

Project 1: Profile, Word of the Year

"Words are like prisms. Empty, nothing inside, and still they make rainbows."

— Denis Johnson

Goal

For this assignment you will write a profile. *Profile* comes from Latin, meaning "to draw a line," and is often used to denote a written genre that "outlines" or "sketches" a subject, normally a person. However, here you are tasked with profiling a **single word or phrase**. It will help you to think of your word or phrase like you would a person: the word or phrase has a story to tell, a history (etymology), a context, an anatomy (a linguistic one); the word or phrase comes from a specific community and culture, and it has friends and enemies (synonyms and antonyms). A word or phrase has a metaphorical relationship to the concept it names, just as we do to our jobs and social identities. Finally, like people, a word's meaning changes over time. Compose a profile **arranged around a selected theme** about your word or phrase from a compelling angle; concepts from class will help you to do that.

Background

You will select your word or phrase from a list of nominees for [Word of the Year](#), compiled annually by The American Dialect Society. You do not have to choose a winner, just a nominee. There are hundreds to choose from, going back to the 90s. It's important to note: this assignment is not simply a summary, a description, or a report. While some summary will be necessary to set the stage (origin, history, etc.), the bulk of the profile should be **analytical**, incorporating **vivid details and descriptive examples**. Whereas summary answers *who*, *what*, *where*, and *when* questions, analysis answers *how* and *why* questions. Examples of questions analysis attempts to answer: "why name the concept this?" or "how does this word make meaning metaphorically?" or "why did the meaning of this word change to mean its opposite over time?"

In your profile, you should consider the historical context in which the word or phrase was coined, the various ways the word or phrase is used, and how the word or phrase functions relative to the concept it names. You might first consider what type of word it is:

- Is it a neologism? A portmanteau? A compound word? An acronym? A hashtag? A slang term? A profanity? A verb, noun, adjective? Popular or obscure? Jargon or vernacular?
- Where, how, why, and by whom was it coined? What does its origin story tell us?
- How does the term function relative to the idea it names? Is it metaphorical? In what way?
- What are some examples of uses of the word or phrase? Does it have any synonyms or antonyms? What are the similarities or differences between them?

As we will discuss in class, one way to deepen your profile is by considering metaphor. Rhetorician Kenneth Burke [identified four so-called "master tropes"](#) of language, each a type of metaphor. Of course, there are endless figures of speech, turns of phrases, and linguistic manipulations, but Burke argues there are four tropes that underlie all language constructions. They describe four distinct relationships between words and the concepts they name, and almost all words make use of these tropes in some form. The four master tropes are: **metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony**. All language is metaphorical (substitutive) on some level—after all, words are never what they stand for, as they are inherently representative or analogic. But words can also take on more specific substitutive relationships to the concepts they describe: associative (metonymy), microcosmic (synecdoche), and oppositional (irony). Examples, taken from the [2015 Word of the Year Nominations](#):

- Metaphor: *(Throw) Shade*
- Metonymy: *Mic drop*
- Synecdoche: *Swipe right/left*
- Irony: *Microaggression*

What You'll Turn In

- 1000-1200 words
- 12-point font, 1-inch margins, double spaced

Criteria	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs Work
Genre [5] Profile Analysis	The profile raises and answers thoughtful and critical <i>how</i> and <i>why</i> questions about the ways in which a word makes various meanings. The essay incorporates vivid detail and descriptive examples.	The profile shows moments of analytical depth, but makes use of too much description or summary. Some details and examples are described.	The profile fails to raise and answer any critical and analytical <i>how</i> and <i>why</i> questions. The essay sheds no new analytical insight on the topic.
Structure & Organization [5] Paragraphs Flow Arrangement	Essay content is clear, in-depth, and logically organized. The paragraph is the unit of the essay. Each paragraph explores a particular and singular topic. Transitions between paragraphs facilitate clear reading.	Essay content features some unclear organizational decisions that make the logic hard to follow. Some paragraphs are either too long or too short. Ineffective transitions between paragraphs.	Essay content features little to no organizational structure. There are no transitions or topic sentences. There is no discernible logic to the sequence of paragraphs.
Depth, Class Concepts, Theme [5] In-depth Original Content	The essay content is in-depth, original, and inventive, not a surface level report or summary description. The profile draws on class concepts: master tropes, etymology, examples, descriptive details, metaphorical structure, type of word, cultural significance, antonyms/synonyms, etc. and has a discernible theme.	Essay content is adequately detailed and focused, incorporating some class concepts. But the profile fails to go beyond surface description or summary and simply reproduces "generic discourse." The theme is underdeveloped.	No evidence of class concepts or in-depth and original analysis. The profile lacks any kind of unifying thesis or theme and there is no cohesion.
Mechanics, Style, Grammar [3] Syntax Punctuation Usage, style, tone	The essay uses complex sentences with minimal grammatical and punctuation errors. The essay wears a deliberate style for a rhetorical effect.	The essay contains some recurring grammatical and usage errors that at times prevent the reader from understanding the writing.	The essay frequently features grammatical and mechanical issues that prevent the reader from understanding the writing.
Drafting/Revision [2] Completed drafts Significant revision	The writer completes and turns in on time a first draft. The writer demonstrates an effort to significantly revise beyond the surface level to improve the final draft. MLA formatted.	Revision from first to final draft is minimal or surface level.	No revision or first draft complete. Not MLA formatted.

Name:

Score:

/20

Professor Daniel Ernst

English 106

September 12, 2017

Facticide

“Facticide” is defined as the figurative “killing” or distortion of fact. This word came to fame as a hashtag on social media sites in 2016 as people across the nation began to butt heads over what they considered to be fact. The difference between fact and opinion especially became a hot topic during the 2016 election. This controversy birthed many new words and phrases meant to articulate the dissonance between reality and fiction. “Fake news” became a buzzword among politicians as “facticide” became an epidemic among both democratic and republican media coverage. Facticide even became common on social media where many people allow their selective bias to dictate what they stated as fact. Many of these “facts” would soon become known as “factasies” or “factinions” or “factheories” or even “factional” because we all know how much the internet loves it’s puns. These words all share a similar structure, the use of the word fact as a prefix followed by the suffix of a word with the opposite meaning. For example “factacies” is a combination of the words fantasy and fact, giving the word a more ironic connotation.

You can tell a lot about a word from its affixes. Facticide contains the suffix “-cide” meaning “to kill” implies that facticide is a very violent crime of sorts. It’s almost as if the word itself indicates that we live in an era of the homicide of fact. Heated discussions over what is fact are prevalent online, especially in comment threads where everything is war. The anonymity of being online allows people to emotionally detach themselves from the harmful things they say and the affects they have on others. Even the language of argument online contains very violent, warlike undertones. One might drop a “fact bomb” or plan a “factual attack” against someone who commits facticide to try and teach them a lesson. Words like “facticide” up the stakes of

disagreement on relative truths to a matter of life or death of a fact to the point that facticide is practically considered a violent crime. This level of aggression over fact and fiction is what made the 2016 election so divisive for most of America.

The act of facticide is far from unusual and should not have quite the stigma of committing a violent crime. Humans are flawed creatures whom often allow their own experiences and opinions dictate what they understand as fact. We must distinguish the difference between the accidental and intentional distortion of fact. The unintentional distortion of fact is a common mistake that may even be unintentional. One can't help if they were raised to believe that you should wait an hour after eating before going swimming. Old wives tales provide people with a false sense of truth that becomes widely accepted through repetition. However, this can be excused as a harmless misunderstanding not an intentional distortion of the truth for personal gain.

The difference between facticide and an accidental misunderstanding of the truth is in the approach to resolving the issue. If a person responds with aggression towards someone who questions their beliefs then it is safe to assume that their goal is no longer to find the truth but to win the argument. Some may even go as far as intentionally perverting fact in order to make themselves look better. This is when the act of facticide crosses the line from being innocuous to having malicious intent behind it. The effect of this kind of facticide can be detrimental depending on how many people will believe the "factasy." Gaining followers to an outlandish version of truth has become far simpler in the age of the internet where anyone with a computer and an internet connection can access a wide range of truths depending on where they search. This gets at the idea that for each person there is a slightly different perception of truth and we have no real way of knowing which truth is the "truthiest" truth.

The idea that a fact can be killed brings into question what we define as fact. Fact is supposed to be an undeniable truth. However, there are many widely accepted truths today that cannot necessarily be considered a fact because they cannot be proven with hard evidence. For example, “all men are created equal” is a nice idea and absolutely should be held as truth but could be refuted since it cannot necessarily be proven. These truths that are not quite fact is where controversy arises. What one individual may consider as “facticide” may just be the result of two individuals having separate ideas of what is truth. They each hold the right to have their own opinion but each view their own personal truth as the fact of the matter even though each of their claims could likely be refuted. We simply function under a set of norms that is suited to our current society and it’s most common truths. This brings into question whether many perceived “facticides” can be considered true facticide if they are the distortion of truth instead of fact. Just because someone's beliefs go against the norms of truth that society accepts does not mean that they are necessarily *wrong* in the strictest sense of the word.

There is so much uncertainty in the world that the possibilities are endless. There are so many sides to every story and each person really only has their own experience to base their own version of truth on. If we try to impose our own version of truth on others then what does that say about us? We think that just because our understanding used on our experience is better just because it’s different? We have no right to tell anyone that Sasquatch isn’t real just as they have no right to tell us God is a myth or that evolution is hogwash. People will believe what they choose to believe no matter what we have to say. We attempt to find the “truer truth” using the scientific method which is widely accepted as the most direct path to establishing truth as fact. However, even the scientific method can’t get at the really hard truths. Especially when dealing

with extremely human issues such as politics and race where “truth” is mostly determined by public opinion.

Truth is a dynamic thing that shifts and changes with the more we discover and the more we change as a society. In many ways truth is not so finite as fact and instead is determined by what the majority of society accepts as true at the time. With so many people having so many different personal versions of truth it’s no wonder facticide can be perceived so often. However, the word itself creates a stigma of a violent crime around simple disagreements among citizens of the society on what truth is. Anytime two parties disagree on the truth there is a perceived facticide, who’s to say which side is more correct than the other. No one can ever truly know the absolute truth of anything, but that’s just the way life is, there’s no need to treat one another like criminals because we simply disagree.