The Homogenized Imagery
of Non-profit Organizations
on the Internet

/ Linda Jean Kenix

Abstract

This research evaluates websites from 200 'non-deviant' and 200 'deviant' non-profit organizations to better understand the relationship between the type of advocacy group and the visual imagery used for self-representation. Seventeen of 21 variables measured for this study found no difference between non-deviant and deviant non-profit organizations' visual representations on the Internet. These findings potentially complicate the notion of a diverse communicative sphere. As non-profits face the responsibility of representing themselves to potentially millions of viewers online, it is suggested that self-imposed 'normalizing' restrictions on visual constructions of organizational identity may be inevitable. The societal implications of homogenized imagery from non-profit organizations online are discussed.

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Non-profit groups have long charged that media misrepresent their purpose or polarize their issues.[1] Their frustration has stemmed from the deeply held belief that those who control power within society also create the predominant mass ideology of citizen organizations.[2] However, the arrival of the Internet has allowed for organizations to present their own ideology to a truly mass audience—without any mediation —for the first time in history. Certainly, organizations have long had access to print outlets in the past, but the cost of advertising could be particularly prohibitive to cash-strapped non-profit organizations and the audience reach of the Internet provided exponential promise. The Internet has permitted groups to define their own terms "within which reality is experienced, perceived, and interpreted."[3]

In creating their own visual ideology, non-profit organizations now control the implicit boundaries where particular information is included and excluded for potentially millions of people. Yet, it is possible that with the capability to reach the masses, non-profit organizations may have to pay greater attention to the powerful moderate 'mainstream'— the majority of those exposed to their message. While the inception of the Internet has been heralded as an advancement for diversity, democracy and a heterogeneity of voices, the actuality—in terms of self-representation—could actually be far more homogenous representations. This possibility has deeper implications for groups that deviate further from societal norms.

Therefore, this research explores the generally overlooked intersection between non-profit organizations and visual constructions of organizational identity on the Internet. The Internet has been heralded as a democratizing and heterogeneous communication tool, particularly for non-profit citizen organizations. Yet, a thorough examination of visual content on the Web that substantiates this position has not followed. With remarkably little data

1 SEE BARKER-PLUMMER, THE DIALOGIC OF MEDIA AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS; GITLIN, THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING; AND VAN ZOONEN, THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND THE MEDIA: CONSTRUCT-ING A PUBLIC IDENTITY. 2 SEE GROSSBERG ET AL, MEDIA MAKING: MASS MEDIA IN A POPULAR CULTURE. 3 GROSSBERG ET AL, MEDIA MAKING, 183.

exploring this facet of cyber-communication, this research asks whether non-profit organizations that deviate more from accepted norms in society use equally deviant visual representations to get their message out. This area of overlooked research must be examined if scholars are to better understand the widely assumed heterogeneous forces of the Internet.

ACTIVISM ON THE NET

Non-profits are defined as "two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion tactics or force".[4] Their success depends in large part on their ability to access and to use political allies, media coverage, money and public awareness.[5] For the most part, non-profit groups are, or begin as, marginal or powerless groups.[6] Certainly, there are exceptions, such as the lobbying powerhouses of the National Rifle Association or the Sierra Club. However, the overwhelming majority of non-profit organizations remain largely powerless in society[7] given that they fall outside of mainstream media's norms of inclusion[8] and they are faced with tight budgetary constraints that hamper their ability for promotion otherwise. Non-profit organizations and social movements are often shut out of mainstream media as they "challenge a major aspect of society, either its authorities or cultural codes, from outside the political process, often employing unconventional actions."[9]

However, because of the inherent capabilities of the Internet, new hope has arisen that non-profit organizations will be able to gain credibility and power in their struggle for social change. The technology of the Internet has allowed for horizontal and vertical flow of communications,[10] physical connectivity, data communality and interactivity.[11] With no central control point,[12] the Internet has allowed non-profits and citizen groups to produce, receive and distribute

4 SEE GRUNIG, ACTIVISM: HOW IT LIMITS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ORGANIZATIONS AND HOW EXCELLENT PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENTS RESPOND.

5 SEE HEATH, STRATEGIC ISSUES MANAGEMENT: ORGANIZATIONS AND PUBLIC POLICY CHALLENGES.

6 SEE BERRY, THE INTEREST GROUP SOCIETY.

7 SEE GREENWALD, GROUP POWER: LOBBYING AND PUBLIC POLICY.

8 SEE WOLFSFELD, MEDIA AND POLITICAL CONFLICT: NEWS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST.

9 SEE LESTER, LOST IN THE WILDERNESS? CELEBRITY, PROTEST AND THE NEWS.

10 SEE STROMER-GALLEY, ON-LINE INTERACTION AND WHY CANDIDATES AVOID IT.

11 SEE FLANAGIN ET AL, THE TECHNICAL CODE OF THE INTERNET/WORLD WIDE WEB.

12 SEE BERMAN AND WEITZNER, TECHNOLOGY AND DEMOCRACY.

13 SEE BERTELSON, MEDIA FORM AND GOVERNMENT: DEMOCRACY AS AN ARCHETYPAL IMAGE IN THE ELECTRONIC AGE; FISHER ET AL, BREAKING GROUND ON THE VIRTUAL FRONTIER:

information almost instantaneously[13] from both a visual and textual perspective.[14]

Many scholars have framed the Internet as space for thriving democracy and plurality[15] where non-profit groups can become more powerful[16] and individuals can become more civically engaged[17] due to their unique, singular voice.[18] These arguments rest on a supposition that as Internet users become increasingly exposed to a multiplicity of perspectives, a Habermasian public sphere will develop. Certainly, previous technologies were seen as equally democratic in promise during their inception.[19] Yet, it has been argued that what differentiates this medium is that the Internet, unlike other communication technologies, is less centralized, accessible to heterogeneous and diverse public intervention and not defined by a one-way or top-down communication model.[20] It is important to note that online communities can, and often do, manifest themselves off-line as well. Howard Dean's real world 'Meet-Ups' are just one example of overlapping community spheres. However, the power of the Internet to potentially foster civically-engaged communities, both offline and online, is indisputable.

The sheer abundance of content on the Internet suggests a strong level of diversity. The Pew Internet and American Life Project found that there were 104 million Internet users in the United States in 2002, which translated to roughly 56 percent of the population.[21] In 2006, over one billion people worldwide, or 15 percent of the total population, used the Internet[22] and in the United States, 73 percent of all American adults in 2006 were online.[23] As more people go 'wired,' the Internet inevitably becomes more diverse. While college educated, highly paid white men inhabited early cyberspace,[24] U.S. women now slightly outnumber men on the Internet.[25] Further, minorities and families with modest incomes continue to grow.[26] African-Americans, along with middle-

SURVEYING CIVIC LIFE ON THE INTERNET; LUNENFELD, THE DIGITAL DIALECTIC: NEW ESSAYS ON NEW MEDIA. **14** SEE DYSON, RELEASE 2.0: A DESIGN FOR LIVING IN THE DIGITAL AGE. **15** SEE KELLNER, INTELLECTUALS AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES; PAVLIK, NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGY: CULTURAL AND COMMERCIAL PERSPECTIVES; ROSEN, CHEAP SPEECH. **16** SEE COOMBS, THE INTERNET AS POTENTIAL EQUALIZER: NEW LEVERAGE FOR CONFRONTING SOCIAL IRRESPONSIBILITY. **17** SEE BUCY AND GREGSON, MEDIA PARTICIPATION: A LEGITIMIZING MECHANISM OF MASS DEMOCRACY. **18** SEE WEIGNER, EVERYONE CAN BE A STAR. **19** SEE DAHLBERG, DEMOCRACY VIA CYBERSPACE: MAPPING THE RHETORICS AND PRACTICES OF THREE PROMINENT CAMPS. **20** SEE KELLNER, INTELLECTUALS AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES. **21** SEE WEB STATISTICS. **22** SEE INTERNET USAGE STATISTICS—THE BIG PICTURE. **23** SEE INTERNET EVOLUTION.

income families, are the major group responsible for the sharp rise in home broadband adoption in the United States.[27] Given these increases in diversity, the assumption could be made that there has also been a concomitant increase in diverse—and sometimes deviant—visual elements on the Internet.

DESIGN AND DEVIANCE

Deviance has emerged as an important conceptual categorization in differentiating citizen organizations.[28] Admittedly, in their effort to change widespread thinking or alter accepted political policies, citizen groups by their very definition, deviate from the norm. Yet, some groups deviate further from accepted societal values than others. Standards of deviance within social organizations have historically been constructed on loose political grounds. Meaning the further away from moderate centrist views, such as similarity to the majority of Americans and the amount of change advocated, the more deviant the group.[29] Organizations can deviate from the mainstream along almost any conceivable axis, such as occupation, sexuality, politics, philosophy, economics or violence.

Extremist groups, conceptually similar to the categorization of deviance, are said to demonstrate dogmatic intolerance, expressed in varying form and possess a rigid obedience to an authority that has been shaped by group unity and ideology.[30]

There is a diverse range of rhetoric found in the non-profit community, moving from the militant to the moderate.[31] More deviant groups have historically represented themselves through direct persuasive imagery that could often utilize violence[32] or subversive design techniques, such as instability and fragmentation. In doing so, these groups have challenged design techniques and popular aesthetic conceptions. A classic image of Huey P. Newton, the Min-

24 SEE GUNKEL AND GUNKEL, VIRTUAL GEOGRAPHIES: THE NEW WORLD OF CYBERSPACE. 25 SEE MORE ONLINE, DOING MORE: 16 MILLION NEWCOMERS GAIN INTERNET ACCESS IN THE LAST HALF OF 2000 AS WOMEN, MINORITIES, AND FAMILIES WITH MODEST INCOMES CONTINUE TO SURGE ONLINE. 26 SEE INTERNET EVOLUTION. 27 SEE REPORTS: TECHNOLOGY & MEDIA USE. 28 SEE GITLIN, THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING: MASS MEDIA IN THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF THE NEW LEFT. 29 SEE SHOEMAKER, MEDIA TREATMENT OF DEVIANT POLITICAL GROUPS. 30 SEE GARDNER, THE AGE OF EXTREMISM. 31 SEE SIMONS, REQUIREMENTS, PROBLEMS, AND STRATEGIES: A THEORY OF PERSUASION FOR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS. 32 SEE RAY AND MARSH, RECRUITMENT BY EXTREMIST GROUPS ON THE INTERNET.

ister of Defense of the Black Panther Party, demonstrates such challenges in imagery (*figure 1*). In this iconic poster, Huey Newton stands in the foreground holding a machine gun. In doing so, this image clearly utilizes violence for its message. The poster is designed in complete symmetry except for one crucial element—Huey Newton holding the gun. This destabilizing image is purposefully placed in the foreground to grab the attention of the viewer. Directly behind him, Newton's face is replicated and blown up to envelop almost the entire page. He stares off into the distance as a martyr for his people. Lines of motion pull from all sides directly to him, as the figurehead of the movement. If there was any doubt as to his stature in the party, his photo is replicated seven times across the top of the page. The repeated emphasis of Huey Newton as the symbol for the Black Panther party is meant to challenge the viewer—and society at large—to consider the power of this man and this party.

These challenges stem from the need for those seeking social change to exercise the "symbolic capital"[33] of visual images in the absence of "electoral clout or (in most cases) economic influence."[34] In a modern world dominated by images not words,[35] non-profit groups—like all others operating in this modern, visual, communicative sphere—have had to rely upon direct, emotionally charged imagery to invoke participation. Dramatic visuals are often the result of "heightened inventional requirements"[36] facing groups who are desperately searching for public participation and awareness. Conklin[37] agrees and argues, "images and ideas, not common identity or mutual economic interests, mobilize political cooperation among people separated by wide distances and differences of language, culture and historical experience." One only need examine the case of Greenpeace to comprehend the true power of dramatic visuals. This environmental organization swiftly gained global power and prominence after "deploying dramatic visuals"[38] in

33 SEE BOURDIEU, OUTLINE OF A THEORY OF PRACTICE. 34 SEE CONKLIN, BODY PAINT, FEATHERS, AND VCRS: AESTHETICS AND AUTHENTICITY IN AMAZONIAN ACTIVISM. 35 SEE DELUCA AND PEEPLES, FROM PUBLIC SPHERE TO PUBLIC SCREEN: DEMOCRACY, ACTIVISM AND THE 'VIOLENCE' OF SEATTLE. 36 SEE SANCHEZ AND STUCKEY, THE RHETORIC OF AMERICAN INDIAN ACTIVISM IN THE 1960S AND 1970S. 37 SEE CONKLIN, BODY PAINT, FEATHERS, AND VCRS. 38 SEE DELUCA AND PEEPLES, FROM PUBLIC SPHERE TO PUBLIC SCREEN.

LET US HOLD HIGH THE BANNER OF REVOLUTIONARY INTERCOMMUNALISM
AND THE INVINCIBLE THOUGHTS OF
HUEY P. NEWTON
MINISTER OF DEFENSE OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY
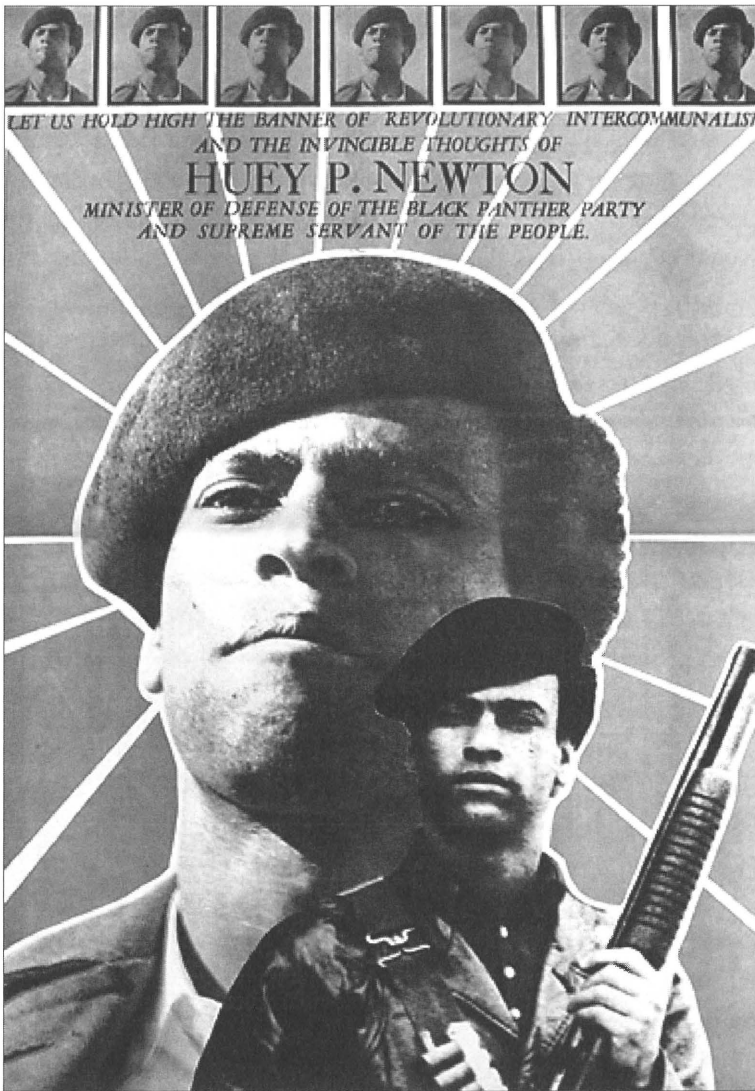AND SUPREME SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE.

Figure 1 A classic image of Huey P. Newton, the Minister of Defense of the Black Panther Party, demonstrates such challenges in imagery.

Figure 2 http://www.greenpeace.org/international/photosvideos/photos
Big Ben: London, UK.

Figure 3 http://www.greenpeace.org/international/photosvideos/photos/riodejaneiro
Christ statue: Rio de Janeiro.

equally dramatic locations (*figures 2 and 3*). This is not to say that mainstream organizations never use challenging imagery. Only that one has to wonder if more deviant organizations might rely on more dramatic imagery to better communicate their philosophical distance from the center.

These visuals have so much dramatic impact because they reproduce informational cues, that individuals use to construct their perception of social reality.[39] Gattegno[40] first argued that sight itself is simultaneous, comprehensive and synthetic in its analysis. Indeed, visual images are central to how we represent, make meaning and communicate in the world around us."[41] Research has shown that different techniques and aesthetic approaches signify different meanings to viewers. For example, the overall design of a web page itself can suggest sophistication, seriousness and professionalism if it follows a structured, aligned construction.[42] When elements are aligned, there is an invisible line that connects items and indicates their relationship. Without any alignment, a design can appear haphazard and unstructured.

In deconstructing design, experts have generally agreed upon several guides[43] that have implications for deviance: unity, balance, rhythm and contrast. These widely accepted design techniques, when skillfully used, create cohesiveness, professionalism, serenity and calmness.[44] When manipulated, these techniques can also translate into disorder, tension, a sense of chaos and division. For example, balanced designs have been found to denote strength[45] whereas an unbalanced design creates uneasiness. Whereby a symmetric design denotes formality, tradition and conservatism, an asymmetrical design proves to have a dynamic tension.[46]

Williams and Tollett[47] suggest that type on web pages can appear more sophisticated and professionalized if a few simple rules are followed: type must be readable; not in too many colors, not too large, stable in movement and

39 SEE MESSARIS, VISUAL LITERACY: IMAGE, MIND AND REALITY.
40 SEE GATTEGNO, TOWARDS A VISUAL CULTURE: EDUCATING THROUGH TELEVISION.
41 SEE STURKEN AND CARTWRIGHT, PRACTICES OF LOOKING: AN INTRODUCTION TO VISUAL CULTURE.
42 SEE WILLIAMS, THE NON-DESIGNER'S DESIGN BOOK.
43 SEE LAUER AND PENTAK, DESIGN BASICS.
44 SEE WILLIAMS AND TOLLETT, THE NON-DESIGNER'S WEB BOOK.
45 SEE LAUER AND PENTAK, DESIGN BASICS.
46 SEE LAUER AND PENTAK, DESIGN BASICS.
47 SEE WILLIAMS AND TOLLETT, THE NON-DESIGNER'S WEB BOOK.

unblinking. Typography that breaks these rules often appears either subversive or elementary. Further, these authors have argued that organization, structure, a navigation menu and a simple background in a website appear more professional.[48]

Images themselves are profoundly important in creating meaning for the viewer. Messaris[49] argues that visual images elicit emotions, serve as photographic proof and establish an implicit link between the image itself and some other emotion or thing. More deviant non-profit groups have historically represented themselves through direct persuasive imagery that utilizes violence or sexualized imagery[50] to denote the direct-action orientation of the organization. Symbols have also been widely used by organizations because these visual constructions effectively and succinctly communicate the ideology of that organization to the viewer.[51] For example, when symbols such as an American flag are used, the meanings associated with that flag (patriotism, democracy, capitalism, freedom, etc.) are transferred to that organization in the mind of the viewer. However, when well-known symbols are manipulated in some way, the opposite of the symbols' intended meaning is often conferred.

In creating imagery for a specific audience, designers often pay close attention to attracting the interests of their constituency. Designers must presumably balance the needs of their audience against the agenda of the organization, the design interests of the non-profit and the organization's budget. Each one of these important facets in the creation of an aesthetic online presence is, in it's own right, central to the output. Kaye and Medoff[52] point out that "an online site may be perfectly designed from a company's point of view, but if it does not attract users or encourage repeat visits, the site is not worth the time and resources of upkeep."[53] Obviously, the same applies to non-profit organizations. For the aesthetic of a site to be successful, the design must reflect

48 SEE WILLIAMS AND TOLLETT, THE NON-DESIGNER'S WEB BOOK.
49 SEE MESSARIS, VISUAL PERSUASION: THE ROLE OF IMAGES IN ADVERTISING.
50 SEE RAY AND MARSH, RECRUITMENT BY EXTREMIST GROUPS ON THE INTERNET.
51 SEE STURKEN AND CARTWRIGHT, PRACTICES OF LOOKING: AN INTRODUCTION TO VISUAL CULTURE.
52 SEE KAYE AND MEDOFF, THE WORLD WIDE WEB: A MASS COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE.
53 SEE KAYE AND MEDOFF, THE WORLD WIDE WEB.

the content provided and attract the organization's core audience. Yet, the dilemma is that there is not simply one single public that visits a site. Rather, there are several publics who may navigate through an organization's site that are in no way homogeneous.[54] Giussani[55] writes that the biggest challenge to those uploading content on the web is that they must "take into account all of these elements, the wild diversity of the public, the different cultures, the different media tools and to make something coherent."[56] Some scholars have argued that there is a broad range of layout and design diversification on the web that reflects the heterogeneity of Internet users.[57]

This research examines whether this suggested visual heterogeneity actually applies to all types of non-profit organizations. Are the most deviant groups on the Internet represented through common, non-confrontational imagery and standard design techniques or do their visual constructions equate with their professed ideologies?

HYPOTHESES

Given previous research that suggests the Internet is an arena for divergent voices to be seen, the following hypotheses are offered to determine whether deviant organizations use concomitant imagery to represent themselves on the Internet:

> **H1** / Non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more likely than deviant non-profit organizations to utilize the skillful design techniques of unity, balance, rhythm and contrast to denote order, cohesiveness, professionalism, serenity and calmness.
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> **H2** / Non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more likely than deviant non-profit organizations to incorporate

54 SEE GIUSSANI, A NEW MEDIA TELLS DIFFERENT STORIES.
55 SEE GIUSSANI, A NEW MEDIA.
56 SEE GIUSSANI, A NEW MEDIA TELLS DIFFERENT STORIES.
57 SEE CORDONE, A SHORT ANALYSIS OF THE VERBAL AND VISUAL ELEMENTS OF THE ENGLISH OF WORLD WIDE WEB PAGES.

a professional design emphasizing organization, alignment, a navigation menu and a simple background.

H3 / Non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more likely than deviant non-profit organizations to use sophisticated and professional approaches to typography (as evidenced by easy readability, small type sizes, unblinking type, static type and aligned type).

H4 / The visuals of a non-deviant non-profit organization will be less likely than deviant non-profit organizations to utilize subversive symbolism, or violent, sexualized, confrontational or deviant imagery.

While practice of logo design dates back to ancient Greece, it has been intrinsically tied to business, and therefore, mainstream, normalized interests. Early logos that used to differentiate mason marks, for example, have become crucial visual identities for any type of business in modern society. The presence of a logo, in and of itself, suggests a connection with mainstream, normalized capitalistic ideologies. Therefore:

H5 / Non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more likely than deviant non-profit organizations to incorporate a logo into their design.

Given previous research that suggests the Internet is an expanding democratic sphere that encompasses a wide range of diversity, it is suggested that all non-profit organizations would be best served by conveying a unified textual and visual representation. Rather than concealing the mission of a deviant orga-

nization behind innocuous graphics, this research suggests that the Internet allows for transparency in visual communication.

> **H6** / The visual content of non-deviant non-profit organization web pages and deviant non-profit organizations web pages will be more likely to communicate textual content than to communicate disjointed visual and textual messages.

METHODOLOGY
Content Selection and Coding

Two hundred mainstream web pages were selected randomly based on inclusion in Guidestar, a database of 850,000 IRS-recognized (U.S. Internal Revenue Service) nonprofit organizations and World Advocacy, publicized as the "world's premier list of advocacy groups."[58] This was done to purposefully gather a spectrum of organizations that are not confined to one political, geographical or ideological location, yet are located in a public index defined by inclusion in the mainstream IRS-recognized database. A further 200 web pages were randomly selected from the American Family Foundation, the Anti-Defamation League and Altervistas. The American Family Foundation[59] and the Anti-Defamation League,[60] assemble URL's of 'deviant' web citizen organizations, such as neo-Nazis, religious cults, militias, Satanists and racist groups for educational or informational purposes. Altervistas,[61] on the other hand, is a database of URL's that are "weird and bizarre." Only non-profit citizen organization web pages were used from the Altervista database.

A randomized content analysis of the front pages of 400 web pages was then completed. Coders were instructed to code only what 'pops up' when the home

58 SEE HOMEPAGE.
59 SEE CULT RESEARCH LINKS SUBJECT INDEX.
60 SEE POISONING THE WEB: HATRED ONLINE.
61 SEE WELCOME TO ALTERVISTAS.

URL is typed in. If the page automatically goes to a second page without any user intervention, then both pages were coded. Two coders were selected from a graduate program that emphasized visual imagery in mass communication. Coders were instructed about the coding scheme together to help facilitate discussion and questions as a group. The coders worked from a randomly ordered list of all 400 websites that combined (200 'deviant' organizations and 200 'non-deviant' organizations).

Coders were trained in determining design guides such as unity, balance, rhythm and contrast as well as symbolism, apparent violence and sexual content in imagery. Coders were also instructed to classify the design of the web page itself along traditional design classifications of proportion, movement, contrast and unity. Finally, students were given training about different typographical treatments in web page design.

Operationalization of Variables

Given the often-subjective nature of visual communication, the following terms were operationalized for the purposes of this study to ensure a higher level of reliability in coding the variables.

> **Unity** / Determined through proximity, repetition or continuation. These forms of unity can communicate specific ideological, geographical or symbolic cohesiveness to the reader.[62] This concept is closely related to the Gestalt theory of visual cognition, which states that through various methods of unification there is a resulting perception that the whole is substantively different than the sum of its parts. For the purposes of this research, if an element

62 SEE LAUER AND PENTAK, *DESIGN BASICS*. **63** SEE LAUER AND PENTAK, *DESIGN BASICS*.

was grouped within a pre-determined space with another element, then these elements were identified as unified by proximity. If more than one element was recurring within a specific space then these elements were unified through repetition. Images that were grouped through a visually continuous line or by their directional unanimity were unified through continuation.

Balance / An element frequently used to demonstrate strength and professionalism or isolation and uneasiness.[63] Accordingly, these emotions are found in symmetrical balance and asymmetrical balance. Radial balance and crystallographic balance are often used to denote a sense of overwhelming emotion or chaos. Radial balance was found when all of the elements radiated or circled out from a common central point whereas crystallographic existed when all elements within a web page carry equal emphasis over the whole format. If any obvious usage of balance was found, it was categorized within these four options.

Rhythm / Categorized as either progressive or alternating. Progressive rhythm was detected when elements gradually shifted in shape, color, value or texture within the frame, creating a quiet sense of serenity. Alternating rhythm was present when elements interchanged with one another in a consistent and regulated pattern creating a tenser, dynamic emotion.

Contrast / Occurs when two elements or more are markedly different, with the greater difference providing greater

contrast. Contrast can occur by using differences in size, value, color and type.[64] More contrast emphasizes difference and divisiveness while less contrast communicates a calmness.

Structure / Arranged elements that mutually connect through parallel or perpendicular alignment.

Organic / Elements that are free form and do not necessarily have perpendicular or parallel alignment with one another.

Navigation menu / A graphical or textual 'map' that guides users through the site and gives users easy access to the pages they want.[65]

Symbols / A widely accepted sign or object that stands for or represents another thing, often an abstract concept.

Logo / A symbol or letter representing a non-profit organization.

Deviance / Differing from the norm or from the accepted social and/or moral standards of society.

Confrontational / Challenging or hostile.

Professional / Demonstrating great skill or experience.

Analysis Technique

The study utilized descriptive statistics to describe the variables of interest. Inter-observer reliability coefficients were utilized to provide an indication of the reliability of the coding scheme used. Chi-square correlations, the Mann-Whitney test when variables are ordinal, expected values, adjusted residual scores, simple percentages and frequencies were utilized to answer the stated hypotheses.

64 SEE LAUER AND PENTAK, *DESIGN BASICS.*
65 SEE BARND AND YU, *CREATING AN EFFECTIVE WEB SITE.*
66 SEE DENNING, *THE CULTURAL FRONT: THE LABORING OF AMERICAN CULTURE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.*

PRE-TEST OF DEVIANCE

To ensure a higher level of validity in determining deviance, coders were asked to stop after coding the first 75 web pages. From these, 15 'very deviant' or 'somewhat deviant' organizations and 15 'not deviant at all' or 'somewhat not deviant' organizations were randomly selected. These thirty web pages were then shown to 100 students in an Introduction to Mass Communication course, who then completed a survey about their conceptions of the organizations' deviance. This was an essential additional step (beyond measuring intercoder reliability for this variable) due to constantly shifting constructions of deviance. Groups that were at one time deemed deviant have become an integral part of the cultural landscape.[66] Students, in particular, were sampled because their age is generally similar to the average age of participants within many non-profit organizations. Students from the Introduction to Mass Communication course in particular were sampled due to their apparent interest in mass communications (gauged by their enrollment in the course) and their limited amount of knowledge in the subject as evidenced by their enrollment in an introductory course. If an acceptable level of similarity between the coders and outside students were to be found then the study would be continued. If a significant difference were to be found then the results would be evaluated and appropriate changes made.

The results from this initial pre-test of deviance were found to be promising. In comparing the randomly sampled 15 'very deviant' or 'somewhat deviant' organizations and 15 'not deviant at all' or 'somewhat not deviant' organizations against student conceptualizations of deviance, there was strong uniformity. Out of thirty organizations, 27 had more than 50 percent of the students agreeing with the coders' categorization of deviance. This suggested a high level of reliability in coding this central variable. Therefore, coders were

instructed to continue with the study.

RESULTS

In total, there were 22 variables coded for this study to examine the six hypotheses across all 400 organizations. Through use of the Cohen's kappa measure of agreement, two coders generated a 69.2 percent inter-coder reliability agreement in coding all non-profit organizations' level of deviance. The first four variables examining unity, balance, rhythm and contrast in the web page design generated 67.6 percent inter-coder reliability. The remaining variables (logo, structure, alignment, navigation menu, background, violent imagery, sexual imagery, apparent symbolism, type readability, type size, blinking type, moving type, alignment of type) generated a much higher 86.9 percent inter-coder reliability. The final four variables that gauged the visual elements of the web site front pages as a whole (visuals conveying content, professional design, visuals as confrontational, visuals as deviant) produced a 74.2 percent inter-coder reliability. Inter-coder reliability values greater than 75 percent indicate excellent agreement beyond chance alone, while values between 40 and 75 percent indicate fair to good.[67]

Frequencies

Unity through repetition was found to be the overwhelming (65.5 percent) source of unity in design (*example in figure 4*). Only 3.3 percent of the 400 front page web pages were found to have no apparent use of unity, suggesting a strong sense of cohesiveness on web page content. Most of these 400 web pages used asymmetrical balance (46.8 percent) followed by no apparent use of balance (29.3 percent), symmetrical balance (21.8 percent) and radial balance (2.3 percent). In accordance with previous research, the preponderance of

asymmetrical balance denotes a rejection of formality, tradition and conservatism and a communication of dynamic tension.

The majority of web pages had no apparent use of rhythm in the design (73.5 percent). The most common rhythm technique used was alternating rhythm (23.3 percent). Contrast was rarely used. Eighty five percent of all web pages 'did not use contrast' or 'did not use contrast very much.' This suggests there was no striking imagery denoting strong difference in visual web page content. Rather, web pages relied more upon communicating calmness in their opening pages.

An overwhelming 96.3 percent of web pages were 'very aligned' or 'somewhat aligned.' A very high 82.7 percent of these 400 web pages had a navigation menu and only 19.5 percent of non-profit organizations used a pattern as their background in their website front page. However, when coders were asked directly if the design was professional, results were much more mixed. In total, 35.7 percent of web pages were found to be 'unprofessional' (*example in figure 5*) and 64.3 percent of all 400 web pages were found to be 'professional' (*example in figure 6*).

In further coding of professionalism and sophisticated approaches to design, the overwhelming majority of web pages used a normal type size (89.5 percent), did not use blinking type (84.8 percent) and did not use moving type (90.3). The alignment of type on a web page tended to be mixed (47.3 percent) or was simply left justified (36.0) percent.

When initially examining the web page, coders were asked to ascertain the meanings behind *only* the visual imagery and the design. As much as it is possible, coders were asked to make initial judgments of the page images and design without reading the words first. The majority of web page visual content was found to be 'not confrontational' (*example in figure 7*) (86.5 percent). Fur-
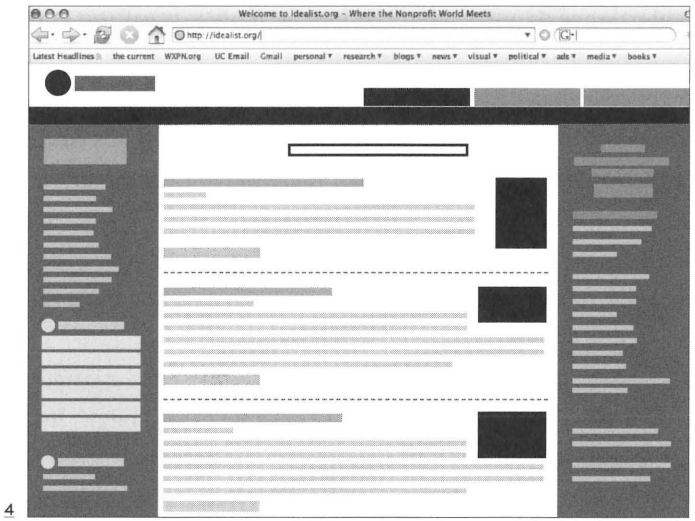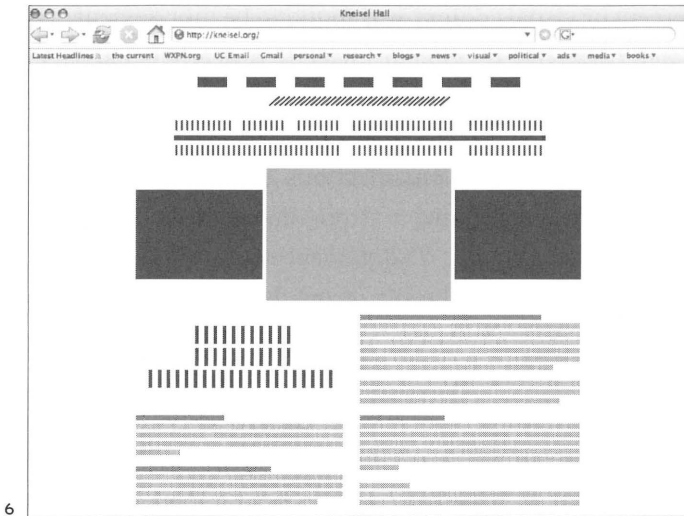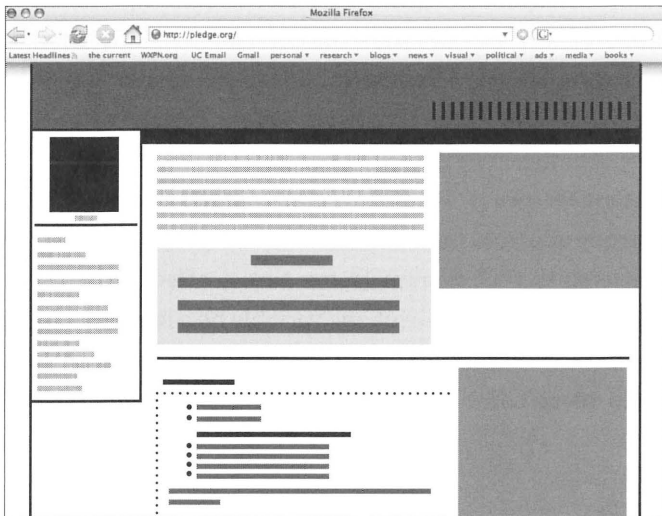
4
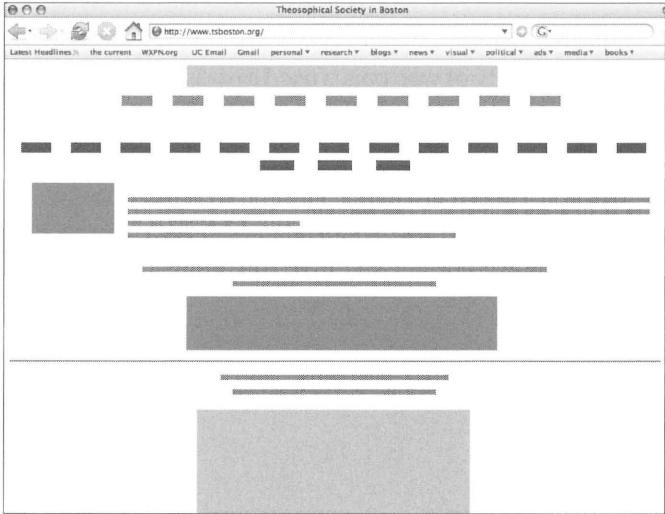
5

Figure 4 Abstracted example of unity through repetition website based on a representative action-oriented non-profit site.
Figure 5 Example of a very unprofessional website.

Figure 6 Abstracted example of a very professional website for a non-profit cultural event.
Figure 7 Abstracted example of a non-confrontational website directed to student action.

ther 78.5 percent of visual content was found to be 'not deviant.' Ninety seven percent of web pages had no violent imagery. A nearly equal 97.5 percent of web pages had no sexual imagery either. Sixty one percent of web pages used no apparent symbolism.

The majority of non-profit organizations (63.0 percent) used a logo on their front web pages, suggesting a strong linkage to mainstream, corporate approaches to identity. Finally, 77.8 percent of all visuals did not appear to convey the textual content of the site (*example in figure 7*). These preliminary results suggest that visuals may have been used (inadvertently or purposefully) to conceal the meaning and mission of the organization.

These findings, when taken in total, suggest a preponderance of 'normalized,' 'mainstream' visual content on non-profit organizations' web pages. However, further statistical measures were completed to discover any linkages between the measured level of organizational deviance and visual content.

Associations Between Deviance and Visual Content

An association was operationalized as a statistically significant relationship between measured levels of deviance and variables used to gauge visual content. This test was necessary to determine if more deviant organizations were more likely to use certain visual constructions on the Internet.

Significance was measured through four statistical measures: chi square p values; the Mann-Whitney Test when variables were ordinal; large expected values; and strong adjusted residual scores, or the difference between expected and observed counts that demonstrates actual effects of this relationship. Strong effects of a particular case of one variable on a particular case of another variable were found if not more than 20% of the cells had expected values less than 5. Within these cells, adjusted residual scores that departed markedly

from the model of independence (well above +2 or below −2) demonstrated added strength in relationships.

Hypothesis 1 stated that non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more likely than deviant non-profit organizations to utilize the skillful design techniques of unity, balance, rhythm and contrast to denote order, cohesiveness, professionalism, serenity and calmness. Three of the four variables (unity, balance and rhythm) tested had a statistically significant relationship between deviance level and the variable in question (*table 1*). Regarding unity, organizations that were seen to be 'not deviant at all' were much more likely to use unity through repetition (3.8). 'Somewhat deviant organizations' used unity through continuation (3.3) more than expected and organizations that were seen as 'not deviant at all' relied on unity through continuation (-4.1) far less than chance allowed. 'Very deviant organizations' were more likely to utilize symmetrical balance (3.0) and organizations that were seen to be 'not deviant at all' relied on alternating rhythm (3.4) in their web design more than one would expect.

However, two of the four variables (balance and rhythm) also produced more than 20% of the cells with expected values less than 5. Therefore, only unity was determined to demonstrate a significant and strong relationship. When adjusted residuals were examined for specific relationships between unity and deviance, the findings were further mitigated. Of the sixteen relationships between deviance ('not deviant at all,' 'somewhat not deviant,' 'somewhat deviant' and 'very deviant') and unity ('none apparent,' 'unity through proximity,' 'unity through repetition' and 'unity through continuation'), six showed strong difference from the model of independence and the remaining ten relationships were found to be weak. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was rejected.

Hypothesis 2 stated that non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more likely than deviant non-profit organizations to incorporate a professional

ASSOCIATIONS (DEVIANCE X ...)	NON DEVIANT ORGANIZATION [PERCENTAGE]	DEVIANT ORGANIZATION [PERCENTAGE]	P VALUE	PERCENT EXPECTED < 5	MANN-WHITNEY VALUE
Unity in Design	–	–	.000	18.8	–
None Apparent	2.5	4.0	–	–	–
Through Proximity	15.5	18.0	–	–	–
Through Repetition	76.0	55.0	–	–	–
Through Continuation	6.0	23.0	–	–	–
Balance in Design	–	–	.001	25	–
None Apparent	28.5	30.0	–	–	–
Radial Balance	2.0	2.5	–	–	–
Symmetrical Balance	14.0	29.5	–	–	–
Asymmetric Balance	55.5	38.0	–	–	–
Rhythm in Design	–	–	.046	25	–
None Apparent	67.0	80.0	–	–	–
Alternating Rhythm	29.0	17.5	–	–	–
Progressive Rhythm	4.0	2.5	–	–	–
Contrast in Design	–	–	.202	0	–
Does not use contrast	87.3	82.6	–	–	–
Uses Contrast	12.7	17.4	–	–	–
Organization of Page	–	–	.022	33	–
Unorganized	2.6	4.5	–	–	–
Neutral	1.9	6.8	–	–	–
Organized	95.5	88.6	–	–	–
Alignment of Elements	–	–	.005	25	–
Aligned	98.1	92.4	–	–	–
Unaligned	1.9	7.6	–	–	–
Navigation Menu	–	–	.023	28.6	–
Not applicable	10.5	24.0	–	–	–
Menu on Left Side	32.5	24.0	–	–	–
Menu on Top	16.0	12.0	–	–	–
Menu on Bottom	2.5	6.5	–	–	–
Multiple Menus	32.0	25.0	–	–	–
Menu in Middle	4.5	7.5	–	–	–
Menu on Right Side	2.0	1.0	–	–	–
Background	–	–	.000	29.2	–
White	1.5	.5	–	–	–
Light Color	14.5	16.5	–	–	–
Black	3.0	19.0	–	–	–
Dark Color	4.5	5.5	–	–	–
Pattern	19.0	20.0	–	–	–
Default Gray	57.5	38.5	–	–	–
Professional Design	–	–	.000	0	–
Unprofessional	25.7	56.1	–	–	–
Professional	74.3	43.9	–	–	–

Rows under "Unity in Design" through "Contrast in Design" are grouped under HYPOTHESIS 1. Rows under "Organization of Page" through "Professional Design" are grouped under HYPOTHESIS 2.

Table 1 Associations Between "Deviance" and Coded Variables for 400 Non-profit Websites

ASSOCIATIONS (DEVIANCE X …)	NON DEVIANT ORGANIZATION [PERCENTAGE]	DEVIANT ORGANIZATION [PERCENTAGE]	P VALUE	PERCENT EXPECTED < 5	MANN-WHITNEY VALUE
HYPOTHESIS 3					
Readable Type	–	–	–	62.5	.001
Very Difficult to Read	0	2.0	–	–	–
Somewhat Difficult to Read	1.0	2.5	–	–	–
Somewhat Easy to Read	2.5	10.0	–	–	–
Very Easy to Read	96.5	85.5	–	–	–
Type Size	–	–	–	33.3	.056
Very Small Type Size	1.0	6.0	–	–	–
Normal Type Size	92.0	87.0	–	–	–
Very Big Type Size	7.0	7.0	–	–	–
Blinking Type	–	–	.390	0	–
No Blinking Type Present	87.5	82.0	–	–	–
Blinking Type Present	12.5	18.0	–	–	–
Moving Type	–	–	.426	12.5	–
No Moving Type Present	91.0	89.5	–	–	–
Moving Type Present	9.0	10.5	–	–	–
Alignment of Type	–	–	.000	30	–
Not Applicable	5.5	10.0	–	–	–
Left Justified	39.0	33.0	–	–	–
Fully Justified	0	.5	–	–	–
Mixed Uses	50.5	44.0	–	–	–
Centered	5.0	12.5	–	–	–
HYPOTHESIS 4					
Confrontational Page	–	–	.001	0	–
Not Confrontational	90.7	78.0	–	–	–
Confrontational	9.3	22.0	–	–	–
Deviant Page	–	–	.000	0	–
No Deviant	95.9	43.2	–	–	–
Deviant	4.1	56.8	–	–	–
Violent Imagery	–	–	–	66.7	.449
No Violent Imagery	98.0	97.5	–	–	–
Somewhat Violent Imagery	1.5	1.0	–	–	–
Violent Imagery	.5	1.5	–	–	–
Sexual Imagery	–	–	–	66.7	.000
No Sexual Imagery	99.5	95.5	–	–	–
Somewhat Sexual Imagery	.5	1.5	–	–	–
Sexual Imagery	0	3.0	–	–	–
Apparent Symbolism	–	–	.000	0	–
No Apparent Symbolism	72.5	50.0	–	–	–
Apparent Symbolism	27.5	50.0	–	–	–
5					
Logo	–	–	.311	0	–
Presence of Logo	63.0	63.0	–	–	–
No Presence of Logo	37.0	37.0	–	–	–
6					
Visuals Convey Content	–	–	.237	0	–
Do not Convey Content	79.5	74.2	–	–	–
Do convey Content	20.5	25.8	–	–	–

design emphasizing organization, alignment, a navigation menu and a simple background. When alignment values were collapsed (aligned and unaligned), the variable was found to have a significant relationship with deviance (.005). The organization of a webpage, navigation menu and background variables were found to be significant (.022, .023 and .000 respectively). All variables had over 28% of cells with small expected values, suggesting that these small expected values made large contributions to the size of the chi-square statistic. The professional variable was the only variable that had a significant value (.000) and an acceptable level of expected values (0). When examining adjusted residuals for the direction of the relationship, it was found that the most extreme residual (5.9) was for a professional design used by organizations that were perceived to be not deviant. Meaning, if the variables were independent, you would expect many fewer professionally designed web pages from non-deviant organizations. Similarly, it was found that very deviant organizations produced fewer professional designs than would be expected if all variables were independent. Therefore Hypothesis 2 was partially accepted for overall professionalism in design from non-deviant organizations, but rejected when examining specific variables of organization, alignment, a navigation menu and a simple background.

Hypothesis 3 stated that non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more likely than deviant non-profit organizations to use sophisticated and professional approaches to typography (as evidenced by easy readability, small type sizes, unblinking type, static type and aligned type). In this case, all relationships with significant p values (readable type and alignment of type) produced more than 25% of the cells with expected values less than 5 (*table 1*). Thus, the contribution of a few sparse cells unduly inflated the chi-square statistic, therefore, Hypothesis 3 was rejected.

Hypothesis 4 stated that the visuals of non-deviant non-profit organizations' will be less likely than deviant non-profit organizations to utilize subversive symbolism or violent, sexualized, confrontational or deviant imagery. Use of violent imagery was found not significantly related to deviance. Sexual imagery had a significant p value but produced 66.7 percent of cells with expected values less than 5. The remaining three variables (apparent symbolism, deviant visual imagery and confrontational imagery) were found to be statistically significant with acceptable expected counts in all cells.

When examining adjusted residuals for the direction of the relationship between symbolism and deviance, it was found that the most extreme residual (5.8) was for use of symbolism by very deviant organizations. Meaning, if the variables were independent, you would expect many fewer uses of symbolism by very deviant organizations. Similarly, it was found that organizations identified as not deviant at all used less symbolism (4.5) than would be expected if all variables were independent. Organizations identified as deviant produced more deviant imagery (12.1) than would be expected while organizations identified as not deviant produced less deviant imagery (12.1) than would be expected if all variables were independent. Similarly, organizations identified as more deviant produced more confrontational imagery (11.2) than would be expected if variables were independent and organizations that were deemed not deviant produced much less confrontational imagery (-11.2) than would be expected. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was partially accepted for increased use of symbolism, deviant imagery and confrontational imagery by deviant organizations (and less reliance on these variables by non-deviant organizations). Hypothesis 4 was partially rejected due to a lack of relationship between violent or sexualized imagery and the level of organizational deviance.

Hypothesis 5 stated that non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more

likely than deviant non-profit organizations to incorporate a logo into their design. This relationship had a p value of .311 and was rejected. Hypothesis 6 stated that the visual content of non-deviant non-profit organization web pages and deviant non-profit organizations web pages will be more likely to communicate textual content than to communicate disjointed visual and textual messages. Again, this relationship was found to be insignificant (p = .223) and Hypothesis 6 was rejected (*table 1*).

DISCUSSION

Since 1989, when Tim Berners-Lee first proposed a global hypertext project, later to be known as the World Wide Web, design on the Internet has become progressively more refined. Early information on the web was purely academic without any aesthetic sophistication.[68] As the medium gained notoriety and attention through the nineties, design increasingly attempted to make elements more 'user-friendly' and idiosyncratic by directly reflecting a user's unique, individual experience.[69] Images and visual representations were introduced and shared from a diverse range of perspectives around the globe. Yet, the findings of this research potentially complicate the notion of a diverse communicative sphere—at least in terms of visual identity constructions for non-profit organizations.

There has been limited research into how the Internet has pragmatically changed communication[70] but no research was found concerning the representation of non-profit organizations—an essential component within the 'democratized' World Wide Web. The general finding of this research is that there is not a meaningful difference between how deviant and non-deviant organizations sampled in this study represent themselves visually on the Internet. Of the six hypotheses searching for difference between non-deviant and

68 SEE VEEN, *THE ART AND SCIENCE OF WEB DESIGN.* **69** SEE CORDONE, A SHORT ANALYSIS OF THE VERBAL AND VISUAL ELEMENTS IN THE ENGLISH OF WORLD WIDE WEB PAGES. **70** SEE GROSSMAN, *THE ELECTRONIC REPUBLIC: RESHAPING DEMOCRACY IN THE INFORMATION AGE.*

deviant organizations in visual representation, four were rejected outright and two were partially rejected. The study also found that more 'normalized' non-profit organizations do present themselves more professionally on the Internet, using little to no symbolism, deviant imagery or confrontational visuals.

Yet, there was no significant difference between non-deviant and deviant organizations in visual constructions of identity on the Internet for most variables. This could suggest that the organizations in this sample were choosing to represent themselves in a homogeneous manner, regardless of societal deviance—a possibility that runs counter to the perception that the Internet is a diverse, heterogeneous arena of communication. If visual content is indeed compressed among these organizations, alternative voices may be creating self-imposed restrictions on visual constructions of organizational identity. This may be inevitable given the pressure to appeal to millions of 'moderate' mainstream viewers on the Internet who may stumble upon a non-profit site through a myriad of different paths.

These findings lead one to wonder what the implications might be for those who are offering a radical message. Further study that interviewed non-profit organizations would help to clarify what these implications might be, but these findings suggest a certain level of concealment, whether it is subconscious or overt. Certainly, representations over time have an inevitable impact on how an organization then considers its operations and purpose. Thus, a mainstreamed image may suggest a much more mainstreamed approach in the process of social change. This has obvious implications for democracy and political participation, particularly for those who continue to view themselves as 'outliers' in society. Those with particularly radical messages may very well be negotiating an increasing sense of defeatism when faced with such a homogenized block of non-profit and non-profit imagery.

Conversely, these findings lead one to question how these homogenized visual messages are received by viewers who are likely bombarded with challenging visual imagery in other arenas, such as advertising,[71] but find non-confrontational images within social change web pages. One has to wonder if such disconnect between imagery and message is seen as a point of invitation or disconcertion to the viewer. In a media sphere of shock, sex and violence, these homogenized, bland, visual messages may be inviting to a viewer—and possible participant—seeking to make a positive difference. Yet, these images may also be seen as cynical and misanthropic to an audience accustomed to challenging images found in other media. Further study, which examined audience response to the websites examined here, would be necessary to better understand this process.

The business of social change is, by definition, on the periphery of society and yet, the visual imagery used by those engaged in social change was found to be homogenous and unchallenging. A considerable issue then is whether social change organizations could be forfeiting the 'symbolic capital,' so necessary for smaller organizations, in their zeal to attract mainstream participants. This may, or may not be, the case. The findings here could also suggest that the very notion of what creates symbolic capital in social change organizations has changed. It is hard to imagine the possibility of a 'deviant' and challenging image, such as the poster of Huey Newton, gaining prominence when contrasted against the findings revealed in this study. Indeed, such an image may now not be seen as empowering, but as debilitating to a more deviant organization.

As already discussed, further study that examines more "deviant" organizations and their images, as well as audience response, is fundamental to better understand how these images are processed and if there is any impact on

71 SEE DAHL ET AL, DOES IT PAY TO SHOCK? REAC-TIONS TO SHOCKING AND NONSHOCKING ADVERTISING CONTENT AMONG UNIVER-SITY STUDENTS; LESTER, VISUAL COMMUNICATION: IMAGES WITH MESSAGES; VAGNONI, "SOMETHING ABOUT" THIS ADVERTISING..

perceptions of social change and activism. These findings suggest that in our modern, polished, media landscape, only modern, polished, images hold social capital within the non-profit community and, therefore, the promise of social change.

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