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## **Introduction**

A recipient of over “one hundred and ninety-seven major awards, which also include: twenty-two American Music Awards, forty Billboard Awards, and twelve World Music Awards” (Altus Directory), it is no wonder why Michael Jackson is known as the “King of Pop.” At the precocious age of four, Michael Jackson’s fame and success was already eminent, yet who knew how the tumultuous road ahead would lead to the eventual “rise and fall” of one of the world’s greatest pop acts. In addition to musical achievement, Jackson also experienced a broad range of media coverage concerning his own personal life- ranging from his poor relationship with his father, to his defunct marriages, to molestation charges, to his personal choice of plastic surgery, to the bleaching of his skin due to vitiligo, a rare skin condition, to his instant fame and transformation into a music icon, and an inspiration to future generations of music artists such as Usher, Justin Timberlake, and Ne-Yo. The life of this great star is intriguing to people all over the world. It is no wonder that he has become such a staple to the paparazzi and to tabloid journalism. The span of media coverage concerning Jackson’s life is vast, yet sadly, barely mentions one of the most moving speeches I have come across: Michael Jackson’s Oxford Union Speech.

This speech should be another of Michael Jackson’s praised achievements, yet strangely enough, there is barely adequate news coverage or articles of the actual event, more so personality and image critiques versus speech coverage. When I looked up variations of “Michael Jackson’s Oxford Speech,” on Google, I found fewer than five news sources or articles covering the actual event. The majority of hits that appear are postings of the actual speech transcription, the video footage of Jackson giving the

speech, and different forums discussing the effect the speech had on the audience. There were a multitude of similar comments from fans stating: “its a shame, the whole world knows the trash written about Michael in the media, but I think hardly no one knows about this speech in Oxford” and “it was a beautiful speech that as fans we should definitely read straight from him, no media involved” (Michael Jackson). Some fans even cited how he changed their lives, “Michael helped me realize the importance of childhood and living so innocently. Michael Jackson changed MY LIFE, not just my Ipod” (YouTube). Shifting to a different source, I came across a wider range of articles from LexisNexis. Oddly enough, these articles seemed to only give a general synopsis of the speech and event, reiterating certain sections of the speech and criticizing Michael Jackson, as opposed to critiquing and criticizing the actual speech. Considering that this speech was Michael Jackson’s first public lecture, I would have assumed the presence of more scholarly critiques, yet found very few. The majority of articles brought up his molestation allegations and merely judged him based off of his appearance and eccentricities.

Interestingly enough, when looking over the biography of Michael Jackson on [biography.com](http://biography.com), minute details such as the name of his chimpanzee are included, yet his invitation to speak at Oxford --a grandiose privilege-- is neglected. The location of the speech, “the Oxford Union, once hailed by Harold Macmillan as 'one of the last bastions of freedom of speech in the world', is no stranger to controversial speakers;”(mailonline) yet while being the “King of Pop” was not enough to gain adequate attention to this speech, the location of the speech should have gained at least a little more scholarly recognition and media coverage. This speech was given at Oxford University in London

for the “Oxford Union debating society, to a crowd of 500 people” (Allbusiness.com). Lasting for almost thirty minutes, Jackson’s potentially controversial speech was made on behalf of child welfare. Speaking on behalf of the children instantly raises concern, sparking controversy for Michael Jackson due to his soiled reputation with regards to children. Many different articles shared similar negative feelings towards Michael Jackson, poking at the odd parenting habits of his own children:

British newspapers this week were filled with reports about the bizarre upbringing of Jackson's own two children, Prince Michael Junior, 3, and Paris Michael Katherine, 2. Rarely seen by their natural mother, Jackson's former dermatology nurse-turned-ex-wife Debbie Rowe, the children are said to be looked after by more than a dozen caretakers. The nurses allegedly are under strict instructions not to kiss or cuddle the children, who are kept under constant camera surveillance in rooms where air quality is carefully monitored. For hygienic reasons, their toys and cutlery are said to be disposed of at the end of every day (Off The Wall).

Parenting techniques vary depending on family values and traditions, and range from culture to culture as well, yet bringing up Jackson’s parenting while discussing the lecture hampers his credibility.

Attacking the credibility of Jackson was common for the majority of articles relating to this lecture, yet the majority of articles also include ad hominem smears and I even found one article’s response that addressed this attack:

Whenever I read anything relating to him, it has an underlying tone of sarcasm or negativity. I find it interesting that you inevitably focus on the image of the

person you call Wacko Jacko rather than pointing out, for instance, the extent of his charity work, his fatherhood, or the content of his speeches at Oxford University in relation to his Heal the Kids foundation earlier this year (Feedback).

Despite negative reactions and comments, Michael Jackson's speech sought to "announce the official launch of their new charity, Heal the Kids" (mailonline). The topic of the lecture is linked to the mission of the Heal the Kids Foundation which is:

To develop a campaign to help parents and adults around the world to educate them on the importance of reprioritizing their lives in order to bring children into the main focus in order to imbue them with the love and devotion which they so badly need and to stop the cycle of neglect. To also give all at risk children more support and consideration from all sectors of society (Michael Jackson).

Audiences from around the world should be exposed to this event, and given the chance listen to, or read the words of this speech, and think about their own family values and the value and significance of "forgiveness." The words of his speech have the power to better the world, move people, and open eyes to a sad reality--that today's society is "producing a generation of unloved children growing more distant from their parents, grandparents and other family members" (Jackson).

In this speech, Michael Jackson takes on a maternal tone as he urges his audience to take greater interest in their families, and to make the most of all the little things. He speaks with a nurturing voice, about issues of heartfelt emotion. Even if the audience believes that the message does not apply to their own situation, it serves as a good reminder of a return back to the more traditional family ethics, when family time was a norm and not a chore. In a grander perspective, communication scholars realize that

there are more aspects to the message than the words that are spoken; this speech allows scholars to study a unique experience and to decipher what happens when a man who is a contradiction of social norms delivers an essential message. Additionally, it will shed light on the media's influence over messages and messengers that dispute familiar relationship norms, further demonstrating media's power to control what we see. This comprehensive overview will assist scholars to analyze the success and failures of this speech and others similar to it which feature eccentric figures challenging contemporary popular media. What is the effect of Michael Jackson's message, after having been filtered through the hegemonic influences of the media which shape our preconceptions and perceived social norms? Is it altered and/or disrupted due to the strict gender and relationship norms of men and women and parents and children? I will argue that due to the message of the speech coupled with Jackson's controversial relationship with children, Jackson's address was intentionally marginalized because the presentation of the speech contradicted the more typical representations of gender and relationship norms portrayed throughout popular media. Furthermore, it is a critique of relationship norms from the perception of a controversial figure that has notoriously been known for going against norms.

I will cover what society deems appropriate according to relationship roles and how these social norms affect the audience's reception and understanding of the message. This will be done through the perspective of an ideological critique. I will begin with a detailed analysis and description of the rhetorical situation. After that I will go over the background of this ideological criticism, with a focus on hegemonic ideology and the

description of the method I intend to employ. After that I will link and apply the method to my event. Finally, I will conclude with a review of my findings and a final thought.

### **Context**

Despite a lack of definitive rules for appropriate actions, we live in a world that contains culturally declared norms for virtually all matters related to gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and ideology. This speech, given by the “King of Pop,” a world renowned trendsetter who is essentially followed by paparazzi non-stop, was barely given any serious attention. Almost all aspects of his life were covered, yet the points made in this great speech are not even mentioned. How is this possible? What about this speech is so controversial that makes it unmentionable and so seemingly taboo? I believe that by dredging further into the speech, I will find that Jackson’s stance is contradictory to the media’s norms regarding the aforementioned set of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and ideology. And moreover, the speech challenges gender and relationship roles in its delivery and parenting methods, an intimate topic, in its content. Michael Jackson speaking on child-rearing, a topic typically considered maternal and thus feminine, raises red flags instantly, signifying a contradicting of norms of how male figures should behave and the topics they should be concerned with. In addition to generally being a feminine role, Jackson’s controversial relationship with children also goes against the norms of speaking on behalf of them. The other main topic of this speech is “forgiveness,” an attitude that is heavily linked to emotions characteristically feminine. According to the prevailing social norms,

women are perceived as being more relationship oriented than men and so may feel responsibility for the resolution of relationship difficulties...there is some

evidence that women are more forgiving, on average, than are men. The result may be a stronger tendency for women relative to men to forgive when something goes wrong in their close relationships (Beach and Fincham 5).

And on the other hand “Men tend to be more vengeful than women, who have been taught from childhood to put themselves ‘in the shoes of others’ and empathize with them” ([physorg.com](http://physorg.com)). It is apparent that we as a society have been raised to link certain characteristics to certain sexes, and Jackson seems to be covering topics that are generally more feminine.

Michael Jackson has been in the public eye since the age of four, with the rise of his all-sibling band, Jackson 5. “Born in August 29, 1958 in Gary Indiana to a big family with nine children, five brothers and three sisters,” (bio.truestory) Michael knew and felt the difficulties associated with a life which lacked love. Within his speech, he gives personal references to his own childhood and how he felt due to what he felt was lack of love and support from his father. Continuously on the road, and working to record new songs, Michael Jackson’s childhood was lackadaisical and almost nonexistent due to his instant popularity and fame. He feels an instant connection with this cause because he has first hand experience of it and he knows the extent to which it influences people’s lives. One can not neglect that Michael Jackson also received numerous child abuse/molestation allegations, which is problematic to the message behind the speech and will be further explained later on in this paper.

The occasion is The Oxford Union Debating Society and the launch of his new charity, The Heal the Kids Foundation. This occasion is grandiose in itself, due to the guest speakers who had previously made speeches there. Previous guests have included

the Dalai Lama, Winston Churchill, Mother Teresa, former US Presidents Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, US diplomat Henry Kissinger, former US Presidential nominee Senator John McCain, physicist Stephen Hawking, actress Judi Dench, singer Gerard Way, fashion journalist Anna Wintour, scientist Albert Einstein, musical humorist and conductor Gerard Hoffnung and many other illustrious figures (oxford-union.org).

At the time of the actual live speech the audience was the five hundred students, professors and guests that had physically attended. “Jackson turned out to be the biggest draw in the Oxford Union's 178-year history. More than 20,000 people applied for tickets, beating out the number of would-be attendees to lectures given over the decades” (Off The Wall). Luckily, due to its availability on the internet, its audience continues to expand as it is now accessible to people all over the world and at any given time. Since the original date of the speech on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March, 2001, it has been freely and widely available online and now almost ten years after the actual event, people are still coming across it, reading, watching and listening to the words of Michael Jackson and spontaneously engaging in discussions about it. I came across a forum addressing this speech, and one of the comments were, “We weren't shown that side of Michael enough. It was always more in line with his extremism and opulent lifestyle...and, of course, the children.” Biases set aside, the majority of comments found on discussion boards linked closer to a positive tone, commending the words of the speech and the desired mission.

### **Description of Method**

Ideological criticism will be utilized for the analysis of this artifact. Ideological criticism is directly linked to rhetorical criticism. According to Sonja K. Foss's book, Rhetorical Criticism “an ideology is a pattern of beliefs that determines a group's

interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world” (Foss 209). Thus, “when rhetorical critics are interested in rhetoric primarily for what it suggests about beliefs and values, their focus is on ideology” (Foss 209). We will be utilizing these two definitions to gain a better understanding of this application. Within this field, there is a subcategory referred to as hegemonic ideology. This field focuses on “the privileging of the ideology of one group over that of other groups” (Foss 210). Another rhetoric scholar, James Watson, states,

in its simplest sense, hegemony means ‘control over’; yet in referring to ‘hegemonic control’ we are not repeating the same thing using a another phrase, but describing a special form of control, one based not on coercion or force, but resulting from successful persuasion or enculturalisation (Watson 18).

Watson’s book entitled Media Communication: An Introduction to Communication and Process, instantly caught my eye because he specifically addresses the media’s power over people’s beliefs. This book relates to my article because I will use it to address the artifact’s message, and how it supports my reasoning that the general media culture filters and limits this speech’s message due to subversion of norms. He emphasizes our need to,

pause for a moment to assess just how much of our knowledge of the world is mediated by newspapers, radio, and TV. The pictures in our heads are pictures for the most part put there by the media; and our attitudes towards those pictures, our definition of their meaning- our recognition of their reality-owes much to what the media have selected, omitted, shaped, and interpreted (Watson 4).

Keeping Watson's words in mind, I will try to avoid falling into the mindset of the Media's hegemonic ideology, analyzing the paper through my own opinions; yet will go over the Media's perceptions as well.

Looking for more interesting literature that helped further my understanding of hegemonic ideology, I came across an article called, "Cultural Studies- Hegemony and Ideology", which cited the works of Todd Gitlin. He states that,

the dominant class controls ideological space and limits what is thinkable in society. Dominated classes participate in their domination, as hegemony enters into everything people do and think of as natural, or the product of common sense—including what is news, as well as playing, working, believing, and knowing, Gitlin argues. Hegemonic ideology permeates the common sense that people use to understand the world and tries to become that common sense ( Encyclopedia.jrank.org).

Gitlin's argument will be linked to the Media's choice of what is deemed normal and thus receives coverage. The article then goes further to state,

Gitlin suggests the media remain free as long as they do not violate the essential hegemonic values or become too sympathetic to radical critiques. Opposition groups can exploit the contradictions in hegemonic ideology when elites' conflict, but opposition groups and autonomous media will be muffled if the challenge to the hegemonic ideology is critical (Encyclopedia.jrank.org).

This further demonstrates the power of the "elite" showing their control over ideas and messages, especially if it contradicts their beliefs. People are no longer seeing live news because almost everything that is shown has already been shaped and formed into the

skewed perception of the media. The media that comprises the primary hegemonic influence of the culture, compete over generating our shared social norms, therefore the media source that is most successful is defined by the media source whose conceptions of social norms are most widely adopted. In order to "stay in the race" and to be competitive over hegemonic dominance, the media outlets must portray themselves as being representative of the most common core social norms, regardless of any undesirable effects. The power of presenting oneself as a representation of the most common social norms is a minimal requirement for credibility, and can be epitomized by American presidential campaigns-the presidential candidate that will have a harder time if he doesn't make reference to god, but instead to Allah. According to another of Gitlin's books, The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making&Unmaking of the New Left, he brings up the concept of media frames which:

Are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual...enabling journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely: to recognize it as information, to assign it to cognitive categories and to package it for efficient relay to their audiences (Gitlin 7).

These frames are unavoidable because they are automatically utilized by journalists as an organization tool, so we as the audience receive information that has already been filtered. These articles will be used to analyze Michael Jackson as a main stream medium that went "deviant," and the chain of events that follows his deviation.

I intend on analyzing the text, supporting my arguments with evidence from within the speech and the ideology. The artifacts will be analyzed using an outline of Sonja K. Foss's four step process. "(1) identifying the presented elements of the artifact; (2) identifying the suggested elements linked to the presented elements; (3) formulating the ideology; and (4) identifying the functions served by the ideology" (Foss 214).

### **Application of Method**

Setting the scene with the dominant elements of the event is essential to the understanding and analysis of the artifact. On a prestigious stage is a feminine, long haired, pale faced man. His face is as recognizable as Mickey Mouse--and possibly just as anatomically distorted. A symbol of success-- with a well-known music career spanning 40 years--among the most powerful presence in the entertainment world, yet a specter in the social scene. In one of the most venerated lecture halls of the world. Upon a stage he wobbles, using crutches he stands in front of five hundred people and speaks in a quiet, feminine tone. In his opening, Jackson speaks of the prestige of Oxford:

I am humbled to be lecturing in a place that has previously been filled by such notable figures as Mother Theresa, Albert Einstein, Ronald Reagan, Robert Kennedy and Malcolm X. I've even heard that Kermit the Frog has made an appearance here, and I've always felt a kinship with Kermit's message that it's not easy being green (Michael Jackson).

He also directly acknowledges his perception as a misfit through his identification with Kermit. He quickly acknowledges the commonly held perceptions of him as an "oddball" by breaking up the tension with humor, yet still acknowledging that he is seen

as a social outcast. Jackson then goes to establish ethos, giving the audience reason to listen to his message:

But I do have a claim to having experienced more places and cultures than most people will ever see. Human knowledge consists not only of libraries of parchment and ink - it is also comprised of the volumes of knowledge that are written on the human heart, chiseled on the human soul, and engraved on the human psyche. And friends, I have encountered so much in this relatively short life of mine that I still cannot believe I am only 42. I often tell Shmuley that in soul years I'm sure that I'm at least 80 - and tonight I even walk like I'm 80! So please harken to my message, because what I have to tell you tonight can bring healing to humanity and healing to our planet (Michael Jackson).

Jackson is literally an eccentric (as an outsider) source of wisdom, gaining knowledge from real world observation. He presents himself as a traveler and one who has seen so much of the world very intimately, shifting his ethos from a career entertainer, to a traveler. Citing a source of wisdom apart from that which would otherwise only be attainable via academic pursuit, he confidently asserts that his educator is the world, thus he is an expert of a wide range of cultures and societies.

Further distancing himself from his unintended ethos (i.e. black man, entertainer etc), he takes control of his own frame of context, “tonight, I come before you less as an icon of pop (whatever that means anyway), and more as an icon of a generation, a generation that no longer knows what it means to be children” (Michael Jackson). We now see him as a representative of a minute perspective, he deliberately transforms

himself. The audience has all but forgotten his pop idol persona; he has become another kind of voice, the voice of a child of a broken family.

Of all the social issues of current hegemonic discourse that are discussed within media today- gay marriage, abortion, healthcare reform-, the breakdown of the family is one which rarely receives attention. However, when issues concerning family are covered, it is usually done so in a comical light; usually poking fun at the dysfunctional aspects of the family versus addressing them. Popular shows such as Family Guy, Desperate Housewives, and Modern Family are ideal examples of this escape of problems through comedy and laughter. We tend to welcome these shows because they show an extreme version of what we currently face. Michael Jackson realizes this problem and calls for action to ameliorate the kids who:

have, essentially, to raise themselves. They are growing more distant from their parents, grandparents and other family members, as all around us the indestructible bond that once glued together the generations, unravel...bred a new generation, Generation O...The O stands for a generation that has everything on the outside - wealth, success, fancy clothing and fancy cars, but an aching emptiness on the inside. That cavity in our chests, that barrenness at our core, that void in our centre is the place where the heart once beat and which love once occupied (Michael Jackson).

Jackson realizes the sad shift of priorities in our new generation O, and states the problem of it, versus other sources which highlight it as a motivated generation (Michael Jackson). The same generation Jackson refers to has been referred to as having “generous access to technology as children, but limited physical freedom means Gen Z will grow up fast. The

erosion of their childhood may see many of them breaking out of the rat race later on in life” (Personneltoday). This article changes the connotation of an eroded childhood, from a typically negative characteristic, to a positive aspect of life that will help them soar in their future. Jackson continues on speaking about the ideals he associates with “childhood,” bringing in his own experiences and various beliefs he associates with it.

All of us are products of our childhood. But I am the product of a lack of a childhood, an absence of that precious and wondrous age when we frolic playfully without a care in the world, basking in the adoration of parents and relatives, where our biggest concern is studying of that big spelling test come Monday morning...when I was young I wanted more than anything else to be a typical little boy. I wanted to build tree houses, have water balloon fights, and play hide and seek with my friends. But fate had it otherwise and all I could do was envy the laughter and playtime (Michael Jackson).

Jackson believes that the ideal of “childhood” features an idyllic experience with emphasis on simple pleasures, acceptance and being sheltered from cares and responsibilities. Simplicity and naiveté are key components to a child’s life, one that Jackson admits to being stripped of. He shares his lack of childhood, and how he only wishes he got to experience the simple joys in life as a child. Focusing on word choice, Jackson uses positively loaded adjectives—precious, wondrous--to express his awe related to an early experience that he lacked. Envy- a loftier and negatively based word, usually associated with resentment towards more fortunate people--is used to show his perceptions about other children’s lifestyles. Ironically, Jackson was probably viewed as one of the most affluent and fortunate individuals during his time, yet despite all of his

fame and belongings, he envied those who got to enjoy the little things in life. Being in the spotlight since childhood, Jackson “loved to set foot in all those regular suburban houses and catch sight of the shag rugs and La-Z-Boy armchairs with kids playing Monopoly...Many, I know, would argue that these things seem like no big deal. But to me they were mesmerizing” (Michael Jackson). Continuing to describe elements that he connotes with “childhood,” Jackson uses the word “regular” which signifies desire for a normative experience, which is the seed of ideology.

Jackson condemns the belief of an eroded childhood, digging deeper into the problem, and eliciting action from the audience.

Friends, the foundation of all human knowledge, the beginning of human consciousness, must be that each and every one of us is an object of love. Before you know if you have red hair or brown, before you know if you are black or white, before you know of what religion you are a part, you have to know that you are loved (Michael Jackson).

Jackson is fighting for an unconditional love, despite everything. It can be inferred that all of the changes that Michael Jackson performed on himself, were in search for this unconditional love and acceptance. As a child, he had large lips and big nose-characteristics that people, at the time criticized and heckled- yet as he grew older he got both surgically altered to be smaller. With hopes of fitting into the public eye, all of Jackson’s plastic surgery did the complete opposite, becoming one of the main aspects that he was criticized and isolated for. He stresses that,

if you enter this world knowing you are loved and you leave this world knowing the same, then everything that happens in between can be dealt with... But if you

don't have that memory of being loved, you are condemned to search the world for something to fill you up. But no matter how much money you made or how famous you become, you will still feel empty. What you are really searching for is unconditional love, unqualified acceptance. And that was the one thing that was denied to you at birth (Michael Jackson).

Jackson offers a subversive refutation of our concept of "success" issued from one who has attained it, essentially attacking the cliché, "Money success fame glamour." Citing his own experience along with fellow famous friends- Elizabeth Taylor and McCauley Culkin-who have shared in this "loss of childhood and love," Jackson argues against beliefs that fame and money are everything. He uses his own personal ethos to attack the socially accepted norm that success equals happiness. But it all begins with forgiveness, because to heal the world, we first have to heal ourselves. Jackson calls for forgiveness, a feminine quality in an innately patriarchal society. He further gives an example of his own personal forgiveness of his father, where he actually starts to cry. He asserts himself in "the *communal* orientation, typical of women, which emphasizes connection with others, cooperation, openness, and nurturing" (Fincham and Beach 5). Taking on a feminine role goes against the gender norms that we are accustomed to, and Jackson does so, once again going against the norms of hegemonic society. Michael Jackson tries to dominate the hegemonic ideology through focusing on this issue of the breakdown of family, speaking of its necessity to be addressed and essentially issuing a jeremiad back to traditional family values.

Jackson purposes a "Children's Universal Bill of Rights," rooted in simple common-sense actions and logic, such as, "7. The right to be thought of as adorable -

(even if you have a face that only a mother could love)” (Michael Jackson), that should not have to be purposed, but should already be a way of life. “5. The right to be read a bedtime story, without having to compete with the evening news” (Michael Jackson). Before we became such a fast paced, technological obsessed society, bedtime stories were the norm. “Less than 33% of British children ages two to eight have a regular bedtime story read to them. You may not think much of that until you take into account that 75% of their parents DID have that bedtime story when they were that age” (Michael Jackson). Now it is as if, television sitcoms and news are taking over the once appreciated and overlooked bedtime story—a possible setting for values and family traditions to be passed down and shared-- something Jackson feels every child should still be entitled to. “6. The right to an education without having to dodge bullets at school” (Michael Jackson), is a sad reality. Schools have become more hostile as years have passed, no longer seen as a “safe” spot as previously would have been. “Dodging bullets” can be taken literally and figuratively in this case because school shootings have increased, yet bullying has also become common as well. If you are not literally trying to stay safe from a shooting, you have to act in a normative way that would decrease the likelihood of being picked on. Sadly, the cliché groupings that are portrayed on television shows have actually become commonplace within school systems. Jackson realizes this sad truth, thus coming up with this right for children, so that they can feel free to go play and learn without having any worries or woes on mind. Neverland Ranch was Michael Jackson's home and personal escape, the one place where people can access unconditional love and not be judged. People who visited were able to revert back to their childish ways for the time that they are there, and enjoy themselves in a carefree

manner. It was his own abyss, possibly one of his findings while searching for unconditional love.

The topic of this speech is one rooted in emotion, so it should be no surprise that the speech be full of pathos. The entire ending of the speech following the explanation of the Children’s Universal Bill of Rights is pathos driven. Beginning with scary statistics, “friends, let me paint a picture for you. Here is a typical day in America-six youths under the age of 20 will commit suicide, 12 children under the age of 20 will die from firearms-remember this is a DAY, not a year- 399 kids will be arrested for drug abuse, 1,352 babies will be born to teen moms (Michael Jackson). Shock and sadness are the first emotions that spark after hearing those statistics, yet they also aid in his credibility and logic behind his speech. He then shares his own personal experiences as a childhood star, even going further to share intimate family details concerning his lack of father-son bond. “What I really wanted was a Dad. I wanted a father who showed me love. And my father never did that. He never said I love you while looking me straight in the eye, he never played a game with me” (Michael Jackson). He genuinely shares with the audience his immense desire for affection with his father, yet continues to share his own experience as a father himself. He brings up his own children and their odd lifestyle due to his fame, and hopes that they will say to themselves “Our daddy did the best he could, given the unique circumstances that he faced. He may not have been perfect, but he was a warm and decent man, who tried to give us all the love in the world (Michael Jackson).” You notice the transformation of Jackson within his speech as he moves from his own childhood, to parent to child relationship, to his Bill of Rights, to his own children, and finally to forgiveness. After he thinks about the relationship with his own children, he

realizes that mistakes will happen, and thus he realizes that he must focus on the good and positive of his own relationship with his own father, and must forgive him as well. He shares stories of little gestures that his father made, such as, “I remember once when I was about four years old, there was a little carnival and he picked me up and put me on a pony (Michael Jackson).” All the stories he shares with the audience spark emotion, whether it is sadness, hope, or anger, his speech brings these feelings out.

Analysis of this speech from a rhetorical perspective is essential in order to appreciate the work as a whole. As Michael Jackson’s first public lecture, he made sure to utilize a plethora of rhetorical devices that make the lecture more powerful. He begins and ends the speech with anaphora—repetition of a word or a phrase, usually used for emphasis. He makes sure to utilize Aristotle’s three artistic proofs- ethos, pathos, and logos; yet focuses primarily on pathos- - which is an appeal to your emotions. This entire lecture is laden with emotion --happy, sad, hopeful-- you automatically feel sympathy for Jackson’s lost childhood, and hearing and seeing him cry is heartbreaking. Jackson beautifully and brilliantly maneuvers the audience’s emotions in a way that evokes emotions and personal experience that enhance his own credibility. Even if the audience is less inclined to follow the words of Jackson, another purpose of this speech is for the audience to position and mold their mindset to that of his own, thus making it difficult not to embrace the change and his beliefs. On an even more scholarly note, Jackson even adds binaries to the lecture, bringing up a familiar idea that he knows will stick in the audience’s mind, bolstering his own credibility of presenting his ideas. He mentions tropes such as “inalienable rights” and “Bill of Rights.” Both these terms are linked to American ideals, that all people are guaranteed- -our fundamental rights as people.

His credibility can arguably be hampered by his molestation allegations, which the media can reference as reasoning for not covering the speech. The media can criticize the irony of Michael Jackson speaking about children and love, while molestation charges were lingering in his past, such was done in an article from The Telegraph. The article begins by debasing Jackson, stating that “Pop singer Michael Jackson, who has suffered two failed marriages and weathered child molestation allegations, is to address the Oxford Union on the topic of balancing love and family,” (Davies) then ends with reminding people of the molestation charges that were dropped due to lack of evidence, and perjury of the child who testified. The article is a prime example of media hegemonic abuse. This whole article is an ad hominem smear, with absolutely no mention of the actual speech. They feel the need to mention Rabbi Shmuley Boteach and his book called kosher sex, as an attack on Jackson’s friends, poking fun at certain aspects of them that depict them as strange. Another article covering the speech, began with, “meet the new Michael Jackson. The wacky star is now the world's latest-and perhaps most unlikely-spokesman on family values” (Chan). These articles further demonstrates Jackson’s abnormal perception and thus, not apart of the hegemonic ideology. When a person is perceived as “different” they will be more likely to be ignored or portrayed in a negative light because they are going against what Media deems the norm. These victims will usually be attacked for their eccentricities, which the media will exaggerate and portray in excess.

On the opposite end are people who attended, listened, or read the speech, view it in a completely different light believing that, “Tears in my eyes again...this speech has touched my life...in so many ways...MJ sounds lovely...I miss his voice and his wisdom

and his kind words...he really knew what he was talking about and so gentle and kind...so well-spoken, too” (YouTube). “I think the lyrics of Michael's new work are refreshing and thoughtful. But that is probably irrelevant to a magazine that prefers to focus on image” (Feedback). There are plenty of fans and listeners who truly appreciated the lecture and actually listened to the words versus focus on the “image” that is portrayed through media. This shows that the media frames are indeed present, and can most likely be associated with the lack of speech critique and abundant event and image critique.

This artifact is unique because he is explaining his artifact. His ideology and thus the ideology of the speech is plainly spoken, that the only way a child can be strong, confident and ready to take on the world, is if he is embraced with unconditional love from his birth and granted that foundation, he is at once secure to develop and to fully explore his own identity. If, however, a child is not given this foundation, he will do whatever it takes to have it, including the sacrificing of his own individuality. The effect of the ideology is a perspective that all things hinge on the availability of love. Watson describes our life as a “story,” one which is being “narrated” (Watson 5) by the media. I believe that if we start to tell our own story and read from other books, instead of being told by mainstream media, we will be able to find more messages like Michael Jackson’s. I think that we as individuals have become lazy subservients, who listen to news and fail to look up different sources. If more of us follow the steps of Michael Jackson, and go against and question the hegemonic ideology, I feel that we can “heal the world” of the altered, biased views that we are shown. After several readings and analysis, I have come up with my own personal synopsis of this moving speech.

A loving parent-child bond is the foundation of every healthy individual. The increases in crime, suicide, psychological anguish, and so on are the effects of a break down in this bond. Individuals are acting out in an attempt to make up for a deficiency of the love and appreciation they were deprived of from the start. In order to reverse this violent trend we must “heal the world” by restoring families back to the highest priority of our lives. Children require and ought therefore be entitled a basic set of fundamental rights. These rights translate to a set of 10 duties as listed above. In order to begin this process of healing the world, we must begin with ourselves. We must let go of any resentment we may be harboring regarding our own individual experiences growing up. Through acknowledging and understanding of the unique circumstances of his previous generation, we may break the chain, forgive, let go of the past and take back control. Jackson gave this speech to a relatively small crowd of only five-hundred guests, yet his words have the power to start change, so we need to listen and start changing.

### **Conclusion**

In review, I went over the importance of Michael Jackson’s message at Oxford and showed you my feeling of why this incident was important and should be looked at. I then stated why this artifact is significant to communication scholars and to people in general. The message is one that is personal, potentially attacking and shedding light on bad parenting- attacking issues that are generally unspoken and taboo. Also I will go over my findings to the question asked in the first portion of my paper. What is the effect of Michael Jackson’s message, after having been filtered through the hegemonic influences of the Media which shape our preconceptions and perceived social norms? Is it

altered and/or disrupted due to the strict gender and relationship norms of men and women and parents and children?

The findings that contribute to rhetorical practice are the findings that deal with hegemonic ideology in the media that surrounds social issues and norms. I realized the media's power and their huge part in setting the hegemonic standards that Jackson went against. In my application section of ideology to my selected speech artifacts I found that the media sways the thoughts of audiences around the world, submerging them in certain beliefs and shielding them from other perspectives.

When analyzing my findings and the contribution that it makes to rhetorical theory, I found similarities between the media's power and rhetorical criticism. The media was a strong user of persuasion, portraying identical images and beliefs in a different light, and framing it as a different belief, when in actuality, they are the same. My findings are essential for rhetorical practice because it sheds light on the media's promotion of biased norms that infiltrate into our society, becoming our way of life. Michael Jackson questions our social norms, which is one of the major categories within hegemonic ideology. He is essentially a social gadfly, who makes people question their gender stereotypes (successful man, who doesn't look like a typical man) questioning all the hegemonic ideologies of social norms- looks, voice, crying, message. Media promotes comfortable things. Rooted in discomfort, Michael Jackson's words were disregarded due to its contradictory message, and despite the absence of media coverage, Jackson's words were strong enough to touch people.

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