

A. Walsh  
21 W.730  
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**ESSAY #2: WRITING FOCUS: INTERPRETING PRIMARY SOURCES: A CASE STUDY:  
CRAFTING INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY IN THE MEDIA AGE**

Submit TWO copies with cover letter and exercise 2.1.  
Draft Due Date: Thurs. 3/22  
Revision Due Date: Tues. 4/10

Introduction: Academic writers often use primary source data as evidence in reconstructing and analyzing historical eras, applying or testing theories and interpreting contemporary communities and individual lives. The adjective "primary" characterizes a source that is uninterpreted. Such sources include diaries, letters, interviews and oral histories, government and other organizational documents, survey data and material artifacts. Primary sources provide critical data in a wide range of disciplines within the humanities, natural sciences and social sciences.

This essay challenges you to create and interpret a primary source text, i.e., an individual interview, within the context of secondary sources on popular media such as television and advertising. In doing so, you will build upon the skills of unit one, as you interpret segments of your interview closely and analyze your interview **text** within the **context** of multiple secondary sources.

ESSAY #2: (Suggested length: 8-10 pg., typed, double-spaced)

In this essay, you are asked to analyze closely an interview that you have conducted with a person in your own age range about his or her experiences growing up and developing an identity(ies ?) in the age of mass media. Your essay should closely interpret key segments of the interview, addressing such topic areas as: (a) the multiple and complex influences of television, advertising and digital media on your subject's sense of identity from childhood through young adulthood in terms of such issues as age, race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, body image/body ideal, educational and occupational goals; (b) the power of television, advertising and digital media in shaping your subject's awareness of social and political issues and attitudes toward political participation; (c) the influence of media on your subject's views of communications technology as a social force in the present and future. Your close interpretation of segments of the interview as a **text** should be presented within the **context** of such course readings as Postman, Ewen, Schudson, Caughey, Gerbner, Jhally and Kellner. Other readings in *Race, Class and Gender in Media* and outside secondary sources may also be applicable.

ESSAY #2 (continued):

**Pre-Writing Stages:**

Conducting and Transcribing the Interview:

Your interview should last for about an hour, and should be tape-recorded, if at all possible. See handout "Interviewing: General Guidelines and Suggested Questions". After recording the interview, you will need to transcribe the portions that you plan to analyze (transcription of interview segments may take 4-5 hours). If your subject is not willing to be tape-recorded, you should create a summary of your interview with quotations that you plan to analyze.

Analyzing the Interview:

Working closely with your transcript, analyze key segments of the interview on topic areas (a) through (c) outlined on p.1 Pay careful and critical attention to the tone and language of the interview, circling or underlining any particularly meaningful or recurrent words, phrases or sentences used by your subject. In your analysis, be especially attuned to the contradictions and complexities expressed by your subject in tone and/or language.

Writing Challenges:

The challenges of this essay are multiple. Rather than choosing an existing text, you will generate new primary source data through an interview. And, then, in closely analyzing that primary source, you will perform a skill of qualitative interpretation used by scholars such as sociologists, historians and anthropologists, usually with larger samples.

Please note that this essay is not designed to "test" the theory of a particular author or authors, but rather to enrich and complicate our understanding of a primary source, individual life data, through the lens of relevant secondary sources. Since growing up in the television age is a major focus of the interview, I expect that you will refer to Postman. However, since advertising images also permeate the media, you may also choose to incorporate Ewen, Schudson, Kellner, Jhally or other authors.

The strength of the essay will emerge from: (a) selection of an interesting and engaged subject (b) a productive interview with clear, focused questions (c) perceptive and well-crafted analysis of key portions of the interview developed in reference to readings from the course. Your incorporation of course readings may demonstrate that your subject fits, or does not fit, the patterns described in the readings.