara: So what was the point of that? You're a tease!

Susan: People tell you exactly who they are if you listen. You tend to project your wants and desires onto people instead of listening to what they tell you. Like that last guy, remember you said that he said He wasn't opposed to a hook-up?

Clara: That's literally what he said.

Susan: Then you filled in the blanks with him not being opposed to a relationship. He didn't say that; it's just what you wanted to hear. All I did was allow this guy to tell us who he is.

Sui: Oh! You're good!

Susan: You can't spend seven years in college studying psychology and communications and not learn how to read people.

Lisa: Teach us your ways, Obi-Wan!

Susan: I'm trying to! If you guys had paid attention in any of the communications classes you were required to take, you would have picked up on some of this stuff already.

Gigi: I paid attention! Remember! I said the thing about the pit bulls!

Susan: You sure did! What a good girl! You're such a good girl!

(Gigi pretends she's a dog for a moment, then sticks her tongue out at Susan.)

Susan: Can anyone please do a google search on Uncertainty reduction theory? That's where we will find the answers about online dating. How to proceed, maintain, and learn about the other person without scaring them away.

Clara: I'm uncertain that this is going to work, but I'll bite. You guys heard what I did there, right? I took the theory, and then, yeah, ok. I'll look it up.

Google search brings up: "**When strangers meet, their primary goal is to reduce levels of Uncertainty. Uncertainty meaning, being unsure how to behave (or how the other person will behave) and unsure of what to think of the other person. For example, if they like the other person or do not like the person. They will communicate to reduce this uncertainty**" (Griffin, 2006, p131).

Clara: Ok, so what does this have to do with me?

Susan: What does this have to do with me? She says... WOW! You guys are paying attention, right? So you understand that she has some steps to take to reduce the uncertainty she may have with her dates. There are three strategies we can utilize; the first is an active strategy. With an active strategy, she can ask them questions about themselves to help her understand outcomes better. A passive strategy would be watching how they behave with wait staff, perhaps. Interactive would be seeking out information online by googling them, looking at their social media if it isn't set to private, and seeing how they interact with other people on their page. That can give you a pretty clear view of who a person is and reduce the uncertainty you feel. Let's see if she understands it as well as you guys do.

Susan: As I have been saying, you are giving too much of yourself from the beginning. A person who wants to see you again will learn things about you intentionally. These guys you are meeting don't give a shit and just want to bang you because they can. They won't take a minute to get to know these things about you unless they are super good players and learn things to use them against you. We determine the difference using uncertainty reduction as well. We are going to use this theory to teach you how to date appropriately. While that isn't the intended use, we can figure out if a guy is interested in you by using it. A person who doesn't intend to see you again has no uncertainty; they don't care. Therefore they won't seek out more information about you through talking to you, observing you, or seeking out your social media to learn more about you. You know when you like someone, and you ask their friends what they think of the person? That's one of the ways we reduce Uncertainty! They will also utilize these tools if they are interested in you.

Clara: Jesus! You've put a lot of thought into this!

Susan: Do you guys listen to me when I talk? This is the theory I am using for my thesis! I've been studying it like crazy, and I talk about it ALL THE TIME.

Sui: I hadn't noticed.

Sally: Really?

Gigi: Um...

Susan: Ok, well, this isn't about me anyway. It's about Clara. So let's get back to that. First, you need to learn the variables...

(All the girls in unison interrupting Susan) KEEP SWIPING!!

(Susan's boyfriend appears on the T.V. screen. All of the girls look at Susan in shock. Susan looks to the camera speechless. The screen goes black.)

Act 2

Interior: Clara and Susan's apartment. The other girls have left, and Susan is in her room as Clara tries to talk to her through the bedroom door.

Clara: You ok, girl?

Susan: What the hell do you think? My boyfriend is on Tinder. Now I don't know what to believe of anything he has said to me. Now I have relational uncertainty.

Clara: Isn't that the thing you were trying to sell me so I could figure out how to date?

Susan: No, that's Uncertainty Reduction theory. That's teaching you how to reduce the nerves and how to learn what to expect from your date. You know things about them, and then you aren't so nervous. What's happening now is the opposite. I had no doubts; Will has been perfect since we were kids, and now I am uncertain of what to do, what to say, how to act. Like he just threw everything into upheaval. Now I am where you are kind of. Unsure of how to proceed or really if I even want to. I can't believe he would do this. Like how long has he been on there? Has he been seeing other girls? Am I a joke to him?

Susan: Changes in circumstances decrease the effectiveness of the cognitive and behavioral connections between partners because those meshed systems are no longer attuned with the individual, relational, or external context for the relationship. Thus, previously functional ways of thinking and behavior patterns must be revised to the new circumstances (Solomon & Thiess, 2011). Remember how I said Uncertainty was caused by not knowing or being able to predict outcomes? Will and I had been together since we were kids, and all of a sudden, I didn't know what to expect. I had no clue what was going on or what would happen. Talk about Uncertainty!

Clara: Have you talked to him? Maybe it's all a mistake. Perhaps someone is catfishing and using his picture. I've had that happen before where I showed up to a date, and it was a different dude!! It was CRAZY!

Susan: Well, if you had used the strategies for uncertainty reduction theory, I was trying to explain to you that never would have happened. You would have done your research and known better. But what the hell am I saying? I don't know shit either.

Clara: Girl, you have to talk to him before you start this pity party shit. I know Will; he adores you! You guys took each other's virginity, for fucks sake! You have life goals and plans. You don't just throw that away for a piece of ass... right?

Susan: Maybe he does.

Clara: I don't believe it at all. He wouldn't do that. He LOVES you, Susan! I helped him pick out a ring for you! He wouldn't be ring shopping if he...

Susan: You what?!?!

Susan: (Stares blankly at the camera)

Clara: Well, that was supposed to be a surprise.

(Susan opens the door, so Clara can come in and sit beside her on the floor.)

Susan: That makes all of this even crazier! I've known him my whole life, I can finish his sentences, and I know what he wants to eat before he does. Now I feel like I don't know anything at all. I didn't think he would propose, and I sure the hell didn't know that he was on Tinder.

Clara: How about we send him a text to come over here, and while we are waiting, you can teach me about the axles or whatever.

Susan: Axioms... I said it like twelve times. Does anyone listen when I talk?

Clara: Not usually, no.

Susan: Ok, well, I'm just going to text Will real fast, then I'll get my research out.

Text: Hey Will, Can you come over tonight? We need to talk...

Clara: OUCH!!! Now you both are living in anxiety.

Susan: Why should I suffer alone?

Clara: Ok, well, teach me about these acorns.

Susan: AXIOMS!! They are fundamental truths.

Clara: Jeez... Ok! Axioms! What are the axioms?

Susan: Let's start with the basics of Uncertainty reduction theory. For starters, the theory shows us that someone interested in getting to know you will seek you out. They will use one of the three strategies to reduce uncertainty. These two dudes, Berger and Calabrese, got together in 1975 and started seeing how people act when they are trying to date or friend someone.

Clara: So what does that have to do with dating me?

Susan: Well, on the surface, nothing. But if we use it as a guide, it does. It can help you be less nervous when you meet a good guy, and we can see if they use them too. If they also use them, then it's a sign that they are interested and not just using you.

Clara: But what if they don't know about this theory? They won't be using this stuff!

Susan: Well, that's where you are wrong! See, Berger and Calabrese show us that whether people know about it or not, they will do these seven things. Some of them are active, some are passive, and some are interactive (Dawkins, 2010).

Clara: What the hell does that mean?

Susan: Ok, so active means you have to do something. Like information-seeking behavior, which is the third variable (Redmond, 2015).

Clara: Like research?

Susan: Yeah, kind of! Like asking other people about the guy or looking him up on google or something (Griffin, 2006)!

Clara: Well, that's not an option on Tinder; I don't know their names or anything.

Susan: But once you start chatting with them, you can ask! Or, if you tried Facebook dating, I've been told that it shows mutual friends. So then you could ask your friends that know them what kind of person he is.

Clara: Ok, I think I get what you are saying.

Susan: Ok, cool! Next would be passive strategies like watching the person's non-verbal cues or treating other people (Knobloch, Satterlee, & DiDomoneco, 2010). Like imagine going to a bar and seeing the guy you're supposed to be on a date with, and you see him being a total dick to the bartender.

Clara: Oh fuck that!

Susan: Right? So that would be a way for you to figure out what you think of them without actively doing the research. If he's a dick, you know right out of the gate that he's a dick. No more dates are needed. But maybe you see him being kind. Then you need more information, right? Then you would do something interactive, which would be directly asking him questions.

Clara: I do that already!

Susan: See?!?!

Clara: Ok, you might be onto something. What else is there?

Susan: Ok, I'm going to go back to the original theory, the seven variables or qualities present in interactions with uncertainty. The first one is the amount of verbal communication. According to this article, I found in the English technical reports about uncertainty reduction theory, and it's the number of words (Redmond, 2015). But I also read a different article that said it had more to do with the quality of words. Like not just small talk all the time, but how intimate the details are (Gibbs, Ellison, Chih-Hui Lai, 2011).

Clara: Well, I have been giving intimate details, and you said that was wrong!

Susan: You're giving too much intimacy for someone with whom you aren't intimate yet. Right here, in this article by Redmond, he discusses how when you break social norms, it's a turnoff (Redmond, 2015, p. 4).

Susan: I said this, right?

Clara: What's the social norm I broke?

Susan: You are oversharing. You can talk about yourself, but you don't have to give your life story away. You worked hard for that story, and it's not for everyone, right? Someone who deserves to hear it should get to listen to it. Not everyone. Expectations dictate the social norm. We expect to have small talk, but not so many details yet.

Clara: Ok, I can get behind that, I guess. What else?

Susan: Ok, next is non-verbal affiliative expressiveness.

Clara: What the hell does that mean?

Susan: (Laughs) Yeah, it's a lot of big words. It's just a specific form of non-verbal cues that are good. Like positive looking, a dude smiling at you, a head nod, things that are affirming. Do you get it (Redmond, 2015)?

Clara: Totally! Keep them coming!

Susan: Ok, next would be information-seeking behavior. We talked about that already. Then we move onto the Intimacy level of communication content. Which we kind of already discussed too. But it's discerning small talk from high-risk conversations, like beliefs, attitudes, and opinions (Redmond, 2015). Then we have reciprocity. The two of you must share information equally. You can't just talk the whole time, or they speak the entire time. It has to be equal.

Clara: Yeah, I tend to talk too much when I get nervous.

Susan: It happens! You can reduce that tendency by practicing the strategies, right?

Clara: Yeah! By looking the person up or talking to people they know I can, and also by observing them, or talking to them directly.

Susan: You are picking this up like a champ, girl! Ok, so next then is similarity. Exactly what it sounds like, finding out if you are similar or not (Redmond, 2015). Then liking, do you have a positive feeling about the person or not? Liking is a tricky one because it can create MORE Uncertainty (Dawkins, 2010)!

Clara: What the hell? All of this was supposed to reduce it, I thought?!?! Why did I just sit through all of this if it's going to cause more?

Susan: Listen, I can't work miracles. There will be plenty of times that you will feel nervous or uncertain about what's to come. Look at me, I have no clue what's going on with my relationship, and no amount of books are going to fucking tell me what to do. I just have to live in the uncertainty until I get a chance to talk to him.

Will: Here's your chance. What the hell is going on? Why did you text me a "we need to talk" when you knew I was at work?

Clara: I'll see you guys a little later, hey, Will.

Will: Hey Clara.

Susan: I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that to you. But honestly, I kind of meant to.

Will: What's going on, Sue? You're scaring me!

Susan: You want to talk about being scared? I found your profile on Tinder today. That's pretty damn scary, don't you think?

Will: Why are you on Tinder?

Susan: WHY THE HELL ARE YOU ON TINDER?!?!?!?

Will: It's not me. My roommate is using my photo

Clara: I TOLD YOU IT WAS A CATFISH!

Susan & Will: SHUT UP CLARA!

Clara: Sorry, I'll go...

Susan: What do you mean it's your roommate using your photo? Why the hell would Jon need to catfish anyone?

Will: He's making a YouTube channel for catfishing, and he wants honest reactions to women showing up after being catfished.

Susan: And I am just supposed to believe this? Why the fuck wouldn't you tell me about that when he started it? What a bullshit excuse Will!

Will: Get your laptop out.

Susan: What?

Will: Just grab your damn laptop Sue, I'll pull up the channel right now. I'm a little bit pissed that you just assumed I would cheat on you. I love you so dang much! I can't believe you would even think it! At the very least, I don't understand why you wouldn't just come out and ask me instead of stewing on it all day. You know how bad ruminating is!

(Susan grabs the laptop, and Will brings up the page, which explains everything.)

Susan: Well, that cleared that up. It was almost as if everything needed to be wrapped up suddenly like a sitcom with only 23 minutes to tell the story.

Susan: I'm a schlep! Why would you want to propose to me anyway?

Will: Who said I was going to propose??

Will & Susan: CLARA!!!!

(Fade to black)

CULTIVATION THEORY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cultivation theorists argue that heavy viewers of television develop their sense of reality from mediated images rather than direct experiences that influence their ideals (Gerbner, 1998). Cultivation theory states that high-frequency television viewers are more susceptible to media messages and believe that they are accurate and valid. Heavy viewers of T.V. are thought to be 'cultivating' attitudes that seem to think that the world created by television is an accurate depiction of the real world. For instance, a person who watches violent media images will assume that the world is a violent place and act accordingly even if they live in a town with little to no crime (Alitavoli & Kaveh, 2018). This goes beyond violence, but violence will be the focus for this script as it adds to the inciting action, and will be easily seen in the character as they change their perspective.

George Gerbner sought to understand how media messages affected viewers on a grander level than what was being researched in his time. He was looking at the messages themselves and the long-term effects on society as they are exposed to these messages every day. By creating surveys in which light to heavy television viewers he found that the more severe viewers had four attitudes: "Chance of involvement with violence. Fear of walking alone at night. Perceived activity of the police. General mistrust of people" (Griffen, 2006, p. 389). Essentially, those who viewed the most television thought the worst of others and were scared of interactions with strangers, and assumed that there were more police than there are.

George Gerbner's article "Cultivation analysis: An Overview" (1998) discusses that these four outliers indicate the television watchers' time spent watching. The question within these surveys is if the person is giving truer to life answers or the "T.V. answer" (p.179). An anecdotal piece of information from this article is that the amount of "non-viewers" was too few and too demographically spaced out to study, which is interesting to think about, that the majority of the population is watching at least some television, but seldom none, at least at the time, and place of the study. So we all are forming an idea of the world in this way, with the exception of a group too small to study.

At the time, television was the only option, in that there were no streaming sites or VCRs and DVD players readily available for the viewer. They had five channels at best in which to watch programming that aired only once. If you missed the episode, there was no way to go back and

watch it at that time. They focused most research primarily on television shows (Roche, Pickett, & Gertz, 2016). With the advent of Netflix, Hulu, and the like, the available content can be focused on specific genres. In his day, because everyone was watching the same programs at the same time, "Gerbner contended that the widespread meanings presented across all media cultivated public beliefs. Those mass-produced messages form a common culture through which communities cultivate shared public notions about facts, values, and contingencies of human existence" (Potter, 2014 p1016). Now that people can watch whatever they want whenever they want, these communities may be smaller and more specific. Few programs bring the community together (Short of a Tiger King limited series at the start of a pandemic. Don't act like you didn't watch this train wreck. According to a quick Google search, 34.5 million viewers watched the series in the first ten days. This murder mystery kept most of us captivated, like watching a train wreck in real time.) It will be interesting to follow public opinion of these types of "wild animal shelters" and see if they follow the mean world syndrome after watching the violence from these characters. Will viewers of this program associate these places with murder mayhem and violence?

Keep in mind that this theory is not suggesting that watching violent programming causes the viewer to become violent, but rather that the viewer expects other people to be violent. The viewers' collective expects the world to be a more violent place because they see violence in most of the programs available. The consensus of violence pertains to inflicting pain, with or without weapons which pushes the plot forward. (Griffin, 2005). While the television can be used as a tool to learn the culture and social behavior patterns, it can also cause illusions about body image, sexuality, and other social issues, along with the delusion of the world being scarier than it is (Hammermeister, Brock, Winterstein, & Page, 2005). We are gathering our worldview from television, learning what we think about how the world works. While heavy viewers will believe that some things are more true to life, light viewers may see it differently. From almost birth, we are creating widely shared assumptions about life.

While the script itself will focus on the characters' developed paranoia due to violent programming, it is not just violence occurring due to cultivation. Dudo et al. (2010) suggest that our representation of specific television careers has changed viewers' understanding of their careers. They delve into the look of scientists and how the lack of information and accurate portrayals is a reason why citizens are less likely to believe scientists. If you consider the lack of

real science in television and movies and the "mad scientist" depiction, it makes sense that they came to these findings through the lens of Cultivation theory. They conclude that viewers who watched these types of descriptions were less likely to believe in science such as climate change. They have less regard for science as a whole because of how these scientists have been presented to them over the years (Dudo et al., 2010).

Within this script, two similar men will become engulfed in programs that either cause paranoia or have the opposite effect to showcase how the theory is explained. One will only watch true crime shows, while the other only watches sitcoms with no violent acts. They will then be placed in rooms with suspicious characters to see how they react. According to the Cultivation theory, the man who watches the darker programming would expect bad outcomes and act accordingly. The first act shows that they currently watch programming that is in opposition to what they will watch during the study to establish a baseline for the viewer to see changes in each twin.

The time frame of the study is not likely. A person would not have their worldview changed in three weeks, but for this script and time constraints, that is how it will be emulated. According to Lee and Niedereppe (2011), they surveyed participants for a year and subscribed to the conclusion that "1 year later does not necessarily mean that cultivation is a unidirectional process from T.V. exposure to beliefs and attitudes" (Lee & Niedereppe 2011, p.748). The time frame will remain one month for this script, though the time frame will be mentioned in the writing. It will showcase the theory by showing the person who watches the violent content, which now subscribes to the "mean world syndrome" discussed in Gerbner's original theory "Those with heavy viewing habits are suspicious of other people's motives. They subscribe to statements that warn people to expect the worst, such as 'in dealing with others you can't be too careful' Gerbner calls this cynical mindset *mean world syndrome*" (Griffin, 2006, p. 389).

At the start of the script, the character is very easygoing and lighthearted, but by the end, he has become skeptical and paranoid due to a constant barrage of crime shows which have changed his worldview. More recent studies have focused on the singular focus many are taking with their program watching behaviors. For instance, bingeing an entire series while not watching any other programs vs. the golden age of television when you only watched what was available. Morgan and Shanahan (2010) discuss a multitude of studies that convey genre-specific studies being conducted and the outcome of each. "Makeover programs" negatively affected self-esteem, while

talk shows like Oprah encouraged a "collective" atmosphere, and respondents were more open to social programs (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010 p. 341). Within the script, one character will say something that could easily be taken a variety of ways, each twin will hear it and react according to the type of programs they have watched. Because Mickey started out easy-going and then watches true crime shows, he will assume the worst in the character, while Matthew who started out paranoid will take a lighter approach to what is said. These studies which look at the singular focus of media will likely become more and more prevalent as streaming networks become king of media, until the next technology comes along.

CULTIVATION THEORY SCRIPT

Synopsis: Twin boys are utilized to illuminate the impacts of the different types of media, as well as to ensure that no other variables are present. Growing up in the same home with the same parent/parent will help to enforce that the boys are merely creatures of their viewing habits.

Characters: Matthew and Mickey, the twins, Mr. Stone, Cassey, and Leah (working on the project with Mr. Stone.)

Act 1:

Interior: Two twin brothers living together on a college campus. They are both very similar in demeanor and identical in looks; they look for summer jobs, so they don't have to move back home until the new semester starts. They sit in a coffee shop looking on craigslist when they come across a study that pays very well and offers living arrangements over the summer.

(The camera pans into the coffee shop showing a multitude of patrons. A man in a suit sits next to the twins who are still out of focus. The man in the suit is the narrator.)

Narrator: Sorry to interrupt your television viewing. Can we talk for a second? The thing you are watching right now, and that thing from right before I interrupted you, is having an impact on how you see the world. Don't believe me? Consider what you were watching, did it have bad guys? Did you scan the room you were in to see if any of the people around you seemed like bad guys? Maybe you were watching a Rom-Com, did you scan the room for your next boyfriend or

girlfriend? Do you think it's possible that something that you watch can affect you in such a way that it affects your whole worldview? Well George Gerbner did! He and his academic buddies tested out this theory by creating surveys, and they found that heavy viewers of television were prone to think the worst of others after watching violent programming. Don't believe me? Let's watch and see. Just don't think the worst of me, ok?

(The man in the suit puts headphones in and looks to a laptop. The camera moves from the man to the twins.)

Matthew: That can't possibly be real, right? They will put us up for a month over the summer, feed us and pay us? There has to be some kind of trick like they will test makeup or drugs or something on us, right?

Mickey: Dude, it says right here in bold print, no drugs.

Matthew: Maybe they just say that to get you there, and then they inject you with some crazy shit!

Mickey: Yeah, I don't think that's going to happen, dude. If they try, we can just leave!

Matthew: Well, if we leave, we have to stay at Moms again. So maybe we just let them.

(Both laugh hysterically)

Mickey: Alright, I'm filling out the application! Keep your fingers crossed, bro!

(After one week, they are given directions to meet with Mr. Stone at his office downtown. Two women stand at a desk upon their entrance. Mr. Stone opens the door to office #311 where they were told to meet.)

Mr. Stone: Thank you both for coming! Please, one of you have a seat, and I will interview the other. Then we can switch. Follow me.

(Mickey and Mr. Stone walk into a different office with a desk.)

Mr. Stone: Please have a seat. (Gestures to a chair) So I'm sure you read the entire ad on Craigslist; you are aware that this will be a month-long study, and you will be completely cut off from the outside world, right?

(Mickey sits across from Mr. Stone)

Mickey: Am I going to be on Big Brother?

Mr. Stone: I'm sorry?

Mickey: No, I'm sorry, I'm a bit of a T.V. junkie, it's a show where they live in a house all summer, and you know what, never mind. Yes, I am O.K. with that, sir.

Mr. Stone: O.K., great. It's good you like T.V. as that will pretty much be the only thing you will be doing for the next month, aside from coming to this floor once a week to check-in. We don't have a huge budget, so we couldn't afford many lavish things for the apartment: just a television, minimal furniture, and food.

Mickey: I get paid, though, right? Like the school is going to pay us for this, yeah?

Mr. Stone: Yes, you will be paid, but we aren't affiliated with the school.

Mickey: Wait, what? I thought this was a study for psych classes or something, like the Stanford prison experiment with less violence.

Mr. Stone: It will be something like that, but I am privately funded. There is no link to any school. I assure you there will be no violence, except maybe on T.V.

Mickey: I was kind of hoping I would get to hit Mattie but O.K.

Mr. Stone: You two don't get along?

Mickey: Oh no! Nothing like that! We are the same person, having been together since the womb. I was just making a joke.

Mr. Stone: You are making a lot of jokes. Do you not take this seriously?

Mickey: Gee, I'm sorry, sir. That's just the kind of guy I am. I like to stay positive and make people laugh. I do take this seriously. I'll stop making jokes.

Mr. Stone: O.K., Take this questionnaire about program preferences.

Mickey: I got the gig?

Mr. Stone: We will see. I just want you to be prepared for if and when you get the call.

Mickey: Truthfully, sir, we are already all packed to move back to our mothers' house for the summer, so we could move into the accommodations today if that were the case.

Mr. Stone: It might be. Please get your brother.

(Mickey exits the office and goes to get Matthew.)

Matthew: How did it go, bro? Did he inject you with anything?

Mickey: Not yet; he said he wanted to test it on you first...

Matthew: WHAT?!?!

Mickey: Dude! I'm joking! It was pretty basic questions, now paperwork for me. He wants you to head in there now. I'll stay here with the ladies.

(Leah and Cassey look up from the desk, then right back down at their computers. Matthew walks down the hallway to Mr. Stone's desk.)

Mr. Stone: Please have a seat.

Matthew: Yes, sir.

Mr. Stone: So I'm sure you read the entire ad on Craigslist; you are aware that this will be a month-long study, and you will be completely cut off from the outside world, right?

Matthew: Yes, sir.

Mr. Stone: Are you O.K. with leaving everyone and everything behind for an entire month?

Matthew: Well, not everyone. Mickey will be there, right?

Mr. Stone: Sort of, you will be in separate quarters.

Matthew: He's the most important person to me. As long as he's around, I'll be fine.

Mr. Stone: You are very quiet compared to your brother.

Matthew: I think we are equally loud, I'm just a little uncertain of what is going on, and I tend to be more reserved when unsure.

Mr. Stone: What is there to be uncertain about?

Matthew: I'm not sure sir, in the back of my mind, I keep thinking that this is all a ploy to test drugs or something on us.

Mr. Stone: So you are paranoid?

Matthew: Not paranoid, just cautious. Do you watch the news at all? There are so many terrible things happening in the world around us at any given time.

Mr. Stone: Yes, I have watched similar news stories. Is that your preference for television viewing? The news?

Matthew: I do like to stay informed. I tend to watch scary movies and stuff, action movies a little too, I guess. Why?

Mr. Stone: Just curious. O.K., well, I think I have all I need. Take this questionnaire, and when you finish it, hand it to the ladies in the lobby.

Leah: Thanks, boys! Be ready to move into the apartments tomorrow.

Mickey: Where are the apartments?

Leah: They are in this building. We renegotiated some of the offices to turn them into apartments. As I was saying, you will be separated but living on the same floor. I hope that offers some comfort. We will provide you with all of your meals; you may have noticed the page

asking about allergies and food preferences. We will maintain your eating habits as you laid them out for us. We will also have a service coming to do your laundry and the like. The only thing you will be held accountable for is keeping the apartment clean and doing the dishes after receiving your meal. Otherwise, it will be much like living in a hotel. You'll put the cleaned dishes outside of the door in the plastic bin for hospitality to come and pick up. Meals will happen three times a day, at the same time every day. You will have some snacks inside the kitchen area that you can eat as desired.

Matthew: You seem very matter-of-factly. What can you tell us about your boss?

Leah: Nothing. I AM matter-of-factly for a reason, sir.

Mickey: Oh, this is going to be a FUN month! See you, ladies, soon!

(The twin's exit the building. Cassey and Leah walk back to the office of Mr. Stone)

Cassey: Why did you pick those two out of all the participants who interviewed?

Mr. Stone: Well, the very fact that they are twins removes many variables in the study because they grew up together and have gone through all the same experiences. Not to mention they already watch decidedly different programming, which has affected how they behave. You may have noticed that Mickey is a very bubbly person, and he noted that he watches mostly sitcoms and comedies. In contrast, Matthew was very quiet and withdrawn. He was so nervous that we would inject him with drugs or had some foul play involved with all of this. He already shows the exact results of the original study. Assuming that people are bad, that crime is more prevalent than it is. We were handed the perfect participants. I had to utilize them.

Leah: Isn't that just their personality and not from television?

Mr. Stone: Some of it is personality, but the paranoia is something different. The hope is we will see Mickey become more paranoid, and Matthew will feel safer in his life. Each week we will bring them down to this floor and have them take the same surveys taken during George Gerbeners' original study.

Cassey: That will be enough to determine the findings?

Mr. Stone: Well, one of the reasons that I am personally and secretly funding this is because I have some ideas about other ways of seeing it in action, which we will discuss in the coming weeks.

Leah: This isn't going to hurt them, is it? They seem like nice boys; I wouldn't want to be involved in anything dangerous.

Mr. Stone: We should see a slight change in worldview, but it is not lasting. At the end of the study, we will debrief them as we would in any routine experiment. They will be fine. I appreciate your candor and concern.

(The camera pans to a random office chair with the man from the coffee shop sitting in it.)

Narrator: This guy really knows what he's talking about! Not much personality though. Did you notice that he gave them surveys? You're pretty smart so you probably assumed that he gave them the same surveys that George Gerbner and his friends gave respondents in their original study. Why would he do that? Well, you get the idea, it's meant to show where they started before the study started. Can you already see that one brother seems pretty straight laced, and the other is easier going? There's probably a reason for that right? I don't want to give anything away, so let's just watch.

Interior: The twins have moved into the apartments and have been separated for a week. Each room is exactly like the other in color patterns, placement of minimal furniture, and rack of DVD carts, although the DVDs on the carts are very different. Mickey has a slew of True Crime documentaries, while Mathew has a multitude of sitcoms from various decades. It is the night before the first meeting with Mr. Stone in an office below the staged apartments.

(The man in the suit is in a room similar to the twins' room watching a T.V. the camera pans to his T.V. to show a split screen showing both of the men sitting on the couch watching T.V. Mickey is perched, sitting upright and tense, while Matthew is lying on the sofa with one leg draped over the back of the chair. We can see through time-lapse that Matthew is very relaxed and getting snacks from time to time, while Mickey is engulfed in the shows. Matthew turns the T.V. off around midnight and goes to bed. Mickey Stays up until four am and falls asleep on the couch.)

Narrator: So it looks like the constant barrage of these programs is already taking its toll! Who could have seen that coming? (winks)

(The camera pans deeper into the television which now shows the outside of the doors, Leah knocks on Matthews's door)

Mathew: Well, hello again!

Leah: Good morning, sir. Are you ready to head downstairs?

Matthew: I sure am! I guess I don't need a jacket since it's just an elevator ride away. So I am ready! How's your morning?

Leah: You sure are chipper! Did you sleep well?

Matthew: You know, I don't know if it's the mattress or what, but I don't think I have slept this well in years! I'm going to bed at a decent time and waking up early. Will you guys rent out these apartments when the studies are done? I might want to rent one.

Leah: I doubt that. I'm sure they will go back into offices.

Matthew: Well, that's a shame.

(Cassey knocks on Mickey's door, Mickey opens the door looking very disheveled.)

Cassey: Good morning, sir. Ready to meet with Mr. Stone?

Mickey: (Grumbles) who makes meetings this early?

Cassey: You did. We specifically asked you in our initial interaction what a good time would be to meet with you.

Mickey: Thanks for reminding me. Yeah, I guess I'm ready.

Act 2

INTERIOR:

The twins have been living there for almost four weeks. Mickey watches only true crime, and Matthew is only watching old sitcoms like *Mork and Mindy*. They have each met in the office once a week at different times. Mickey enters the restroom next to the office first and hears a man in the stall next to him. The man is on the phone. This is the first time anyone has been in or around the office since the experiment started. All Mickey sees from his stall are boots and a long jacket.

Jacket Man: What else could I have done? I left her there! I had to! What did you expect me to do? I can't get in trouble, man! I've been working hard to turn shit around. If anyone found out about this ... I did what I had to do, man! Just please, god, keep it quiet!

(The man hangs up the phone and walks out. Mickey rushes out of the bathroom to find him but sees only Leah walking up to the door.)

Mickey: There was a man in the bathroom! I think he hurt someone!

Leah: Calm down Mickey, he's part of another experiment. He should have already been gone. He has nothing to do with you.

Mickey: Did you hear what he was talking about?!?! I think he abandoned some girl. Maybe he killed her! Is he allowed to leave, or is he stuck here like us?

Leah: We cannot discuss the details of his experiment Mickey. I would think you would understand that by now. Mr. Stone is ready to see you now.

Mickey: Seriously?!?!

Leah: C'mon in Mickey.

Mickey: Where's Cassey?

Leah: She went on a date a few days ago, and we haven't heard from her since.

Mickey: Was it with that guy?!?! What do you mean you haven't heard from her?!?! She could be hurt or worse!

Leah: Maybe she just had a great date.

(Leah and Mickey are walking from the bathroom back to office 311 as Mr. Stone steps out to meet them.)

Mr. Stone: Good afternoon, Mickey. How are you feeling? Getting close to the end, anything you'd like to share about how this project is going?

Mickey: Who was the guy that was in here before me?

Mr. Stone: Mickey, you know I cannot tell you that. Everyone signed documentation, and I am a man of my word. I would not give him your information, just as I will not give you his.

Mickey: He asked for mine?

Mr. Stone: No, I mean if he had asked. The point is, you need to forget about him and tell me how YOU are doing.

Mickey: I am O.K. I guess.

Mr. Stone: How are you sleeping? Accommodations are still up to par, I hope.

Mickey: Yeah, they are O.K. I guess. I think I am getting restless; I tend to stay up most nights watching T.V. instead of sleeping. I think it's from the lack of exercise.

Mr. Stone: I never said you couldn't exercise. If you think that will help you, feel free to exude some of that energy. What kind of programs are you watching?

Mickey: Well, that's the other thing I was going to tell you; I don't mean to be rude; I know how much work goes into all of this. But I think I got the wrong DVD cart. All the stuff on it would be better suited for my brother. He loved true crime stuff. Remember when you asked before I told you I liked comedy?

Mr. Stone: Oh yes, that's right. Well, there's only a week left now, so I suppose it doesn't make much difference.

Mickey: Yeah, I suppose not. I stay amused by it. I've been watching this series about a detective that solves murders every episode. It's crazy because no one ever believes him at first, but its season six, and he's right every episode! Stop with the dramatics and just listen to him!

Mr. Stone: Well, I am glad you have been able to find some enjoyment. Sorry about the mix-up, but as I said, there is only a week left. It's too late to change anything now. I hope that is O.K.

Mickey: Oh yeah, it's totally fine. Can I please tell you about this guy in the bathroom, though? I'm bothered by it! If I don't say something and I find out that guy hurt a woman, I will never forgive myself for not saying something!

Mr. Stone: Trust me, Mickey, everything is fine. I appreciate your concern, though. I need to get you out of here before your brother comes. Please let Leah know that you are ready to head back.

Mickey: O.K. Mr. Stone. Thanks for nothing.

(Leah walks into the room)

Leah: C'mon Mickey, I'll walk you to your room.

Mickey: Thanks, Leah. I cannot believe no one is willing to listen to me about this! I'm just like that detective!

Leah: What detective?

Mickey: From that show, I have been watching! He solves all these murders, and no one believes him until the end of the episode when he's all like "The candlestick in the foyer."

Leah: That's Clue.

Mickey: I have clues!

Leah: No, I mean that is from the game clue.

Mickey: You know what I mean, though! I swear that guy was up to no good! He even had that long jacket as bad guys have!

Leah: Mickey, it's raining outside. People wear jackets. If everyone who wore a coat were a murderer, we would have a lot fewer people and way more Burlington coat factories.

Mickey: I liked you better when you didn't talk.

Leah: Gee, thanks, Mickey. Here's your room. Have a good week.

Mickey: Leah...

Leah: Yeah, Mickey?

Mickey: Don't let that jacket guy get too close to you, O.K.? I don't trust him one bit!

Leah: I'll be fine, Mickey. Thank you, though.

(Mickey closes the door, and Leah walks down the hall past the man in the suit who is standing aloof leaning against the wall of the hallway.)

Narrator: Did you see how he filled in the gaps of that conversation the man in the bathroom had? It did sound fishy, I won't lie. Do you think he would have been so quick to decide he was a bad person with bad intentions if he hadn't been watching so much violence on television? One thing that George Gerbner and his cohorts found was that the more violence a person watched on television, the more they felt that the world at large was more dangerous. They found too that those heavy viewers felt that crime was on the rise despite actual data suggesting the opposite.

Interior:

Matthew walks into the restroom before his meeting and finds another man in the only other stall. Mathew sits down and hears the man talking on his phone.

Jacket Man: What else could I have done? I left her there! I had to! What did you expect me to do? I can't get in trouble, man! I've been working hard to turn shit around if anyone found out about this. I did what I had to do, man! Just please, god, keep it quiet!

Matthew: Who'd you leave, man?

(Jacket man leaves abruptly)

Matthew walks back into the office

Leah: Good afternoon, Matthew!

Matthew: Hey Leah! How's it going?

Leah: Same old. How's it going for you?

Matthew: Oh, you know, I live in a box, and I get to see your dazzling face once a week! So pretty good!

Leah: Mr. Stone will see you now.

Matthew: Thank you so much, Leah! Hey, where is Cassey?

Leah: She had a date a few days ago, and we haven't heard from her since.

Matthew: Musta been a helluva date! Good for her!

(Matthew walks into the office)

Mr. Stone: Welcome back Matthew, how are you feeling?

Matthew: I couldn't be better, sir! I woke up on the right side of the bed today, and I was able to talk to a stranger even though he didn't talk back.

Mr. Stone: What do you mean by that?

Matthew: Some guy in the bathroom. He must have been on his phone, he was talking, and I commented back, but he didn't respond.

Mr. Stone: Well, I am sorry, no one should have been there at the same time as you.

Matthew: It happens; deuces are wild and you can't control when they happen, you know?

Mr. Stone: You seem more easygoing than when you first got here.

Matthew: I guess I'm just comfortable?

Mr. Stone: Wonderful! Leah will take you back to your room once you finish the survey.

Matthew: Thanks, Mr. Stone!

(Matthew finishes the survey just as Leah walks in to escort him to his room.)

Leah: You ready, Matthew?

Matthew: I sure am! Thanks for taking me! When you talk to Cassey next, tell her I hope she had a good time on her date!

Leah: You aren't worried about her?

Matthew: Why would I be worried?

Leah: I guess I just thought you might be since you seemed to like her when we first met.

Matthew: Well, of course, I like her! I like you both!

Leah: Well, I appreciate that! Here's your room. See you next week for the very last time! That month flew by!

Matthew: For you, maybe, I've been confined to a room with old sitcoms. It went about the same as a regular month for me.

(After Matthew is left at his room, Leah, Mr. Stone, and Cassey, who is wearing boots and a long jacket, reconvene outside of Mr. Stone's office.)

Mr. Stone: So everything went off without a hitch? Matthew said he tried to talk to you. You didn't say anything back, did you?

Cassey: No, sir! I just played the tape as you said, then I got out of there. He did try to talk to me, but I just ran out.

Mr. Stone: Good Job! Do you think they suspected anything?

Cassey: No, sir. I believe it went off just as we planned. Did you tell them you hadn't seen me for a few days? How did that go?

Leah: Mickey was worried. He automatically jumped to the worst-case scenario. Matthew was excited that your date went so well.

Cassey: It's so weird! They flipped personalities!

Mr. Stone: Well, no, that's not the case.

(The man in the suit walks by the office and the camera pans to him.)

Narrator: But he is less paranoid because he doesn't have murder documentaries on 24/7. It's exactly like George Gerbner suspected. By having Mickey watch the more fear-inducing programs, he is now more paranoid and less trusting. Matthew, on the other hand, has become more easygoing by not watching them. Cultivation theory explained that this would happen. The constant streaming of them has amplified it. Mickey even said he isn't sleeping at night, thereby giving him more time to watch crime dramas. I assure you, their personalities are quite the same. They just aren't adding suspicion or a comedic air to their day.

Mr. Stone: They are the same men as the day they walked in, and they just have a different attitude about what's happening around them.

Leah: It's so crazy! It reminds me a little of Albert Bandura's Bobo doll experiment. Remember that from class, Cassey?

Cassey: Well, it's very similar in that violent media is thought to be the cause, but one mimics the aggression, while the other internalizes it, right, Mr. Stone?

Mr. Stone: Well, you're on the right path Cassey, it's an emotional effect that convinces the viewer that the outside world is much scarier than it is. George Gerbner discusses cultivation differential, in that some people are light viewers, while others are heavy viewers and the difference between the two. He did a survey that included four standpoints. The first being "chances of involvement with violence," the second "fear of walking alone at night," "perceived activity of the police," and lastly, "general mistrust of people."

(The man in the suit walks past again.)

Narrator: In other words "Those with heavy viewing habits are suspicious of other people's motives. They subscribe to statements that warn people to expect the worst, such as 'in dealing with others you can't be too careful' Gerbner calls this cynical mindset mean world syndrome" (Griffin, 2006 p.389).

Leah: So the general mistrust of people is what Mickey experienced when Cassey was dressed up like the man in the bathroom, right?

Mr. Stone: Yes, exactly! That's why we had her do that, to begin with. If he paid no attention to it, we might conclude that cultivation theory may not have as much merit as we have come to believe. While there is much criticism of this theory, I think it is worthwhile.

Leah: It is fascinating to see the changes in the twins. Do you think the accelerated rate at which they are watching these programs has expedited the process?

(The group has walked back into the office. Mr. Stone picks up a book off of his desk and reads directly from it.)

Mr. Stone: "Through extensive research and quantitative analysis, foremost scholars have found some correlation between the amount of television exposure and forming conceptions of social reality for many topics such as violence" (Alitavoli, R. Kaveh, E. 2018, p. 2).

(He sets the book down.)

Mr. Stone: That was the main reason we did the study in this way. For instance, had we allowed them to live at home, they could still gather world information from other sources. By basically

quarantining them and only allowing one specific genre, we can isolate the effects. A person could be prone to watch a multitude of programming, which could affect the study.

Leah: So by picking what each twin watches and making notes about their viewing habits before the study, we can identify the differences, and because there are no other media allowed, we can isolate what is causing the change. You are brilliant, sir!

Mr. Stone: I know.

(The man in the suit walks past the office again, and gestures towards Mr. Stone)

Narrator: This guy. He really knows what he's talking about!

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Imagine craving your favorite fast-food burger all day. When you get into the car, you hear an entire report on the radio about how that very cheeseburger is linked to heart disease and obesity. On the one hand, you know this is the most delicious cheeseburger (in your opinion) in the world; on the other, you know how important your health is. What would you do? What is that discomfort that you are feeling? According to Leon Festinger (1957), what you are experiencing is cognitive dissonance, and that uneasy feeling is your brain trying to recalibrate so that you aren't going against what you believe. With this new information contradicting your beliefs, how would you proceed? Would you still get the burger?

Let's come back to the burger a little later. Before getting into the history of this theory, let's look at the psychological events that happen to create cognitive dissonance. As we grow and develop, we learn specific ways of communicating and learning. We create schemata, which are "mental structures that are used to organize information partly by clustering or linking associated materials" (Duck & McMahan, 2018, p. 54). With those, we can usually successfully go into the world and understand what is around us by comparing it to situations we have been in previously. When things do not go with that schema, it can cause a disturbance in your cognition or thoughts. In 2015 Palkovich studied the cognitive dissonance that occurs when children read literature with "bad mothers," an image outside of our cultural, and societal norm. She discusses how our schemas prime us for certain expectations, and when those expectations are not met, it

creates dissonance, or in other words, a temporary discomfort (2015). While the consensus is Mothers are here to help, someone who did not have that upbringing would not experience dissonance at reading stories noted in her study, such as *Coraline*, and *Flowers in the Attic*, two stories with notoriously poor mothers. In *Coraline*, the mother tries to keep her from her real family, while in *FITA*, the mother literally tries to poison her children so she will no longer have to raise them. Hopefully this is not a norm for any readers as these are truly awful situations, and thankfully fiction. Although some readers may relate to these stories, the majority would not. Festinger stated that some things that cause dissonance for one person might not have that effect on another. He discussed that cultural differences could abolish specific thought patterns, which would create dissonance. For instance, a person who learned "proper dining" habits would be appalled watching a person eat steak with their hands in a fancy restaurant, but a person who comes from a culture that generally does not use utensils would not be phased (Festinger, 1957). That is important to note as collecting data for an empirical study needs certain consistencies to establish patterns for coding data.

Cognitive dissonance is a highly regarded study in both Psychology and Communications studies. Leon Festinger and his cohorts were introduced to another study that posed more questions than solutions. So they began their work by looking at a study about how rumors were spreading. That study looked at an earthquake and how the people who experienced actual destruction talked about the earthquake precisely as it happened, and those surrounding the earthquake spoke of it as a much bigger issue. Festinger found that those close to the destruction had already experienced the negative outcome and therefore were not afraid. Those who were outlying the earthquake were fearful that more would happen. Thus they spread rumors of worse earthquakes happening to combat the cognitive dissonance created from the fear of the unknown. Those who experienced it were no longer fearful and did not need to spread rumors. Festinger et al. conceptualized the physical components of the act of thinking and acting differently. They noted that when the two do not line up, physical discomfort ensues. They determined multiple ways of eliminating the discomfort, including changing behavior, changing attitude, and justifying the behavior. Festinger concluded that much like the drive to end hunger would propel someone to eat, the drive to reduce dissonance would drive them to change the behavior or thought. As with the level of hunger, the level of discomfort would aid in the speed of those

changes. Not only that, but they would maintain distance from people and places, which would add to the dissonance or make an attitude change to lessen the dissonance.

Attitude change, as described by McGrath (2017), is "The mode of dissonance reduction that has received the most empirical attention in changing a cognition (Broadly defined by Festinger as any piece of knowledge), and specifically the changing of one's attitude" (McGrath, 2017, p. 4). Attitudes can be changed and often will be to maintain the consonance or the alternative to dissonance. A person may have to change the way they think to avoid uncomfortable feelings. In the instance of the proceeding script, political affiliation is a large part of the dissonance, so looking at how dissonance or party favoritism is created during voting can help showcase the theory.

Bolstad, Dinas, and Riera (2013) looked at cognitive dissonance amongst voters, and saw that they were voting on party lines to lessen the dissonance they would evoke for voting for a different party. Despite their ideologies, it was easier to maintain consonance when voting in this way. One aspect of this theory is that after a choice has been made, they will regard the object not chosen as lessor than to back up the notion they chose correctly. They found that voting for one party created a stronger bond with that party. Again, because once the person has made a choice, they convince themselves they made the best choice (or they will suffer a special buyer's remorse type of agony.) Voting for a party strengthens the belief that they are the best party, which will lead to more consistent voting for that party, despite actual ideologies (2013)

Egan, Santos, and Bloom (2007) confirm this habitual choice making by looking at children and capuchin monkeys to determine if cognitive dissonance reduction is a learned behavior or more primal. They found that both the children and the monkeys would decide between two stickers or M&M's and then consistently pick the original choice time and time again. The actors decided to stick with their original choice, which the researchers ascertained that they would create dissonance if they chose differently. Much like the fox in Aesop's fables who couldn't reach the grapes and decided they would be too sour anyway. Once you have made the cognition, straying from it would cause much dissonance. Again, they are showcasing how making a decision confirms that the right decision was made, or at least the person will make the same decision to avoid dissonance.

As Festinger (1957) and McGrath (2017) have stated, behavior change is used to a lesser extent as it takes effort and is not the most convenient. Consider a person who smokes; they

would see the label which clearly states that smoking causes death. In this instance, changing the behavior of smoking would be the path of the most resistance. Changing the behavior of smoking would prove to be most difficult, although prudent. The person may likely change their attitude about being healthy instead of becoming healthier by quitting. Changing behavior proves more difficult; changing the attitude or original cognition would be much easier. Also, one could justify the behavior by stating that they exercise in other ways which maintain a balance. Therefore, the likelihood of falling victim to smoking's adverse effects would be minimized, and they can keep their habit.

The following script utilizes the main characters' (Catherine) belief that all republicans, or former President Trump's followers, are bad people who do bad things. She develops a crush on the other main character (Kyle), a Trump supporter, but she is unaware. She develops feelings for him and then realizes that he is precisely what she thinks is wrong. She experiences dissonance because she likes a person, but hates his political beliefs. She can make a few decisions to eliminate the dissonance, starting with no longer dating him, which would be a behavior change. She could justify the behavior and decide that she has judged too quickly and lumped all people into one group unfairly, or she can change her belief patterns (which would be insurmountable as she has strong ties to those beliefs). She is only experiencing dissonance because she has grown to appall that political party. If she were a republican, there would be no dissonance and no story.

"Trust is extended (or not) on the basis of perceived cues, or signals, that indicate something trustworthy (or untrustworthy) about another's identity. It has been argued that trust is most likely to develop and flourish among those actors who share tacitly understood background assumptions and a corresponding set of 'common cognitions' " (Perret & Timming, 2016, p. 234). Because the main characters have other commonalities, like enjoying the outdoors, trust can be developed between the two and allow for feelings of "like" to occur between them. While the two characters may have had a chance to fall in love, her already established cognitions of his political party will stand in the way. How could she hate a group so much and fall in love with a person from that group? She wouldn't.

Dissonance can vary in magnitude, which drives the person to actively end the state of dissonance. There are three fundamental assumptions in Cognitive dissonance theory, humans are sensitive to inconsistencies between beliefs and actions, and recognition of this inconsistency

will cause dissonance motivating someone to remove it. Lastly, dissonance can be removed in one of three ways, changing our beliefs to be in line with our actions, we can change our actions to be in line with our beliefs, or we can change how we perceive our actions. Think about that cheeseburger from the beginning, would you eat it?

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORY SCRIPT

Cognitive Dissonance Theory explains the discomfort one might feel when their beliefs, attitudes or behavior are incongruent. In this script, the main character begins to fall for a man she believes has similar beliefs. Unfortunately, she learns that he is part of the opposite political party, and it causes a shift for her. She feels she can no longer be attracted to him because of their significant differences, but she is still attracted, so she must break up with him to stop the feeling of cognitive dissonance.

Characters:

Kyle (the man): 6'4" With dark brown spiky hair, arms covered in tattoos. Republican fiscally conservative, Caucasian.

Catherine (the main woman): 5'8" Thin with curves. Light brown hair and olive skin. Liberal feminist, and one-quarter Latino.

ACT 1

Interior: Grocery Store

(The narrator is a voice over. The camera watches Catherine shopping as they speak.)

Narrator: The year is 2020. Maybe you've heard of it? The year everyone had to stay inside and wear a mask to go out in public. Last week Catherine was leaving a woman's rally where there were many different types of women and men protesting an array of injustices, specifically the mistreatment of women and minorities, of which Catherine was both. When she got to the

parking garage she saw a beautiful young man, she believed he was also leaving the march. They spotted each other and they made eye contact. They both smiled brightly through their masks then continued on their way.

Catherine works for the young democrats of Indiana and has little time for a relationship in her life, despite her desire to have one. She is hyper-focused on the upcoming election as she believes that the current administration is destroying the country's fabric. While she maintains most of her time working on campaign strategies, her mind wanders to the man she saw leaving the march on that day. She thinks how nice it would be to meet a man who had the same political affiliation instead of having the same fight in her relationships over politics and subsequently breaking up with her partner. Many of the men in her town were staunch republicans, as she lives in a very red state. It is hard to find anyone outside of her friend group that holds her beliefs. Days later, she and the gentleman from the parking garage meet again at a grocery store. Covid-19 had made its mark on the United States. The pressure is mounting causing global anxiety. To top it all off, Catherine has no idea that she was about to fall into a classic trap. She believes one thing is true but will find that her actions and beliefs will not line up, causing cognitive dissonance. Catherine is very much against everything this young man believes in but will connect with him before knowing just how different they are. She will have to navigate her thoughts and feelings to avoid discomfort from thinking one way and behaving another. Let's watch to see how she handles this.

(The actors bump carts in a stereotypical meet-cute)

Kyle: Aren't you the woman from the parking garage?

Catherine: Twice in one week, this must be my lucky week!

Kyle: I was just thinking the same thing myself! How lucky am I that I get to see the most beautiful woman I've ever seen, twice?

Catherine: Wow! You are laying it on pretty thick there! You haven't even seen half my face! But I'll take it! I'm Catherine, what's your name?

Kyle: How could I miss those eyes? Well, my friends call me Pepper, but my real name is Kyle.

Catherine: Why Pepper?

Kyle: I've been going gray since I was in high school, so the salt and pepper hair. It's dumb.

Catherine: I like that! It's cute!

Kyle: Yeah, That's what you want. "Cute" (does air quotes)

Catherine: Cute is good. Trust me!

Kyle: O.K., so you know my dirty secret, what's your nickname?

Catherine: You're never going to believe this, but it's Salt.

Kyle: ARE YOU SERIOUS?!?!!

Catherine: No. Not at all.

Kyle:...

Catherine: I'm joking with you

Kyle: I know, I've just never met a funny woman before. I'm not sure what to do.

Catherine: WHOA!!

Kyle: Now I'm joking.

Catherine: We have wildly different ideas of humor.

Kyle: I was just messing around. I hope someday this will be the story we tell people when they ask you how people started referring to us as 'Salt and Pepper.'

Catherine: That's very bold of you.

Kyle: One might call me... Spicy

Catherine: Seasoned is more like it. You often pick up gorgeous women at the grocery store?

Kyle: You think you're gorgeous?

Catherine: Well, you said I was the most beautiful woman you had ever seen. What would you have me believe?

Kyle: You are a bit salty. That really may have been the best nickname for you.

Catherine: You know, I agree with you. This has escalated pretty quickly. Let's start over, you are handsome, and I have been on edge with everything currently happening in the world. I need a breather.

Kyle: Inhale five, exhale five?

Catherine: That sounds amazing!

(They both breathe deeply and exhale)

Kyle: All better?

Catherine: Yeah, that takes care of all of it. Perfect! Thank you so much!

Kyle: My pleasure! Well, consider me a safe place. We can agree never to discuss politics, masks, pandemics, or any of the things that have you feeling so on edge. I usually don't do this, but I am going to give you my card. I hope that you will call me. I think us connecting twice in one week means something. I'm not a hokey guy or anything. I just think we were supposed to meet.

Catherine: We did meet.

Kyle: Well then.

Catherine: Give me the card.

Kyle: You are something special. I can tell already.

Through text messaging: (She rushes around her apartment cleaning and organizing while he sits in front of the computer for the entire exchange.)

Catherine: Hey, it's Salt.

Kyle: You waited the three days. Impressive!

C: It took that long to convince myself to message you. Also, I wanted it to be funny. I had to prove I could do it.

K: Well, I'm still not sold. LOL! Do you think I'm such a bad guy?

C: I can't tell yet, but most men have been in my experience.

K: You've dated most men? I don't like those odds.

C: Just a handful, but my experience has been they lie to you for the first few months then suddenly reveal themselves.

K: Really? Generally, I feel like people tell you exactly who they are. We just don't always listen. But you're a girl, so you probably have a different experience.

C: Yeah, men and women are very different.

K: Truly. So do you want to get dinner with me?

C: A dinner? Isn't coffee the protocol?

K: I think coffee is when you are trying to decide if you like someone. I already like you.

C: You do? You don't even know me!

K: Well, I like what I know so far, and I'm going to need a couple of courses to get to know more.

C: O.K., count me in. You intrigue me.

K: You intrigue me too! ;)

C: I'm free on Saturday, you can pick me up at 8.

K: I'll see you then! Can we keep messaging, though?

C: I could be convinced.

K: Well, let me make you a shortlist of reasons to chat with me.

1. I'm a great guy
2. I'm hardworking, and I make good money.
3. I'm hilarious!
4. I'm adorkable.
5. You are very attracted to me, and you will regret it if you let a great catch like myself getaway. You'll regret it forever. J.S.

C: Well, when you say it like that.... It comes off a little pompous. Also, that's six.

K: Pompous? I just know my worth. I hope you do as well.

C: Oh, I am aware of my worth. I'm just trying to see if you are inflating yours.

K: Well, if you keep chatting with me, you will find out. CONVINCED!

C: Hahaha! O.K., I believe #3 now.

K: You are falling in love with me. I can tell already! I am going to let my mom know she may be a grandma sooner than she realizes.

C: Whoa!!!! O.K., that's a little fast.

K: I'm just teasing you. You have a lot of fear about settling down, huh?

C: I DON'T have a fear of commitment. I have a fear of men trying to trap me. Why are you trying to trap me?

K: I am not trying to trap you. I'm trying to convince you that we could have a fantastic future together if you just let us.

C: You are coming on a little stronger than I am O.K. with. Not because I have issues, but because I have boundaries.

K: I'll step back.

C: Thank you.

K: So, back to the first square. You are beautiful, and I am very excited that you decided to message me.

C: What do you like to do for fun?

K: I enjoy nature and chatting with women who are not interested in me.

C: I asked you what you like to do, that shows I'm pretty interested!

K: So you DO like me!?!?!

C: I'm not sure yet.

K: Well, that's what the dinner is for, so you can realize that you do. <3

C: You are a goofball!

K: Now you understand!

C: O.K., so back to the nature stuff. What kind of nature stuff? I love going for hikes, how about you?

K: I like that also! I tend to appreciate anytime I get outside vs. being stuck inside. I worked in an office (at home now), so most of my day is spent behind a computer. Anything to get away from that blue glow is O.K. by me.

C: I relate to everything you just said! I need it to recharge!

K: Same! To me, there's nothing better than getting in a kayak and floating down a river! I've always spent as much time as possible outside!

C: That's great! I've always been a bit of a tomboy myself. I love climbing trees and floating on the lake!

K: Well, it sounds like we have planned our second date already!

C: Let's see how the first one goes before we jump into a second one.

K: I'm just saying I'll keep it in my pocket.

C: O.K., you do that. LOL! I need to get to bed. It was nice talking to you most of the time.
LOL!

K: You were a delight a minimal amount of the time, but it was worth it. ;)

C: I'll see you soon.

K: You'll see me Saturday at 8 Ma'am.

ACT 2

(Catherine prepares for their date as she talks about Kyle with her friends in a Zoom meeting)

Lily: Lipstick under your mask? This guy must be HOT!

Lucas: I don't think it matters how hot he is. She hasn't been laid in a year!! He's automatically more desirable!

Lily: I know that's right!

Lucas: Do tell Cat!

Catherine: O.K. guys! We get it; I have some cobwebs to knock off. But also he IS hot! Very hot!

Lily: Tell me all about him! How did you guys meet?

Catherine: We were both leaving the women's march and ran into each other in the parking garage. He looked so sexy! Just the fact that he was at the protest was enough to spark my interest. I feel like every guy that has tried to talk to me lately is a total douche and riding the

Trump train. I just cannot take another D-bag like that. They are always trying to convince me that the liberals want to trade our democracy for communism and socialism instead of just realizing we could all use some basic human decency.

Lily: I don't quite understand how these guys are even coming up to you. They can't tell that you're part Latino? The same people they are keeping in cages and building a fucking wall to stay separate?

Catherine: Who the hell knows? I just need it to stop! So thank heavens for Kyle!

Lucas: Kyle? Like the Monster drinking drywall punching kind of Kyle?

Catherine: Not that kind; he goes by Pepper, which might be why he isn't like that.

Lily: So tell me more!

Lucas: Are you summoning the pink ladies from Grease?

Lily: "Tell me more, tell me more, like is he really hot?" (Sung to the tune.)

Catherine: He is, in fact, a beautiful man! He took my breath away! Super tall, spiky dark brown hair, loads of tattoos! When I saw him in the parking garage, I immediately put him in the spank bank! I thought about him all week; then I saw him again at the grocery store. When I first saw him, he was just in jeans and a t-shirt, then at the grocery, he was in a suit.

Lucas: So he has a job?!?!

Catherine: He handed me his business card at the store, and he said something about staring at blue screens all day, so I guess he's in an office?

Lily: So what did the card say?

Catherine: Just his name and number.

Lily: Anyone can have a card made. That doesn't mean he has a job. He could just print them at home to hand out to women that he meets. Hell, he could just be a guy that plays video games all day! "Staring at a blue screen" doesn't say office to me. It says a guy who lives in his mom's

basement and plays video games. Even worse, he could be one of those guys who have "Twitch" and hopes just to play video games for pay. Like Only fans for video games. Kids watch someone else play video games instead of just playing the video games.

Lucas: Can you imagine watching someone play Barbie's on video?

Lily: OMG! We should totally do that!

Catherine: Off topic much? Help me pick an outfit! That's why I invited you guys over here!

Lucas: You are right. Sorry! Grab something pink! He likes pink if he was at the march with all those hats!

Catherine: I don't think that two are correlated, but I like your thought process!

Lily: So tell me more about this guy!

Catherine: Well, we've been messaging all week, and he's into all the same stuff I am. He's very outdoorsy and suggested we go kayaking for our second date!

Lucas: He already asked you out on a second date?

Catherine: Yeah, kind of. I told him we should get through the first date first.

Lily: He must like you if he's already talking about a second date!

Lucas: Well, of course, he does! She's awesome!

Catherine: Thanks, Lucas!

Lily: O.K., so he's a democrat or he wouldn't be at the march, he's got a job, maybe, and he's attractive? What's wrong with him?

Catherine: I don't know yet. I guess that's what this date is for?

Lucas: Don't go in looking for something terrible. That's all you'll find! Just stay open! You already know he hits the top three things on your list!

Lily: But three things a boyfriend does not make! He needs more to become a real boyfriend!
Right Cat?

Catherine: I guess we will see!

Lucas: Well, we can see all about it while you finish getting dressed. He's going to be here any minute!

Catherine: Oh my goodness!!

(She rushes around to finish getting ready. Her friends sign off, and she waits by the door for Kyle to arrive.)

*Doorbell rings

Catherine: Good evening!

Kyle: Wow! You look stunning! I honestly didn't think that you could get any prettier, but look at you! I'm just... wow!

Catherine: Two wows? I'll take it! I'll take those flowers too if those are for me?

Kyle: Well, I got them because they matched my outfit, and I couldn't find a broach or anything, but I guess you can have them.

Catherine: Well, thank you very much! Aside from the whole being a dick about it, that's very sweet! I don't think anyone has ever brought me flowers on a first date before!

Kyle: I'll let that dick comment slide since you look fantastic. Let's be honest, I look amazing too. Let's get dinner.

Catherine: You're probably right. I'm starving anyway. What do you have planned for us tonight?

Kyle: Oh, I didn't plan anything. I thought you would do that.

Catherine: Are you joking?

Kyle: Of course I'm joking! I told you I'm old-fashioned. We have dinner reservations at the steakhouse, then a special secret surprise for dessert. You like dessert, right?

Catherine: Oh, I LOVE food.

Kyle: All the food?

Catherine: All of it.

Kyle: Well, hop into my chariot Madame, let me take you on a remarkable food journey!

Catherine: Why, thank you, sir! (She bows)

(He opens the door, and they drive to the restaurant. He then opens her door and the subsequent door to the restaurant. They are seated in a very fancy steakhouse that is lit by candlelight.)

Kyle: You look remarkable tonight! I can't believe I got so lucky to run into you twice. The candlelight brings out the green in your eyes!

Catherine: You're too sweet!

Kyle: I just call it as I see it. You are beautiful!

Catherine: Well, you aren't so bad yourself there, handsome.

Kyle: Who me? (Bats his eyelashes)

Catherine: You are silly!

Kyle: I am! I hope you like that!

Catherine: I like everything about you so far!

Kyle: Good! My evil plan is working then! Muah haha!

Catherine: You're a weirdo.

Kyle: But you already said you like it, so it's a non-issue.

Catherine: Well yeah, because I'm a weirdo too, so it's O.K.

Kyle: You don't seem weird to me at all. In fact, you seem pretty amazing to me!

Catherine: Well, thank you! My Tia always tells me that I am amazing, but men generally don't.

Kyle: Who is Tia?

Catherine: My Aunt.

Kyle: That's a bizarre name. Is it a family name?

Catherine: Oh no, sorry, Tia means Aunt, her name is Maria.

Kyle: Oh! I didn't realize you were a Mexican... Do you have a green card? Do you need to marry me? I'm available!

Catherine: Wow, dude! That's a pretty racist thing to say.

Kyle: Oh my gosh! I am so sorry! I didn't mean anything negative. I was trying to be cute; remember when you said cute was good. I was hoping for more of that.

Catherine: It wasn't cute at all.

Kyle: Please don't be mad at me. I didn't mean anything by it.

Catherine: Just, maybe take a second and think before you speak. O.K.?

Kyle: I promise! Wow, I am so sorry!

Catherine: Let's just move past it. All forgotten.

Kyle: Let me open the door to the past and toss it all back there.

Catherine: Thanks for getting the door.

Kyle: Well, I'm kind of old-fashioned like that. I think women are supposed to be swept off their feet. I open all doors, even though those feminists would rather I not.

Catherine: Well, I don't know about that. I think feminism opens the door for a better appreciation for courtesy. I don't need you to open a door for me, but it's sweet that you want to. Feminism doesn't say you can't let a man open a door for you.

Kyle: Are you a feminist?

Catherine: Absolutely! Are you not one?

Kyle: I'm a man. You might have noticed how great I look in this suit. You don't look like a regular feminist.

Catherine: What does that mean? Men can be and should be feminists too.

Kyle: Well, you always see that meme of the woman with the short hair yelling at men. You don't come across that way. You aren't wearing combat boots or anything.

Catherine: Wow! That's a pretty stereotypical view of a feminist. We come in all shapes and sizes. I thought you were going to start thinking before you speak. Wait, why were you at the women's march if you aren't a feminist?

Kyle: The women's march? I wasn't at the women's march. Were you?

Catherine: Of course I was! I thought that's where you were leaving when we ran into each other at the parking garage.

Kyle: No, I was leaving my office. I have Trump stickers on the back of my car. We don't support that sensitive shit.

Catherine: Sensitive shit? Basic human decency, you mean? Treating people like they matter.

Kyle: They don't all matter. You have to earn respect, and you don't get it by crying all over town.

Catherine: Who are you? You aren't at all who I thought you were. I feel sick.

Narrator: The discomfort she feels is directly related to feeling what she felt for this man and now realizing that he isn't what she thought he was. She assumed that he was a feminist and

probably a democrat since she believed he was leaving the women's march. That sick feeling is the cognitive dissonance. She had thought he was perfect for her, and now she realizes that he is not. She must now make a decision based on what she knows to lessen this discomfort. Will she realign her thoughts? Change her behavior? Justify her actions by changing her stance? Let's watch.

Kyle: I'm precisely me. Exactly who I have been this whole time. I am sorry that I offended you with the racist thing, but I see now why you were so easily offended. I didn't realize you were a snowflake.

Catherine: A snowflake? I'm tougher than you will ever have to be. I can't believe I thought you were a good guy.

Kyle: I AM a good guy! You are way too sensitive. It doesn't have to be like this. I think we could get along if you dropped all the sensitivity.

Catherine: The guy you have stickers of, which by the way, if I had seen them, there's no way I would have ever got in your car. He's putting kids in cages. He is a stain on this country.

Kyle: Why do you care? It's not your country anyway.

Catherine: I was born here. My parents were both born here. I belong here, but your antiquated attitude does NOT belong here. Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to get an Uber and go home.

Kyle: You aren't even going to finish dinner?

Catherine: I don't want to spend one more second in your company now that I know who you really are.

(She gets up and leaves the table. Orders an Uber and leaves to go home.)

ACT 3

(Catherine is in a zoom meeting with Lucas and Lily discussing the preceding events.)

Lily: So wait, you just saw him in a parking garage and assumed? You never asked him?

Catherine: Yes, yes, I jumped to conclusions. I see now that I should not have done that.

Lucas: I'm sorry, Cat, I know you liked him a lot.

Catherine: But that's just it. I thought I liked him, but I don't.

Lucas: But you did. You're still wearing the lipstick, girl. I was there two hours ago. You can't lie to me.

Catherine: I guess I was hoping I could just lie to myself.

Lily: Have you heard from him?

Catherine: Yeah, he has texted me a couple of times.

Lucas: What did he say?

Catherine: He said he could peel the stickers off his car, but he can't change who he is. He wants to go on another date and not discuss politics ever.

Lily: Well, that sounds kind of doable. If you don't discuss your heritage, beliefs, or job ever.

Catherine: Exactly!

Lucas: So what are you going to do?

Catherine: I don't know. I just feel sick about the whole thing. I thought he was a good guy!

Lily: He could be a good guy and still be a trump supporter, right?

Catherine: That's just it. I've spent all these years putting them all into a box marked "Bad guy." How can I take this one guy out and put him in a different box?

Lucas: Well, you could remove the boxes. People are allowed to think differently than you, Cat. That's one of the things you've always promoted, right? We aren't all the same, but we all deserve the same rights? Haven't you said something exactly like that before?

Catherine: I have. You are correct. But he told me tonight that not everyone deserves rights. He told me they have to earn them.

Lucas: Oh.

Catherine: Yeah.

Lily: Gross!

Catherine: Yeah. Do you guys see my dilemma? I cannot in good conscience date a guy who thinks like that.

Lucas: Well, what are you going to do then? You've decided you can't date him. What are your other options?

Catherine: I think I have to just chalk this one up as a lesson. I feel sick to think that I could continue to date him, even though I connected with him, if nothing else lines up, it won't work anyway. I have to call this one and be grateful I found out before I fell in love with him. I'm going to let you guys go. I think I need to nap until after the elections.

Lucas: Sweet dreams, girl! We are here if you need us!

Narrator: Catherine had many options to get rid of her cognitive dissonance. She could have continued to date Kyle and justified his behavior to make herself feel better. Catherine could have changed her beliefs, which would be much harder to do. She could have tried to change his beliefs, even harder to do. But she decided to walk away, knowing that even though she liked him, it caused too much discomfort for her internally. Now her actions and beliefs lined up again, and she could continue on her path. Cognitive dissonance can be brought on by something minimal like eating food you know is bad for you or something massive like what Catherine went through. The key is to note how you are feeling about specific actions and making the discomfort go away.

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