

Olivia Moosey

Professor Peter Forster

MCS 343: Media Ethics

August 24th, 2021

### The Internet Can Be a Scam

People are victims of the internet. They believe, and buy into, everything they see online. The *Black Mirror* episode titled, “The National Anthem” depicts just that. The episode is about the Prime Minister of the UK getting blackmailed into having sexual intercourse with a pig on national television.

Watching the episode, it reminded me a lot of the toxicity and manipulation within the diet culture industry. Now, I know what you might be thinking: how does an episode of *Black Mirror* connect to diet culture? They are on complete opposite ends of the spectrum. Diet culture is all about taking your money and profiting off of your insecurities. They will sell you on “magic weight loss” products, when in reality, it does nothing. Think about all the diets out there: Weight Watchers, Optavia, and Noom to name a few, all a big scam and MLM! All these “diets” do is starve you, make you dependent on their program, and they don’t teach you how to properly nourish and fuel your body. Most importantly, it’s not sustainable for long term and healthy weight loss. Diets are just glorified disordered eating. There are loads of people, including myself, who develop eating disorders, horrific relationships with food and themselves *because* of what the media feeds us.

According to the textbook, ethics is described as, “generally conceived to be the philosophical study of morality [...] It is the rational discussion of the process of making moral judgments.” (Horan, 5). Morality is whether an action is right or wrong based on your opinion on

the topic. As a society, there is no right or wrong way to do something. It's not based on anything factual, it's based on the experiences we've had and the people we surround ourselves with, our culture. All of this combined can determine whether we believe an action is right or wrong. There are questions we ask ourselves while making a decision such as: "Is it right or wrong to broadcast material that may offend sections of the television audience? [...] Is it right to lie to get a good story?" (Horan, 5). All of this comes down to how you view the world.

Furthermore, the moral decisions that are made in the episode and the diet culture industry are as follows. In both cases, they are bribing individuals to do a certain action, and we fall for it. We believe what they say is true and the correct thing to make ourselves happy. We want to better ourselves and help others around us, and we think this is the way to do it. We are so immersed in this type of culture, by wanting to please everyone, that it's second nature to us. Ethically, in both cases, are as follows. Like I said previously, they are bribing us with all this information to get us to do something they want us to do not taking into account the expense it will have on our mental well-being. Morality is the decisions we as individuals make. Ethics is based on the bigger picture: what society, the work place, any big organization deems to be true.

In the beginning, we see an emotional and distraught Susanna telling the Prime Minister that her life depends on him. Of course, the Prime Minister feeds into it by continually asking her questions about her and thinks what she asked him to do on national television was fake when it's in fact, real. He interpreted it as a joke as there's no way someone was asking him to do such a thing. Afterwards, he disapproved of doing the action and sent teams to figure out what was going on and to get a grasp on everything. Wouldn't that be what anyone would do in a given situation? If you don't have all the facts and are forced into a situation, that's the most logical thing to do.

Later on, we see that the Prime Minister is the main perception of the media. The perception they have of him is purely based on what's on the media. The video of Princess Susanna is posted on Youtube, and afterwards, everyone seems to be on the Prime Minister's side. The team directed him to not do what he was told. We then see the attempt to find Susannah was a flop, and the Prime Minister decides to fake the act. When both of the attempts to fake the act completely flop, the Prime Minister decides to do it for real. All in all, we witness Susanna being found and rescued by her captor. The Prime Minister still does what he was told unaware of what had previously happened. Lastly, we see the Prime Minister one year after the unfortunate event with high rankings, but still in extreme distraught with what had happened.

All the actions that the Prime Minister and the team made were purely a moral choice. They were doing what they thought would be best with the situation at hand. They could've easily not cared and just let it go. They were doing what they thought was the right and correct choice with, essentially, what was being bribed at them. The actions of "society," or in this case, Susanna and the broadcasting team, were all ethical. They are forcing all this information to individuals with what they want to do. They don't care how it affects us, they "profit" off of this.

I struggled in the beginning with coming to terms with the fact that I had an eating disorder. I didn't want to accept it, and I was in complete denial about everything. I went to this eating recovery center just to go and convince myself I was working on myself. I was "faking the act." Long story short, I lasted no more than two weeks and quit. I hated that I needed help and thought I would be able to do this on my own. Additionally, hearing other people's story on their journey, mine wasn't even close to that, and I felt like even more of an outsider.

I'm lucky and grateful to announce that I'm finally in recovery from my eating disorder. No wonder I struggled with my eating and body image! We live in a world where society and the

media have brainwashed us, especially women, into thinking our bodies need to look a specific way that is highly unattainable and impossibly perfect. If it doesn't, you will have no worth as a person and no one will think you're beautiful, but now, I've realized they're wrong. I did this by unlearning all this information and being okay with my body and where I'm at now while I'm struggling to do so.

That's probably the biggest rant I've gone on and will assure you on how it relates to the *Black Mirror* episode and the next source(s) I'm about to provide.

The ethical framework that the Prime Minister should voluntarily operate is through utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is "generally held to be the view that the morally right action is the action that produces the most good [...] The right action is understood entirely in terms of consequences produced." When Utilitarian thinking comes into play, there's usually some sort of a social problem. In this case, there is.

You have to come up with alternatives for possible solutions. There are three questions you have to ask yourself in this type of situation: What's the problem? What are the alternatives to address the problem at hand? How would your possible ending result affect each person involved? You are doing the greatest good for the greatest number of people. The key is the more people you affect in a positive way, the choice you made is the morally correct decision.

In this situation, there are a few questions the Prime Minister should be asking himself. First and foremost: How did this situation make me feel? As an audience member, we can assume he felt ashamed, humiliated, and embarrassed. The more he comes to terms with where he's at now, and feel what he's feeling, the better he will be able to perform for the community. Once that is complete, a few more questions should be: Is there anyone else Susanna did this to?

If so, how many? What does the team think about all of this? Is Susannah planning to do this again?

With all of this in mind, the best thing the Prime Minister should do is speak up about his experience. Whether that's on social media or a public speaking event, he needs to share his side of the story. Not only would this help him accept what happened and move forward from this, but this will also help others who have experienced this, bring awareness to the community so something like this doesn't happen again or if it does, they will be more prepared. Overall, this could help a huge amount of people which is the ultimate goal of utilitarianism.

I know I used this same quote in my last paper, but I thought it was appropriate for this too. This TedTalk speaker discusses if it would be applicable to inform its' users, to make it a better place. Would this be worthwhile? "If we want to provide decent, fulfilling lives for our children and our children's children, we need to exercise to the very greatest degree possible that duty of care for a vibrant, and hopefully a lasting, democracy." (10:08-10:19)

No matter where we are, the internet will always be full of information that may not be 100% true. That's just how life is right now. It's how we react to it that will make all the difference. Is it okay to buy into things the media tells? Absolutely. I'm guilty as charged. If we've learned from our mistakes and know what we bought into was toxic, inform others. Educate yourself, educate those around you to stop the spread of things happening. If we do this, the world would become a much better and calmer place.

## Annotated Bibliography

Horner, David Sanford. "Understanding Media Ethics." Sage Publications, 2015.

"The National Anthem." *Black Mirror*. Directed by Otto Bathurst. Netflix. Season One, Episode One. December 4th, 2011.

Putnam, David. "Does the Media Have a "Duty of Care?" TED: Ideas Worth Spreading, June, 2013. [https://www.ted.com/talks/david\\_putnam\\_does\\_the\\_media\\_have\\_a\\_duty\\_of\\_care#t-617743](https://www.ted.com/talks/david_putnam_does_the_media_have_a_duty_of_care#t-617743)

In this Ted Talk video, David Putnam raises multiple different questions on the media and if it's up to us to, as he puts it, raise democracy. Is it up to us to change the narrative? "Does it have a moral imperative to create informed citizens, to support democracy?" He provides us with possible solutions to this problem at hand.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. "The History of Utilitarianism" March 27, 2009. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/utilitarianism-history/>

This article, by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, discusses the history of Utilitarianism. Where it started, how it's used, the importance of it are all things talked about in the article. Additionally, it addresses how this framework is one of the "most powerful" ways to approach a situation. Thus, I used it in this research paper.