MEMES TO AN END:
AN ANALYSIS OF ONLINE ACTIVIST ART FROM THE PENN STATE BLUE OUT MOVEMENT TO END CHILD ABUSE

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by
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the use of contemporary Internet memes within online activist spaces. The novelty of social networks limits the amount of research currently available on the topic, restricting information on the pedagogical repercussions of social media within social justice art education. Visual imagery shared on the 2011 Blue Out Facebook event page offers an opportunity to discover new implications for the field. All content on the Facebook event page was examined to compare rates of interaction (“Likes,” “Shares,” and replies) of different posts types. The high proportion of interaction enjoyed by the Blue Out Internet memes, as compared to hyperlink and text, sheds light onto how these works functioned within the event’s online activist environment. Furthermore, this study uses visual discourse analysis (Rose, 2012) to examine the ideas portrayed by the Blue Out Internet memes.
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PREFACE

The fallout from Jerry Sandusky’s grand jury report and ensuing media attention was unlike anything I have ever experienced. My family has lived in central Pennsylvania for over 100 years. It is impossible to grow up here without finding oneself inextricably connected to The Pennsylvania State University and the major figures of the Sandusky scandal. Joe Paterno was a long-time friend of my grandfather and uncle. I went to sleepovers thrown by Graham Spanier’s daughter. My best friend’s brother worked at Sandusky’s Second Mile summer camps. In fact, he told me that volunteers were besieged with background checks and training to recognize and report child abuse.

I used to be proud of Penn State’s football program. I truly believed that our head coach was committed to leading an ethical and moral team. Paterno championed a “Grand Experiment,” which he saw as proof that collegiate sports and academic integrity could coexist (Mahler, 2011). He endowed a library wing, professorial grants, and countless student scholarships. My personal objections to the amount of time, money, and veneration given to a violent and male-dominated sport were swayed by the assumption that the game provided more good than harm to the local area. After all, home football games were the lifeblood of my hometown’s economy. Every hotel room was reserved, every restaurant was booked, and every retail business (including my family’s clothing shop) enjoyed a prosperous weekend. We allowed football to control our way of life.

After earning my undergraduate degree in art from Penn State, I worked in New York for three and a half years as a web designer for a large corporation. I returned to State College in 2010 to be near my father. He had lost his sight and been ill for most of my life, but his health was quickly deteriorating. I chose to apply to graduate school in art education at Penn State because I wanted to combine my three passions: art, technology, and people. Years spent working
in a corporate environment had taken their toll, and I looked forward to rebooting my career in a more socially responsible field. Growing up with a blind father made me realize the importance of technology for the differently-abled. I started my graduate program with a focus on designing creative spaces and other arts-related outlets that could be accessed by people regardless of their physical, mental, or social abilities.

My partner, Stuart Shapiro, was born in Connecticut and graduated from the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University with a degree in film and television production. After graduation he produced broadcast and interactive commercials at a large advertising agency that created commercials for my company. We met six months before I returned to Penn State for graduate school. A year later, I convinced Stuart to join me for the 2011 school year. He had started working on side projects for non-profits and became interested in campaign development for social causes, and wanted to switch to a career that involved connecting non-profits and corporations for mutual benefit. He found that he needed to learn more about how businesses are run, so he enrolled in Penn State's MBA program in fall 2011.

The news of Sandusky's criminal allegations broke on a regular weekend. Stuart and I were sitting on the couch—procrastinating from homework—when he found the grand jury report on a sports blog. A book that I recently read for an art education class, *Releasing the Imagination* by Maxine Greene (2000), posited that the arts offer us the ability to imagine the world in a different way. The only way I was able to re-imagine the situation laid out by the Sandusky grand jury report was a world without child rape and cover-ups. With this re-imagined world mind, I searched the Internet for the term “child abuse ribbon color,” and the first result showed that dark blue (the color of bruises) was used to represent support for child abuse prevention. Coincidentally, dark royal blue is also a traditional Penn State color.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Just as it takes a village to raise a child, so it took a university to write this thesis. The Blue Out could not have happened without the compassion and mobilization of the entire Penn State community. First, I would like to thank Stuart Shapiro, a terrific accomplice who manages to pacify concerns ranging from international news coverage to getting dinner ready. My deepest appreciation extends to my advisers, B. Stephen Carpenter, II and Kimberly Powell, for their unwavering support and guidance—especially when it takes the form of song-and-dance numbers. I am grateful for the advice and assistance I received from close friends and family as well as my professors within the Art Education program and colleagues at the Institute for the Arts and Humanities. Finally, I would like to recognize my mother, Lynn Petnick, for her steadfast love and care. I dedicate this work to the memory of my father, Nick (Lester) Petnick, who was delighted to see his daughter’s crazy scheme succeed.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Activism through art thrives on social media. User-created artwork illustrates an innate need for creative expression in times of crisis, yet the newness of social media limits the amount of scholarly research currently available on the topic. To date, there is no easily accessible information regarding the purpose of organic art production within digital activism. Analyzing these artworks and the responses they collect will advance our understanding of social media’s current applications and generate strategies for future social justice-based art education programs.

In November 2011, I used Facebook to create and co-organize the first Blue Out at The Pennsylvania State University, the largest public response to the school’s child sex abuse scandal. The student-led and online-managed event came to fruition offline on November 12, 2011, six days after its initial inception. Over 100,000 people at Penn State’s football stadium wore dark blue to show solidarity with the victims and survivors of child abuse. Without any provocation, 16 unique user-created images inspired by the Blue Out were uploaded onto the event’s Facebook wall in the six days before the event, sparking hundreds of associated responses. This memetic spread of information through digital art encouraged online and offline participation in a grassroots activist community.

This chapter presents an overview of the entire thesis. I begin by explaining the significance of this study, emphasizing the lack of information regarding organic art production in online activist spaces and posing future implications for social justice art education. Next, I propose research questions that examine the function and themes of the Blue Out Internet memes. I offer specifics on my methods of data collection and analysis before wrapping up this chapter with details on the Penn State sex abuse scandal and the Blue Out movement’s origins.
Significance of Study

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the function and themes of the Blue Out Internet memes. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of information on organic art production within online activist spaces. I use the term “organic” to describe these images in contrast to work created in response to a specific call for content. Tatarchevskiy (2011) found nonprofits, such as Bono’s ONE campaign, often outsourced visual labor (in the form of posts, YouTube videos, e.g.) to their social media networks. However, this does not explain unsolicited creative output—particularly that of Internet memes. Internet memes are appropriated digital objects that have been altered and repositioned back into their original context (Nooney, 2012).

Understanding the themes contained within the successful Blue Out Internet memes and the functions of these images allows art educators to tap into the zeitgeist of contemporary online culture and create curricula that reflect authentic instruction for visual art production. Authentic instruction refers to learner-centered activities that focus “on real-world, complex problems and their solutions, using role-playing exercises, problem-based activities, case studies, and participation in virtual communities of practice” (Lombardi, 2007, p. 2). Art educators interested in social justice should find any example of spontaneous visual production combined with activism appealing. The creators of the Blue Out Internet memes became arts-based activists on their own time using available tools. This example can also inspire current and future art education students. Learners who have been previously exposed to activist memes and see the value of creating them may have an easier time constructing meaning and producing knowledge using disciplined inquiry. In particular, this prior knowledge will facilitate the meaning-making process and encourage students to aim their work toward the production of artwork that has value or meaning beyond school achievement (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993, p. 8).
Research Questions

The Blue Out Facebook event page offers the opportunity to uncover the purpose of Internet memes within an online activist space. To understand how these posts function as compared to other content posted to the page, rates of user interactions ("Likes," "Shares," and reply comments) need to be compared. However, this method does not identify what the Internet memes communicate. Rose’s (2012) visual discourse analysis structure provides an approach to research that extends analysis to the larger dialogues surrounding images. For example, one Blue Out Internet meme gives the words “defend our honor” much more prominence than “support the team,” which, in turn, is more prominent than the words, “support the kids.” This implies a discourse that values the Penn State football team more than the children victimized by Sandusky and disregarded by university administrators. In summary, examining successful Blue Out images within the context of their creation and reception will satisfy the following research questions:

1. How did the Blue Out Internet memes function within the event’s Facebook page?
2. What themes were portrayed by the most successful Blue Out Internet memes?

Defining Success

Like Dawkins (2006/1976) and Blackmore (1999), I use the word “successful” to describe the most spreadable memes. Dawkins, creator of the word meme, explained “…just as not all genes that can replicate do so successfully, so some memes are more successful in the meme-pool than others. This is the analogue of natural selection” (2006/1976, p. 194). Furthermore, Blackmore (1999) viewed memes as autonomous from their hosts and “selfish,” meaning that they work “only to get themselves copied” (p. 8). The Blue Out Internet memes that spread farthest across Facebook as identified through user “Likes,” “Shares,” and reply comments
are, therefore, the most successful in this study. However, this definition of success does not infer qualitative traits. It simply signifies a meme’s positive disseminating ability.

I use other terms to describe qualitative characteristics of the Blue Out Internet memes, as numbers can be misleading. For example, *The World Will Not Be Destroyed...* has an extremely high rate of reply comments, but most are provocative posts by the image’s creator and angry responses from other users. Even though the Internet meme spread effectively into the reply posters’ social network, qualitative analysis offers space for a more in-depth interpretation of this phenomenon. I chose to use Rose’s (2012) visual discourse analysis method to better understand my data, as it allowed me to more thoroughly investigate the relationship between the images and their context.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Data for this research were collected from the 2011 Blue Out Facebook event page. Only posts and associated actions made in the days between the launch of the page (Sunday, November 6, 2011) and the event date (Saturday, November 12, 2011) were considered, as spam comments permeated the page after the event. All content is still available to the public through http://on.fb.me/SPKBfX—viewers do not need an active Facebook account. Protections of current research guidelines, including those of Penn State’s Internal Review Board, have been deemed inapplicable to public postings in online forums. Unfortunately, the potential offline harm that may come through the re-publishing of grievances and opinions is very real. To mitigate this risk, profile images and user names were anonymized for this thesis. The 4,903 unique actions (i.e. posts, replies, “Likes,” and “Shares”) on the event page were saved as a PDF and coded using ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software. I chose this software for its ability to code and analyze large amounts of data; the Facebook page’s PDF was 171 pages and 26.7 megabytes.
This thesis focuses on the images posted to the first Penn State Blue Out Facebook event wall. Examining creative expressions inspired by the Blue Out but shared through other channels is beyond the scope of this project. Future research could examine these productions as well as those made for subsequent Blue Out events. Only publicly accessible contributions are discussed out of respect for the privacy of their authors.

Personal belief in feminist and inclusive humanist philosophies influenced my decision to create, advertise, and manage the Blue Out event. These values continue to inform my reflection upon the data. Sensitivity towards human rights (particularly the protection of children) was central to the analysis of these Facebook posts. Others who have different priorities and/or beliefs will view the data differently and may consequently find different meanings.

Repercussions of Gerald “Jerry” Sandusky’s rape of children and its subsequent impact on The Pennsylvania State University continue to be felt. It is a highly controversial and sensitive case that provokes a myriad of reactions from community members (i.e. students, faculty, staff, alumni, and State College residents). Complete details regarding the actions (or non-actions) taken by members of the university administration and coaching staff have yet to be examined in a court of law. Once again, I reiterate my previous statement of sensitivity towards children’s rights, as it transcends any possible indignation stemming from the treatment of adults who were aware of their victimization. Consequently, the following section’s overview of the scandal and its immediate impact on the Penn State community reflect this position. Subsequent information revealed in the future may also influence these findings.

**Overview of the Sandusky/Penn State Child Rape Scandal**

The report detailed graphic sex crimes committed by the former Penn State assistant football coach against eight children between 1994 and 2008. During his 30-year tenure at the university, Sandusky founded The Second Mile, a charitable organization for “troubled” youth (Pennsylvania Attorney General, 2011, p. 1). Sandusky met each of the victims described in the report through the charity, which gave him “access to hundreds of boys, many of whom were vulnerable due to their social situations” (Pennsylvania Attorney General, 2011, p. 1).

Two Penn State administrators, Timothy Curley (Director of Athletics) and Gary Schultz (SVP of Finance & Business and overseer of the university police department) were also discussed in the first grand jury report. The grand jury found that Curley and Schultz had failed to act appropriately upon known reports of Sandusky’s behavior. Furthermore, their credibility as witnesses was questioned (Pennsylvania Attorney General, 2011, pp. 7-11). Curley and Schultz have since been charged with perjury (Associated Press, 2012).

The published grand jury report also revealed that Michael “Mike” McQueary saw Sandusky raping a child inside a Penn State sports facility in 2002 (Pennsylvania Attorney General, 2011, p. 6). At the time, McQueary was a graduate assistant with the football program, but had since been promoted to a receiver’s coach at the time of his interview with the grand jury. He described the rape to the head football coach, Joseph “Joe” Paterno, the following day (Pennsylvania Attorney General, 2011, p. 7). The next day, Paterno reportedly told Curley and Schultz that McQueary had seen Sandusky “fondling or doing something of a sexual nature to a young boy” (Pennsylvania Attorney General, 2011, p. 7). Curley and Schultz reported that Sandusky may have acted inappropriately with a child to the then-university president Graham Spanier, but Spanier denied being told that the incident was sexual in nature (Pennsylvania Attorney General, 2011, p. 8). Spanier, Curley, and Schultz banned Sandusky from bringing children into the Penn State athletic showering facilities, but did not attempt to identify the victim.
Sandusky continued unabatedly abusing children until the mother of “Victim 1” reported her suspicions via a phone call to her son’s high school administrators in 2008 (Pennsylvania Attorney General, 2011, p. 5). In 2012, Victim 1 said his school principal told him that “…Jerry has a heart of gold and that he wouldn't do those type of things” and asked him “to go home and think about it” upon hearing his description of the abuse (Rhee et al., 2012). Victim 1’s mother replied that they would notify the local Children and Youth Service bureau directly if the school did not take action and later learned that the school communicated the allegations to the police—but only after their face-to-face meeting (Rhee et al., 2012). According to Pennsylvania’s Child Protective Services Law mandated reporting requirements (2001), suspected child abuse should have been reported immediately to the Department of Public Welfare.

Yet Sandusky was not charged until three years later, the morning after the grand jury report was made public. On the same day that Sandusky was charged, President Spanier released his first and only official statement regarding the allegations, in which he expressed “unconditional support” for Curley and Schultz (Spanier, 2011). The university administration fell silent for the rest of the weekend after this announcement, even as camera crews and news vans flooded the school and surrounding town. As the entire Penn State community waited for guidance, tensions rose. On Monday, November 7, 2011, a spokesperson for the university’s Board of Trustees told the press that Curley and Schultz were placed on administrative leave and provided a seemingly trivial list of measures the school would take in response to the allegations (Pickel, 2011). One of these actions included an independent review of the grand jury’s claims against university administrators, which later became known as the Freeh Report. While no specific timeframe was given for the review, the report’s findings were made public on July 12, 2012 (Penn State News, 2011; Freeh, 2012).
Three days passed until another announcement was made. On a live broadcast late Wednesday night, another spokesperson from the Board of Trustees revealed that President Spanier and Coach Paterno were dismissed from their administrative positions (although not fired). Frustrated students—many of whom viewed Paterno as a father-figure—took to the streets of Downtown State College immediately, causing approximately $22,000 in damage (Gallagher, 2011a, 2011b). Penn Staters needed a more constructive outlet for their disappointment, anger, and shame.

Many events occurred the week immediately following the release of Sandusky’s grand jury report. *Figure 1.1* shows a general timeline of these events as they unfolded. For larger, more detailed look at each event, refer to *Appendix B: Detailed timeline of events: 11/5/2011 – 11/11/2011*. A full interactive timeline with links and multimedia is available at www.lauramarch.com/blue-out-timeline.

**Origins of the Blue Out**

Minutes after learning that dark blue was the nationally-recognized color of child abuse prevention, I began to plan the Blue Out event with my partner, Stuart Shapiro, as a way of showing visual solidarity with victims and survivors. Together we started spreading the idea of wearing the color at the next—and last—home football game of the 2011 season through social media. Previously, the game was an officially scheduled "White Out," in which fans were asked to dress in white to intimidate the opposing team (Auerback, 2011). The idea to change from a White Out to a Blue Out as an act of protest quickly spread through social and printed media. Stuart and I worked closely with Therese Jones, a Penn State alumna, who created an event page on Facebook with the same idea. Together we managed the social media presence for the first Blue Out, garnering over 28,000 invitees in six days. *Figure 1.2* shows a screenshot of a video
detailing the origins of the Blue Out that Stuart and I produced. The full video is available online at http://youtu.be/ME0dRuwVwpA.

The Blue Out’s Facebook page became a public space for discussing the Penn State scandal in real time. Unlike the official university Facebook page (see Appendix C), Stuart, Therese, and I refused to remove any content that was posted to the event wall. When users complained of inappropriate postings, we encouraged them to use Facebook’s “Report” function. Not only did this foster democratic discussion, but users who were in violation of the site’s community standards would also face repercussions for their actions. If comments were simply deleted, as some of those that were posted to the official Penn State page (refer to Appendix C), the authors could continue their harassment without any consequences.

Four hundred ninety-seven original posts and 1,245 replies were posted on the Blue Out Facebook event page. Of these posts, 16 were original, user-created images. According to their associated profiles, creators of the most popular images (in terms of reply comments, “Likes” and “Shares”) did not have visual arts backgrounds. Why did adults with degrees in areas such as engineering, mathematics, and journalism feel compelled to create pieces of visual imagery, and what did they wish to communicate by publically sharing their work in this space? To answer these questions, I first look to the current literature on memes and memetics, arts-based activism, and engagement through social media.

On a final note, my father died a month after the first Blue Out. In one of our last conversations, he said he was proud of Stuart and me for doing something to bring his community together again—especially when the people in charge of the university did nothing. Sales of a shirt I designed supplied proceeds that were donated to abuse prevention charities and volunteers were allowed to can for money at the stadium—something that has rarely been allowed by Penn State administrators. I cut and pinned thousands of blue ribbons that were passed out with educational materials on rape before the game. In six days we raised $47,000. Even though my
father was not physically able to see a stadium full of people wearing blue on November 11, 2011, he happily wore my Blue Out event t-shirt while listening to the game on his radio.

In summary, I used this introductory chapter to provide an overview of my thesis, the Penn State sex abuse scandal, and the origins of the Blue Out. In Chapter 2, I review current literature to frame the Blue Out Internet memes within the contexts of memetics and contemporary Internet meme culture, art activism and social justice art education, and engagement through images on social media. I detail the methods used to analyze the Blue Out Internet memes to examine their purpose and major themes in Chapter 3. To do this, I compile rates of interaction between different types of content on the page (images, hyperlinks, and text posts). Next, I use visual discourse analysis (Rose, 2012) to ascertain the concepts portrayed within the Blue Out Internet memes. In Chapter 4 I display the findings of this analysis. Proportionally high rates of interaction with the Blue Out Internet memes combined with the uncovered discourses of appropriation, text usage, memeplexes, digital imaging tools, and visible mistakes provide substantial implications. These implications are revealed in regards to the Blue Out movement, memes, art education, and social media in Chapter 5. I also include recommendations for further research in the final chapter.
Figure 1.1. Timeline
Figure 1.2. Hyperlinked Screenshot of Blue Out Origin Video.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The previous chapter provided an overview of this thesis that detailed the significance of studying the organically created images shared on the Blue Out event’s Facebook page. Additionally, I discussed the Penn State sex abuse scandal and origins of the Blue Out movement.

In this chapter I look to the current research available on memes, art activism, and social media to frame my understanding of how the Blue Out images functioned and the ideas they expressed. First, memetics offers a conceptualization of how and why ideas spread. Next, contextualizing the Blue Out Internet memes as representations of art activism illustrates the significance of social justice art education. Finally, I describe the current understandings of social media, particularly the impact of engagement and user-generated content, to provide a baseline for comparing the Blue Out Internet memes to previous research.

Memes

*The Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word meme as “a cultural element or behavioural trait whose transmission and consequent persistence in a population, although occurring by non-genetic means (esp. imitation), is considered as analogous to the inheritance of a gene” (Meme, 2012). First coined in 1976 by biologist Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*, meme is a shortened version of *mimeme* (Greek for imitation) and pronounced to sound like the word gene (Dawkins, 2006/1976, p. 192). The imitation required to spread memes does not necessarily refer to an exact copy; rather, the essence of an idea must be replicated (Dawkins, 2006/1976, p. 194; Blackmore, 1999, p. 6). Just as genetic variation is required for biological evolution, memetic variation promotes cultural evolution (Distin, 2005, p. 13). Human life is
permeated with memes and their consequences, as everything learned through imitation is a meme (Blackmore, 1999, p. 6). This includes “tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches” (Dawkins, 2006/1976, p. 192).

A singular meme is “an entity that is capable of being transmitted from one brain to another” (Dawkins, 2006/1976, p. 196). More narrowly, memetic units “are the smallest elements that replicate themselves with reliability and fecundity” (Dennett, 1996, p. 344). This is useful for understanding how and why memes become linked, creating a memeplex. Blackmore (1999) explains “the essence of any memeplex is that the memes inside it can replicate better as part of the group than they can on their own” (p. 169).

Like genetic natural selection, some memes replicate more successfully than others (Dawkins, 2006/1976, p. 194). Blackmore (1999) states memes that grab one’s attention and require mental rehearsing will have a better chance of being passed on than those that bury themselves quietly in memory, are never rehearsed, or are too boring to be thought of again (p. 41). She also posits that human evolution created brains to be especially concerned with sex, food, and power, so popular memes often reflect these genetic concerns (Blackmore, 1999, p. 121). Blackmore (1999) maintains that we are more often persuaded to imitate others that are powerful, famous, and/or perceived to be similar to ourselves (p. 141, 163). On the other hand, she provides memetic understanding for altruism (a behavior that benefits another at the expense of oneself) that cannot be explained by biological evolution (Blackmore, 1999, p. 147). Altruistic people become popular, and “because they are popular they are copied, and because they are copied their memes spread more widely than the memes of not-so-altruistic people, including the altruism memes themselves” (Blackmore, 1999, p. 155).

The use of the word meme recently increased. It achieved its highest gain in popularity as a Google search term in January 2012 and continues to maintain the same numbers as of early 2013 (Google Trends, 2013). Approximately 20,400,000 global monthly searches that included
the term were performed on Google over the past year (Google AdWords, 2013). It appears as if this scientific word for a unit of culture is experiencing a renaissance, perhaps due to the fact that the word meme has evolved to signify popular Internet trends.

**Internet Memes**

Mike Godwin, an attorney specializing in Internet law, was the first person to connect the term ‘meme’ to popular Internet phenomena (Conger, 2011). In a 1994 *Wired* magazine article, Godwin described how he designed a “counter-meme” in 1990 to show discussion participants how Nazi and Hitler comparisons are offensive. For example, rhetorical devices used to describe women’s rights campaigners as “feminazis,” or compare Barak Obama’s healthcare reform as “a new holocaust” are irrelevant and logically unsound (Chivers, 2009). As a means to address this widespread phenomenon, Godwin proposed a response to be evoked when necessary, named “Godwin's Law of Nazi Analogies: As an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches one” (Godwin, 1994). To his surprise, Godwin found a lower incidence of glib Nazi comparisons occurred in forums he seeded with the counter-meme (Godwin, 2008).

Godwin’s objective was to empower online forum users “to make a conscious effort to control the kinds of memes they create or circulate” (1994). In doing so, I posit that Godwin’s Law became a form of activism. While Godwin’s Law references text-based discussions in particular, the Internet has since expanded to include other types of media-based interactions over the past 23 years. The counter-meme’s continued use today illustrates the sustained success that other activist memes could potentially enjoy.
As illustrated by the spread of Godwin’s Law, the Internet provides fertile ground for the global diffusion of memes (ThinkQuest, 2000). Memes can be copied without errors at any time to another online device around the world (Blackmore, 1999, p. 216). Transmission of memes through the Internet is relatively simple and does not incur the costs associated with radio, TV, print, or word-of-mouth proselytism (ThinkQuest, 2000). The advent of social media allows memes to spread through one’s online network of friends at lightning speed. Conversely, the anonymity of online forums such as 4chan may also help spread unpopular memes, as advocates are not required to reveal their offline identities in these spaces (ThinkQuest, 2000). In a call for papers on the topic, the Journal of Visual Culture describes Internet memes as “digital objects that riff on a given visual, textual or auditory form” that “must be appropriated, re-coded, and slotted back into the Internet infrastructures it came from” (Nooney, 2012). While the issue containing these papers will not be published until 2014, this definition best describes the contemporary understanding of Internet memes. Consequently, I use the term “Internet meme” and “Blue Out Internet meme” to differentiate this specific use of the term.

Critiques of Memetics

In responding to a critique of memetics, Blackmore (1999) pointed out similarities between memes and signs. Semiotics reasons that signs are a product of biological evolution, as symbols must provide a selective advantage for the transmission of genes. While memes may have their origins in a biologically evolved trait (imitation), they do not need a genetic reason for existing (Dawkins, 2006/1976, p. 198; Blackmore, 1999, p. 98). Memetic theory explains that

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1 All online, digital networks are part of the Internet; the term ‘World Wide Web’ describes the subset of the Internet that delivers HTML pages through web browsers (Gil, 2010). Tim Berners-Lee, a software engineer at CERN, created the Web in 1989 to facilitate the exchange of scientific data and results (World Wide Web Foundation, 2013). Berners-Lee proposed three technologies (HyperText Markup Language, Uniform Resource Identifier, and HyperText Transfer Protocol) that continue to remain the foundation of today’s Web (World Wide Web Foundation, 2013).
both genes and memes are replicators and exist only to copy themselves, which is why memes may sometimes come in conflict with genes. In fact, memes such as religious celibacy actually inhibit genetic transmission.

Many supporters of religion also condemn memetics. Dawkins and other evolutionary biologists that developed the theory regularly use religious beliefs and behaviors as examples of memes (like the discussion of celibacy above). Concepts such as deities and an afterlife are powerful aspects of many cultures. Framing them as cultural units that spread exceptionally well can be threatening. However, many scientific theories now accepted as truth (such as heliocentrism and evolution itself) were originally viewed as extremely frightening (Blackmore, 1999, p. 8).

**Arts Activism**

**Art and Transformative Aesthetic Experiences**

Like spreading memes, the act of artistic invention can be viewed as a basic need.

Elizabeth Grosz, reflecting on the philosophy of Deleuze, suggests there is a common force shared between the arts and all sentient beings that originates from the universe itself (2008, pp. 82-83). Expressive behavior is also seen in many species on both a biological and memetic level. For example, Darwin discusses the colorful transformation of male fish during their mating season as a natural means to intensify their appeal towards the opposite sex (Grosz, 2008, p. 67). Blackmore (1999) describes artistic behavior as indicative of one’s meme-spreading ability and therefore, a desirable trait in one’s mate (p. 131).

Creativity and artistic output provide a great way to copy, use, and spread memes (Blackmore, 1999, p. 131). Much like evolution itself, human creativity thrives on variation and
recombination (Blackmore, 1999, p. 15). Art educators Eisner (2002) and Greene (2000) complicate Blackmore’s notion of creativity, adding additional reasons for its existence. The arts provide the conditions needed to help learners notice the world (Eisner, 2002, p. 10) and imagination fosters alternatives and breaks from traditions (Greene, 2000, p. 3). Imagination makes empathy possible, allowing people to create a coherent world (Greene, 2000, p. 3).

Using imagination and technical skills, artists shape cultural objects, images, encounters, and moments that influence our experience (Eisner, 2002, p. 17). The act of expression transforms energy into action through the combination of meanings created by past experiences (Dewey, 2005/1934, p. 63). Art provides transformative aesthetic experiences through expressive content, which refers to the emotional quality of a piece (Eisner, 2002, p. 87). This uniquely personal event “is shaped not only by the work, but by what an individual brings to the work” (Eisner, 2002, p. 87).

Artistic engagement “can offer aesthetic experiences that are not only pleasing, but that transform the very way we encounter our world” (Albers & Harste, 2007, p. 8). As defined by Dewey (2005/1934), an aesthetic experience is the “conversion of resistance and tensions, of excitations that in themselves are temptations to diversion, into a movement toward an inclusive and fulfilling close” (p. 58). Involvement with the arts enables us “to see more in our experience, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routines, habits, and conventions have obscured” (Greene, 1995, p. 379). The awakening of one’s self to the world, how places and relationships feel, the noticing of our environment and the root of individual autonomy is the cognitive function of the arts (Eisner, 2002, p. 10). Growth occurs in this moment of intellectual stimulation.

Beyond promoting alternative understandings of the world, the arts engage the imagination through exploring new possibilities free from rigid rules and procedures (Eisner, 2002, p. 10). These possibilities create spaces of freedom for people to become initiators and
agents, “existing among others but with the power to choose for herself or himself” (Greene, 2000, p. 22). Imagination also enables us to create new connections based on past experiences while also suggesting the contingency of one’s personal reality (Greene, 2000, p. 30). Once reality is viewed as provisional, then changing reality can occur. Contradicting the established through art “leads those who are willing to risk transformations to the shaping of a social vision” in which “we are likely to strain towards conceptions of a better order of things” (Greene, 2000, p. 30; p. 122).

Educators must encourage constant dialog, risk-taking, and mistake-making in order to construct environments where learners are not limited by the conformity inherent in pedagogies that include relentless evaluative judgment (Frazier, 2001). As such, transformative learning is inherently messy. Embracing this ambiguity within an educational environment can be done through pedagogies of uncertainty (Shulman, 2005) or planned uncertainty (Lankford, 1990). These teaching philosophies require goals and plenty of preparation, but also emphasize content derived from student engagement and learner-centered projects (Shulman, 2005; Lankford, 1990). An open and interpretive approach to both subject matter and the lives of learners may help students create a newly human world that is “both durable and open to continual renewal” (Greene, 1985, pp. 79-81).

Eisner (2002) reasons that the “most significant kind of learning in virtually any field creates a desire to pursue learning in that field when one doesn’t have to…The aim of the educational process inside schools is not to finish something, but to start something” (p. 90). The Blue Out was not started for course credit, but began as a connection between current events and Maxine Greene’s philosophy, a topic originally brought up in an art education class. Most importantly, it inspired others to spend their personal time and effort to create works of art and participate in discussions. Examination of the Blue Out images illustrates how contemporary Internet memes offer a creative platform to express one’s desire to change the status quo.
Art Education and Social Justice Artmaking

Since aesthetic experiences can expose new possibilities, art educators must provide opportunities for themselves and their learners to choose to become persons of integrity (Greene, 2000, p. 127). Exploring multifaceted issues empowers both instructors and students “to make sense of the complex, postmodern society and their places within it” (Jeffers, 2002, p. 167). After all, social, political and cultural issues are important subjects to address within the arts classroom since they provide the contexts where one teaches, interprets, and makes art (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002, p. 3). Focusing on social issues reminds learners that art is never politically neutral and can lead to an acceptance that their own world is socially constructed and, consequently, can be changed (Wyrick, 2002, p. 222).

Social justice artmaking is “the process of making art [that] offers participants a way to construct knowledge, critically analyze an idea, and take action in the world” (Dewhurst, 2010). The term social justice refers to “the vision of a society that is equitable and in which all members are physically and psychologically safe” and “demands that all people have a right to basic human dignity and to have their basic economic needs met” (Center for Nonviolence & Social Justice, 2008). Since art provides insights into contemporary issues and inequalities through emotion and passion, it can strengthen one’s commitment to social justice (Schivone, 2009). Key pedagogical features that can initiate social justice artmaking projects include collaborative, reciprocal, and contextual planning; student-driven projects; relevant reflection; critical questions; tactical balance; and a public audience (Dewhurst, 2010).

Art activism, a term referring to activism that utilizes the arts, is “largely untapped and underutilized” (Shank, 2005). However, art activism provides the tools needed by the social justice movement to win hearts and minds through emotional and cognitive tactics (Shank, 2005). Art activists who promote social change within unjust systems “can either (1) employ art to wage
conflict nonviolently when confronting powerful structures, systems, or organizations; or (2) utilize art to build capacity among the powerless and disenfranchised movements” (Shank, 2005). The popularity of Do-It-Yourself kits and other arts-and-crafts activities after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks suggests that creative outlets are also needed in times of crisis, which stems from a desire to feel resourceful and in control of the situation (Umbrico, 2010). Furthermore, art activism is not only confined to the visual arts. Other creative disciplines utilizing art activism include music and drama, such as protest songs (Phull, 2008) and Boal’s (1985) *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

One popular method of visual art activism is culture jamming, a genre that “takes the form of popular culture, but with the purpose of subverting and critiquing that culture” (Lievrouw, 2011, p. 73). Culture jammers, as described by Lasn (2000), are a loose network of media activists seeking to disrupt existing power struggles and change human interaction with mass media (p. xi). In other words, culture jamming is a technique that transforms existing mass media objects in a way that acts as a public social commentary on the original media itself (Albers & Harste, 2007, p. 16). One example of culture jamming is the work created by the activist group ACT UP in the 1980s and 1990s. ACT UP distributed fake money and newspapers on Wall Street to direct attention to the growing AIDS crisis (Frankenstein, 2011, p. 34). Culture jamming provides “ways that people can disrupt the taken-for-granted, such as developing educational materials, creating alternative journalism, and participating in civil disobedience” (Frankenstein, 2011, p. 34). Darts (2004) connected this contemporary artmaking strategy to the classroom, theorizing that educators can generate student engagement with everyday sociopolitical discourses through creative explorations of themes with shared social significance (p. 325).

Internet memes that critique social, political, or cultural messages can also be labeled as culture jams. There are entire series of culture jamming Internet memes. Examples of these
include *Feminist Ryan Gosling* (Henderson, 2013), *Texts from Hillary* (Lambe & Smith, 2012), and *Feminist Hulk* (Lawson, 2013). Conversely, some artists use established Internet memes to craft singular instances of culture jams. *Figure 2.1* illustrates how the *One Does Not Simply*... meme riffs on Mitt Romney’s gaff during a 2012 presidential election debate (WeKnowMemes, 2012).

**Visual Culture**

Culture jamming and other social justice artemaking practices can be studied in the classroom as examples of visual culture. Visual culture concerns “visual events in which information, meaning or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology” (Mirzoeff, 1999, p. 3). Since the field of visual culture encompasses all visual information, it confronts the traditional boundaries between high and low culture; it also challenges materiality versus simulation as it relates to the abundance of online digital imagery (Bowen & Nemanic, 2010, p. xiii). Traditional boundaries are further blurred when visual artists employ media strategies and advertisers use “fine art” to sell products (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002, p. 15). Art instructors employ pedagogical theories such as contextualism (studying the meaning of an object through its function) as tools to examine pieces of visual culture (Jeffers, 2002, pp. 159-160). While Jeffers (2002) suggested that contextualism emphasizes function over aesthetic value, I believe the two can be mutually dependent. Perhaps the function of a work is contingent on its aesthetic appeal.
Color and Awareness

Color awareness ribbons are pieces of visual culture that serve a contextualized function. Advocacy through colored ribbons began during the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979, when Penne Laingen (the wife of a hostage) tied a yellow ribbon to an oak tree in her front yard (Spillane, 2003, p. 12). Laingen was inspired by the folksong, “Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree,” which details the triumphant return of an ex-convict. The most popular recording of the song was performed by Dawn, featuring Tony Orlando, in 1973 (Spillane, 2003, p. 13).

According to mid-20th century oral traditions (on which the song was based), a man returning home from prison on a train asked his wife to show him a sign visible from the platform if he was still wanted—if he didn’t see anything, he would continue on the train and start a new life (Parsons, 1991). Some versions of the story feature white ribbons covering an apple tree while others describe a yellow handkerchief tied to a roadside oak (Parsons, 1991). In any case, Laingen’s actions transformed the popular story-cum-folksong into reality. An advocacy group connected with the families affected by the Iranian hostage crisis distributed ten thousand yellow ribbon pins, thus cementing its new meaning (Parsons, 1991).

The memetic evolution of yellow ribbons continued its shift in signification. Yellow ribbons represented support for US hostages during the first Iraq war in 1990, but proliferated even after the hostages were released as a sign of encouragement for soldiers in the Persian Gulf (Spillane, 2003, p. 20). What was once a folkloric symbol of an ex-convict returning home developed into a show of care for hostages and later morphed into support for military combatants abroad. The “colored-ribbon-promoting awareness” meme soon diversified to encompass many other causes as well. Other early color/cause combinations included red for HIV/AIDS and pink for breast cancer (Spillane, 2003).
In 1989, Bonnie Finney tied a blue ribbon to her van as a symbol of her personal commitment to stop child abuse (Child Advocacy Services, 2013). She chose blue to represent the bruises she saw on her abused grandchildren’s bodies (Mississippi Department of Human Services, 2009). Since then, the blue ribbon has become a global symbol of child abuse prevention. The term child abuse includes all forms of physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011). While teal is the awareness color associated with sexual assault, the children raped by Sandusky were also harmed by the negligence of The Pennsylvania State University’s leaders. Blue encompasses both of these crimes. The Blue Out’s Facebook page used an image of a blue ribbon as its event icon. Consequently, this became a virtual symbol of supporting the victims and survivors of child abuse at Penn State.

Social Media, Engagement, and Online Activism

Social Media as a Site for Engagement and Art Activism

Widespread use of a new medium alters human life. The title of McLuhan’s groundbreaking work, “The Meaning is the Message,” describes the massive impact of new communication channels, as “the ‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs” (2006/1967, p. 108). For example, televisions did not exist one hundred years ago, yet Americans now spend an average of 36 hours and 41 minutes a week watching TV (Nielson, 2012a, p. 5). Similarly, the World Wide Web was only established in 1989 (World Wide Web Foundation, 2013), but today the average Internet user spends 29 hours of his or her week browsing online content through user interfaces (Nielson,
While the experience of watching television is passive, using the Internet (and, in particular, social media) requires active participation (Gauntlett, 2011, pp. 10-12).

The Internet provides a space where people can make and share things in order to communicate with like-minded users easily and without geographic restrictions (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 107). Like other visual culture platforms, online content contains creatively designed elements as well as text, aural, and kinesthetic components (Bowen & Nemanic, 2010, pp. xv). Making things to share online is, in itself, a craft process; creators start with basic tools and materials and imprint their character on their work (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 81). Social network users take advantage of easy-to-use online tools that enable people to collaborate, learn both about and from one another, and share resources (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 13).

Social networks, as defined by boyd and Ellison (2007), are online spaces in which users create a personalized profiles, form and share a list of connections, and peruse the profiles and networks of others (p. 211). The largest, Facebook, was started by Mark Zuckerberg in his Harvard dorm room in 2004 (Bertolucci, 2012). Facebook’s competition with Google to be the most-visited site on the Internet is currently neck-and-neck; however, the most searched term on Google is “facebook” (Alexa, 2012; Google Trends, 2012). The site reached 1 billion users in September 2012, supports 77 languages, and is free to use (Facebook, 2012a, 2012b). Facebook users can fill out a standardized profiles; “friend” others; “Like” celebrities, products, organizations, concepts, etc.; join groups and events; send private messages; play games; text and video chat; and “Share” content through “walls.”

User-Generated Content and Engagement

User-generated content powers Facebook by fostering engagement. The phrase user-generated content includes both the production of new work (otherwise known as user-created
content) and the sharing of items made by others (Östman, 2012, p. 1006). Engagement refers to sustained interest in content (Yaros, 2011, p. 60). The site’s “NewsFeed” template design encourages users to understand themselves in relation to the actions of others (Arola, 2010, p. 8). Facebook supports the distribution of text, images, video, and audio user-generated content. While some worry that Facebook acts as an “echo chamber” by repeating the same information and reinforcing the status quo, content analysis of the site found that users are more likely to be exposed to and spread information from distant contacts than close friends, making online social networks an important medium for sharing new ideas, events, and more (Bakshy, 2012).

Since photo sharing began in 2005, over 265 billion images have been uploaded to the site (Facebook, 2012a). Half of Facebook’s 1 billion users comment on images at least once a week (Hampton et al., 2011, p. 17). While research on Facebook has primarily been concerned with text, it is clear that the visual practices of self-expression and the use of images for engaging and communicative purposes is equally important (Autenrieth & Neumann-Braun, 2011, p. 9). If the motivation and reward for making and sharing art are essentially the same, “to be part of an active community, part of a conversation, and to feel somewhat more connected to people we know” (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 97), then the prevalence of art on social media comes as no surprise. As Bowen (2010) points out,

The ability to appropriate, produce and use diverse communicational and representational forms and literacies is crucial. How we spatialize our various communications practices to serve different purposes to different audiences problematizes negotiations across virtual/physical worlds and complements our perceptions of how we are seen by others.

(p. 42)

Personal self-expression through sharing images is integral to the social exchange process on Facebook (Autenrieth & Neumann-Braun, 2011, p. 10). This multimodal channel for self-expression fosters relationships (Hum et al., 2011, p. 1829). After all, Facebook users display
images on their profiles to both present and introduce themselves to others (Astheimer et al, 2011). Social media users “becomes actively present in the virtual space” through site activities like uploading other images or videos (Astheimer et al, 2011, p. 20). Online photo albums make it “possible to visually depict larger narrative contexts within which the profile owners can present themselves and their environment in various contexts in a multifaceted way” (Autenrieth, 2011, pp. 62-63).

Since trends in social media interaction change rapidly, the most up-to-date information on the topic stems from commercial applications for technology. As such, current research on the types and times of interactions within social media focuses on consumer interactions with brand pages. Buddy Media (2012) analyzed two months of data from 1,800 Facebook pages of the world’s largest brands to find the most effective commercial strategies. The marketing company found that “ Likes” make up approximately 79% of all interactions with a page, while comments and “Shares” account for 15% and 6%, respectively (Buddy Media, 2012, p. 3). Furthermore, Facebook user interaction rates are 69% higher on weekends and lowest on Wednesdays (Buddy Media, 2012, pp. 5-6). While the study does not provide many details on the difference of interaction rates between types of posts, it does note that on average, image and text posts received higher rates of interaction (39% and 12%, respectively) than hyperlinks or video files (Buddy Media, 2012, p. 17). This contradicts a 2011 study of Facebook brand pages that found text and video posts had the highest number of interactions, while photos and links elicited the least (Cvijikj et al., 2011, p. 813). Other social media marketers have found that page posts with calls-to-action (asking others to “Like,” “Share,” or reply) have high rates of corresponding interactions (Zarrella, 2012). However, the interactions on typical brand pages may not be the same as pages with non-commercial purposes.

Facebook was a natural fit for the Blue Out. The social media platform allowed organizers to reach out to diverse social groups quickly and inexpensively, as a vast majority
(86%) of those who are college-aged actively use the site (Brenner, 2012). This audience proved particularly receptive to the event’s message and used Facebook’s tools to spread it across their networks. Since two-thirds of Americans use social media to stay in touch with friends and family (Smith, 2011, p. 2), the platform created a space for Penn State community members to discuss current events with people they cared about. Additionally, the Blue Out Facebook event provides an example of a social media page that did not represent corporate or commercial interests. Analysis of this page highlights the differences between the ways users interact with businesses and not-for-profits on social media.

**Studying Social Media in the Social Justice Art Classroom**

In the art classroom, student interest in social media provides an easy and relevant entry point to class work (Tran et al., 2011, p. 57). Some art educators use online forums such as Facebook as inspiration for traditional 2D media projects, like the “Artist Postcard” pen-pals created by Cress (2013). However, meaningful multimodal pedagogy requires making design visible and exposing the discernable objectives within online spaces (Arola, 2010). Social justice art educators can show learners how social media facilitates “rapid scalability of civic action and the collective power of the individual” and emphasize the idea that any user could potentially make a contribution to society by leveraging technology (Tran et al., 2011, p. 57). Instructors required to provide direct links between course content and future employment can also point to the increasingly available career opportunities in social media management in both technology and non-technology related companies (Montalvo, 2011, p. 91). Most importantly, however, educators should focus on the ways in which social media shapes both our interactions and our identities (Arola, 2010, p. 7).
One major difficulty of researching social media is the misinterpretation of personal expressions (boyd, 2007, p. 12). Images produced with specific meanings for a particular audience “are at risk when read as texts in other contexts and under a different set of assumptions” (Bowen, 2010, p. 49). Also, since most online user engagement metrics are quantitative (number of users, click-throughs, page views, etc.), the diversity of experiences and interactions offered through today’s technology are often ignored (Lehmann et al., 2012, p. 164-165). Using social media in instructional settings also provides its own set of restrictions, as many institutions utilize Internet firewalls that prevent student access to social networking sites. This can be mitigated by the prevalence of students’ personal mobile phones, even across socioeconomic status (Tran et al., 2011, p. 57). Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that while images have historically been perceived as reflections of reality, viewing them as multi-layered cultural texts allows diverse interpretations. In the case of the Blue Out images, people became active producers of their own meanings by choosing their use of cultural texts (Bowen & Nemanic, 2010, p. xiv).

In Chapter 2 I reviewed literature that frames my research in terms of memetics, arts activism, and social media. As part of this inquiry, many areas of interest related to the study of the Blue Out Internet memes emerged. These include the performance of a memeplex when one of its memes is altered; how the popularity of Internet memes can be used to reach the aim of the educational process, as described by Eisner (2002), and spark a desire to continue the learning outside of school (p.90); and if the contextual purpose of a piece of visual culture described by Jeffers (2002) could indeed be contingent upon its aesthetic appeal. While the upcoming chapter offers a design for a study that is guided by the research questions determined in Chapter 1, i.e. how Blue Out images functioned and what ideas they portrayed, quantitative results and visual discourse analysis also provide a means for examining these specific concerns.
Figure 2.1. One Does Not Simply... Meme
Chapter 3

Framework, Design & Methodology

I reviewed the literature to contextualize my research in terms of memetics, art activism, social media in Chapter 2. These understandings facilitate the conceptualization of the Blue Out images as Internet memes in this chapter. First, I offer a framework for understanding how this designation intersects with aesthetic experiences and social media. Next, I explain the study’s design and image selection process. Subsequently, I detail the calculation of interaction rates and Rose’s (2012) visual discourse analysis strategies. These methods allow me to uncover (1) how these images functioned within the Blue Out Facebook event page and (2) the themes portrayed by the most successful Blue Out Internet memes. Identifying the function and expressive content within these images guides the contextualization of Internet memes and their significance within social justice art education.

Framework

The Blue Out event was a meme in the traditional sense of the word, meaning it was an idea that spread virus-like throughout a population. Accordingly, the idea of wearing blue to support the victims and survivors of child abuse at a football game circulated through the Penn State community. This meme was further supported by the existence of specific Blue Out Internet memes, appropriated digital entities that were altered and repositioned back into their original context (Nooney, 2012). While the actual Blue Out event occurred offline, it may not have existed without the rapid popularity it gained online.
Framing the Blue Out works as Internet memes offers the ability to understand how images were used to spread ideas. Their creators utilized contemporary artmaking skills and strategies to recontextualize pertinent imagery and slot it back into the event’s virtual space. Studying these images also provides an opportunity to delve into the significance and meanings found within expressive content created for an activist event. Social justice art educators can use these findings to demonstrate the importance of the arts and aesthetic experiences within online activist spaces and inspire learners to become more fully aware of the world and their ability to change it. This research also highlights the differences between the ways users interact with business and not-for-profit pages on social media and provides relevant implications.

Research Design

All data examined in this study was collected from the 4,903 public posts, “Likes,” and “Shares” on the 2011 Blue Out Facebook event page made between the launch of the page (Sunday, November 6, 2011) and the event date (Saturday, November 12, 2011). The page was expanded to show all interactions and saved in a Portable Document Format (PDF). Each interaction was coded using ATLAS.TI software. Content was coded as either “original” or “responses.” Posts that included images were coded as such. Finally, interactions with pieces of content (“Likes” and “Shares”) were connected to their corresponding posts.

Twenty-one of the original posts were images. Several conditions were established to determine the most successful Blue Out Internet memes to study. Repeated or unoriginal images were consolidated or removed. Three images of a t-shirt design I created for the event and one image that was re-posted later in the week by the same creator were consolidated. I disregarded one image of the Penn State Nittany Lion logo and one image of a screenshot of Jerry Sandusky’s book cover from Amazon.com, ironically named *Touched: The Jerry Sandusky Story.*
Consolidating the repeats as one image and disregarding the logo and screenshot left 16 original images that formed the body of data analyzed in this study. I did not study the images I personally created to mitigate personal bias. According to these conditions, the five most successful images as defined by the amount of interactions were *Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor; We Are Penn State; Buckeye White Out; The World Will Not Be Destroyed...; and Ever True To You, Dear Old White & Blue*. Popularity of interactions does not infer that other users agreed with the artwork’s sentiment, but rather infers its ability to elicit responses. Appendix D details the image selection process, connects the amount of interactions with each image, and provides a corresponding title to each work.

**Methodology**

I collected and compared the amount of interactions (“Likes,” “Shares,” and replies) garnered by all pieces of content according to type of post: image, hyperlink or text. Differences between the rates of interaction provide insights into how the Blue Out images functioned within the event’s Facebook page. Higher numbers of interactions with one post type indicate that users are more compelled to respond to that kind of expression over others. These quantifiable results provide one dimension of understanding how user-created and user-generated images function within social media.

I used a qualitative method, visual discourse analysis, for a more in-depth interpretation of my data. Visual discourse analysis offers a way to tease out the ideas portrayed by the most successful Blue Out Internet memes. The term discourse describes “groups of statements that structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking” (Rose, 2012, p. 190). Furthermore,
Discourse disciplines subjects into certain ways of thinking and acting, but this is not simply repressive; it does not impose rules for thought and behavior on a pre-existing human agent. Instead, human subjects are produced through discourses. Our sense of our self is made through the operation of discourse. So too are objects, relations, places, scenes: discourse produces the world as it understands it. (Rose, 2012, p. 192)

While discourse analysis may be an unusual approach to visual research, “Discourses are articulated through all sorts of visual and verbal images and texts, specialised or not, and also through the practices that those languages permit” (Rose, 2012, pp. 190-191). Specific works make particular discourses visible and others invisible. Examining discursive formation explains how meanings become connected together in a discourse (Rose, 2012, p. 191). It is also important to note that discursive images or texts depend upon intertextuality, i.e. the meanings carried by other images and texts (Rose, 2012, p. 191).

Rose provided a structure for investigating the relationship between text, intertextuality, and context. I modified her summary of strategies used to interpret the rhetorical organization of discourse—look for sources, reoccurring references, effects of truth, complexity and contradictions, and visibility (2012, p. 220)—to create a method for analyzing the Blue Out images. Using this method, I examined the five most popular Blue Out Internet memes created by others. This uncovered the ideas that elicited the most interaction and therefore provided a deeper understanding of the ways the Blue Out was internalized and how people acted upon that internalization by creating new media works and sharing them online.

Much of the vocabulary I use to describe the Blue Out Internet memes derives from the Postmodern Principles, as conceived by Gude (2004). The elements and principles of design do not sufficiently describe contemporary art practices, nor do they help others uncover contemporary meaning-making strategies (Gude, 2007). Postmodern Principles offer a way to describe current visual and conceptual artmaking approaches (Gude, 2004, p. 8) that are found in
the Blue Out Internet memes. Appropriation, the first principle, means the use of recycled imagery (Gude, 2004, p. 9). Juxtaposition refers to imagery and/or objects placed close together intentionally or by chance (Gude, 2004, p. 9). Recontextualization results when familiar content is extracted from its original context and introduced into another space to generate meaning (Gude, 2004, pp. 9-10). Layering is the placement of images on top of each other, which is made increasingly accessible through digital imaging programs like Adobe Photoshop (Gude, 2004, p. 10). Interaction of text and image forms rich and/or ironic associations created from the interplay between the two modes (Gude, 2004, p. 10). Hybridity is the incorporation of multiple media and/or elements of different cultures into a work (Gude, 2004, p. 10). Gazing shifts familiar contexts of imagery to reveal and question systems of power (Gude, 2004, pp. 10-11).

Representin’ presents one’s personal artistic voice as it is located within a personal or cultural history (Gude, 2004, p. 11). Multiple principles may be visible in one work, and some principles may not be easily discernable in any of the Blue Out Internet memes. However, this vocabulary provides a foundation for describing the works and interpreting their meaning.

In summary, this chapter conceptualized the Blue Out images as Internet memes to provide a framework for analyzing their function and content. Comparing the amounts of interactions between post types—and between the Blue Out’s Facebook content versus that of brand pages—illustrates how user-created images function within social media. Rose’s (2012) visual discourse analysis strategies create a method for researching the ideas portrayed in the Blue Out Internet memes studied. I describe the findings of this analysis in the next chapter using the vocabulary of Gude’s (2004) Postmodern Principles.
Chapter 4

Findings

Earlier, in Chapter 3, I detailed the framework, design, and methodology that I use to study the Blue Out Internet memes in this thesis. Chapter 4 provides the results of this analysis. First, I present the rates of interaction according to types of content and types of interaction. Then, I begin my visual discourse analysis by describing each image studied. Next, I detail the strategies used in my analysis: sources, reoccurring references, effects of truth, complexity and contradictions, and visibility. Afterwards, I organize my findings according to these strategies. Gude’s (2004) terminology helps me describe these findings as her Postmodern Principles aptly describe the contemporary artmaking skills and tools used in the Blue Out Internet memes. Visual discourse analysis as organized by image is available for reference in Appendix E.

Rates of Interaction

The rates of interaction (“Likes,” “Shares,” and replies) visible on images uploaded to the Blue Out Facebook event page differed in regards to whether the image was repeated on the page and whether the image was created specifically for the event. User-created images elicited the highest rate of all interactions studied across both image and post types (see Table 4.1). All images (including repeats and redistribution of other images) received the highest rate of “Shares” (47.6%) and that rate becomes even higher (50%) when only unique images are considered. However, hyperlink posts received a higher rate of replies (56.2%) and “Likes” (89.9%) than images when repeats and copied works are included (52.4% and 85.7%, respectively). All shared content was a hyperlink, image, or both, and one of the images studied
contained a hyperlink within its caption. For a visual representation of the interaction rates by content type, see Table 4.2.

The proportions of “Likes,” “Shares,” and reply comments were calculated to compare these results to Buddy Media’s (2012) findings. When all content on the page is considered, “Likes” made up the highest proportion of the interactions (55.9%), followed by reply comments (40.8%), and finally “Shares” (3.3%). Unique user-created images share this sequence, but with much closer proportions, 45.5% “Likes,” 30.3% reply comments, and 24.2% “Shares.” These findings are displayed and compared to the proportion of interactions on brand pages described by Buddy Media (2012) in Table 4.3.

**Images Studied**

*Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor*, created by Artist A, garnered 88 interactions—the highest of all Blue Out Internet memes studied. The image presents supportive slogans and information on top of an Associated Press photograph of Penn State football players on the field (*Figure 4.1*). Artist B received 66 interactions with his Internet meme that layers a *Stop Child Abuse* ribbon logo on top of text displaying a popular Penn State athletic slogan in *We Are Penn State* (*Figure 4.2*). Artist C’s *Buckeye White Out* received 43 interactions and displays stylized text that exclaims, “I may be a Buckeye, but I’m also in the White Out!” (*Figure 4.3*). The World Will Not Be Destroyed... by Artist D layers words of a quote misattributed to Albert Einstein on top of a photograph of Joe Paterno (*Figure 4.4*). It received 27 interactions, the vast majority of which were provocative statements by Artist D and angry responses to his posts. The final image studied, Artist E’s *Ever True To You, Dear Old White & Blue*, places a Nittany Lion “chipmunk” logo above the title’s stylized text (*Figure 4.5*). This image was reposted to the Facebook event wall two days after its original debut, amassing 26 interactions in total.
Strategies of Visual Discourse Analysis

The following strategies were used to interpret the rhetorical organization of visual discourse as it applies to the Blue Out Internet memes. Sources are starting points for visual research, as they provide a basis for understanding imagery. Examining iconography or other visual tools utilized by artists clarifies how and why an image was created (Rose, 2012, pp. 109-206). Reoccurring References refers to repeating words or imagery (Rose, 2012, p. 210). Repetition creates connections and relationships across multiple sources, producing meaning (Rose, 2012, pp. 210-213). The name of this strategy was adapted from Rose’s key themes (2012, p. 210) to avoid confusion with the broad themes that emerged from this study’s completed analysis. Effects of truth describe how a particular discourse works to persuade viewers, often by using claims of truth or scientific certainty (Rose, 2012, p. 215). Analyzing moments of dissent from a particular discourse and how these contradictions are reconciled can also be useful (Rose, 2012, pp. 215-216). Complexity and contradictions can be part of a visual discourse, as “part of the power of a specific discursive formation may rest precisely on the multiplicity of different arguments that can be produced in its terms” (Rose, 2012, pp. 217-218). Visibility refers not only to the discourses easily seen in a work, but also what is not, as “Absences can be as productive as explicit naming; invisibility can have just as powerful effects as visibility” (Rose, 2012, p. 219).

Visual Discourse Analysis

Sources

Every Blue Out Internet meme studied contained appropriated imagery and/or text. All of the original source material could have been easily found through a Google Image search and downloaded with a single click. However, only Artist B mentions potential ramifications for not
acquiring appropriate permissions or citing his work. Artist B writes, “Hope PSU doesn’t sue me for making this, but please share it…” implying that he understands copyright infringement is a punishable act but only worries about Penn State coming after him—not the creators of the *Stop Child Abuse* ribbon logo. The image used on Artist B’s work is the university’s Alumni Association flag; see *Figure 4.6* for the original image, located on a blog written by USWeapon (2010). A hint of an underline (which was mostly cropped out in Artist B’s work) is visible at the bottom-right of *We Are Penn State*. The *Stop Child Abuse* ribbon logo was featured on the Blue Out Facebook event page. Therese Jones, a manager of the Blue Out Facebook event page, took this image from a Google search result of “child abuse awareness ribbon.” The original image (*Figure 4.7*) is still on Pinmart (2013), a promotional webpage that sells car magnets and other awareness ribbon trinkets.

Both of the artists that used photographs in their work utilized images from the Associated Press. The photograph on the bottom layer of *Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor* was a snapshot of football players walking onto the field during a 2008 game (see *Figure 4.8*). *The World Will Be Destroyed…* features an image that documents Joe Paterno at a 2007 press conference (see *Figure 4.9*). The Associated Press is an independent newsgathering organization that collects and distributes content (Associated Press, 2013). Using their work without following their protocol has major implications, which are discussed in Chapter 5. It is also interesting to note that *The World Will Be Destroyed…* contains a credit line at the bottom of the image while *Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor* does not. This could be attributed to the specific source used to download the image or later cropping.

Only two of the five Blue Out Internet memes studied required specific digital imaging tools. *We Are Penn State* utilized a masking and/or cloning tool to hide an original letter. *Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor* needed transparency and color saturation techniques. These two images also elicited the highest rates of interaction. All other images could have been created using a
word processing program. In particular, *Buckeye White Out* and *Ever True To You, Dear Old White & Blue* are the same size as a default Microsoft Word page. Artist C, who created *Buckeye White Out*, may have used one of the software’s textbox options to style her text. *Ever True To You, Dear Old White & Blue* uses the current default Microsoft Word font, Cambria, which is not often seen outside of the program.

Three of the images contain logos. *We Are Penn State* and *Buckeye White Out* use a *Stop Child Abuse* ribbon logo. *Buckeye White Out* and *Ever True To You, Dear Old White & Blue* include a Penn State athletics “chipmunk” logo. Affectionately nicknamed for its visual similarities to the small creature, the “chipmunk” logo was created in response to national press coverage stemming from the Penn State football team’s 1982 national championship. Penn State athletics continues to use the logo even after a different university mark was adopted as an overarching school symbol (The Pennsylvania State University, 2009).

The interaction of text and image is very prevalent in the Blue Out Internet memes, as all contain textual elements. Three images use text to reference slogans promoted by Penn State athletics. “*We Are / Penn State*” is a chant used at school events (particularly sporting events) as a show of unity. While the cheer as it is known now was first created by Penn State cheerleaders in the 1970s, the first use of the phrase is attributed to Steve Suhey (a 1947 football captain) who responded, “We’re Penn State and we play together or we don’t play,” to a situation in which the school’s integrated football team was snubbed (Penn State University, 2013). In *Buckeye White Out*, Artist C uses text to mistakenly reference the familiar White Out instead of the new Blue Out. However, the artist’s comment posted with the image correctly identifies blue as the color to wear. The text in *Ever True to You, Dear Old White and Blue* recalls song lyrics from “*Fight on State*,” a Penn State fight song written in 1935 by Joseph Saunders (class of 1915) (Penn State University, 2013). Originally, the song was “given to the freshman class to sing as their song and
it was so catchy that it was soon adopted by the entire student body and the Blue Band” (Penn State University, 2013).

Text and font treatment as design elements are clearly visible in *Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor*. The spray paint-like typeface is Base 02 and is available as a free download on the popular font portal dafont.com. Base 02 was created and copyrighted in 2003 by Clément Nicolle. Nicolle’s 15 fonts on dafont.com have been downloaded over 9,317,353 times, with approximately 2,000-3,000 new downloads daily (DaFont, 2013). The designer allows personal, non-commercial use of the font but requires donations for commercial use (Nicolle, 2003).

Artist D provides the most words in his work, *The World Will Not Be Destroyed…* The image uses a quote mistakenly attributed to Albert Einstein and layers it on top of an Associated Press photograph of Joe Paterno. Perhaps the quote, “The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything,” evolved memetically from a reference Einstein made regarding the musician Pablos Casals. He describes Casals in these words:

> What I particularly admire in him is the firm stand he has taken, not only against the oppressors of his countrymen, but also against those opportunists who are always ready to compromise with the Devil. He perceives very clearly that the world is in greater peril from those who tolerate or encourage evil than from those who actually commit it.

(MobileReference, 2011)

A similar quote, “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing,” is attributed to Edmond Burke, but this exact phrasing has yet to be found in any of Burke’s writing (O’Toole, 2010).
Reoccurring References

All of the studied works reference support and/or loyalty. Four out of the five endorse the Blue Out and Penn State either implicitly or explicitly. *Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor...* literally states “Support the Team – Support the Kids” within the image itself. Artist B’s transformation of a beloved slogan visually implies universal Penn State support for the Blue Out. Artist C extends her encouragement across traditional football rivalries, stating that her loyalty to the Ohio State Buckeyes will not keep her from wearing blue. In the most visible call for support, Artist E writes “CHANGE YOUR PROFILE PICTURE TO SUPPORT PSU” in his image’s caption. By using an athletic logo and an athletic fight song to represent Penn State, he could be arguing that those who do not support the athletics program (and everything that implies) do not support the university. Conversely, Artist D does not support the Blue Out, stating “This event is a thinly veiled attempt to ‘Support JoePa’.[sic] I’ll pass,” with his provocative image.

Support for children is another key theme visible in four of the images studied. This makes sense, as the Blue Out was created as a show of visible support for child abuse prevention. However, two images combine the message of supporting children with that of supporting Penn State and/or the football team. This is done through the logos and language used in *Buckeye White Out* and *Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor*.

Many of the artists offer calls-to-action as part of their image’s caption. The artists of *We Are Penn State* and *Ever True to You, Dear Old White and Blue* specifically ask others to share these images, presumably through the “Share” function on Facebook. Artist B does not use the term “Share,” but states his hope that circulating his image “can help spread our cause.” On the other hand, overused capitalization makes Artist E’s caption seem extremely aggressive and feels desperate, as if shouting (and not logic) will win over supporters.
Views on Joe Paterno are featured in *The World Will Not Be Destroyed...* and the first comment of *Buckeye White Out*. Artist D expresses his scorn towards the Blue Out, as he believes the event supports the former coach. On a different level, the interplay of text and image within this piece could also imply that Penn State’s hero-worship is misplaced. Perhaps Artist D believes that academics (like Einstein) provide better role models than athletes. On the other end of the spectrum, Artist C writes “Joe Pa♥” at the end of her caption, seemingly tacking the statement onto the end of her expression of intercollegiate amity. While Paterno is not described in the image, the creator obviously feels a desire to publically share her feelings towards the coach.

**Effects of Truth**

Each of the studied artists recontextualized slogans, images, quotes, or other references to express something new in their work. The original sources, such as athletic logos and song lyrics, carry familiar meanings. Through recontextualization, these meanings were strengthened, given a more pertinent significance or transformed to question their implications. For example, the rousing “We Are / Penn State” chant (as realized through an alumni flag image) was visually layered and juxtaposed with the symbol for child abuse prevention. By merging a beloved symbol of university solidarity with child abuse prevention imagery, Artist B seeks to combine the two concepts and portray the Penn State community as protective of children. On the other hand, Artist D’s use of a lighthearted Joe Parterno image sharply contrasts with superimposed and piercingly relevant words of responsibility. Paterno’s likeness is presented as unconcerned and nonchalant, which challenges the assumption of his moral integrity.

Text acted as another pervasive method of communicating ideas through the Blue Out Internet memes. Two of the images featured text below or above the visual imagery while the rest combined the elements more thoroughly. Four of the five Internet memes are written in all capital
letters, a textual equivalent of shouting (University of Phoenix, 2013). These are the same four images that seem to be “pro” Blue Out and/or Penn State. Yelling implies both urgency and aggression and can also be related to the rowdiness of an athletic event. Beyond simply choosing capitalization for text treatment, Artist A went one step further and opted to use a non-standard spray paint-like font in Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor. Perhaps the artist chose this font to convey an underground and/or anti-authoritative stance.

Much of the text used grammatical possessive ownership of the school or the Blue Out event. The well-known “We Are / Penn State” chant could imply homogeneity of thoughts and actions across the entire university community. Artist A’s use of the words “defend our honor” written in the image itself suggests the honor of everyone within the Penn State community is threatened by the scandal. Moreover, Artist A uses the possessive word again by stating his hope that the image “…can help spread our [emphasis added] cause.”

**Complexity and Contradictions**

Appropriating sources provides a host of complex and contradictory messages. One notable example is Artist B’s recognition of Penn State’s ability to press charges on him for appropriating the image used in his background, yet he encourages others to copy and re-distribute his work. This becomes an lightning rod for the intersection of artist rights, branding, and promotion. The widespread use of athletic symbols (such as the Nittany Lion “chipmunk” logo) and aggressive tactics (using all capitalized letters) may not be appropriate as a method to show support for child abuse prevention. After all, the school’s athletics department promoted a system of power that fostered Sandusky’s actions and the administration’s inactions. Artist B’s evocation of the “We Are / Penn State” chant may actually confirm perceptions of the school’s uniformity. This parallels sentiments voiced by others outside of the community, which implied
all Penn Staters would permit criminal acts for the sake of the school’s football program. Artist E aggressively asks Blue Out event page users to change their profile picture to his image, *Ever True To You, Dear Old White & Blue*, using all capital letters. Being a beneficial member of any community should not require submission and conformity, especially when moral failings of that organization appear.

The positioning of text within an image also provides fodder for complex interpretations. Artist A positioned the phrase “support the team” before “support the kids,” making the previous concept seem more important. Similarly, the words “wear blue” and “defend our honor” are capitalized, drawing more attention than the call for supporting children (and protecting them from abuse). As such, wearing blue to defend Penn State’s honor and support its team is more important than wearing blue to support children.

All of the Blue Out Internet memes were created within days of the Sandusky grand jury report’s publication. Not only is the speed of their creation intriguing in its own right, but their rapid production provides insights into the pitfalls of rash decision-making. This can be seen in Artist C’s mixing up of terminology (Blue Out vs. White Out) within the image of *Buckeye White Out* itself, yet getting it right in the caption below. She obviously understood that blue was used to represent child abuse prevention and that she should wear blue to show support for the event. However, transferring information that into a different name for the event (i.e. participating in a Blue Out and not a White Out) was problematic. Another image that illustrates impulsivity is *The World Will Not Be Destroyed...* A quick Internet search reveals that Einstein did not write this quote (at least not directly) and that the Blue Out was not an attempt to support Paterno. Slowing down to check a quotation as well as reflect upon the nature of the event might have made Artist D rethink his choice of creative expressions.
Visibility

In addition to creating complex and contradictory meanings, choosing to appropriate specific imagery generates significance that may not be immediately observable, such as the other choices and tools available at the time of an artwork’s creation that were not used. *Ever True To You, Dear Old White & Blue* showcases a song lyric that was not often brought up during the week following the release of Sandusky’s grand jury report. However, “may no act of ours bring shame,” a line from Penn State’s alma mater, was quoted often. Perhaps using the latter lyric would be an admission that an indignity occurred. Artist E’s choice evades this presumption and focuses on supporting the school wholeheartedly. In the same vein, an altered version of the “chipmunk” logo sporting a teardrop spread rapidly through social networking outlets at the time this work was created. Choosing the unmodified logo may have been a conscious decision against admitting any wrongdoing.

Ownership of imagery is another invisible trait connected to the Blue Out Internet memes. Only one artist voiced concern over the use of copyrighted material. Perhaps the others did not realize this is illegal, as content is easily found and downloaded without pertinent copyright information. Artist A extends the notion of communal ownership by using language to downplay his role in the production and dissemination of his image. In *Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor*’s caption, he describes the image as simple, which also suggests that the process of creating this effective work is also easy. However, using digital imaging tools and a non-standard font requires prior knowledge, experience, and time. The informality and lack of pride regarding the skill and resources needed to create the associated image suggests that Artist A views himself as an ordinary member of the Penn State community.

One of the strangest examples of visibility is Artist C’s mixup of terminology in *Buckeye White Out*. Any mention of the Blue Out is missing from the image itself, but Artist C describes
her intent to wear blue in order to participate. Artist C also communicates (without explicitly saying so) that supporting Penn State and/or child abuse prevention is more important than collegiate rivalries. On a related note, Ohio State (Artist C’s beloved team) is no stranger to football scandals, as their program was found to have bribed players and continues to face the ramifications of these illegal acts (NPR Staff, 2011).

Surprisingly, a work created to shame members of the Blue Out event (The World Will Not Be Destroyed...) was increasingly made visible through the popularity of its associated interactions. This stems mostly from the prolific replies to provocative statements from its creator. One of the final responses to Artist D’s work and its related comments sums up multiple points of volatile conversation well:

[Artist D], you are the only one talking about JoePa on this site. Everyone else is here for the kids. Personally, I'd rather give my money to the blue ribbon campaign since the CC Child and Youth Services let it go years ago, despite a mother's wishes. You should do YOUR homework. You could read up on it rather than finding new and interesting profile pictures to display your ill-placed energy. The rest of us will be looking for positive solutions. "Peace."

Ironically, Artist D also failed to hold himself to the highest standards, as he used an all rights reserved Associated Press image and misattributed quote to admonish a group for ostensibly supporting someone it did not.

**General Findings**

The previous sections of this chapter described the discourses uncovered through tallying user interactions rates with different types of content on the Blue Out Facebook event page and Rose’s (2012) visual discourse analysis strategies. First and foremost, there is a distinct difference
in the amount and types of interactions that took place with various content on the page. The popularity of images, and unique user-created images in particular, emphasizes their function as memes, i.e. spreadable ideas. Rose’s (2012) strategies provided a method that allowed me to analyze these Internet memes, find the ideas they portrayed, and organize the five themes that emerged. All of the images studied used appropriated resources. Each of the images also utilized text. Persistent memeplexes are found within many of the works. Sophisticated digital manipulation tools were needed to create the most popular Blue Out Internet memes in terms of “Likes,” “Shares,” and comment-based replies. Finally, some of the images studied contained conspicuous mistakes, yet still received high amounts of interaction.

Images Earn Interactions

Unique user-created images elicited the highest rate of interactions of all the different post types analyzed on the Blue Out Facebook event page. Remarkably, half of these works were “Shared.” When compared to the rates of hyperlink and text post “Shares,” (13.5% and 0%, respectively), the images extended much farther across personal networks. This also implies that virtual Blue Out attendees had a much better chance of garnering observable reactions through making and posting images. Consequently, the discourses portrayed within the Blue Out Internet memes spread farther than other types of content.

Compared to the average brand page described by Buddy Media (2012), users interacted differently with content on the Blue Out Facebook event page. The event page had a higher proportion of reply comments (40.8% to 15%) but lower proportion of “Likes” (55.9% to 79%) and “Shares” (3.3% to 6%). More differences are apparent when only unique user-created images on the Blue Out Facebook page are considered. These enjoy a high percentage of reply comments (30.3%) and “Shares” (24.2%) and relatively low percent of “Likes” (45.5%).
Themes of Visual Discourse Analysis

Abundant Appropriation

Even though all of the Blue Out Internet memes contained appropriated imagery, only one artist mentioned this fact. Artist B’s fear over the legal action Penn State could enforce regarding his use of an alumni flag image did not extend to the creators of the Stop Child Abuse ribbon logo. The snapshots used in Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor and The Word Will Not Be Destroyed..., the two Blue Out images that contained photographic elements, belonged to the Associated Press. The ease of uncovering all the original sources used in the Blue Out Internet memes shows how quickly relevant imagery can be located. Appropriated text also made its way into the Blue Out Internet memes, discussed below.

Ubiquitous Use of Text

Every image studied contained some amount of text. However, only one (Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor) used a non-standard font. Another textual finding is the (over) use of capitalization. Artists that used all capital letters came off as desperate yellers, even though the tone of athletic events is often loud and aggressive. Finally, the positioning of textual elements has implications for the discourse it creates. The location and size of the words “defend our honor” and “support the team” suggest more importance to those concepts than the smaller and right-aligned “support the kids” in Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor.
Persistence of Memeplexes

Visual discourse analysis revealed particularly strong associations connecting Penn State to its football program. Four of the five images studied alluded that meaningful support for Penn State requires supporting the school’s athletic program as well. This was implied through the use of athletic references such as logos and fight song lyrics. It is particularly alarming to see how this concept manifests in the Blue Out images. For example, the textual emphasis in Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor places “support the team” before “support the kids.” Clearly, many of the artists believe Penn State’s value lies with its athletics program.

Another memeplex, Joe Paterno’s positive connection with Penn State, plays out through imagery on the Blue Out page as well. The Blue Out’s organizers frequently stated that they took no position on the coaching staff—their only goal was spreading awareness about child abuse prevention and providing a constructive outlet for frustrated community members. Behind the scenes, the event managers decided not to take an official position because the allegations had yet to be tried in court. Avoiding a public stance prevented the possibility of being charged with libel. Since there was no explicit message about supporting (or not supporting) Joe Paterno, many projected their own feelings onto the event.

One image creator remarked “Joe Pa♥” at the end of her caption without referencing him anywhere else in her work. Obviously she felt the event page was the appropriate place to share her positive feelings towards the coach publicly. However, the event was specifically geared towards the support of child abuse prevention. The cognitive dissonance required to support both the event and the coach after related allegations within Sandusky’s grand jury report were made public is striking.
**Popularity of Photoshop**

The most popular Blue Out Internet memes utilized specific digital imaging software. In particular, these images made use of masking/cloning, color saturation, and text treatment tools. While these tasks do not require the use of Photoshop and could have been made using free online programs, Photoshop is widely available and is often easier to use for more complex digital manipulation. Conversely, the rest of the Blue Out images studied could have been created using a simple word processing program. This indicates that even though digital imaging tools may increase the popularity of an image, they are not required for successful Internet meme production.

**Sloppy Slipups**

Two images had glaring errors. Perhaps the most easily recognizable mistake seen on any of the Blue Out Internet memes is the mix-up of “Blue Out” and “White Out” on Artist C’s *Buckeye White Out*. However, she got the terminology correct in the caption accompanying the image. This mistake was not discussed in any of the reply comments, nor did it prevent the image from receiving a high amount of other interactions. Another Blue Out Internet meme, *The World Will Not Be Destroyed…*, used a misattributed Einstein quote. While this mistake was not picked up by commenters, the implication that the group’s purpose as a vehicle for Paterno support was repudiated. Trying to stop evil was a goal for both the artist and the Blue Out organizers. As such, wearing blue was a direct contradiction of the Penn State athletic department's scheduled White Out. While some claim this to be an empty gesture, showing visible support for a cause is a compelling experience. Visual events and images are powerful. Imagine the fear and awe inspired by watching atomic bomb detonations; the relief of finding an icon indicating a public restroom
in an unfamiliar airport; or the motivation elicited through faith symbols like the Cross, Star and Crescent, or Star of David. Blue Out participants showed their willingness to move beyond the safety of officially endorsed acts. Consequently, they demonstrated their opposition to silence and subordination.

This chapter presents the results of content analysis performed on posts shared on the Blue Out Facebook event wall. High rates of interaction with the Blue Out images indicate that these works functioned memetically, spreading ideas through the social network. Rates of interaction also differ from those found on brand pages (Buddy Media, 2012). Furthermore, visual discourse analysis revealed the following themes: appropriation, text usage, memeplexes, digital imaging tools, and visible mistakes. Chapter 5 examines these findings in relation to the original research questions. Implications for this study and future research recommendations are also offered.
Table 4.1. Interaction rates of posts by image type.

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<th>Total Posts</th>
<th>Has Replies</th>
<th>Has “Likes”</th>
<th>Has “Shares”</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All images</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11 (52.4%)</td>
<td>18 (85.7%)</td>
<td>10 (47.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique images</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10 (55.6%)</td>
<td>16 (88.9%)</td>
<td>9 (50%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>User-Created images</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10 (62.5%)</td>
<td>15 (93.8%)</td>
<td>8 (50%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2. Interaction rates of posts by content type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post Type</th>
<th>Total Posts</th>
<th>Has Replies</th>
<th>Has “Likes”</th>
<th>Has “Shares”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>User-Created images</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10 (62.5%)</td>
<td>15 (93.8%)</td>
<td>8 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperlink</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>50 (56.2%)</td>
<td>80 (89.9%)</td>
<td>12 (13.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>198 (51.2%)</td>
<td>257 (66.4%)</td>
<td>0*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>259 (52.1%)</td>
<td>355 (71.4%)</td>
<td>21 (4.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All shared content was either a hyperlink or image. One image caption contained a hyperlink.

Table 4.3. Proportion of interaction types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction Type</th>
<th>Brand Pages (Buddy Media, 2012)</th>
<th>All Blue Out Content</th>
<th>Blue Out User-Created Images</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Likes”</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replies</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Shares”</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.1. Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor

Artist A: While it is pretty simple, it hopefully can help spread our cause.
Figure 4.2. We Are Penn State

**Artist B:** Hope PSU doesn’t sue me for making this, but please share it...
I MAY BE A BUCKEYE, BUT I'M ALSO IN THE WHITE OUT!

GO STATE!!

Artist C: I may be a Buckeye, but I'm also a nittany lion for LIFE! I'm for sure trading my scarlet and gray in Saturday for some blue! Joe Pa ♥

Figure 4.3. Buckeye White Out
“The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything.”

-Albert Einstein

**Figure 4.4. The World Will Not Be Destroyed...**

*Artist D:* This event is a thinly veiled attempt to "Support JoePa". I'll pass.
Figure 4.5. Ever True To You, Dear Old White & Blue
Figure 4.6. Original Alumni Association Flag (USWeapon, 2010).
Figure 4.7. Child Abuse Awareness Ribbon Image (Pinmart, 2013).
Figure 4.8. Associated Press Photograph of Football Players (Kaster, 2008).
Figure 4.9. Associated Press Photograph of Joe Paterno (Little, 2007).
Chapter 5

Discussion

Chapter 4 revealed the analysis of content on the Blue Out Facebook event page. I found high rates of interaction with the Blue Out Internet memes and uncovered themes of appropriation, text usage, memeplexes, digital imaging tools, and visible mistakes. In Chapter 5, I incorporate these results into the previous knowledge and methodologies discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Next, I organize these findings in response to the research questions first proposed in Chapter 1. Then, I provide implications relevant to themes discovered in Chapter 4. Finally, I wrap up this thesis with recommendations for future research.

Summary of Study

This study examined the use of contemporary Internet memes within online activist spaces. Visual imagery from the 2011 Blue Out Facebook event page provides plenty of fodder for new discoveries in this field since the newness of social networks restricts the amount of research currently available on the topic. Major findings include the difference of interaction rates seen between types of content on the page (with unique user-created images being the most popular) as well as differences between the proportions of interactions on the Blue Out page versus that of a commercial brand’s page. The Blue Out Internet memes also contained themes of widespread appropriation, use of text, enduring memeplexes, new media tool usage, and two obvious mistakes. Framing the Blue Out images as Internet memes contextualizes these findings and suggests implications for art education and social media.

Memetics, the study of ideas and their viral-like transmission, provides a conceptual framework I use to view popular phenomena, such as the Blue Out event. Some memes spread
more easily than others and become embedded within cultures and personal identities. Of particular interest to this study, Blackmore (1999) found that altruistic people and their memes become popular because their memes are more widespread than those of others (p. 155) and some memes replicate better as part of a group, called a memeplex (p. 169). The Blue Out was a philanthropic event aimed to raise awareness and funds for the victims and survivors of child abuse. This charitable meme successfully defeated similar ideas, like a proposed Black Out and full-stadium walkout (WJAC Web Staff, 2011), which did not contain similar benevolent leanings. Connecting the child abuse awareness color meme with the meme of dressing a specific way to support the football team created a successful memeplex.

Some memes come in conflict with a previously established memeplex. This was seen in the connection between Joe Paterno, Penn State, and the university’s football program. Paterno’s role in the Sandusky scandal jeopardized the reputation of both the university and the “Grand Experiment.” The endurance of Paterno’s upstanding repute in the face of damning evidence illustrates the strength of memeplexes.

The Internet provides fertile ground for the global diffusion of memes (ThinkQuest, 2000). Godwin (1994) first used the term to describe the proliferation of Internet culture and to explain an experiment in which he created a “counter-meme” to show online discussion participants that Nazi and Hitler comparisons are offensive. Furthermore, “Godwin’s Law of Nazi Analogies” also became the first activist meme on the Internet. Since then, the word meme itself has evolved to describe “digital objects that riff on a given visual, textual or auditory form” that “must be appropriated, re-coded, and slotted back into the Internet infrastructures it came from” (Nooney, 2012). As this study also describes memetics’ older and broader implications, I use the words “Internet meme” to describe the visual Internet artifacts studied. The 16 Blue Out Internet memes examined in this thesis were original images posted to the event’s Facebook wall.
Successful Internet memes, which accumulate high rates of interaction, employ visual tools and strategies. After all, creativity and artistic output provide a means to copy, use, and spread memes (Blackmore, 1999, p. 131). Participating in the arts allows people to notice the world (Eisner, 2002, p. 10) and using imagination contributes to valuing alternatives and breaks from traditions (Greene, 2000, p. 3). Aesthetic experiences through artistic engagement transform the way life is understood (Albers & Harste, 2007, p. 8). Social justice artmaking describes the process of creating art and aesthetic experiences “to construct knowledge, critically analyze an idea, and take action in the world” (Dewhurst, 2010). Art activism provides the tools needed by the greater social justice movement to win hearts and minds through emotional and cognitive tactics (Shank, 2005). Like other pieces of culture, widespread social justice ideas are popular memes. One effective meme connected with art activism is the use of ribbons to identify particular causes, such as blue and child abuse prevention.

The Internet and social media have altered communication. Online forums create spaces where one can make and share things with like-minded people easily and without geographic restrictions (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 107). Three graduate students managed the Blue Out Facebook event page, yet the movement amassed tens of thousands of virtual attendees that participated in discourses with one another. Easy-to-use online tools enabled the collaborations in which they gained understandings about and from one another while sharing resources (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 13). Facebook, the largest social network, reached 1 billion users less than a year after the first event (Facebook, 2012a). Engagement on the site thrives via user-generated content (i.e. the production of new, user-created content and the sharing of items made by others). Over 265 billion images have been uploaded to the site since photo sharing began in 2005 (Facebook, 2012a). Since the motivation and reward for making and sharing art both involve participating in an active community and strengthening personal connections, art’s popularity on social media makes sense (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 97). While research on Facebook has primarily been concerned
with text-based functions, the visual practices of self-expression and use of images for engaging and communicative purposes is equally important (Autenrieth & Neumann-Braun, 2011, p. 9).

Visual artifacts shared on the 2011 Blue Out Facebook event page lay at the intersection of memes, art activism, and social media. The Blue Out was the first student response to allegations of child rape and its related cover-up by administrators at The Pennsylvania State University. I planned the Blue Out event with my partner, Stuart Shapiro, to show visual solidarity with victims and survivors of abuse minutes after learning blue was the nationally-recognized color of child abuse prevention. Together we started spreading the idea of wearing blue to the next home football game through social and traditional media. Within six days, the Blue Out Facebook event page garnered 4,903 public posts, “Likes,” and “Shares.”

I compared the rates of interaction observable on different types of posts (image, hyperlink, and text) on the page and found that unique user-created images elicited the most “Likes,” “Shares,” and reply comments. This means that the ideas portrayed within the Blue Out Internet memes spread farthest across personal networks. Rose’s (2012) visual discourse analysis provided a method I used for understanding the ideas portrayed by the most successful images, and Gude’s (1994) Postmodern Principles helped me describe the techniques and themes found within each work. In order to avoid personal bias, only images created by others were studied. This analysis found widespread appropriation, use of text, enduring memeplexes, new media tool usage, and two obvious mistakes. These findings are discussed in relation to the study’s research questions next.
Responding to Research Questions

1. How did the Blue Out Internet memes function within the event’s Facebook page?

Unique user-created images earned a higher rate of interactions (“Likes,” “Shares,” and reply comments) than hyperlink or text-only posts on the Blue Out Facebook event page. Situating these images as Internet memes reinforces a discernible purpose; images provoke observable responses. Memes are ideas that spread, virus-like, throughout a population (Dawkins, 2006/1976). Internet memes are appropriated and recontextualized digital objects that are repositioned back into their original contexts (Nooney, 2012). The Blue Out meme spread through the Internet memes shared on its Facebook event page.

In addition, these findings do not parallel previous research on the interactions rates of seen on Facebook’s commercial brand pages. Unique user-created Blue Out Internet memes garnered a higher proportion of “Shares” (24.2% to 6%) and reply comments (30.3% to 15%) than the images posted to corporate pages Buddy Media (2012) studied (6% and 15%, respectively). This means that the Blue Out Internet memes motivated a greater proportion of users to spread its content to their own networks (through “Sharing”) and spend more effort creating personal responses (reply comments) than simply clicking the “Like” button. Implications for this divergence will be discussed later in this chapter.

2. What themes were portrayed by the most successful Blue Out Internet memes?

Rose’s (2012) visual discourse analysis revealed the following broad themes within the Blue Out Internet memes studied: appropriation, text usage, memeplexes, digital imaging tools, and visible mistakes. All of the images contained appropriated imagery and/or text, but only one artist referred to the potential repercussions of using another’s content without permission. Every
Blue Out Internet meme also utilized textual elements, creating fully multimodal works. Memeplexes that connected Penn State with Joe Paterno and/or its athletics program were found throughout many of the works studied. The first is demonstrated in the *The World Will Not Be Destroyed*..., which criticizes the association between the school and its former football coach. On the other end of the spectrum, *Buckeye White Out’s* artist wrote “Joe Pa♥” at the end of her image’s caption without referencing him anywhere else in the work. Since the Blue Out event took place at a football game, it is not surprising to see memeplexes that utilized images to connect Penn State to its athletics program through logos, text references, or photographs. The two most popular images (in terms of interactions elicited) required digital imaging tools for their production. This infers that digital creative capabilities were highly valued by other virtual Blue Out Facebook event attendees. On the other hand, it also demonstrated that the rest of the artists did not feel limited by a lack of new media skills, as they created and shared work using widely available and easy-to-use programs such as Microsoft Word. Finally, the presence of major errors in two of the Internet memes studied deserves attention. One artist mixed up the terminology of “Blue Out” and “White Out” within her image, while another used a misattributed quote. However, neither of these mistakes was commented upon.

**Implications of Study**

**Interaction rates**

The popularity of unique user-created images has major implications. Since the Blue Out Internet memes elicited the highest rate of interactions, they spread farthest across the social network. These images also garnered a much higher rate of reply comments and “Shares” than hyperlink and text posts, which requires a greater level of personal investment. Forming a
response and allowing content to be posted to one’s page is more of a commitment than simply clicking a thumbs-up icon. Consequently, the Blue Out Internet memes functioned as shareable sites of expressive content that triggered dialogue.

Social justice art educators should take advantage of these findings to illustrate the importance of their field. Numerical data shows that creative production provokes interactions, yet the perceived advantage of using images on social networks remains limited to commercial interests. Similarly, I posit that the contextual function of an Internet meme is contingent upon its aesthetic appeal. Art education provides the tools needed for learners to create works that successfully spread memetically on social media platforms. These include learning to use digital manipulation programs and visually connecting memeplexes. More time and recognition ought to be spent on using these tools to advance social justice initiatives.

**Abundant Appropriation**

All of the Blue Out Internet memes studied utilized appropriated imagery. In fact, the use of appropriated imagery (through recontextualization) is integral to the creation of an Internet meme. There seem to be two choices that those concerned with intellectual property face in regard to this use of other’s visual work without permission. Currently, all online content that utilizes another’s previous work could be removed and its creators punished. This does not seem to be the best option, as using visual content without permission continues unabated. For example, two of the Blue Out image creators used Associated Press photographs in their work. These images are protected under contemporary intellectual property laws and in the site’s terms of use, which stipulates that any downloaded content that is used without permission could result in civil and criminal penalties (Associated Press, 2009).
A second option would allow content to be freely borrowed, remixed, and/or otherwise used. This is the foundation of Internet memes and would require a major shift in the way quality content is produced and disseminated. In particular, the Associated Press and other content providers would need a new business model to survive. Perhaps creative commons licensing and fair use laws will begin this process.

Art educators must address concerns in both of these scenarios. If the current method remains in effect, learners need to become more aware of the penalties they may incur by appropriating visual imagery in their work. Otherwise, a system needs to be established in which student and professional artists can freely cite another’s work without fear of retribution. For example, the APA guidelines could be extended to encompass visual work as well. As writers can freely quote a certain amount of Emily Dickenson’s work without being sued by her current publisher, so should artists have a standard of referencing one another.

**Ubiquitous Use of Text**

The Blue Out Internet memes are truly multimodal as each of the works studied contained text as well as imagery. Furthermore, many images included extensive capitalization and all but one employed default fonts. However, the effect of using text inside the Blue Out images is often flawed. For example, Artist A implies a discourse that values the Penn State football team more than the victimized children through the positioning and size of his text in *Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor*. Yet both the time in which he created this image (before the athletics program stopped advertising a White Out) and his caption referencing his desire to “spread our cause” imply differently. Artist A’s textual elements failed to align with the ideas he wished to portray. Clearly, the visual effects of text need to be better emphasized through education.
Art and writing educators could work together in this interdisciplinary subject. Graphic design knowledge gained from eye tracking software could provide insights into how media consumers experience text and may also suggest new options for emphasizing specific elements. Free fonts available through Internet databases, such as typeface from DaFont.com used by Artist A, supply even more lettering choices. These are just a few examples that educators can use to show the importance of aligning what one wishes to say with how one chooses to say it.

**Persistence of Memeplexes**

Memeplexes connecting The Pennsylvania State University with Joe Paterno, football, and/or its athletics program permeated the Blue Out Internet memes studied. While one could reason that a new negative association should weaken these links, only one out of the five images studied (*The World Will Not Be Destroyed...*) suggested any change. Furthermore, that particular Internet meme prompted the most outrage in the form of angry response comments. This implies that creating or emphasizing other connections is more effective than trying to change an established association. Perhaps the Blue Out meme spread quickly because it reinforced the Penn State and child philanthropy memeplex while refraining from explicitly commenting upon Paterno, football, and the athletics program, This silence allowed those with strong convictions to project their own opinions onto the event.

Art educators can use this knowledge about memeplexes to their advantage. Instead of angering and isolating a wide audience by condemning an accepted connection, a more effective use of time and creativity might emphasize previously unexplored facets of a social injustice. Reframing and re-imagining situations could be applied in many different areas of the arts classroom. For example, learners could be encouraged to create an Internet meme that inferred the positive aspects of attaining a social justice goal, like the economic boost of equal marriage
laws (Ellis, 2012). Framing this civil rights issue as a boon to the economy moves the conversation away from stagnant discourses.

**Popularity of Photoshop**

The two most successful Blue Out Internet memes studied, in terms of interaction rates, utilized specific new media content manipulation tools. As such, knowledge of Photoshop and/or similar programs directly affects the potential popularity of one’s Internet meme. Art educators can provide training in these tools and introduce free online options that can be used outside of class. Introducing the cause-and-effect of employing specialized creative tools versus standard computer software may motivate previously uninterested learners.

On a related note, Artist A (one of the artists who utilized digital manipulation tools) erroneously stated that his work was “simple” in the image’s caption. However, he needed prior knowledge, time, and effort to create this image. Art educators that encourage digital image creation and value its results may change these types of sentiments. Amateur artists should learn to become proud of their skills and acknowledge how their work affects the discourse of an associated topic.

**Sloppy Slipups**

No reply commenters mentioned the fact that two of the Blue Out Internet memes contained conspicuous mistakes. This leads to two very different implications: (1) Internet meme creators need to spend more resources on refining their work and (2) a Facebook page can be a space where Internet meme creators can make errors without harsh judgment. To the first point, future Internet meme creators should be encouraged to spend the extra time needed to examine
their work and the associations it infers. As Buckeye White Out demonstrated, Internet memes can be quick visual responses, but simply double-checking one’s work could potentially save a lot of embarrassment. Artist C knew the event’s objective required wearing blue (as this was mentioned within her image’s caption) but used the familiar, older White Out name inside of her image. Furthermore, teaching learners to take the time to grasp the background of appropriated resources and their connotations would allow budding artists to fully understand and commit to specific choices and discourses. This development of critical thinking skills will emphasize the diverse and complex interpretations inherent in studying visual culture.

On the other hand, this study shows that Internet meme creation and reception allows space for errors. These mistakes may be part of a learning experience. Also, this finding illustrates that online communities may not always judge inaccuracies harshly. However, the disrespect seen in other anonymous, private, or emotionally-charged settings questions the extent to which errors are accepted within online environments. Perhaps the leeway offered to the Blue Out Internet meme artists is rare, or maybe creative expressions are evaluated differently than other forms of communication. Ideas for more research on this topic are discussed within the Recommendations for Future Research section.

Using Internet Memes in Social Justice Art Education

Social justice art educators can take advantage of the findings within this thesis to prepare related curricula. Both the novelty of Internet memes and the incorporation of individual learners’ experience require educators to be comfortable with the unknown. Applying a pedagogy of uncertainty (Shulman, 2005) or organizing class according to planned uncertainty (Lankford, 1990) facilitates this process. These educational philosophies meet students at their current understandings and encourage growth through constant dialog, meaningful projects, and
ownership of decisions and work. An educator might start an instructional unit on online activist art by asking learners to reflect upon examples of Internet memes. Younger students could share what they see and the feelings elicited by viewing particular images. More advanced students could show the class their favorite Internet memes, explain their selections, and defend their choices. Depending on learner response to thematic guiding questions and previous creative work, educators could facilitate social justice artmaking using Internet meme creation that either confronts undesirable situations or empowers the disenfranchised (Shank, 2005). Activities that contradict the established allow learners to imagine the world differently. As Greene (2000) affirmed, those willing to risk these transformations will likely strain towards a better conception of life (p. 30; p. 122).

The spreadability of Internet memes is also incredibly important to social justice art education. One billion Facebook users can access, react to, and spread the discourses through visual imagery. Instead of allowing business interests to dominate social media, art educators can broaden their methods and share social justice values with the world. Challenging evils and/or emboldening the oppressed ought to be as visible as corporate advertising. As this research shows, knowledge and use of digital imaging tools (such as Photoshop) elicits more user interaction. These skills, which are already being taught in the arts classroom, can be put to use spreading social justice objectives. Acknowledging the persistence of memeplexes provides another related area of work suited for arts instruction. Imagination can be applied to reframe activist initiatives by finding new links and associations instead of rehashing staid arguments.

Internet memes shared online are multisensory. They are not simply viewed; their words and textures can be experienced aurally and tactiley, even though these senses are mediated through technology. Heightened senses during transformative aesthetic experiences allow us to see, hear, feel, and become conscious of previously obscured insights, which propel us into new understandings (Greene, 2000). Additionally, creating an Internet meme involves
performance, as the images are shared and compared with other works. This relational quality, along with new interpretations of technologically mediated aesthetic experiences, builds upon theories of contemporary art that emphasize process (and provocation) over final products.

Using a student-centered pedagogy of uncertainty, social justice art educators can utilize Internet memes to facilitate transformative aesthetic experiences relevant to contemporary life. Nevertheless, educators must encourage imagination “…in full awareness of approximations and uncertainties and even the likelihood of failure” (Greene, 2005). These digital objects offer an exciting opportunity for learners to play, relate to each other, fail, and make mistakes. Yet the findings and implications derived from this thesis are just the beginning. Other areas of exploration involving Internet memes and their applications are outlined in the next section.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The size and scope of this study could not attend to all areas of online activist art creation. A future corollary of this work could study the Blue Out Internet meme creators in order to determine more information about their personal creative decisions. Research is also needed to understand how the content and images of the 2011 Blue Out Facebook event page compares to those of other events, such as event pages of the 2012 Blue Out or the annual Penn State Dance Marathon. Furthermore, a broader study of Internet mediated art activism would also be useful. An example of this would be the analysis of interaction types (and the quality of interactions) on different social networks, like deviantART, Instagram, or Twitter. As mentioned within the Implications: Sloppy Slipups section, the Blue Out Facebook event page community’s lack of harsh judgment in responding to Internet memes with errors deserves more attention. Future research is needed to see if this support and flexibility is widespread. Content analysis of response posts to other types of Internet memes with mistakes in different spaces (e.g. other Facebook
pages, Tumblr blogs, and Reddit submissions) would provide a more comprehensive evaluation of this phenomenon. Another study might focus on examining how one’s age or other personal factors influence their propensity to create and distribute Internet memes. This could also include a content analysis to compare the discourses of prolific versus infrequent Internet meme creators. Needless to say, plenty of space for research in online activist art remains.
Epilogue: One Year Later

Jerry Sandusky was convicted of sexually abusing 10 boys on June 22, 2012, over 7 months after his grand jury report was released. A few weeks later, the results of the Penn State Board of Trustee’s independent investigation of the associated events were made public. Louis Freeh (a former director of the FBI) and his law firm, Freeh Sporkin & Sullivan, LLP, conducted over 430 interviews and analyzed over 3.5 million emails and other documents pertaining to the case (Freeh, 2012). The Freeh report made it clear that University leaders failed to stand up for those needing their help most.

In a press release issued in conjunction with the report, Freeh writes,

It is critical that Old Main, the Board and the Penn State community never forget these failures and commit themselves to strengthening an open, compliant and victim sensitive environment—where everyone has the duty to 'blow the whistle' on anyone who breaks this trust, no matter how powerful or prominent they may appear to be. (2012, p. 7)

The report showed evidence, in the form of secondary-sourced emails, that Joe Paterno had prior knowledge of Sandusky’s inappropriate contact with children. Paterno, who died of natural causes six weeks after the scandal broke, continues to remain a controversial figure. Many Penn State community members refuse to believe the Freeh report’s documentation. Indeed, it seems like many forgot his statement to the press on November 11, 2011, in which he remarked, “With the benefit of hindsight, I wish I had done more” (Paterno, 2011). After the university’s new president, Rodney Erickson, agreed to harsh sanctions from the NCAA, Paterno supporters became even more aggressive and partisan, taking their frustrations out on Internet forums and Letters to the Editor.

In contrast, Stuart and I decided to continue the Blue Out and transform it into an annual event. Instead of ignoring the scandal or trying to pass blame, we believed the Penn State family
should work together and cultivate change. I was wary about the commitment needed to sustain the movement another year, as I was still grieving the loss of my father. However, I realized that the best way I could honor his memory as a schoolteacher was continuing to work my hardest to make the world a safer place for children. Stuart and I partnered with a newly created student organization, One Heart: Penn State Students Against the Sexual Abuse of Children, to ensure student leadership long after we graduate. Blue Outs should not be punishments, but a way to reconcile our membership in this community and ensure that Penn State becomes a safer place for future generations. The occasion is meant to foster engagement, compassion, and integrity.

The second Blue Out took place on September 22, 2012. We chose this date because it was “All-University Day”—which was created to unite and recognize students from across the commonwealth campuses. In addition to working with One Heart, we also joined forces with PCAR, the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, for educational materials and other support. Stuart and I organized volunteers to accept charitable donations through selling an event t-shirt and collecting contributions at the stadium. We raised over $79,000, bringing our two-year total contributions to child abuse prevention charities to over $126,000.

The time spent researching, analyzing, and writing this thesis allowed me to reflect upon all of the connections necessary for the Blue Out movement to occur. My passions—art, technology, and people—combined when I chose to begin graduate work in art education and again while spearheading an activist event that used visual culture and social media to promote child abuse awareness. This research allowed me to delve into the significance and meanings within expressive online content and publish my findings in a space where others can learn from my experiences. With any luck, the function and implications of Internet memes as idea transmitters will be put to use in future social justice art initiatives.
Appendix A

Definitions of Terms

• **Meme**: “a cultural element or behavioural trait whose transmission and consequent persistence in a population, although occurring by non-genetic means (esp. imitation), is considered as analogous to the inheritance of a gene” (Meme, 2012).

• **Memeplex**: linked memes that “can replicate better as part of the group than they can on their own” (Blackmore, 1999, p. 169).

• **Internet meme**: a digital object that riffs “on a given visual, textual or auditory form” that “must be appropriated, re-coded, and slotted back into the Internet infrastructures it came from” (Nooney, 2012).

• **Grassroots activism**: local-based activism generated by community members who are not accountable to larger entities or organizations (Cross, 2011, p. 9).

• **Art activism**: Any activism that utilizes the arts. Art activists “can either (1) employ art to wage conflict nonviolently when confronting powerful structures, systems, or organizations; or (2) utilize art to build capacity among the powerless and disenfranchised movements” (Shank, 2005).

• **Social justice artmaking**: “the process of making art [that] offers participants a way to construct knowledge, critically analyze an idea, and take action in the world” (Dewhurst, 2010).
Appendix B


Appendix B illustrates a timeline of the Blue Out and related events that occurred the week after Sandusky’s grand jury report was made public. An interactive version of this timeline is available at www.lauramarch.com/blue-out-timeline. Following the full timeline below, individual events are included for intelligibility.

*Figure B.1. Full Timeline*
Figure B.2. Sandusky’s Grand Jury Report Released
A Guide To The Child Sexual Abuse Charges Against Jerry Sandusky, And To Penn State’s Alleged Willful Ignorance

Figure B.3. Finding the Report
Releasing the Imagination

March remembers Maxine Green’s Releasing the Imagination description of art and aesthetic experiences as providing a means of examining and imagining a different world. “Art offers life; it offers hope; it offers the prospect of discovery” (Green, 2005, p. 133).

Figure B.4. Releasing the Imagination
Searching for Symbolism

Google’s first result for the terms “child abuse ribbon color” reveals that dark blue symbolizes prevention awareness. The color was selected by a grandmother in remembrance of her grandson’s bruises (Mississippi Department of Human Services, 2009).

Figure B.5. Searching for Symbolism
1:00 PM
November 6, 2011

**Social Networking**

March and Shapiro begin posting the idea of changing from a White Out to Blue Out on social networks.

*Figure B.6. Social Networking*
March and Shapiro on Facebook

Laura Petnick March shared a link via Stuart Isaac Shapiro. November 6, 2011

Instead of a White Out for Nebraska this weekend, why not wear all blue? Penn State football fans ought to show support for the kids who deserved better than what our coaching staff and administration did. FTK

Blue Ribbon Campaign – Child Advocacy Services
www.childadv.net

Figure B.7. March and Shapiro on Facebook
Figure B.8. March’s First Tweet
Nov. 6, 2011 at 6:29 PM

Shapiro's First Tweet

Ignore the whiteout for Nebraska this weekend. Wear blue in support of child abuse victims http://t.co/aRdXBN0 #sandusky

Figure B.9. Shapiro’s First Tweet
Therese Jones, a Facebook connection of March’s, creates an “event” page for the Blue Out.
Figure B.11. Making Waves

March contacts the athletic department through a staff directory page as support grows.
8:00 PM
November 7, 2011

Making Ribbons

Late in the day, March buys a single spool of blue ribbon at a local store

Figure B.12. Making Ribbons
November 8, 2011

Letter to the Editor

March’s Letter to the Editor calling for a Blue Out is published in two local newspapers, the Centre Daily Times and the Collegian (March, 2011a).

Figure B.13. Letter to the Editor
Art Ed Reinforcements

Students in the Graduate Student Art Education Association ask to help. A table session at the HUB is planned for Friday night.

Figure B.14. Art Ed Reinforcements
Figure B.15. Gaining Legitimacy
Figure B.16. On the Radio

Shapiro and March call into the LION FM Radio Free Penn State show and are well-received by its hosts—and noticed by virtual event attendees.
Figure B.17. Pushback

Pushback

A student athletics marketing intern contacts March and questions the feasibility of a Blue Out.

Nittany Lion's Den

I will say that one thing that concerns me about a BlueOut is that if 1/10 people don't comply, it looks much worse then is 1/10 people don't comply in a whiteout. Another is that there are many shades of blue, only one of white.

I want to iterate, however, that I am not pro-white simply because of the group that I have created. This decision is bigger than one person and/or his pride.
November 9, 2011

Press Release

The Facebook administrators create a collaborative press release as media interest grows (March et al., 2011b).

Figure B.18. Press Release
Figure B.19. Mural Edits

Mural Edits

Muralist Michael Pilato replaces a portrait of Sandusky with a blue ribbon.
TMZ begins a rumor that coaches have asked players to wear white to support Joe Paterno. The story is picked up by outlets nationwide.

Figure B.20. White Out Rumor
Blue Out Swag

March contacts a local shop and designs a Blue Out t-shirt to be sold with all proceeds donated to charity.

Figure B.21. Blue Out Swag
Riots

Students riot after the Board of Trustees announces the firing of Joe Paterno and Graham Spanier.
Radio Rush Hour

March and Shapiro are interviewed by four local Clear Channel radio stations and promote the Blue Out during the morning rush hour.

Figure B.23. Radio Rush Hour
Selling Shirts

The first shipment of Blue Out shirts designed by March sells out within three hours.

McLanahan’s sells blue out shirts

Figure B.24. Selling Shirts
Facebook Boom

The Blue Out Facebook event page grows by 3 new “attendees” every second.

Figure B.25. Facebook Boom
Figure B.26. ABC News Interview
Figure B.27. TMZ Clarification

TMZ responds to March's White Out vs. Blue Out clarification requests and grants an interview.
Figure B.28. Ribbons & Support

Blue Out organizers and Art Education students provide a table in the HUB before the vigil. Students can pick up blue ribbons and take part in a “Chain of Support” activity.
Figure B.29. Educational Materials

PCAR gives March thousands of educational brochures on child abuse to distribute at the ribbon table.
Figure B.30. Candlelight Vigil

9:00 PM
November 11, 2011
Candlelight Vigil
Students gather on campus for a candlelight vigil organized by undergraduate students.

[Image: Thousands attend student-organized candlelight vigil]
Figure B.31. Before the Event

7:00 AM
November 12, 2011 – 12:00 PM
November 12, 2011

Before the Event

Volunteers distribute educational materials, blue ribbons, and pinwheels outside of the football stadium.
SportsCenter Interview

March is interviewed for ESPN’s SportsCenter. Footage is replayed internationally all weekend.
The Blue Out Event

Over 100,000 fans in the stadium, and countless others across the world, wear blue.

(Coughlin, 2011)

Figure B.33. The Blue Out Event
Appendix C

Facebook Page Control

Figure C.1. Conversation regarding Penn State’s official Facebook page governance.
Figure C.2. Conversation regarding Blue Out Facebook page governance.
Appendix D

Blue Out Internet Meme Data Selection

The table below details the image selection process by showing the amount of interactions each image garnered and the title given to each work.

Table D.1. Blue Out Image Interactions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Likes</th>
<th>Shares</th>
<th>Replies</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor</td>
<td>November 8, 2011</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>We Are Penn State</td>
<td>November 10, 2011</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Wear Blue Saturday</td>
<td>November 8, 2011</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image4.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Buckeye White Out</td>
<td>November 9, 2011</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image5.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Blue Out Shirt</td>
<td>November 9, 2011</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image6.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>The World Will Not Be Destroyed...</td>
<td>November 9, 2011</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image7.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Ever True To You, Dear Old White &amp; Blue</td>
<td>November 8, 2011</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image8.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Candlelight Vigil</td>
<td>November 11, 2011</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image9.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Ribbon Lion Shirt</td>
<td>November 10, 2011</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image10.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Lion Ribbon</td>
<td>November 10, 2011</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image11.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Stadium Snapshot</td>
<td>November 12, 2011</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image12.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Superhero Run</td>
<td>November 10, 2011</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image13.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Stadium S Zone</td>
<td>November 12, 2011</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image14.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>A Candle is Lit For You It Still Burns</td>
<td>November 11, 2011</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image15.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>S Ribbon</td>
<td>November 10, 2011</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image16.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>S Ribbons</td>
<td>November 10, 2011</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Visual Discourse Analysis By Image

Table E.1. Analysis of *Wear Blue: Defend Our Honor* with caption.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Image and Caption</td>
<td><img src="image_url" alt="Image" /> Artist A: While it is pretty simple, it hopefully can help spread our cause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sources</strong></td>
<td><strong>Background Image:</strong> Taken by Carolyn Kaster (2008), a photographer for the Associated Press. <em>Figure 4.8</em> shows the original image of players walking onto the field during a 2008 football game against Illinois. The image is easily found without copyright notices or watermarks through Google Image Search using terms such as “Penn State Nittany Lions” and “Penn State Football.” <strong>Font:</strong> “Wear Blue” and “Defend Our Honor” are written in all capital letters, a textual equivalent of shouting (University of Phoenix, 2013). The spray paint-like font used is “Base 02,” available for free download on the popular free font portal dafont.com. The font was created and originally copyrighted in 2003 by Clément Nicolle. Nicolle’s 15 fonts on dafont.com have been downloaded over 9,317,353 times, with approximately 2,000-3,000 new downloads daily (DaFont, 2013). The designer allows personal, non-commercial use of the font, with donations required for commercial use (Nicolle, 2003).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reoccurring References</td>
<td>• Solidarity (“Our”) • Defending Honor • Support (Team and Children) • Call for action (sharing) • Appropriating an AP image without mentioning it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of Truth</td>
<td>Within the image, all-capital letters are used for “wear blue” and “defend our honor.” “Wear blue” is the largest text on the page, the only term not in white (it is blue) and set diagonally across the page. The rest of the text is white and fully horizontal, making “wear blue” appear to be the most important message of the work. Capitalization implies urgency and aggression. Spray-paint font conveys an underground and anti-authority stance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity and Contradictions</td>
<td>Positioning “support the team” before “support the kids” makes the previous concept seem more important than the latter. Similarly, the words “wear blue” and “defend our honor” are capitalized, drawing more attention. Artist A implies that disseminating information about the Blue Out is a worthwhile endeavor, and that Facebook is an appropriate place to post information for others to spread. Using the word “ours” while referring to the Blue Out suggests he sees the event as a communal movement/cause. In his caption, Artist A infers that creating something (even something that can be described as “simple”) can help a worthy cause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>The caption refers to the image Artist A has made as “it,” and does not even explicitly mention that the image was made by himself. It further downplays the image’s potentially powerful use as method to spread the event’s message by using the terms “hopefully” and “can help.” Artist A privileges the use of imagery (and in particular, posters) to spread information about a cause. However, he describes the process of creating an effective image as simple. Using everyday language (and not directing this to anyone in particular) implies that the effective image making does not require special skills, but being able to search for (and use) a unique font requires prior knowledge and experience does. This image and caption lack any reference or concern over the use of an AP image.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E.2. Analysis of *We Are Penn State* with caption.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Image and Caption** | “We Are / Penn State”: Slogan used at sporting events as a show of unity. The image used as a template is the first result on Google Image Search for the terms, “We Are Penn State.” It is a representation of an Alumni Association flag—there is a hint of underline (which was cropped out in this version) visible at the bottom-right of image See Figure 4.6 for the original Google Image result as located on a blog by USWeapon (2010).  
Stop Child Abuse blue ribbon with crying child + handprint: Blue ribbon represents child abuse awareness in general and the Blue Out event in particular. The ribbon image was probably copied from the Blue Out’s Facebook event page, which was taken from a Google search result of “child abuse awareness ribbon.” The original image (Figure 4.7) was on Pinmart (2013), a promotional webpage that sells car magnets and other awareness ribbon tchotchkes.  
Blue and white colors: Traditional colors of Penn State University (Penn State University, 2013).  
Fear of litigation: Penn State is well known for carefully guarding their logos and trademarks (Moon, 2011). |
| **Sources**         | Artist B: Hope PSU doesn’t sue me for making this, but please share it…  
**Reoccurring References** | • Solidarity  
• Transformation of beloved slogan to reference timely events  
• Fear of punishment for not seeking permission to create/post image  
• Call for specific action (sharing)  
• Capitalization of text  
| **Effects of Truth** | By merging a beloved symbol of university solidarity with child abuse prevention imagery, Artist B seeks to visually combine the two concepts. This image seeks to portray the Penn State community as protective of children.  
**Complexity and Contradictions** | The “We Are Penn State” chant could imply homogeneity of thoughts and actions among the entire university community. Perceptions of uniformity parallel remarks made by others outside of the community that imply all in the Penn State community would permit criminal (and/or immoral) acts for the sake of the school’s football program.  
While Artist B recognizes Penn State’s ability to press charges on him for appropriating the original background image, he encourages others to copy and re-distribute his work. This becomes a noteworthy intersection of artist rights, branding, and promotion.  
| **Visibility**      | There is no mention or citation of original sources (and/or artists) even though Artist B recognizes infringement. Furthermore, the fear of legal action rests with the use of Penn State’s work, and not with the Stop Child Abuse ribbon graphic. |
Table E.2. Analysis of *Buckeye White Out* with caption.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Image and Caption</td>
<td><img src="image.jpg" alt="Image" /> <strong>I MAY BE A BUCKEYE, BUT I'M ALSO IN THE WHITE OUT!</strong> Artist C: I may be a Buckeye, but I'm also a nittany lion for LIFE! I'm for sure trading my scarlet and gray in Saturday for some blue! Joe Paterno ♥. <strong>GO STATE!!</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Sources                      | **Fonts:** The fonts used are easily re-creatable through Microsoft Word’s text box formatting.  
**Logos:** Ohio State and Penn State logos are the top Google Image search results for “Ohio State” and “Penn State” – the first and third result, respectively (as of February 7, 2013). *The Stop Child Abuse* ribbon logo is the same as the Blue Out Facebook event page. **Terminology:** Artist C mistakenly connects the familiar White Out with the Blue Out event in the image. However, the artist’s comment posted with the image correctly identifies blue as the color to wear. The comment also shows support for Joe Paterno by using a heart symbol next to his name. |
| Reoccurring References       | - Solidarity across Big Ten teams (traditional rivals)  
- Support for Joe Paterno  
- Personal expression of support for team/school  
- Capitalization of text |
| Effects of Truth             | The use of capitalization and multiple exclamation points suggests the passion Artist C wishes to communicate with her work. Using symbols that represent the event and both universities underscores the message Artist C communicates through text. It is almost as if she states the idea twice, first through text and again through imagery. |
| Complexity and Contradictions | Mixing up the terminology (Blue Out vs. White Out) within the image itself, yet getting it right in the comments is intriguing. Artist C obviously understood that blue was used to represent child abuse prevention and that she should wear blue to show support for the event. However, transferring that into a different name for the event (i.e. participating in a Blue Out and not a White Out) was problematic. Within the caption, the word “Buckeye” is capitalized while “nittany lion” is not, suggesting more respect for the former term. One exclamation point is used after “…I’m also in the White Out” but two are used after “Go State.” The evocation of Joe Paterno (followed with a heart) is seemingly tacked on to the end of the entire sentiment. While Paterno is not described in the image, the creator obviously feels a desire to share her feelings towards the coach publicly and in the Blue Out forum. |
| Visibility                   | Any mention of the Blue Out is missing from the image itself, but Artist C describes her intent to wear blue in order to participate. By creating this image, Artist C attempts to communicate that supporting Penn State and/or child abuse prevention is more important than collegiate rivalries. On another note, Ohio State was also in the midst of a football scandal at the time of the Blue Out, as their football program was found to have bribed players and continues to face the ramifications of these illegal acts (NPR Staff, 2011). |
Table E.3. Analysis of *The World Will Not Be Destroyed...* with caption.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Image and Caption**     | “The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything.”  
                           | -Albert Einstein  
                           | Artist D: This event is a thinly veiled attempt to "Support JoePa". I'll pass.                                                     |
| **Sources**               | **Einstein Quote:** The quote on top of Joe Paterno’s image evolved from the original, which was a reference to the musician Pablo Casals (MobileReference, 2011). The full quote is “What I particularly admire in him is the firm stand he has taken, not only against the oppressors of his countrymen, but also against those opportunists who are always ready to compromise with the Devil. He perceives very clearly that the world is in greater peril from those who tolerate or encourage evil than from those who actually commit it” (MobileReference, 2011). A similar quote, “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing,” is attributed to Edmond Burke, but this exact phrasing has not been found in Burke’s writing (O’Toole, 2010).  
                           | **AP Photo:** Pat Little (2007) took the original photograph (see Figure 4.9) and it is an Associated Press image documenting a 2007 press conference. The image can be found easily through a Google Image search of the terms “Joe Paterno smiling,” “Joe Paterno Laugh,” and “JoePa smiling.” |
| **Reoccurring References**| • Sarcasm  
                           | • Allowing bad actions is just as bad as doing them  
                           | • Questioning who defines Penn State  
                           | • Appropriating an AP image without mentioning it |
| **Effects of Truth**      | Artist D uses sarcasm and juxtaposition to express her/his feelings towards what s/he supposes the event to intent. Using a lighthearted image of Joe Paterno sharply contrasts with the superimposed and piercingly relevant words of responsibility. Presenting Paterno as unconcerned and nonchalant challenges the assumption that he was morally adequate. |
| **Complexity and Contradictions** | Placing words of wisdom from (supposedly) one of the greatest minds in history on top of Joe Paterno does not simply imply that the coach allowed evil to flourish. It also questions whom we should admire—academic heroes like Einstein, or athletic heroes like Paterno. Trying to stop evil seems to be the goal for both Artist D and the creators of the Blue Out. However, the Blue Out’s managers frequently stated that they took no position on the coaching staff—their only goal was spreading awareness about stopping child abuse and providing a constructive outlet for frustrated community members. The artist created this image to provide an alternative voice—yet the voice itself is an image overlaid with text. We see JoePa as relaxed and carefree, but he failed morally. However, Artist D also failed to hold himself to the highest standards. Ironically, Artist D used an all rights reserved AP image and misattributed quote to admonish a group for ostensibly supporting someone it did not. |
| **Visibility**            | A rush to judgment permeates both the work and the sentiment it carries. Einstein did not write this quote (at least not directly) and the Blue Out was not an attempt to support Paterno. However, this image was the second-most commented upon work (after “We Are Penn State”). This stems mostly from the original creator’s replies to commenters. |
Table E.4. Analysis of *Ever True To You, Dear Old White & Blue* with caption.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Image and Caption**  | **EVER TRUE TO YOU, DEAR OLD WHITE & BLUE**  
**Artist E: CHANGE YOUR PROFILE PICTURE TO SUPPORT PSU**                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| **Sources**            | **Logo:** The original “chipmunk” logo used at the top of the image was created in response to the national press coverage after the Penn State football team’s 1982 national championship. It was retained even after the University mark was adopted as the overarching school symbol to be used as an athletics logo (The Pennsylvania State University, 2009). **Text:** The text below the logo are song lyrics from “Fight on State,” a Penn State fight song written in 1935 by Joseph Saunders, a 1915 graduate (Penn State University, 2013). The song was originally “given to the freshman class to sing as their song and it was so catchy that it was soon adopted by the entire student body and the Blue Band” (Penn State University, 2013). The artist uses all capitalization in both the image and its caption. The size of the image is similar to a standard Microsoft Word page and uses the default font on newer versions of the software (Cambria). |
| **Reoccurring References** | • Loyalty  
• School Spirit  
• Solidarity/Support for Penn State  
• Capitalization of text                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| **Effects of Truth**   | Using all-caps in an online forum is the equivalent of shouting (University of Phoenix, 2013). The artist is effectively shouting her/his loyalty and requesting others to do so as well. Artist E uses an athletic logo and an athletic fight song to represent Penn State as a whole, essentially arguing that those who do not support the athletics program (and everything that implies) do not support the university. |
| **Complexity and Contradictions** | Being a beneficial member of any community should not require submission and conformity, especially when moral failings of that organization appear. Any “dear” establishment ought to value the safety of children.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| **Visibility**         | The overuse of capitalization makes the work (and Artist E’s caption) seem extremely aggressive and feels desperate, as if shouting (and not logic) will “win over” supporters. Shouting and yelling frequently occurs in athletic events, making fans feel as if they are part of the team and showing their “spirit.” This aggression is further compounded by the use of the university’s athletics logo and fight song.  
“May no act of ours bring shame,” a lyric from another Penn State song (the alma mater) was often used in response to the Sandusky scandal. However, this sentiment admits an indignity occurred. Artist E’s choice of song lyric evades this presumption and focuses on supporting the school wholeheartedly. In the same vein, a modified version of the lion logo sporting a teardrop spread rapidly through social networking outlets at the same time this work was created. Choosing the original logo may have been a conscious decision against admitting any wrongdoing. |
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