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**APPLYING CONTENT ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE TO TENNESSEAN NEWSPAPER
THE CITY PAPER: UNDERSTANDING CULTURE OF THE KURDISH PRIDE
GANG IN NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE**

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine how the Tennessean newspaper The City Paper and its readers' comments frame the coverage of the Kurdish Pride Gang. This study observes how news coverage regarding the Kurdish Pride Gang (KPG) influences reader's opinions in Nashville, Tennessee. This research focuses on how readers vary in their interpretation of news coverage of the KPG in the newspaper. A single article can generate many unique interpretations. This research does not suggest that the news coverage directly causes racist attitudes. Conversely, this study examines the trigger effects of news coverage, including the construction of readers' interpretation of the news. Moreover, this study tests how news coverage about the Kurdish Pride Gang is constructed in media coverage. In this regard, the theory symbolic interactionism is applied to study interpretation of media coverage among the individuals. Content analysis technique is employed to analyze data and in addition, coding and frame techniques are also used to observe the data.

Key words: Kurdish Pride Gang, The City Paper, Nashville, symbolic interactionism, Kurdish immigrants

**ANLAM ANALİZ METHODUNUN TENNESSEE GAZETESİ OLAN ŞEHİR
GAZETESİ'NE UYGULANMASI: NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE'DE KÜRT GURUR
ÇETESİ KÜLTÜRÜNÜN ANLAŞILMASI**

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı Tennessee gazetesi olan Şehir Gazetesi'nin ve okuyucularının Kürt Gurur Çetesi ile ilgili haber yorumlarının nasıl anlaşıldığını

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incelemesidir. Bu çalışma Kürt Gurur Çetesi ile ilgili medyada yapılan haber yorumlarının Nashville, Tennessee’de ikamet eden halkın fikirlerinin nasıl etkilendiğini değerlendirmektedir. Bu araştırma Şehir Gazetesi’ni takip eden okuyucuların Kürt Gurur Çetesi ile ilgili medyada yaptıkları haber yorumlarının ne kadar farklı olarak algılandıklarına odaklanmaktadır. Tek bir makale çok fazla yegâne anlam ortaya çıkarabiliyor. Bu araştırma haber yorumlarının direkt olarak ırkçı tutuma sebebiyet verdiği izlenimini ima etmez. Diğer taraftan, bu çalışma haber yorumlarını harekete geçirici etkenleri ve buna ilaveten habere yorum yapan gazete takipçilerinin kurgulama ve anlamlarını dikkatle gözden geçirmektedir. Bunun yanında bu çalışma Kürt Gurur Çetesi ile ilgili haberlerin nasıl inşa edildiğini test etmektedir. Bu bakımdan sembolik etkileşimcilik teori bireyler arasındaki haber yorumlarının açıklamalarını ve anlamlarını öğrenmek amacıyla uygulanmıştır. Verileri araştırmak için anlam analizi yöntemi uygulanmış olup ve bunun yanında kodlama ve çerçeve teknikleri verileri gözlemek amacıyla kullanılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kürt Gurur Çetesi, Şehir Gazetesi, Nashville, sembolik etkileşimcilik, Kürt göçmenler

Introduction

In the United States, the largest population of Kurdish immigrants can be found in Nashville, Tennessee, about 10,000 to 15,000 Kurdish immigrants originating from Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, the greater majority of which are Iraqi Kurds who escaped Saddam’s totalitarianism and use of chemical weapons on the Iraqi Kurdish population (Kanan, 1998; Dawisha, 2009).

There are severe discrepancies between first generation immigrants who migrated from Iraq and their children born in the United States, referred to here as second generation immigrants. Second generation immigrants grew up in American culture while their parents grew up outside of American culture, leaving parents to struggle to adjust to the dominant culture and its cultural differences. Thus, two different generations and with two different cultures now exist in the same family. One central difference is that the younger generation is prone to engage in more criminal activities. Second generation immigrants in the United States have stated to fall into gang activities involving drugs and violence. Like Somalis in Minneapolis, and Pakistanis and Iranians in Los Angeles, Kurds are categorized as notorious groups (Ahmed, 2010) and appear to be experiencing similar problems with respect to gang activities in Nashville.

Ahmed (2010) interviewed one of the Kurdish community leaders and learned that the Kurdish community was experiencing racist and discriminatory attitudes and behaviors from the society around them. The common perception towards the Kurdish community is they are all Muslim terrorists. Some second generation immigrants reacted to these racist experiences by forming groups to protect themselves. In time, these groups transformed into a formal gang group called the Kurdish Pride Gang.

A brief contextual history of the Kurdish Pride Gang

The Kurdish Pride Gang was formed in 1999, a gang first known as the Kurdish Boys and then Kurdish Pride with approximately 30 members. Brothers Ako and Aso Nejad, gang members in their 20s, were convicted in 2008 of conspiring to kill a drug dealer and firing shots at a park police officer (The City Paper, 2008, July 17).

The officials reported what the Kurdish Pride Gang has committed is that:

“A teenage suspect's suicide and four arrests connected to the attempted murder of a police officer...Police officials say that Kurdish Pride members have grown increasingly vicious and brazen...investigators believe the gang has committed about 10 home burglaries since January, including two involving rapes...there was an assault in which a student was dragged from a high school classroom and beaten, and another during the school graduation that left the victim hospitalized. Kurdish Pride members have been accused of shooting at a rival gang, wounding three, and also beating a man to death in January at a motel” (Emery, 2007).

Why did KPG emerge?

The City Paper in Nashville frames the problem of Kurdish Pride Gang as derived from their violent homeland, Iraq. A newspaper article titled, “Kurdish gang’s violent roots traced back to violent homeland,” stigmatizes the Kurdish people, particularly those who migrated from Iraq. In terms of ethical concerns of media coverage, the article focused on anti-immigrant “agenda setting” in their news coverage stating that “the foundation for the rapid manifestation of KPG was laid generations ago in one of the most dangerous parts of the world; the violence-laden deserts of Northern Iraq” (The City Paper, 2007, July 5).

Two photos show some characteristic of Kurdish Pride Gang.



A courtesy of streetganglife.com



A courtesy of nashvillecitypaper.com

Theoretical framework

Symbolic interactionism

Studies on audiences show that people are very creative and very unpredictable, which leads to a diverse interpretation of media coverage among the individuals. The stories in newspapers are made to provoke thought and to manipulate the reader’s opinion, but the reader may respond in surprisingly ways (Grossberg et. al, 2006). The editor or reporter encodes his article to be decoded in a particular way by the reader, but the reader may decode it differently by virtue of his/her own unique symbolic interpretations. According to Barthes (1972), the

meaning of the text is not static, but dynamic. The texts include polysemic meanings that lead to diverse interpretations from the audience. Some research sees audiences as passive readers who accept how media text as written, while other studies perceive audiences as actively challenging what they read (Grossberg et. al, 2006). Blumer (1958) stated that the public media helps the dominant racial group construct their image in a positive manner while focusing negatively on other racial groups. This approach benefits from the symbolic interactionist perspective, which allows for “a middle ground whereby neither structure nor agency is negated” (Hughey, 2010, p.478). Through our analysis, we realize that readers interpreted the same document differently in the same newspaper. Commenters feel freer to express their opinions and feelings liberally since they remain anonymous. Moreover, the commenters are less constrained by the restrictions that generate a “spiral of silence”, referring to people remaining silent by virtue of feeling marginal in regards to the dominant opinion (Neumann, 1974).

Hall (1980) conceptualizes an encoding and decoding model showing how media texts support the dominant ideology in society and are encoded to be decoded by the audience in terms of that ideology. The encoded meaning ends up having varied interpretations due to the varied social positions of the readers. First, readers may interpret media text as supporting the dominant (preferred) meaning. Second, readers may make sense of it with a negotiated meaning in a sense that suggests the reader adjust the dominant meaning of the text according to his/her own interests. Finally, the reader may decode it as an oppositional meaning that challenges the preferred meaning of promoting the dominant ideology of society. The audience gets opinions and beliefs that are against the dominant meaning of the text. The interpretations audiences have are reliant on their socioeconomic status, such as class, gender, age, educational attainment and ethnicity along with past experiences and prior understanding of the medium read (Hanes, 2000). Casey et al. (2002) suggested that the preferred meaning and intended meaning should not be mixed since the encoding process consists of both conscious and unconscious choices. What the producer, writer or editor intends is undoubtedly important, but the preferred meaning may include assumptions of which they were unaware.

Goffman describes framing as the “principles of organization that govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them” (Goffman, 1974, p. 10). How the author frames the text helps readers to interpret the intended meaning. Moreover, it is suggested that journalists tend to organize media texts and introduce context to audiences by using frames that are “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion” (Gitlin, 1980, p.7).

Davis & Baran (2012) further developed Erving Goffman’s theory of framing. Goffman found that women were presented the same as children in the media, almost as if women want to return to girlhood. Goffman pointed out that there is a certain association between women and childhood in media, and this undoubtedly affects how women are perceived in U.S. society. For instance, the image of a little girl is: thin, flat-chested, and weak. Advertisements use models who are thin and delicate appearing girls grow up thinking this is what women should like in U.S. society should look like. This, more than anything, is what we notice to be true of Goffman’s accounts. Goffman discovered this is through observing advertising in the media. He notices that women are often exposed as submissive, whereas men are illustrated as being powerful and ready to take action. It was very true when Goffman said that all of this is determined by what culture tells us and is not part of nature. It is just what has developed in recent history of what is expected from women and men. It is best argued in connection to

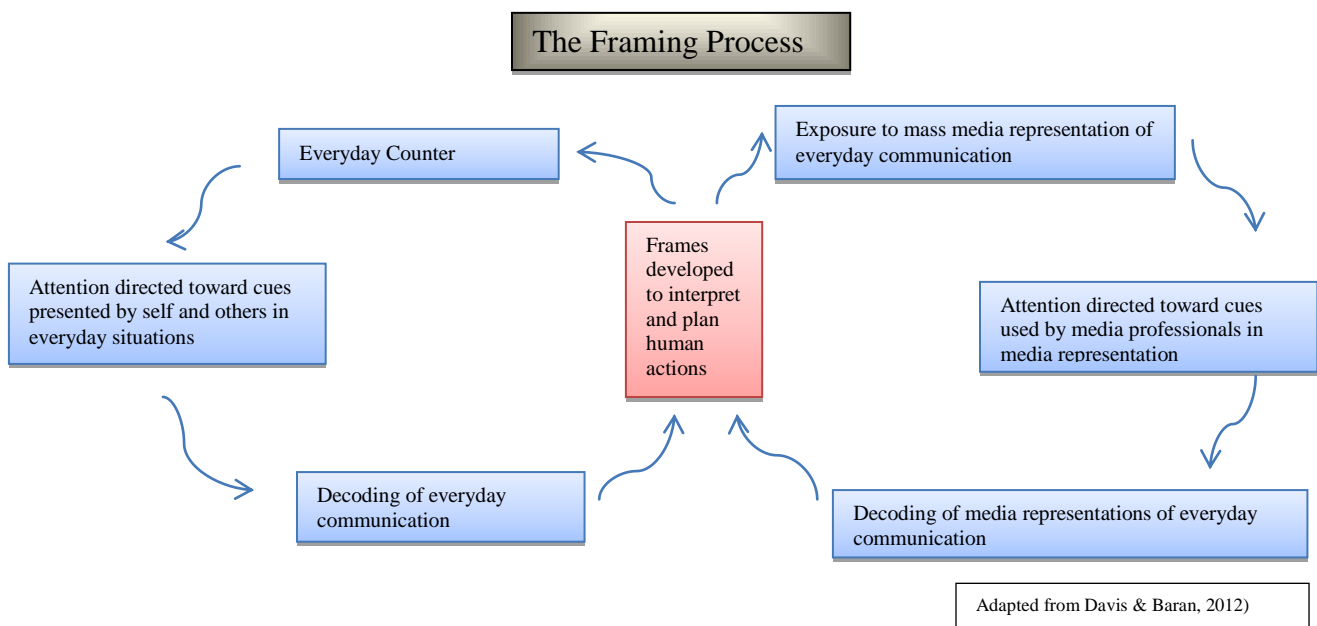
Goffman's vision of face-to-face interactions in daily life. Goffman concludes that, depending on circumstances and social context, humans must adjust their personalities to adapt to the situation, what he calls adaptations of self or "theatrical presentations". Rather than individuals being their true selves, they are putting on an act they designed to fit the social situation. These adaptations occur because of societal pressures from birth; such as boys get blue clothes and girls get pink clothes. Rather than deal with the backlash of violating these mores, individuals acclimate to what society expects of them. Nonetheless, we believe there is a rising awareness in today's society that is allowing Goffman's model to become secondary.

Ethical Concerns of Media Coverage and Framing KPG in the News

Denis McQuail (1987) summarizes the basic principles of Social Responsibility Theory as follows:

- The media have obligations to society and media ownership is public trust.
- News media should be truthful, accurate, fair, objective and applicable.
- The media should be unrestricted, but self-regulated.
- The media should follow agreed upon codes of ethics and professional conduct.
- Under some circumstances, government may need to intervene as a safeguard on behalf of public interest.

This figure suggests that mass media representation construct the framing process for individuals when they read news articles as well as their interpretation of life.



One reporter legitimized this by saying:

"These profiles confirm what gang culture experts and elder members of the Nashville Kurdish community have already said many of these young immigrants who have turned to a life centered around gang violence are still mentally living in the violent homeland from which they and their families fled to avoid annihilation" (The City Paper, 2007, July 11).

KPG news coverage is also framed by associating KPG with Islam. “Allah” essentially means God, but media coverage of Allah links Muslims to terrorisms. Commenter Bullet, who declines to use his real name on his MySpace page and describes himself as a 22-year-old male from Nashville, Tenn., states “Am from Kurdistan, AKA Bomblands, and ma only fear is ALLAH.” (The City Paper, 2007, July 11). Many of Bullet’s 226 MySpace “friends” are also from Nashville. And like Bullet’s page, his friends’ pages are rife with references linking Iraqi Kurdistan and Allah (KPG network alive, 2007, July 11). News coverage also mentioned these gang members are influenced by “Thug Life” culture because they mentioned Tupac Shakur on their myspace.com account.

Data and methods

The articles and reports from this newspaper were taken from its website. For this research, the data is derived from the Nashville’s online source for daily news, The City Paper. The City paper sells about 48,000 copies a day in Nashville. The data consisted of comments by readers regarding the news coverage of the Kurdish Pride Gang. All of the comments were published between July 5, 2007 and September 14, 2010. This time frame was selected since the media gave more attention to the KPG during this period due to the gang members committing several deviant activities during this period; such as robbery, killing, and placing graffiti on the police department’s wall. Moreover, two members of the Kurdish Pride Gang were accused of killing drug dealers and attempting to kill a police officer. Every single comment posted to these the news articles was included in the unit of analysis.

The Internet was used to news coverage regarding the Kurdish Pride Gang. The New York Times, the National Public Radio (NPR), and CNN published and broadcasted articles about the Kurdish Pride Gang. Unfortunately, no comments were found in their related online pages for these articles. The only online source of comments the researcher found for news coverage on the KPG is The City Paper, which is accessible online. The articles and reports along with commentaries were downloaded and printed directly from the website. There are 20 news articles regarding the Kurdish Pride Gang in the newspaper, and 14 of them were commented on. These fourteen articles included 188 comments, which is the sample in this study and it is the actual population.

Data analysis

The analysis of the comments used the qualitative content analysis technique. Unlike other interpretation techniques, content analysis method is considered a “more systematic and objective method of describing the manifest or surface content of a text” (Grossberg et.al, p. 186, 2006). Since manifest content is the surface structure existing in the text and latent content is the deep structural meaning of the text, we blend the strategy of manifest and latent content analysis as the commentaries include both manifest and latent content in this data analysis. To accomplish this, framing is used to conceptualize the main patterns in the commentaries. There are two main frames in this study consisting of racist attitude and anti-racist attitude. On the one hand, the racist attitude is framed as anti-immigrant commentaries.

The news coverage examined whether it includes commentaries. Subsequently, each commentary is coded for the existence of the frames for racist and anti-racist attitudes. Each commentary is evaluated for whether the comment can fit into these two frames. Next, two sub-

themes from each main themes are considered if the commentaries can fit. Then, each comment is coded through these themes.

When applying the content analysis, I tracked all sources of the Kurdish Pride Gang and counted publications and websites. Microsoft Excel was used to demonstrate the findings and produce charts. For this study, the time frame is from July 5, 2007 and September 14, 2010. In terms of measuring, after applying numbers to goals, we analyze the racist and anti-racist attitudes.

Findings

Anti-immigrant commentaries

The newspaper Nashville City Paper stated that the KPG problem in the Kurdish community could be traced back to their “violent” homeland country. Some readers refer to this statement while using anti-immigrant language. To illustrate, commenter rbullet said,

“before revoking their citizenship and deporting them they should be dropped off at the electric chair for some juice and then ship their ass back as dead and then we nor their Country would have to worry about anymore trouble out of them.” (The City Paper, 2010, September 14).

Moreover, By vandy36,

“...these pieces of TRASH have got what they deserve. What would be even better would be to deport their butts back to Iraq where this type of behavior is normal. And they would fit in...” (The City Paper, 2008, July 17).

On the one hand, Jim Boyd, using commentary places for propoganda for the election in Nashville, by stating that “If immigrant kids (of ANY foreign nation) are here causing trouble on a refugee visa, send them back to their home countries. If their parents complain, revoke their visas too so they can accompany their troublemaking kids.” (The City Paper, 2007, July 5). On the other hand, the reader, Zingers, commented that “ Who is in charge of immigration?...we are importing middle-eastern (Muslims) at higher levels than ever before...when did we delegate immigration policy and control to our enemies?...therefore, problems such as the KPG and others will only get worse. We are importing the war zone into our backyard!” (The City Paper, 2007, July 5). Finally, by ActiveCitizen, The reader commented “If people immigrate into the United States with the genuine desire of becoming citizens then they need to learn OUR culture, OUR laws, OUR language, and OUR history...So if any immigrants without the TRUE desire to become loyal American citizens DO NOT belong here.” (The City Paper, 2007, July 5).

Deconstruction of American culture

This section focuses on the readers’ comments relating to what the American culture is about.

By ycartrob, the reader remarked

“seeing how the USA has such a high murder rate, I think these Kurds are assimilating well to our American values...now if we can only get the Kurdish women to wear bling-bling, show thier mid drifts, embrace the notion that they are bitches and ho's, then they'd really be considered Americans. Huh?” The readers who are xenophobic focuses on natural born citizenship. (The City Paper, 2007, July 5).

Moreover, it is said that there has been a gang problem in the United States for a couple of hundred years. Gusdog remarked that “The coverage of KPG is exaggerated by the mass media. There is also other gang group, but media didn’t give attention.” (The City Paper, 2008, August 22).

“What aspects of American culture are the Kurdish kids ignoring? Gangs, unfortunately, ARE a part of American culture. It’s probably more of an American problem than a Kurdish problem, anyway. That sounds cynical, and maybe it is, but I guess what I’m saying is that it isn’t the Kurds who brought gang violence to our country. We’ve done that well for at least a couple of hundred years.” (The City Paper, 2007, July 5).

The reader, By Maestra, remarked that

“...I wonder why other gang incidents have not been as covered by this and other papers. For example, the graffiti at the new Harding Academy, the hugely covered-up incident at the shops at Highway 100 in which an employee had her face sliced up by a gang member, etc.” (The City Paper, 2008, August 22).

The reader, By TNKurd commented that

“This whole KPG thing has gone far far more then what it is. These are a bunch of 20-30 teenagers. Is all this media coverage and exploitation worth it? This is no more then the stupid f***** media trying to make something bigger then what it is.” Also, what does Kurdistan have anything to do with KPG? Yes these are Kurds, however I don’t think when a black guy is convicted of a gang related crime, the newspapers won’t be putting the whole history of Zimbabwe or Sudan or Nigeria on their.” (The City Paper, 2007, July 11).

By millenboy,

“As with a lot of immigrants from undeveloped countries the second generation has a difficult time. Half in the homeland their parents left and half in America. It seems these young men have pick up on some of the worst aspects of American culture. The most of the Kurds are smart, hardworking people. To bad these young men chose the wrong path. By the way birthright citizenship makes them undeportable U.S. citizens.” (The City Paper, 2007, July 11).

The reader remarked that the thug life is associated with gangsta rap music and is true among members of the Kurdish Pride Gang as well.

By greenwood, “Besides the fact that these people come from a terror ridden, rat hole of a country, they are here being fed the Hip-Hop crap and culture. This is a large part of how they end up so misguided. Until our culture eliminates that CRAP, it will not stop...Unfortunately, the lifestyle glorified in the music videos is a dicey proposition in urban America, because some of our young people aren't just playing it, they're living it!...Young gang members, many of them without guidance or role models in their lives, are slipping from society's grasp faster than we can catch them. But it's particularly galling to see corporate America cashing in on the carnage. This has obviously touched a nerve in our community. Whether it's called rap, gangsta rap, or hip-hop, It is violent, has violent degrading lyrics and glorifies street gangs. It truly has no place in our community and should be eradicated.” (The City Paper, 2007, July 11).

The reader, By silverfox, remarked that

“...first of all these young men came here as very small children. They learned how to live, defend themselves, and survive in the schools and on the streets in Nashville, Tennessee (NOT IRAQ) IN AMERICA FROM PEOPLE BORN HERE. Any alleged gang involvement and activities were learned and formed right here while they were growing up in Nashville, Tennessee (NOT IRAQ) as a matter of self-defense. Did all the "Gangs" in America (too numerous to name) "bring that here" with them also? I think not. Would the "MAXIMUM" sentence have been given to them if they were "WHITE AMERICANS" instead of "KURDISH AMERICANS"? I DOUBT IT....A lesser sentence with a lot of Community service attached at the end may have been a better form of rehabilitation and a better way to spend my tax dollars. People convicted of murder receive less time. I think the Judge and our Justice System was unfair and prejudiced against them. I BELIEVE AMERICA AS A WHOLE FAILED THESE YOUNG MEN.” (The City Paper, 2008, September 3).

Firsthand experience with Kurds

The reader, by Maestra, remarked that

“...I am a teacher and our three wonderful custodians are Kurdish. They would do anything for us and are nice, generous men. I also teach Kurdish students. Although of course crime should be reported and this act should definitely be prosecuted, I would hate to see biased coverage which promotes hatred just because of ethnicity. If you all haven't seen the documentary on NPT about our Kurdish community in Nashville, you should--it was very interesting and well-done.” (The City Paper, 2008, August 22).

The reader, By i.am.a.taxpayer, commented that

“Who said they are illegal immigrants? There are many good and decent Kurdish people in Nashville. Some of them had to escape for their lives from Saddam. Every group has good and bad people. The gangs have been in the United States for decades, and they have spread to Nashville. That doesn't excuse it. People should be punished if they are convicted of a crime. However, most criminals are neither immigrants nor gang members, so we have plenty of crime all around. They say crime is down in Nashville, but violent crime seems to be going up.” (The City Paper, 2007, August 10).

The reader, by nnotheworthy remarked that

“...I am not against Kurdish people in any way. My 1st-grader son has a Kurdish friend (and they are a lovely family, as far as I can tell). I buy my cigarettes (evil as both the cigarettes and my addiction to them are) from a Kurdish-owned and operated store. If a Brown Pride, Crip, Blood, Disciple, Saint, etc. attempted to kill a police-person, I would expect that, if convicted, they would spend a long time in jail. Honor-student or not, when you make the decision to shoot at someone, there are consequences, at least in America.” (The City Paper, 2008, September 3).

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it cannot be generalized since it focuses only one group and the data were limited to only one newspaper. We should also note that while this paper may be based in Nashville, we do not know where the commenters actually live.

Conclusion

This study is the first research that explores the relationship between news coverage about the Kurdish Pride Gang and public opinion. Since there is a Kurdish population of about

10,000 in Nashville and a Kurdish population of about 10 thousand in the United States, the news about the Kurdish Pride Gang is reported in local newspapers as well as national newspapers and television shows. This abundance of information contributes valuable insights into how news coverage of the Kurdish Pride Gang influences public opinion on Kurds at the local level as well as nationwide. Furthermore, this research contributes to the body of the literature pertaining to the influence of newspaper coverage on public opinion.

In this study, some readers supported the dominant (preferred) meaning and some supported an oppositional meaning challenging the dominant meaning. Surprisingly, those comments challenging the dominant meaning and supporting deconstruction of American culture made up the dominant theme.

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