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Nothing But The Truth And The Whole Truthiness: Examining Markers Of Authenticity In The Modern Documentary

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NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH AND THE WHOLE TRUTHINESS:
EXAMINING MARKERS OF AUTHENTICITY IN THE MODERN
DOCUMENTARY

A Thesis

Presented To

The Faculty of the Department of Television, Radio, Film, and Theatre

San Jose State University

In Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts

by

Andrew V. Dickerson

May 2012

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled
NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH AND THE WHOLE TRUTHINESS:
EXAMINING MARKERS OF AUTHENTICITY IN THE MODERN
DOCUMENTARY

by

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THEATRE

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2012

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ABSTRACT

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH AND THE WHOLE TRUTHINESS: EXAMINING MARKERS OF AUTHENTICITY IN THE MODERN DOCUMENTARY

by Andrew V. Dickerson

This thesis examines the phenomenon comedian Stephen Colbert dubbed “truthiness” as it pertains to representations of authenticity in the documentary film genre. This thesis identifies several “markers of authenticity,” such as voice-over narration and confessional interviews, which have come to represent trustworthy representations of reality in the documentary form. This thesis also provides a content analysis of the markers’ use in five carefully selected contemporary documentaries, including *Super Size Me* (Spurlock, 2004) and *Bowling for Columbine* (Moore, 2002). The purpose of the study is to create a more comprehensive definition of the word truthiness as it pertains to the documentary film genre. The results of the study show that truthiness exists when a marker of authenticity is used to support the articulation of the documentarian’s viewpoint at the expense of a subject’s authenticity. The results of the study also show that truthiness exists when any marker of authenticity is used to convey a secondary meaning for comedic or ironic effect.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Significance of the Study	1
Literature Review.....	5

CHAPTER 2: STRUCTURE OF RESEARCH

Methodology	15
Definition of Terms.....	18
Markers of Authenticity	19
Voice-Over Narration and/or Subtitles	21
Manipulation of Footage.....	22
“Talking Heads” or “Confessional” Interviews.....	26
Documentarian’s On-Screen Presence.....	28
Documentarian’s Level of Intrusion	30
Participants’ Consent	33
Staged Action.....	34
Conclusion	36

CHAPTER 3: SETTING THE STAGE – FILM DESCRIPTION

<i>Super Size Me (2004)</i>	37
<i>Spellbound (2002)</i>	38
<i>An Inconvenient Truth (2006)</i>	40
<i>Food, Inc. (2008)</i>	41
<i>Bowling for Columbine (2002)</i>	43

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Voice-Over Narration and/or Subtitles	46
<i>Food, Inc.</i>	47
<i>Bowling for Columbine</i>	49
<i>Super Size Me</i>	51
<i>An Inconvenient Truth</i>	53
<i>Spellbound</i>	55
Synthesis	57
Manipulation of Footage.....	61
<i>Spellbound</i>	61
<i>Super Size Me</i>	64
<i>Bowling for Columbine</i>	67
<i>Food, Inc.</i>	70
<i>An Inconvenient Truth</i>	72
Synthesis	73
Talking Heads or Confessional Interviews	77

<i>Spellbound</i>	77
<i>Food, Inc.</i>	79
<i>Super Size Me</i>	81
<i>Bowling for Columbine</i>	83
<i>An Inconvenient Truth</i>	84
Synthesis	85
Documentarian’s On-Screen Presence.....	88
<i>Super Size Me</i>	89
<i>An Inconvenient Truth</i>	91
<i>Bowling for Columbine</i>	93
<i>Food, Inc.</i>	95
<i>Spellbound</i>	95
Synthesis	96
 CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS	
How Each Marker Exhibited Truthiness.....	98
General Observations.....	101
A More Comprehensive Definition of Truthiness	104
Suggestions for Future Research	107
 REFERENCES	 108

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1	
Selection Criteria	16

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The goal of my research into a few carefully selected documentaries was to create a more comprehensive definition of the phenomenon comedian Stephen Colbert dubbed “truthiness,” discussed below, as it pertained to representations of authenticity in the documentary film genre. I used the term “markers of authenticity,” to denote cinematic, aesthetic, or technological elements of documentary filmmaking that, through repeated use over time, have become inherently associated with genuine, reliable, and trustworthy representations of reality in the documentary form. It was my hypothesis that these markers, many of which have become synonymous with the documentary genre, could be used in different ways. The markers could be used to help educate the audience on a particular subject matter that was relatively unfamiliar to the general populace; they could also be used to articulate and/or support a documentarian’s particular point of view on that subject; or they could be used in both manners simultaneously. With those thoughts in mind, I endeavored to define markers of authenticity and reliability, identify their use in modern documentaries, and provide a content analysis of each marker in order to better understand the different manners in which they have been used by contemporary documentarians.

Significance of the Study

From the invention of the motion picture camera in the late nineteenth century, filmmakers such as the Lumière Brothers and Thomas Edison focused much of their attention on common events, such as workers exiting a factory, children playing games in a garden, and horses galloping around a race track. By recording these events on film

and re-presenting them to the public, some of the world's first filmmakers simultaneously served as the world's first documentarians. Over time, as with any art form, theorists, critics, filmmakers, and audiences alike began to form their own opinions with regards to how documentaries should be constructed. The predominant theory for much of the 20th century was that the primary function of the documentary film was to expose the "truth" about people and events through the eye of the camera lens (e.g., Dziga Vertov, Robert Drew, and Jean Rouch). Consequently, documentarians were "held to a duty to respect the rights of others" and had "an obligation to disclose their intentions and to create unbiased depictions, in short, to 'tell the truth'" to their audiences (Butchart 428-429). This belief arose from the documentary genre's strong ties to journalism in that any journalistic enterprise was accompanied by an assumed understanding that the piece would responsibly "shape public expectations about integrity, fairness, and good taste" (Butchart 428). Examples of these ideals can be seen in the work of Dziga Vertov, most notably in *Man With A Movie Camera* (1927), as well as the later work of such pre-eminent filmmakers as Robert Drew, D.A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, and the Maysles Brothers during the American Direct Cinema Movement that spanned the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s (Barnouw 231-253).

Over the past thirty years, however, a new wave of documentarians has emerged, one that has challenged the aesthetics and tenets of documentary construction set forth in the first three-quarters of the 20th century. This movement has been led by filmmakers such as Michael Moore and Morgan Spurlock who have mediated the journalistic obligations created by their forbearers with the belief that "the documentary's claim to an

inside track to the truth and reality of other people [has been] undermined if not destroyed completely,” and that documentaries are now recognized by many “as an articulation of a point of view – not a window into reality” (Ruby 53). As documentary and ethnographic film theorist Bill Nichols explained, the documentary form is no longer viewed as a *reproduction* of reality; rather it is viewed as “a *representation* of the world we already occupy. It stands for a particular view of the world, one we may never have encountered before even if the aspects of the world that is represented are familiar to us” (20). In many modern documentaries the emphasis has shifted from focusing primarily on the exposition of truth through the camera lens or the “Kino-eye,” as Vertov would have seen it, to expressing the documentarian’s point-of-view. Further, many documentarians now view themselves as entertainers as well as informers. “As Gordon Quinn, producer of *Hoop Dreams* (1994), *Stevie* (2002), and other Kartemquin Films productions, says, ‘We are storytellers, not journalists, first and foremost’” (Aufderheide 27).

As the attitudes of documentarians have shifted, so too have the expectations of contemporary audiences. In analyzing audiences’ interpretations of *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), University of Arkansas-Fayetteville Communication Studies professors Thomas Rosteck & Thomas S. Frenz argued that “very few still cling to the belief that documentaries record some pristine objective reality. Most still believe that this genre is the closest we can come to that outmoded ideal, and discussions of the genre often reflect the tension between ‘documentary as record’ and ‘documentary as argument’” (3). The transformation in the attitudes of both documentarians and audiences’ reception of their

work has created an extremely complex and intriguing discourse in the documentary film realm.

Comedian Stephen Colbert's creation and popularization of the word "truthiness" in 2005 has turned more public attention toward this phenomenon. As defined by the American Dialect Society, truthiness is "the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true" (January 2006). Applying this concept to documentaries, truthiness can be seen as any attempt to employ a form of "pseudo-communication and overwhelming relativism, where, at best, the ability to persuade one's opponents or a potential audience of the 'rightness' (as opposed to the communicable 'truth') of one's position, is all-important" (Olivier 1). Taken to the extreme, a documentarian that employs truthiness in the construction of his or her film takes traditional "markers of authenticity" (i.e., documentary film aesthetics such as "confessional interviews" [Barnouw 233] or the "Voice of God commentator" [Introduction 13] that have become synonymous with the documentary genre) and uses them in a way where the conveyance of the filmmaker's viewpoint on a given subject becomes the paramount objective. Opposing viewpoints can be downplayed. "Documentarians, almost exclusively independent producers, often develop films around arguments rather than, say, life narratives...[They], of course, select the facts they think are the most relevant or important" (Aufderheide 27). Narration can attempt to persuade the audience of a certain idea. As Nichols states, "speech added to images is like captions added to pictures: they steer us toward one understanding and away from others within an arena of social interpretation where meaning is inevitably up for grabs"

(*Blurred* 128). Footage can be creatively edited to achieve a desired effect through a process “Freud called *nachträglichkeit* and Hayden White called ‘willing backward’” that occurs “when we rearrange accounts of events in the past that have been emplotted in a given way, in order to endow them with a different meaning or to draw from the new emplotment reasons for acting differently in the future from the ways we have become accustomed to acting in our present” (*Blurred* 118). The presence of these practices in some areas of the field has raised issues about how modern documentaries are composed, what their desired impact on audiences is, and where the line between truth and truthiness really lies.

Literature Review

My initial literature search was concentrated in two main areas of discourse: the history of documentary film and theoretical criticism and analysis of the form and the conventions associated with it. Erik Barnouw’s seminal *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (1983) served as a resource for historical background and perspective on the development of the genre since its genesis in the late 19th century. Barnouw’s separation of movements within the genre by documentarian type (e.g., “explorer-documentarist,” “advocate-documentarist,” and “catalyst-documentarist”) proved particularly useful in tracking changes in the form throughout history and helped me better associate particular conventions with certain movements and/or individual documentarians. Written in 1983, however, it lacked information and in-depth analysis of the past thirty years of documentary film that I needed in order to create a functional

contemporary lens that could be used to analyze the modern documentaries I eventually selected to screen.

Bill Nichols' *Introduction to Documentary* (2001) picked up where Barnouw left off and provided useful information on contemporary documentary movements. Nichols did not provide as much historical analysis or overall breadth of information as Barnouw, though, and instead framed his chapters around questions, such as Chapter two's "Why Are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking?" However, this approach was particularly useful for my research as he examined many of the same questions I posed at the outset of my study with regards to how traditional markers of authenticity have been treated by modern documentarians. Take, for example, the following question: by what means can a documentarian convince an audience that the on-screen images they are presented with are reliable and authentic? Nichols asserts that the images audiences are presented with when viewing a documentary film automatically attain a certain level of reliability because of the associative nature of their subjects; the people, places, and things presented on-screen are almost exclusively those that, given the appropriate circumstances and financial resources, audiences members could encounter on their own, "outside the cinema" (Nichols, *Introduction* 3). Nichols notes that the "remarkable power of the photographic image cannot be underestimated, even though it is subject to qualification because (1) an image cannot tell everything we want to know about what happened and (2) images can be altered both during and after the fact by both conventional and digital means" (Nichols, *Introduction* 3). These qualifications, he

argues, sit square in the minds of audience members and contribute to a shared wariness of the truthiness phenomenon.

Richard Meran Barsam's *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History* (1973) provided an interesting discussion on what defined a documentary film and assisted me in creating my own definition prior to embarking on my film selection process. Barsam stated that documentary is "a term which only signifies one approach to the making of nonfiction films. All documentaries are nonfiction films, but not all nonfiction films are documentaries" (1). He continued to say that "nonfiction film dramatizes fact instead of fiction," and that "documentary is distinguished from the factual film by its sociopolitical purpose" (Barsam 3-5). Barsam noted that pioneering documentarian John Grierson classified the documentary film in a slightly different way than he did, calling it "a creative treatment of actuality" (Barsam 2). Grierson's definition further differed from Nichols, who believed that Grierson's classification undercut "the very claim to truth and authenticity on which documentary" depended (*Introduction* 24). Based on the three theorists' arguments, I was able to construct a definition of my own, discussed below. In addition to assisting in the formation of my definition of the documentary film, Barsam's perspective on the evolution of documentary film over the first half of the 20th century provided a useful alternative historical account to compare with Barnouw's retrospective while also providing a different view on some of the theoretical issues raised by Nichols.

Though Barnouw, Barsam, and Nichols provided useful general historical information about documentary film, they did not address at length the observational cinema movement (which encompassed the British "Free Cinema" Movement, the

American Direct Cinema Movement, and the European “Cinema Vérité” Movement) that was most prominent in the 1960s and 1970s. This movement had direct bearing on some of the 21st century documentaries I examined in this thesis, which made gaining information on the subject a top priority. Dave Saunders’ *Direct Cinema: Observational Documentary and the Politics of the Sixties* (2007) impeccably filled the gap created by the other theorists with a detailed analysis, particularly of the American Direct Cinema Movement and some of the period’s most influential films. The bulk of Saunders’ work centered around four rock documentaries, which he deemed to be the most representative of the Direct Cinema Movement: D.A. Pennebaker’s *Dont Look Back* (1965) and *Monterey Pop* (1967), Michael Wadleigh’s *Woodstock* (1970), and Albert and David Maysles’ *Gimme Shelter* (1971). These films and their rejection of the rote journalistic enterprise of pairing pieces of film with a “voice-of-God” narrator, he argued, exemplified how the “documentary form was transcending its roots in didacticism and finding new purpose in a world of change, disorder, and unclear horizons” (Saunders, 140). In addition, Saunders provided a critical analysis of the cinematic techniques the movement’s documentarians employed in order to both educate and captivate their audiences. Ironically enough, in an era that is often associated with “the unattainable goals of omniscience, objectivity, and invisibility” (Saunders, 141), it was the manipulation of footage, one of my markers of authenticity, discussed below, that came to the forefront as the most used technique. For example, in *Monterey Pop*, Saunders noted “there is entrenched, within *Monterey Pop*’s joyous worldview, and unswerving rejection of critical discussion” (Saunders, 96). Director/Editor D.A. Pennebaker

purposefully edited out any footage that might have disrupted the “pro-filmic whimsy” that he was intending to capture on film. So while he and his crew might not have overtly interfered with the proceedings of the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival, he significantly altered its presentation and effect on film through “spellbound diminution of inconvenient, malignant, or troublesome factors (the attendant Hell’s Angels, Black Panthers, and every politically dissenting performance)” (Saunders, 97). Saunders even went so far as to suggest that Pennebaker’s manipulation of the footage captured from that event created a piece that was, albeit unintentionally, tantamount to Leni Riefenstahl’s work for the Nazis, stating: “Pennebaker’s empirical ‘obligations’ to the viewer, such as they are, are not fulfilled. In looking for fun, or in looking to sanctify or santise [*sic*] an event – or in this case an entire ethos – a film can be little other than synthetic propaganda, a benignly intended *Triumph of the Will* (1934) in which not Adolf Hitler, but Eastern avatar Ravi Shankar entrances and incites masses to exaltation” (Saunders). Such pointed criticism and enlightening analysis of such fabled works from the Direct Cinema Movement provided a perspective for me to rely on in forming my own definitions of contemporary markers of authenticity.

In contrast to Saunders’ historical retrospective analysis of the Observational Documentary Film era, Alan Rosenthal’s *Writing, Directing, and Producing Documentary Films* (1990) “deliberately” (2) de-emphasized historical analysis and instead focused on deconstructing how documentaries are composed. Most relevant to my research was his examination of the logistical and ethical dilemmas documentarians face on each project, which he deemed “one of the most important topics” in the field due

to the fact that “filmmakers use and expose people’s lives” (Rosenthal 239). He argued that each documentarian’s personal set of dilemmas differed depending on the method of filming chosen prior to embarking on each project. For example, the documentarian who chooses to subscribe to the Direct Cinema method of filming encounters a different set of challenges than the documentarian constructing an historical documentary. The Direct Cinema documentarian subscribes, with varying degrees of commitment, to a set of self-imposed restrictions that include constructing their film with “an evolving story with plenty of incident, no prestructuring...no prompting, directing, or interviewing between the director or cameraman and the subject, [and] minimal commentary” (Rosenthal, 195). Rosenthal also noted that the Direct Cinema film required a “tremendously high ratio of shooting, up to forty or fifty to one” (195) and “in 90 percent of the cases, the cinema vérité film is found and made on the editing table” (199). In contrast, the historical documentary is less restrictive in form and relies primarily constructed from archival footage (Rosenthal 219). Any new footage or interviews shot for the finished product are done so with one of three approaches in mind: “the essay, the ‘great man’ approach, [or] the ‘personal reminiscence’ method” (Rosenthal 219-221). Each of these approaches share a common thread in that “the story is of prime importance” and that documentarians must, before shooting any new footage, “look for the central theme and then find a concrete way of illustrating it” (Rosenthal 222). Additionally, commentary or narration of some sort is a necessity for historical documentaries because it is “excellent for stories and anecdotes and for evoking mood and atmosphere” (Rosenthal 223). Rosenthal’s explanation of the differing types of dilemmas documentarians face when

constructing their films aided tremendously in my identification of what directorial choices were made in the films I screened, specifically with regards to the use or neglect of individual markers of authenticity.

Complementing Rosenthal's work on the composition of documentary films was Michael Renov's *The Subject of Documentary* (2004), which consisted of a compilation of essays on a wide range of topics, including television journalism history, personal identity crises in the digital age, and documentary film theory. The last subject was the most relevant to my research, particularly the essay titled "Charged Vision: The Place of Desire in Documentary Film Theory," in which Renov challenged the notions of theorists such as Nichols who maintained that the experience of viewing a documentary should be "characterized as epistophilic" (96). Referencing Freud, Foucault, and Lacan, Renov instead argued "for the documentary gaze as constitutively multiform, embroiled with conscious motives and unconscious desires, driven by curiosity no more than by terror and fascination" (96). Renov's assertion helped provide the basis for my claim that markers of authenticity could be simultaneously used to educate the audience on a particular subject while also articulating the documentarian's point of view. For example, in *An Inconvenient Truth*, documentarian Davis Guggenheim presents film footage of his subject, former American Vice-President Al Gore, during a Senatorial inquisition as he questions scientists about their views on global warming. The footage is supplemented by a voice-over from Gore who discusses his difficulties in convincing some scientists, those who had been "silenced" by corporations, to talk openly about the growing problem of global warming. The footage with corresponding voice-over

accomplishes two tasks at the same time: as Renov would phrase it, the footage “consciously” informs the audience about Gore’s previous work in the Senate while also informing the audience about scientists who were less than forthcoming on the issue of global warming; it also “unconsciously” reinforces Gore’s credibility as an expert on the topic of global warming while attempting to increase the audience’s desire to view Gore as a representative of the public interest in relation to the potentially frightening topic of climate change.

Finally, I leaned heavily on Liz Stubbs’ *Documentary Filmmakers Speak* (2002), which consisted of a compilation of interviews with some of the most notable documentarians of the past 50 years, including Albert Maysles, D.A. Pennebaker, and Ken Burns. I found Stubbs’ work extremely useful in writing this thesis as it provided direct quotations from some of the pioneers of documentary genre and, indirectly, their take on the markers of authenticity I studied. For example, Stubbs asked Maysles “Do you find the presence of a camera or camera crew changes people’s reactions?” (Stubbs 5). He responded, “It can. But it depends on how it’s used... That is, it’s not a serious factor in making what I do any less valid, nor do I think that the fly-on-the-wall approach is at all useful, because the fly on the wall is an instrument without a mind or a heart to control it... photography lacks a heart and too many people who are skillful in their camera work... just don’t give it the empathy that draws the emotions of the scene, draws it out, evokes it, and gets it on film. Without that process, you end up with a lifeless series of images” (Stubbs 5-6). Maysles’ comments are particularly interesting in that they come from someone who was so closely associated with the American Direct

Cinema Movement, which was, at its core, an observational, non-interventionist undertaking. His comments show that, over time, individual documentarians can change their opinions on key aspects of how they compose their films. That type of self-criticism was as important to my research as the criticism taken from academics.

The theoretical criticism of the documentary form provided by Renov and Rosenthal, bolstered by the historical background information of Barnouw, Barsam, Nichols, and Saunders, laid the groundwork for the identification of the aforementioned markers of authenticity that have formed the core of my research discussed in this thesis. Through their repeated use over the past century, many of these markers have become synonymous with the documentary form and are integral parts of the genre's "institutional framework," which, in a sense, "imposes an institutional way of seeing and speaking, which functions as a set of limits, or conventions, for the filmmaker and audience alike" (Nichols, *Introduction* 23). "Audiences have become captivated by the appeal of 'authenticity' and the 'real'" (Armstrong 72) and many markers have come to validate that what is being presented on-screen is authentic. However, many documentarians "also make representations, mount arguments, or formulate persuasive strategies of their own, setting out to persuade us to accept their views as appropriate" (Nichols, *Introduction* 5). In these instances, the same markers that might have been used to convey authenticity can be used as elements of truthiness to convince audiences to accept the documentarian's viewpoint on a given subject in spite of or in contrast to the information presented on-screen. The goal of identifying and defining each marker was to be able to better understand and identify situations where the use of each element

compromised and/or supported the assumed documentary convention of authentic representation of the real world.

CHAPTER 2 STRUCTURE OF RESEARCH

Methodology

By studying theoretical and critical discourse about the documentary genre, I was able to identify a set of traditional markers of authenticity, discussed below, that through repeated use over time have become inherently associated with genuine, reliable, and trustworthy representations of reality in the documentary form. In an effort to better understand how these markers have been put to use in contemporary documentaries, I screened a set of five modern American documentaries and documented each instance where one of the markers was exhibited on-screen. In order to be eligible for selection, films had to have been released after the year 2000 and films had to have either been directed by an American or have had their largest distribution area been America (measured by the number of theaters in which the film was screened). Additionally, in an effort to cover as many different pieces of subject matter possible I screened one film per director.

With those limitations in mind, I developed a rubric¹ to help determine the films to screen. Factors taken into consideration in selecting films to run through the rubric included notoriety of each film's director, each film's lifetime gross (i.e., its domestic [American] gross box office revenue), the number of theaters in which each film was screened, and the number of accolades each film accrued from popular worldwide film festivals (with special consideration given to each film's Academy Awards wins and

TABLE 1

¹ See Table 1, statistics from www.boxofficemojo.com and www.imdb.com.

² Information and statistics about each film and its documentarian from www.boxofficemojo.com and www.imdb.com

<u>Film</u>	SELECTION CRITERIA				
	<u>Director(s)</u>	<u>Release Date</u>	<u>Lifetime Gross</u>	<u>Theaters</u>	<u>Viewing Quotient</u>
<i>Bowling for Columbine</i>	Moore	2002	\$21,576,018	248	\$87,000
<i>Spellbound</i>	Blitz	2002	\$5,728,581	117	\$48,962
<i>The Fog of War</i>	Morris	2003	\$4,198,566	261	\$16,086
<i>Fahrenheit 9/11</i>	Moore	2004	\$119,194,771	2,011	\$59,271
<i>Super Size Me</i>	Spurlock	2004	\$11,536,423	230	\$50,158
<i>Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room</i>	Gibney	2005	\$4,071,700	151	\$26,965
<i>An Inconvenient Truth</i>	Guggenheim	2006	\$24,146,161	587	\$41,135
<i>Jesus Camp</i>	Ewing & Grady	2006	\$902,544	52	\$17,357
<i>King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters</i>	Gordon	2007	\$677,914	58	\$11,688
<i>Sicko</i>	Moore	2007	\$24,540,079	1,117	\$21,970
<i>Food, Inc.</i>	Kenner	2008	\$4,417,674	115	\$38,415
<i>Religulous</i>	Charles	2008	\$13,011,160	568	\$22,907
<i>The Cove</i>	Psihoyos	2009	\$875,005	56	\$15,625
<i>Waiting for Superman</i>	Guggenheim	2010	\$6,417,135	330	\$19,446

<u>Film</u>	ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	
	<u>Oscar</u>	<u>Festivals</u>
<i>Bowling for Columbine</i>	1 WIN (Best Documentary Feature)	28 wins, 7 nominations
<i>Spellbound</i>	1 Nomination (Best Documentary Feature)	14 wins, 7 nominations
<i>The Fog of War</i>	1 WIN (Best Documentary Feature)	5 wins, 6 nominations
<i>Fahrenheit 9/11</i>	Not Nominated	26 wins, 12 nominations
<i>Super Size Me</i>	1 Nomination (Best Documentary Feature)	5 wins, 5 nominations
<i>Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room</i>	1 Nomination (Best Documentary Feature)	1 win, 1 nomination
<i>An Inconvenient Truth</i>	2 WINS (Best Documentary Feature, Best Original Song)	22 wins, 5 nominations
<i>Jesus Camp</i>	1 Nomination (Best Documentary Feature)	2 wins, 3 nominations
<i>King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters</i>	Not Nominated	4 wins, 3 nominations
<i>Sicko</i>	1 Nomination (Best Documentary Feature)	9 wins, 7 nominations
<i>Food, Inc.</i>	1 Nomination (Best Documentary Feature)	3 wins, 6 nominations
<i>Religulous</i>	Not Nominated	2 wins, 1 nomination
<i>The Cove</i>	1 WIN (Best Documentary Feature)	24 wins, 5 nominations
<i>Waiting for Superman</i>	Not Nominated	9 wins, 9 nominations

Legend

Lifetime Gross = Domestic (American) Gross Box Office Revenue
 Theaters = Number of Domestic Theaters on which the Film was Screened
 Viewing Quotient = Lifetime Gross/Theaters
 Oscar = Number of Academy Award Nominations and/or Wins
 Festivals = Accolades from Popular Worldwide Festivals

Categorical Leaders

1st
2nd
3rd
4th
5th

Statistics from www.boxofficemojo.com and www.imdb.com

nominations). Each of these factors played a meaningful part in the selection process with the film's lifetime gross and the number of theaters in which the film was screened serving as the most influential factors. These two numbers provided the information I needed in order to formulate the film's "viewership quotient," discussed below, and ultimately determined the films I screened. The notoriety of each film's director and the number of accolades each film accrued from various international film festivals played secondary roles in my selection process. These two factors were used early on in the selection process to help initially identify films that merited consideration for screening; however, these factors did not play a definitive role in the final selection of the films to be screened.

With those factors in mind, I compiled a list of 14 films that could be selected for screening. The list included *Bowling for Columbine* (Moore, 2002), *Spellbound* (Blitz, 2002), *The Fog of War* (Morris, 2003), *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Moore, 2004), *Super Size Me* (Spurlock, 2004), *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (Gibney, 2005), *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim, 2006), *Jesus Camp* (Ewing & Grady, 2006), *King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters* (Gordon, 2007), *Sicko* (Moore, 2007), *Food, Inc.* (Kenner, 2008), *Religulous* (Charles, 2008) and *Waiting for Superman* (Guggenheim, 2010). The determining factor I used to narrow the list from my initial group of 14 candidates to the final five films that were eventually screened was a formula I dubbed "viewership quotient" (or VQ). Each film's VQ was calculated by taking the film's lifetime gross and dividing it by the number of theaters in which the film was screened. The resulting quotient represented the average amount of revenue each individual theater accrued by

screening that particular film, a quotient that, based on my research, represented the best correlation to each film's potential influence or reach (i.e., the more money a film made, the more people saw it and were exposed to its message, thereby potentially making it more socially and culturally influential and making my analysis more applicable to the general populace). The five films with the highest VQ's were selected for screening. The only exception made was with respect to the limitation I had set with regards to screening only one film per director. Two of Michael Moore's films (*Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*) cracked my top five, so the one with the lower VQ (*Fahrenheit 9/11*) was omitted and the film with the sixth-highest VQ (*Food, Inc.*) was instead selected for screening. The final list consisted of the following films (each film's VQ is listed in parentheses): *Bowling for Columbine* (\$87,000), *Super Size Me* (\$50,158), *Spellbound* (\$48,962), *An Inconvenient Truth* (\$41,135), and *Food, Inc.* (\$38,415).

Definition of Terms

The goal of my research was to create a more comprehensive definition of the word "truthiness" in relation to representations of authenticity in the documentary film genre. First I had to establish what defined a "documentary film." For the purposes of my research, the term "documentary film" was defined as any nonfiction film that offered the audience a "likeness or depiction of the world that [bore] a recognizable familiarity" (Nichols, *Introduction* 2) while also carrying a distinct "sociopolitical purpose" (Barsam 4) and at times demonstrating a need "to persuade, to influence and to change" (Barsam 5) an audience's viewpoint on a given subject matter. My definition was formulated around two concepts, both identified by Nichols. First, regardless of the individual

interpretation of the definition of the term, “documentary filmmakers share a common, self-chosen mandate to represent the historical world rather than to imaginatively invent alternative ones” (Nichols, *Introduction* 25). Second, documentaries “take shape between the three-fold interaction among (1) filmmaker, (2) subjects or social actors, and (3) audience or viewers,” conveniently articulated in the idiom “*I speak about them to you*” (Nichols, *Introduction* 13). The pronoun “*I*” represents the documentarian; “*speak about*” reflects the idea that documentarians, for the most part, “represent others” and either tell a story, create a poetic mood, or construct a narrative; the third person pronoun “*them*” represents the subject(s) of the film and “implies a separation between speaker and subject”; and “*you*” represents the audience or whom is being addressed by the speaker (Nichols, *Introduction* 13-16). Variations on this rhetorical formulation exist (e.g., the case of *Super Size Me* [2004] when director Morgan Spurlock serves as both documentarian and subject [*I and them*]) but the one outlined is the most common.

Markers of Authenticity

For the purposes of this thesis, I defined “markers of authenticity” as cinematic, aesthetic, or technological elements of documentary filmmaking that, through repeated use over time, have become inherently associated with genuine, reliable, and trustworthy representations of reality in the documentary form. By studying the historical background and critical analysis provided by Barnouw, Barsam, Nichols, Renov, Rosenthal, and Saunders I was able to identify seven potential markers of authenticity for evaluation. Each marker presented itself during my film evaluation, but did so in different ways and with varying frequency. Some markers readily presented themselves

in an easily quantifiable fashion and, thus, much of my final analysis was based on how each of the documentarians used those markers. Other markers manifested themselves in more of a general film aesthetic that could be felt at various times throughout each film. These markers did not necessarily overtly present themselves to the audience, but still helped shape my understanding of what each documentarian was attempting to achieve and what documentary “rules” they were prescribing to.

Regardless of the fashion in which the markers presented themselves, I refrained from analyzing the intentions of each documentarian with regards to his or her use, or non-use, of the markers. I imagine that a personal retrospective interview with each documentarian after the completion of their film would reveal some insight into his or her intentions with regards to his or her use of the markers I identified. For example, the documentarian might reveal why he or she chose not to use any voice-over in their film or might reveal that in some instances he or she asked his or her subjects specific questions in an attempt to purposefully elicit a specific response that he or she felt would help make a certain persuasive point in the finished product. Due to the fact that I did not have the required access to conduct such interviews with the documentarians, I deemed an analysis of their intentions to be outside the scope of my research. Consequently, I focused my analysis on the content of each film, the manner in which each documentarian employed each marker, and how each documentarian’s use of the markers enhanced the reliability of the images presented on-screen and/or contributed to an increased level of truthiness through the articulation and/or support of a particular point of view.

Voice-Over Narration and/or Subtitles

The markers that were most prominently used in the films I evaluated were voice-over narration and/or subtitles. While some might consider the two elements of filmmaking to be separate entities, I chose to combine the two into one category because they both accomplish the goal to provide supplemental commentary, in most cases written by the documentarian, to the images the audience is presented with on-screen. Voice-over can accomplish this through audio from one of the subjects, from a paid voice-actor, or from the documentarians themselves. Subtitles can accomplish this through an animated title sequence or by laying text over the on-screen images. Among the five films I screened, there were 152 instances where voice-over narration and/or subtitles were used. Voice-over narration was most heavily used in *Super Size Me* and *Bowling for Columbine*. Both films' documentarians, Morgan Spurlock and Michael Moore, respectively, had a similar approach to the use of voice-over: in lieu of hiring an actor or using one of their subjects to provide voice-over, they provided the voice-over themselves. This was not surprising to see as Nichols noted, "The Voice of God, and a corresponding voice of authority – someone we see as well as hear who speaks on behalf of the film, such as Roger Mudd in *The Selling of the Pentagon* or Michael Rubbo in *Daisy: The Story of a Facelift* – remains a prevalent feature of documentary film" (Nichols, *Introduction* 14). Spurlock and Moore's frequent and authoritative use of the voice-over marker reinforced Nichols' assertion that the marker's use is alive and well in the modern documentary.

In contrast to documentarians like Moore and Spurlock, Robert Kenner (*Food, Inc.*) and Jeffrey Blitz (*Spellbound*) exhibited a noticeable distaste for voice-over narration and instead used subtitles to communicate with the audience. This method found its first use in early documentaries where, due to limitations in sound equipment, subtitles were used to explain “the following shot, or a limited group of shots” (Barnouw 59). After the authoritative “Voice-of-God” narrator rose to prominence in the first half of the 20th century, Richard Leacock and other proponents of the Direct Cinema Movement in the 1960s developed a “growing aversion to voice-over narration” (Barnouw 236) and instead chose to compose their films “with no voice-over commentary” (Nichols, *Introduction* 110). Leacock described his view on the subject based on personal experience. “It is when I am not being *told* something, and I start to find out for myself, this is when it gets exciting for me...the minute I sense I’m being *told* the answer, I tend to start rejecting it” (Barnouw 236). Leni Riefenstahl held a similar view on the use of narration. Riefenstahl, who has gained a somewhat infamous position in history as the director of *Triumph of the Will* (1935), which chronicled the Nazi party’s annual rally in Nuremberg, Germany, included no spoken commentary in her films as “she considered any commentator an ‘enemy of film’” (Barnouw 103). Kenner and Blitz embraced this approach in their films, using no voice-over narration while making extensive use of the subtitle, including 51 instances in *Food, Inc.* alone.

Manipulation of Footage

Not far behind the use of voice-over and/or subtitles was the marker I classified as “manipulation of footage.” Among the five films screened, there were 132 instances of

this marker. It should be noted that the term “manipulation of footage,” as it applies to documentary filmmaking, could encompass a wide variety of elements, including but not limited to visual editing, sound editing, lighting, the use of song, the use of technological novelties, and mise-en-scène. However, I limited my definition of manipulated footage to any instance where it was readily apparent that the documentarian had altered the raw footage that was shot during production in order to achieve an effect that was different than what would have been conveyed to the audience had the footage been left unaltered, primarily through editing of image, sound, or both. Specifically, in the films I evaluated, this included the use of the montage to show the passage of time, the presentation of subject matter in non-chronological order, the juxtaposition of contrasting images, the juxtaposition of an image with voice-over, and the ironic use of song.

In addition to limiting the definition of what was included in my documentation of instances of manipulated footage, I found that a distinction needed to be made in order to differentiate this marker from “contextual footage.” Contextual footage, or footage that is used with the sole purpose of informing the viewer about a particular subject they might be unfamiliar with, is recognized as an important part of documentarianism. For example, in *Super Size Me*, Spurlock provides a voice-over about McDonald’s PlayPlaces and the impact their presence has in presenting McDonald’s as a “family environment.” Spurlock’s voice-over is juxtaposed with footage of children playing in and around actual McDonald’s PlayPlaces; footage that does nothing but inform the audience of what a PlayPlace looks like and how it relates to McDonald’s’ business model. In a later scene, though, Spurlock presents the audience with an image of the exterior of a McDonald’s,

and then allows the scene to continue until an obese person walks away from the McDonald's carrying a bag of McDonald's food. He finally adds his own voice-over with complementary illustrations to describe 20 different medical maladies, such as heart attack, stroke, and diabetes, which have been found to be associated with adult obesity. The statistics Spurlock rattles off do not directly correspond with McDonald's; however, his presentation of an obese person walking in front of a McDonald's while carrying a bag of McDonald's food strongly implies that eating McDonald's' food contributes to obesity, thereby contributing to a greater risk of suffering obesity-related medical maladies. Contextual footage like the first scene I described was not catalogued during my film evaluation; however, understanding the differences between the two types of footage proved very useful in identifying and analyzing actual uses of manipulated footage of the second scene I described.

Whether it was done through a contextual or manipulated fashion, the importance of filmmakers having the ability to edit footage in a meaningful manner instead of being forced to present the footage unaltered in order to maintain some preconceived notion of authenticity – in both documentary film as well as in narrative fiction film – has been acknowledged since the advent of the motion picture by some of the medium's most well-known authorities. In reference to the documentarian's necessity to alter footage, Vertov wrote “it is not enough to show bits of truth on the screen, separate frames of truth. These frames must be thematically organized so that the whole is also a truth” (Barnouw 58). Grierson felt that documentarians could, by way of the editing process, dramatize “issues and their implications in a meaningful way” in order to “lead the

citizen through the wilderness” (Barnouw 85). Further, his “determination was to ‘bring the citizen’s eye in from the ends of the earth to the story, his own story, of what was happening under his nose...the drama of the doorstep’” (Barnouw 85). However, as Nichols cautioned, documentarians must be mindful of the “burden of responsibility” to maintain authenticity through the editing process due to the fact that they “set out to represent others rather than...portray characters of their own invention” (*Introduction* 6). Ruby addressed this authorial responsibility and offered an explanation as to why the documentary form has room to allow the use of purposeful editing:

As the acknowledged author of a film, the documentarian assumes responsibility for whatever meaning exists in the image, and therefore is obligated to discover ways to make people aware of point of view, ideology, author biography, and anything else deemed relevant to an understanding of the film, that is, to become reflexive [Ruby 1977]. They abandon the idea that being moral means being objective and in its place openly acknowledge the ideological base of all human knowledge, including films. Ironically, the traditional form of the journalistic documentary not only denied a voice to subjects but to the filmmakers as well. ‘Objective’ documentaries have no authors, only reporters who present the ‘who, what, where and whys’ of the ‘truth.’ So the move toward a multivocal documentary form has also involved a renewed and increased role for the filmmaker – an overt acceptance of authorial responsibility (53-54).

Four of the five documentarians I evaluated wholeheartedly agreed with Ruby's statement, as each of them showed no qualms about altering footage from its original form. The vast majority of manipulated footage came in the form of juxtaposed images, where two pieces of footage were presented side by side or one after the other to create new meaning for both pieces of footage individually and, in some cases, new meaning as a singular whole. The chief user of this marker was Jeffrey Blitz in *Spellbound* who exhibited 38 instances of manipulated footage.

“Talking Heads” or “Confessional” Interviews

In addition to making full use of the manipulated footage marker, Blitz happened to be the most avid user of the third most prominent marker that presented itself through my film screening: the use of “talking heads” or “confessional” interviews with subjects. Both terms refer to any scene, in formal or informal settings, where a subject is allowed to directly address the camera in order to better explain themselves, their thoughts, feelings, or desires, or their recollection or point-of-view of certain events. As Barnouw explained, in the infancy of documentary film, due to a combination of technological limitation and aesthetic choice, subjects were rarely allowed to speak directly to the camera. “Since the advent of sound – throughout the 1930s and 1940s – documentarists had seldom featured talking people, except in brief static scenes” due to the fear that their inclusion would “take control away from the director” (Barnouw 234-235). Decades later, though, the advent of more portable cameras and the rise of the Cinema Vérité Movement in Europe produced documentaries that were “crammed with interviews” (Barnouw 261). Blitz's *Spellbound* was a perfect example of a film that bombarded the

audience with interviews. *Spellbound* exhibited a whopping 45 instances of confessional interviews, primarily of spelling bee contestants and their families in their homes or schools preparing for the Scripps National Spelling Bee competition that served as the film's climax. Noted film theorist Jay Ruby viewed the use of interviews as crucial to maintaining authenticity, stating that "being able to hear people tell their stories and observe their lives instead of being told what they think and the meaning of their behavior clearly offers subjects a greater say in the construction of their image. It represents a major shift in attitude about where one looks for authority and authenticity. It recognizes that the opinions of the experts and the vision of the filmmakers need to be tempered by the lived experience of the subjects and their view of themselves. It is 'speaking with' instead of 'speaking for'" (54).

Through the course of my film evaluation, it became apparent that I needed to make a distinction in how I differentiated between the confessional interview and the fourth prominent marker of authenticity that I identified, the documentarian's on-screen presence. In each of the films I evaluated, the documentarian was present for nearly all of the confessional interviews and was positioned somewhere off-screen to provide questions or prompts for their interview subjects. Instances in which the subject was the only one on-screen but was clearly addressing the documentarian – a distinction that was revealed through the inclusion of an extended prompt from the documentarian or where an extended dialogue developed between the off-screen documentarian and the on-screen subject – were classified as an instance of the documentarian's on-screen presence marker. Instances in which the subject directly addressed the camera, but the

documentarian's presence was minimal – denoted by the inclusion of a short, contextual prompt – or their presence was not revealed at all were classified as confessional interviews.

That distinction made, the confessional interview manifested itself 124 times, which was nearly as many instances as the manipulated footage marker. However, this marker did something that the manipulated footage marker did not: it presented a notable shift between Moore and Spurlock. Noted earlier for showing a similar approach to the use of voice-over narration, the two differed greatly on the use of confessional interviews. Spurlock spent a large portion of his film interviewing doctors, nutrition experts, college professors, and corporate representatives and was judicious in his use of confessional interviews, manipulated footage, and voice-over narration (exactly 33 instances of each marker). Moore, on the other hand, put much more weight in the use of his own voice (40 instances) and manipulating footage (27 instances) than he did in interviewing subjects (only 13 instances). Meanwhile, Guggenheim's *An Inconvenient Truth* had no confessional interviews as the primary subject, former American Vice-President Al Gore, did most of the film's talking through voice-over (13 instances) and our next marker: the documentarian's on-screen presence.

Documentarian's On-Screen Presence

Directly speaking to the audience is quite a powerful opportunity for documentarians, which is why the on-screen presence of the documentarian was one of the first markers I recognized as one to study through film evaluation. This practice was popularized relatively recently in documentary history by social documentarians such as

Michael Moore – most notably in *Roger & Me* (1989) where he portrayed a “socially conscious nebbish who will do whatever is necessary to get to the bottom of pressing social concerns” (Nichols, *Introduction* 14) – and has become familiar in the genre since the 1980s with the rise of the “reflexive documentary” (Nichols, *Introduction* 138). Nichols cautioned that “speaking in the first person edges the documentary form toward the diary, essay, and aspects of avant-garde or experimental film and video. The emphasis may shift from convincing the audience of a particular point of view or approach to a problem to the representation of a personal, clearly subjective view of things” (Nichols, *Introduction* 14). On the other hand, University of South Florida Communication Studies professor Garnet C. Butchart argued that the documentarians’ presence on-screen is an “ethic of truth” and that “doubling the camera” by having participants and/or documentarians look directly into the camera (thereby “breaking the 4th wall”) or addressing the presence of the camera – another marker of authenticity I will address shortly – is one way to show that the documentarian is attempting to be “authentic” (Butchart 438).

The “video diary” form of documentary that Nichols cautioned against most notably presented itself in *Super Size Me* as Spurlock appeared in the film 46 times. To his credit, though, Spurlock presented plenty of expert testimony, computer illustrations, and footage of other subjects to make the film less of a self-indulgent piece and more of a representative cautionary tale in the best interest of the public. *An Inconvenient Truth*, on the other hand, provided more screen time to a single subject/documentarian than any of the other films I screened. While Gore might not have been the director of the film, he

was an executive producer and had a large say in how the final product was put together. The composition of the film itself – a PowerPoint presentation on the effects of global warming with Gore as its chief speaker given to a small audience – and Gore’s on-screen presence for nearly 75 minutes of the 90-minute film predicated it toward the “video diary” that Nichols warned against.

The documentarian’s on-screen presence marker presented itself 99 times among the 5 films I evaluated, which might appear to be a small number given that I evaluated films by noted on-screen participants such as Moore and Spurlock; however, despite registering 53 fewer instances than the leading marker (voice-over and/or subtitles), the documentarian’s presence marker registered the most overall screen time with each instance lasting, on average, much longer than the three aforementioned markers. The longest such instance, for example, was nearly 11 minutes of uninterrupted footage of Al Gore presenting his slideshow presentation near the beginning of *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Documentarian’s Level of Intrusion

Referenced in the preceding paragraph, the documentarian’s level of intrusion marker is gauged by whether the camera is concealed from the subjects or openly acknowledged by them. This distinction is meaningful in relation to a discussion of the differences between the “observational” Direct Cinema Movement and the “participatory” Cinema Vérité Movement, spearheaded in Europe by Jean Rouch. “The direct cinema documentarist took his camera to a situation of tension and waited hopefully for a crisis; the Rouch version of *cinéma vérité* tried to precipitate one. The direct cinema artist aspired to invisibility; the Rouch *cinéma vérité* artist was often an

avowed participant...[or] provocateur” (Barnouw 255). Indeed, the decision whether to reveal the camera to the subject is one of great controversy in the documentary realm, in terms of its effect both on the audience’s viewing experience and the film itself.

Referencing the choice to conceal the camera, Nichols asserted that “the filmmaker’s retirement to the position of observer calls on the viewer to take a more active role in determining the significance of what is said and done” (Nichols, *Introduction* 111). He also noted the impact the camera can have on the subjects’ on-screen actions, stating “the degree to which people’s behavior and personality change during the making of a film can introduce an element of fiction into the documentary process...self-consciousness and modifications in behavior can become a form of misrepresentation, or distortion, in one sense, but they also document the ways in which the act of filmmaking alters the reality it sets out to represent” (Nichols, *Introduction* 6). Some believe that regardless of how camera-subject relationship is addressed, the fact that a camera is present inherently alters what is captured on film. “The nature of documentaries presumes the presence of the camera, which changes the behavior of the protagonists even if the camera remains unobtrusive. Documentary cinema therefore always contains an element of ‘stagedness’ [*sic*] and engages in intrusion and voyeurism, a problem that Sergei Dvortsevoi formulates: ‘The documentary filmmaker is like a vampire who fastens upon people’s lives and sucks out everything he needs’” (Beumers & Lipovetsky 635).

Quantitatively documenting such Dracula-like behavior in the five films I evaluated proved to be relatively difficult as the marker only overtly presented itself 18 times. However, the overall aesthetic each documentarian exhibited with regards to this

marker was qualitatively ascertained at various moments throughout each film. The marker mostly manifested itself through directorial choices. One such choice was whether to use a tripod or a hand-held camera for confessional interviews. The use of a tripod provided stability to the camera and expressed a directorial desire for a more formal interview environment. In contrast, the use of a hand-held camera, primarily done for “on-the-street” interviews during *Super Size Me*, *Bowling for Columbine*, and *Food, Inc.*, created a feeling of being “in the moment” with the subjects and, consequently, a more informal aesthetic.

Another choice was whether the subjects should directly address the camera or whether the camera’s presence should remain relatively hidden from the subjects. *Food, Inc.*, for example, presented eight different scenes, such as observing courtroom testimony or riding along with an illegal immigrant worker who was shadowing border patrol raids, where the camera went unaddressed by the subjects. The camera acted in a very “fly-on-the-wall,” observation-like manner. These scenes were almost always supplemented by subtitles or confessional interviews to help explain what was happening or to articulate directorial opinion. As Beumers & Lipovetsky noted, any film that used the confessional interview marker admitted at least a subliminal acknowledgement from their subjects that a camera was present. The only film I evaluated that did not use a single confessional interview was *An Inconvenient Truth*, which chose to express all of its commentary through the use of Gore’s on-screen presence or his off-screen voice-over.

The recognition of these types of directorial choices provided a fascinating lens for me to use when screening each film. However, the lack of quantifiable instances

made it feasible to only use this marker only as a complementary element to consider when evaluating the four more prominent markers mentioned previously.

Participants' Consent

Indirectly related to the documentarian's level of intrusion is the "participants' consent" marker, which I defined as whether the documentarian secured the consent of their subjects prior to the start of filming and/or whether the subjects were allowed to participate in the editing process. In the past, some documentarians have employed this marker in an effort to avoid a persuasive viewpoint on the part of the filmmaker. For example, "in Jeff Vaughn and John Schott's 1978 film *Deal*, a documentary about Monte Hall and 'Let's Make A Deal,' the subjects were given the right to view all footage and to veto any scenes they felt inappropriate" (Ruby 55). Butchart noted that Rouch provided his subjects with the opportunity to take part in the filmmaking process in order to reveal to the audience "just what they were up to" (440). In Rouch's work, the participants were not only interviewed and/or observed during principal photography, but were actually given the opportunity in post-production to approve or veto the use of footage in which they were featured (Butchart 440). In Ruby's view, though, allowing the evaluation of subject matter by the subjects themselves did not eliminate the questions surrounding "participant consent" in producing a documentary film (Ruby 55).

In evaluating the five films I screened I could not find a single quantitative instance of participants' consent. However, there were some qualitative instances that contributed some information to the marker's identification. Al Gore, for example, was the primary subject of *An Inconvenient Truth* and was also one of the film's executive

producers, so it is safe to assume that he had at least a measure of influence in the editing process. Also, any time that a person's face was blurred or only a portion of their body was shown on screen – as in the presentation of obese individuals walking the streets of New York City in *Super Size Me* – it is safe to assume that those individuals did not consent to be identifiable on-screen. Finally, there were instances where the pitch of an individual's voice was lowered and their face was covered in darkness by a black light in order to make the individual indistinguishable during a confessional interview. These cases where subjects obviously wanted to maintain anonymity, such as interviews with farmers that had been persecuted by the Monsanto Corporation in *Food, Inc.*, exhibited a certain level of participant consent. Like the documentarian's level of intrusion, this marker became a complementary factor to my final analysis, but did not play a large role in evaluating each documentarian's level of truthiness.

Staged Action

The final marker of authenticity I identified was one I termed “staged action.” This marker occurred whenever a documentarian constructed a re-enactment of an event that had previously occurred in order to capture it on film for re-presentation or when trained actors were embedded amongst everyday people to achieve a desired cinematic effect. Some documentarians, such as Vertov, subscribed to the idea that action should be “caught on the run, from any revealing vantage,” that “staged action was abhorred,” and that cinematic drama would be revealed through ““the prose of life”” (Barnouw 57). Others, however, did not share the same view. As Aufderheide stated, “manipulation of reality is as old as documentary: the Lumière brothers had their own relatives seed their

'actualities' in order to be able to ensure that the people those large and noisy cameras recorded wouldn't look at the camera. Robert Flaherty notoriously concocted characters and events for *Nanook of the North* and other films" (27).

In evaluating the five films I screened, four out of the five documentarians seemed to agree with Vertov and did not feature any instances of staged action. Moore, however, did use one instance of staged action in *Bowling for Columbine*. At 1:09:50 through the two-hour film, Moore interviewed Dick Hurlan, Executive Producer of the TV shows *COPS* and *World's Wildest Police Videos*. The two discussed how the plotlines of both shows are constructed around socially reinforced perceptions of what is "entertaining television." Moore believes that these perceptions do not accurately portray "who [*sic*] we should care about seeing go to jail" and instead proposes a new show he calls *Corporate COPS*. Moore then proceeds to show images of himself chasing down and arresting "criminals," who are obviously paid actors, set to the *COPS* theme song: "Bad Boys" by Inner Circle. The inclusion of an obviously fictional scene in a documentary film infringes upon the traditional elements of documentary that were formed in the early 20th century. These elements, which include the pursuit of authenticity and the realist goal of portraying life "as accurately and objectively" as possible by filming "real people in their actual surroundings, living their lives unadulterated by directorial interference" (Stubbs 1), still remain key parts of modern documentaries as evidenced by the fact that I was only able to document one instance of staged action in five films' worth of footage.

Conclusion

My initial literature search helped me identify seven potential markers of authenticity that I then used to evaluate the five films I had selected using my method. Through the course of my evaluation, it became apparent that four of the markers I had identified were much more prominently used than the other three. Those prominently-used markers were the use of voice-over narration and/or subtitles, the manipulation of footage, the use of talking heads or confessional interviews, and the documentarian's on-screen presence. The study of each documentarian's use (or non-use) of these four markers provided a tremendous amount of information for me to digest and eventually form some conclusions with regards to each marker's use in documentary film and its impact on the definition of truthiness in documentary film. The other three markers, which were less-used or presented themselves in a more qualitative, overall aesthetic fashion, were the documentarian's level of intrusion, the participants' consent, and the use of staged action. These markers complemented each documentarian's use of the main four markers and provided supplemental information about how they composed their films, what set of documentary "rules" they subscribed to, and how they viewed their relationship with their subjects.

CHAPTER 3 SETTING THE STAGE – FILM DESCRIPTION

Before beginning my critical analysis of each of the five films I selected for screening I would like to supply some background on each film and its documentarian as well as a short synopsis of each documentary's plot.² I screened the films in no particular order, but will present the description of each in the order they were screened.

Super Size Me (2004)

The first film I screened was Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me*. The film was released in 2004, was screened in 230 American theaters, and accumulated \$11,536,423 in domestic (American) gross box office revenue. The film's total run-time is 100 minutes. The film won five awards at notable international film festivals and accumulated six other nominations, including an Academy Award nomination for Best Documentary Feature. The film was Spurlock's first full-length feature documentary and he was 34 years old at the time of its release.

The film's main focus is on chronicling a 30-day period of time, during which the main subject, Spurlock, consumes food only from McDonald's. He follows a set of self-prescribed rules which consist of the following: 1) he may only "Super Size" his meal when asked to do so by a McDonald's employee and must do so every time he is asked; 2) he can only consume food and beverages that are sold at McDonald's; 3) he must eat everything on the menu at least once during the 30-day period; and 4) he must consume at least three meals per day. His goal in undergoing this binge is to provide court-permissible evidence against McDonald's to prove that they are engaging in corporate

² Information and statistics about each film and its documentarian from www.boxofficemojo.com and www.imdb.com

negligence by selling food that, when consumed on a regular basis, will cause serious health issues for the general public. He also seeks to answer the following question: “where does personal responsibility stop and corporate responsibility begin?”

By the end of the film, Spurlock puts together a compelling argument in his favor as he gains 25 pounds over the 30-day period and is diagnosed with serious health concerns that would have threatened his life had he continued the all-McDonald’s diet. Along the way, Spurlock presents the audience with confessional interviews with doctors, law professors, nutrition experts, elementary and middle school teachers, health magazine writers, and representatives of major corporate food companies. Based on their interviews and the information he personally experienced from surviving an all-McDonald’s diet, he calls the audience to action by urging them to stop eating fast food, change their diets, exercise, and start living healthier lives to force the food industry to produce healthier food.

Spellbound (2002)

The second film I screened was Jeffrey Blitz’s *Spellbound*. The film was released in 2002, was screened in 117 American theaters, and accumulated \$5,728,581 in domestic (American) gross box office revenue. The film’s total run-time is 97 minutes. The film won 14 awards at notable international film festivals and accumulated eight other nominations, including an Academy Award nomination for Best Documentary Feature. The film was Blitz’s first full-length feature documentary and he was 33 years old at the time of its release.

The film's main focus is on the 1999 Scripps National Spelling Bee and the path eight contestants took to reach the competition. The film documents each contestant's trials and tribulations in preparing for the competition and presents the audience with a unique look at the psychological impact the competition has on the contestants and their families. The film is rigorously segmented with each of the eight contestants being allotted nearly equal screen time during the film's first 45 minutes. Each contestant's segment begins with establishing shots of their hometown, confessional interviews with the contestant, their parents and siblings, their classmates, their teacher and, in some cases, their spelling coaches. Occasional subtitles provide additional information about the contestants and their previous forays into the spelling competition circuit.

The second half of the film chronicles the National Bee itself. The eight contestants we have become familiar with are prominently featured and when each of them reach the stage to spell their first word, Blitz cuts away to show further confessional interview footage with the contestant and/or their parents. All of the confessional interview footage presented during the competition is manipulated, in that it is presented out of chronological order: some of the footage was taken before the competition with the contestants and their parents speculating about how things might go while the rest of the footage was taken after the competition in reflection of what had happened. Through the use of multiple montage sequences, Blitz moves the action to the end of the competition where one of the contestants we had been following actually wins the competition.

An Inconvenient Truth (2006)

The third film I screened was Davis Guggenheim's *An Inconvenient Truth*. The film was released in 2006, was screened in 587 American theaters, and accumulated \$24,146,161 in domestic (American) gross box office revenue. The film's total run-time is 100 minutes. The film won 22 awards at notable international film festivals, including two Academy Awards (Best Documentary Feature and Best Original Song), and accumulated five other nominations. The film was Guggenheim's first full-length feature documentary, though he had done a great deal of work in television, directing episodes of such notable TV shows as *Party of Five*, *NYPD Blue*, *ER*, *24*, *Alias*, *The Shield*, *Deadwood*, and *Numb3rs*. He was 43 years old at the time of the film's release.

The film's main focus is on the growing problem of global warming and former American Vice-President Al Gore's crusade to inform people about the impending crisis that will occur if nothing is done to address the world's environmental issues. The documentary is a bit non-traditional in that it features no confessional interviews. Instead, the film is essentially a Direct Cinema-style observational documentation of Gore's PowerPoint presentation about global warming. Using multiple cameras in an auditorium setting with a small audience, Guggenheim simply rolls film and allows the overwhelming statistical data, photos and video of the devastation that has besieged our planet over the past decade and Gore's southern charm to captivate the audience and carry the bulk of the film's narrative.

Guggenheim supplements Gore's presentation with file footage of Gore's Senatorial service and his 2000 Presidential run, photos and video from Gore's family's

farm, footage of Gore compiling the PowerPoint presentation, footage of Gore traveling and giving his presentation in foreign countries, and Gore's personal anecdotes that explain why educating people on the issue of global warming became the goal of his post-political life. All of the supplemental footage is set to Gore's voice-over. Gore's presence dominates the film as he is either on-screen or heard through voice-over from 0:00:45 to the point when an extended pre-credit title sequence begins at 1:29:30. The pre-end credit sequence is an interesting coda to the film, as it consists of a series of flashy titles offering tips on how to save energy as well as a direct call to action, discussed below, for audience members to act in a more environmentally responsible manner. The nearly five-minute series of titles is all set to Melissa Etheridge's "I Need to Wake Up," which captured the Academy Award for Best Original Song.

Food, Inc. (2008)

The fourth film I screened was Robert Kenner's *Food, Inc.* The film was released in 2008, was screened in 115 American theaters, and accumulated \$4,417,674 in domestic (American) gross box office revenue. The film's total run-time is 94 minutes. The film won three awards at notable international film festivals and accumulated seven other nominations, including an Academy Award nomination for Best Documentary Feature. The film was Kenner's first full-length theatrical documentary, though he had directed multiple made-for-TV documentaries in the past. He was 37 years old at the time of the film's release.

The film's main focus is on the American food industry and answering the question: "where does our food come from?" The film is largely based upon the works of

two authors: Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* and Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Schlosser and Pollan provide a running commentary about the "corporatization" of the American food industry, which Kenner explores in great detail. Kenner uses elegant computer-generated images throughout the film to illustrate complex points, such as how 99% of the beef and pork industries have been consolidated into four large corporations, the fattening and increased processing of chickens, and all of the different food products that contain some sort of corn or corn by-product. However, Kenner most heavily relies on the use of titles and subtitles (51 instances) to supplement the images presented on-screen.

As for the film's plot, the growth and "assembly line-izing" of the fast food industry that occurred in the 1950s, due in large part due to the success of McDonald's, is the first item addressed in a segment dubbed "Fast Food to All Food." Kenner organizes the film's themes into similarly titled segments, each lasting five to 15 minutes in length, and addresses the following topics: the alarming state of chicken farming, the engineering of corn to serve as the primary ingredient in many of the processed foods we consume, an increase in E. coli outbreaks due in large part to a slackening of Food & Drug Administration (FDA) oversight, an examination of why healthy food is so much more expensive than unhealthy food, the disturbing and dangerous state of pork processing at the world's largest slaughterhouse, an exploration of the growth of the organic food industry, the monopolization of the soybean industry by the Monsanto Corporation and the company's effect on small farmers, and a discussion about the legal and political protection corporations like Monsanto have developed by continually

getting their former employees elected or appointed to positions of power in the American government.

Kenner ends the film with a segment titled “Shocks to the System,” during which Pollan and others discuss how corporate agricultural businesses could fold under further exposés, global economic pressures, protests, oil and food shortages, etc. Then at 1:29:30, in eerily similar fashion to Guggenheim, Kenner leaves the audience with an extended pre-end credit title sequence that offers tips on how to more healthily. The series of titles also provides a direct call to action, discussed below, for audience members to demand better quality food from the corporations that control the production of their food and better oversight from the government that is supposed to be protecting their health and well-being.

Bowling for Columbine (2002)

Finally, the last film I screened was Michael Moore’s *Bowling for Columbine*. The film was released in 2002, was screened in 248 American theaters, and accumulated \$21,576,018 in domestic (American) gross box office revenue. The film’s total run-time is 120 minutes. The film won 28 awards at notable international film festivals, including the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, and accumulated seven other nominations. The film was Moore’s third full-length theatrical documentary and he was 48 years old at the time of its release.

The film’s main focus centers on the tragic shootings that occurred at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado on April 20th, 1999. Moore recaps the events of that fateful day, attempts to diagnose what factors might have caused the young gunmen to

act as they did, and tries to dissect why America is the most gun-violent country in the world. Moore's film is composed of a strong mixture of his own personal voice-over and subtitles (40 instances), manipulated footage (27 instances), and on-screen appearances (25 instances).

While the film's goals are relatively clear, the film's actual plot is a bit fractured. Moore begins with a self-narrated montage of "a normal day in America" that includes plenty of imagery of gun violence. He then describes his childhood affinity for guns before presenting the audience with a rapid-fire sequence of footage: first, a confessional interview with an unidentified Michigan State Police Officer about an accidental gunshot case where a dog "shot" its owner; second, file footage of Chris Rock performing stand-up comedy about "bullet control;" then, interviews with the Michigan Militia and James Nichols, brother of Oklahoma City bomber Terry Nichols; and then, finally, interviews with residents of Oscoda, Michigan who went to school with and/or knew of Eric Harris, one of the Columbine gunmen. The sequence, which bombards the audience with information and indirectly related subjects in a short period of time, lasts just over 15 minutes. Moore repeats the quick-fire formula in a few other sections of the film.

The second section of the film consists of Moore interviewing Lockheed Martin representatives in Littleton, Colorado, confessional interviews with students and parents that were involved in the Columbine shootings, and file footage from the shooting and its aftermath. The third section features Moore delving into why Americans are the most gun-violent society in the world, and features interviews with "shock-rocker" Marilyn Manson and a cartoon titled "Brief History of the USA," narrated by a talking bullet, that

discusses “white people fear” and the connection with gun violence. In the fourth section of the film, Moore ventures into Canada and conducts street interviews with Canadian citizens and formal confessional interviews with local police officers and the mayor of Sarnia, Ontario in an attempt to ascertain why Canadians are “so much less violent” than Americans.

The final three sections of the film make up the final 40 minutes of the two-hour piece and deal with three indirectly related subjects: first, Moore interviews school administrators, police, and members of the media in Buell, Michigan where a six year-old first grader inexplicably shot and killed one of his classmates; second, Moore takes two of the former Columbine students that were handicapped due to injuries suffered during the shootings to K-Mart headquarters in Troy, Michigan to “return the ammo used to shoot them” in what turns out to be a successful attempt to have the company discontinue sales of automatic weaponry and ammunition in their stores; and finally, Moore drops in on Charlton Heston, the former actor who also served as the outspoken former president of the National Rifle Association (NRA), for an awkward conversation about gun-owning rights, gun use, and gun violence in America. The interview with Heston, which occupies nearly 10 minutes of screen-time, serves as a chilling climax to the film.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The ultimate goal of my research was to create a more comprehensive definition of the word truthiness as it pertained to representations of authenticity in the documentary film genre. I conducted an extensive literature search and gained as much background as possible on the history of the documentary film, the pioneers that helped shaped the elements that we now consider to be “traditional” pieces of documentary, and the various iterations of the genre that had developed over the past 120 years. I used that information to preliminarily define seven markers of authenticity that represented the cinematic, aesthetic, or technological elements of documentary filmmaking that, through repeated use over time, had become inherently associated with genuine, reliable, and trustworthy representations of reality in the documentary form. I then limited my area of focus for film evaluation to films released in the 21st century and selected five films to screen in order to better understand how the markers of authenticity I had identified were being used in contemporary documentaries. My analysis separated four markers from the rest: the use of voice-over narration and/or subtitles, the manipulation of footage, the use of talking heads or confessional interviews, and the documentarian’s on-screen presence. The study of each documentarian’s use, or non-use, of these four markers provided a tremendous amount of information for me to analyze. Provided below is a detailed analysis of how each of the more prominently-used markers were utilized by the documentarians I studied and what impact each of the markers had on forming a more concrete definition of the word truthiness as it pertains to documentary film.

Voice-Over Narration and/or Subtitles

As previously noted, the voice-over and/or subtitle marker was the most frequently used of all the markers I studied. In evaluating five films that combined for a total screen-time of 511 minutes, I documented 152 instances where the marker was used, which represented an average of 30.4 uses per film and an average of one use every 3.36 minutes. The marker was used in varying degrees in each of the five films with a high use of 51 instances in *Food, Inc.* and a low use of 13 instances in *Spellbound*. The marker was also put to use in completely different ways by each documentarian; some used only subtitles, others used only voice-overs, while others used a combination of both.

Food, Inc.

Kenner almost exclusively used subtitles to add commentary to his film. He did use elaborate computer-generated titles with names like “The Veil” and “A Cornucopia of Choices” to separate the nine sections of the film and, in a few cases, edited some of the confessional interviews so that his subjects’ answers acted as a voice-over for another piece of footage. However, the vast majority of his usage of the voice-over/subtitle marker came through the use of subtitles. In nearly every instance, the subtitles were used in conjunction with contextual footage in a fashion that provided the audience with additional information to the images being presented on-screen. For example, at 0:38:55 in the film, Kenner presented the audience with images of the Gonzalez family – Maria, her husband, and their two teenage children – ordering food from a Burger King drive-thru in a California suburb. Kenner then laid simple textual titles over the images to

illustrate the cost of food for a family of four from a fast food restaurant, which happened to be “\$11.48” for their Burger King visit. Subtitles like these gave the audience additional information about the images being presented on-screen without offering opinionated commentary and, in doing so, actually enhanced the reliability of images themselves. The footage Kenner enhanced using the titles also provided a mental reference point for the audience to recall when in the next scene the Gonzalez family proceeded to discuss, through confessional interview, how difficult it was for them to maintain healthy diets because the only sources of food that fit within their budget were inexpensive, unhealthy fast food restaurants like Burger King.

Kenner’s subtitle and voice-over use was not all done in a contextual fashion, though, as there were some instances where he did use the marker in a non-neutral way. This was done most notably with subtitles used over hidden camera footage or over footage that had been taken from slaughterhouses. For example, at 0:52:15 of the film, in an effort to supplement footage of the pigs being slaughtered at the Smithfield Hog Processing Plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina, Kenner overlaid the subtitle “THE KILL FLOOR: 32,000 hogs are slaughtered per day here.” While the statistic regarding the number of hogs killed per day by the slaughterhouse lent authenticity to the images of the hogs being slaughtered, Kenner’s presentation of the fashion in which the hogs are slaughtered – which involved being smashed up against a piece of sheet metal – combined with his choice to use all capital letters to spell “THE KILL FLOOR” signified an attempt to add cinematic drama to the to the scene and, perhaps, also signified an attempt to influence the audience’s interpretation of the scene. In this way, Kenner used

the subtitle as an element of truthiness to both create cinematic intrigue for the audience while also expressing his personal disapproval of the manner in which the hogs were being slaughtered.

A second example, at 0:44:00 in the film, features two separate images, one of obese children playing in a schoolyard and the other of African-American children playing in the same schoolyard. The images are framed so that the children are only shown from the neck down in order to hide their identities. Kenner adds subtitles to the images that state, “1 in 3 Americans born after 2000 will contract early onset diabetes” and “Among minorities, the rate will be 1 in 2.” The statistics themselves, while not attributed to any particular source, discussed below, do not express any particular opinion and actually serve as informative pieces of information to help the audience better understand the level of unhealthy food consumption in which Americans currently engage. The images themselves also do not express any particular opinion either as they simply show children at play in a schoolyard. However, the combination of the imagery and the voice-over create a completely different message altogether; one that implies that the obese children and African-American children presented on-screen are examples of the statistics laid over the images, thereby lending a fabricated level of reliability to Kenner’s statistics.

Bowling for Columbine

In contrast to Kenner, Moore leans decidedly in favor of using the voice-over half of the marker instead of using subtitles (30 voice-overs out of a total of 40 instances). As he has done in each of his films, Moore provides his own voice-over and is not shy about

making his opinion known to the viewer. At 0:43:10 in the film, Moore presents the audience with a promotional video for a metal detector company and overlays a contextual title, which enhances the reliability of the commercial. He then presents a montage, which features schoolchildren walking through metal detectors, news footage about other violence-preventative measures that were installed in schools around the country in reaction to the Columbine shootings, and various individuals expressing their fears for their children in light of the shootings. Moore then caps the montage with something that accomplishes the exact opposite of the contextual title laid over the metal detector commercial: his own sarcastic voice-over that states, “Yes, our children were indeed something to fear...they had turned into little monsters.” The tone in Moore’s voice combined with the selection of footage for the montage – footage that overwhelmingly featured hysterical people over-reacting to the aftermath of the shooting – expressed a distinct opinion on behalf of the documentarian that marginalized the images presented on-screen and instead drew the audience’s attention to his opinion of the images. Instead of allowing the audience to draw their own conclusions from the manipulated montage, Moore used a distinct tone in his five-second voice-over, that of sarcasm, that signified an overt attempt to convince the audience that the images he presented on-screen were indeed absurd. This example of truthiness effectively took the focus off the documentation of the reactionary measures taken in light of the shootings and, in a subliminal fashion, placed the following question square in the minds of individual audience members: do I agree or disagree with Moore’s sarcastic assertion that

children “had turned into little monsters” and do I share his belief that the reactionary measures put in place after the shootings were overkill?

While Moore primarily made use of the voice-over to add commentary to the images presented on-screen, he also made limited use of the subtitle. However, unlike his use of the voice-over, Moore primarily used the subtitle in an authentic, informative fashion rather than in service of truthiness. Perhaps the most notable example of this is the extended 150-second title sequence that occurs at 0:26:00 in the film. Moore presented the audience with a montage of imagery that documented a slew of American military incursions in foreign countries. While the images themselves were heavily manipulated, discussed below, the sequence featured almost exclusively contextual subtitles, such as “1953: U.S. overthrows Prime Minister Mossadeq of Iran,” “1991: U.S. enters Iraq,” and “2000-01: U.S. gives Taliban-ruled Afghanistan \$245 million in ‘aid.’” Moore could have very easily enhanced the level of truthiness of the images, which he had already manipulated, but instead chose to remain relatively straightforward in his use of subtitles. This restraint exhibited a noticeable dichotomy between the use the voice-over, which was presented in a heavily opinionated fashion, and the subtitle, which was done in a more neutral fashion.

Super Size Me

Spurlock used the voice-over/subtitle marker 33 times in his film, mostly through the use of the personal voice-over. Given the fact Spurlock and his 30-day binge of consuming food only from McDonald’s was the main subject of the film, the voluminous use of the personal voice-over was not surprising. What was surprising was that the vast

majority of Spurlock's voice-overs were contextual in nature. For example, at 0:18:01 in the film, after providing 30 seconds of a confessional interview with John Banzhaf, a Law Professor from George Washington University, Spurlock featured photos of news articles about Banzhaf and his legal work. Spurlock then added a personal voice-over with background information about Banzhaf, whom he stated happened to be "spearheading the attacks on fast food industry." While the photos themselves would have been enough to authenticate Banzhaf's interview about working on behalf of plaintiffs that had filed lawsuits against large food manufacturing companies, Spurlock's voice-over helped increase Banzhaf's reliability as an expert on the legal ramifications food manufacturing companies could face for producing unhealthy food.

While most of Spurlock's voice-overs added information to the images presented on-screen to enhance their authenticity, he did use the marker in limited instances to speak directly to the audience through the "call to action." The documentarian's call to action is one of the more common elements of truthiness in that the documentarian asks, or in some cases demands, that the audience take action in a certain way at the conclusion of the film. The use of this technique is a prototypical representation of truthiness in the documentary film genre in that the documentarian takes a traditional marker of authenticity – in this case, the voice-over or the documentarian's on-screen presence – and uses it to express a personal viewpoint. For example, a documentarian could instruct the audience to "Join the navy. Visit this country. Support this museum" (Rosenthal 228). Regardless of the amount of evidence supplied to exemplify why performing the suggested task is a good idea, the fact remains that the documentarian is performing the

task of a “salesperson” (Rosenthal 229), making every attempt possible to persuade the audience to act in the way the documentarian feels is most appropriate.

Spurlock’s most notable use of the call to action technique occurred in the film’s dénouement when, at 1:34:15 in the film, he passionately urged people to “stop eating fast food, change [their] diet, exercise,” and help force corporate to start producing healthier foods that are affordable for the average American. Spurlock’s insistence that the audience act in a particular way based on the images and information he had exhibited on-screen was an overt use of the marker in a manner of truthiness that I imagine would have offended many observational documentarians, such as Leacock and Riefenstahl, who abhorred being “told” what to do and would have rather judged for themselves based solely on the images provided (Barnouw 236).

Spurlock’s only non-voice-over uses of the marker were the nine title sequences used to separate the film into segments. Oddly enough, Spurlock separated *Super Size Me* into the exact same number of segments into which Kenner separated *Food, Inc.* Each one of Spurlock’s sequences, though, were not high-tech computer-generated pieces of text; rather, they consisted of simple pieces of text laid over paintings of fast food mascots re-enacting scenes from famous paintings like Leonardo Da Vinci’s “The Last Supper.”

An Inconvenient Truth

Guggenheim made limited but consistent use of the voice-over/subtitle marker as 14 of the 15 instances featured a voice-over from his main subject, Al Gore. The voice-overs varied in duration from 30-90 seconds and covered a wide variety of topics.

However, like Guggenheim's consistency in using Gore as his only voice-over talent, the tone and motivation of each of Gore's voice-overs were very consistent in that each one dealt with a personal anecdote, recollection, or experience. In contrast to the way voice-overs were utilized in the other films I studied, Gore's voice-overs were so decidedly subjective in nature that Guggenheim was forced to alter the way he wove the voice-overs and corresponding images together. In most documentary filmmaking, the imagery is selected prior to any voice-over or subtitles being added; such post-production techniques are only added in order to provide additional information about on-screen images that are unable to properly explain themselves through imagery alone (Rosenthal 161). The use of voice-over narration in general needs to be carefully considered, and as Rosenthal notes, "Narration is excellent for stories and anecdotes and for evoking mood and atmosphere. It is not good at detailed analysis of complex events or abstract thought" (Rosenthal, 223). In Guggenheim's case, Gore's voice-overs needed to be included because they provided important information to help the audience understand the motivations of his main subject: Gore himself. However, the focus of Gore's passion, global warming, was a complex issue that needed plenty of explanation, something that Gore's voice-overs alone, on the whole, did not provide. Consequently, Guggenheim was forced to work in reverse by selecting images that could simultaneously complement Gore's voice-overs while also providing the explanation necessary to properly educate the audience on the subtopics on which Gore was commenting.

For example, at 0:25:35 in the film, Gore explains how his son's near-death experience helped renew his passion for raising awareness about environmental issues.

Illustrating someone's "renewed passion" for something is not an easy task to accomplish; nor is it one that has a pre-defined series of images set aside for a documentarian to call upon that are universally accepted authentic representations of feeling "renewed." Consequently, Guggenheim was forced to select the best series of images he could compile that would both document how deeply Gore was affected by his son's illness and how his dealing with the experience manifested itself in a renewed effort to bring awareness to environmental issues. Guggenheim's selections included a montage of photos of Gore with his son in the hospital, Gore flying over areas of wilderness, and images of a peaceful stream. In most cases, seemingly disconnected images are unified by an authoritative voice-over; however, in this case it was the disconnected images that provided unity for Gore's vague musings.

The only use of titles in the film is the aforementioned pre-credit sequence, which consisted of a series of flashy titles that offered tips on how to save energy as well as a direct call to action for audience members to act in a more environmentally responsible manner. The non-verbal call to action is really the only overt commentary that could be attributed directly to Guggenheim as Gore carried the narrative for most of the film, both through his on-screen PowerPoint presentation and through his voice-over.

Spellbound

Blitz uses the voice-over/subtitle marker the least often of all the documentarians I studied; however, he is the only one to use it in an exclusively authentic manner that does not run to truthiness. In a very observational spirit, Blitz chose not to add any voice-over commentary in post-production and, for the most part, allowed his subjects to

carry the on-screen narrative. The only use he made of the voice-over/subtitle marker was through five subtitles and eight sets of titles. The limited subtitles he used were statistical or informational in nature, supplying interesting details about the contestants that were not revealed through their extended confessional interviews. For example, at 0:07:31 in the film, Blitz presents the audience with observational, non-interventionist footage of one of the first of the eight contestants the audience eventually follows throughout the film, Angela, as she competes at the Regional Spelling Bee in Amarillo, Texas. Blitz films the entire competition from a single camera positioned among the attendees and only adds two sets of subtitles: the first simply states “Neelima: Potter County Champion,” and is laid over the first footage we see of Angela’s most talented competitor; the second set of subtitles is a series of numbers that change in time with a montage of footage that reflects the passage of time as Angela and Neelima battle through 54 rounds of spelling before Angela finally emerges as the regional champion. The first set of titles provides a simple statistic about Angela’s opponent and enhances the authenticity of how tough she eventually is to eliminate from the competition. The second series of subtitles enhances authenticity of the film montage by effectively illustrating the passage of time as Angela and Neelima continually trade correctly spelled words.

Blitz’s uses of title sequences are similarly authentic as opposed to truthy as they consist of simple titles, such as “Day One: 249 Spellers,” laid over a stylized illustration of each of the eight contestants that the audience follows throughout the film. This illustration recurs throughout the competition and subsequent iterations remove the

featured contestants from the picture as they are eliminated from the competition. The illustration is supplemented by updated subtitles through each round until the final subtitle, which reads “Round 10: 3 Spellers.”

Synthesis

There were several conclusions I was able to formulate from my evaluation of the use of the voice-over/subtitle marker. First, for the most part, the documentarians I evaluated chose to use either the voice-over or the subtitle extensively, but did not choose to use both extensively. *Food, Inc.* and *Spellbound* primarily made use of the subtitle while *Super Size Me* and *An Inconvenient Truth* primarily made use of the voice-over. *Bowling for Columbine* was the only one of the five films I evaluated that made significant use of both elements of the marker, though there was still a sizeable split (30 instances of voice-over to 10 instances of subtitles). This seemed to reflect an inherent acknowledgement by the documentarians that extensive use of both elements of the marker might detract from the film’s overall message by providing too much commentary from the filmmaker for the audience to comprehend.

Second, the two elements of the marker were used in completely different ways. Across all five films, subtitles were almost exclusively used in a manner that enhanced the authenticity of the images they were associated with. The key component of the subtitle that differentiated it from the voice-over was, obviously, the absence of an auditory tone of voice, something that was inherently present through the use of spoken word. This lack of emotion imbued the subtitles with a neutral starting point for conveying information. The choice to use a non-oral form of commentary seemed to

create a level of separation for the documentarian from the message that was conveyed through the subtitle and, consequently, enhanced the level of authenticity of the images they were associated with.

Kenner's use of the subtitle in *Food, Inc.* was primarily explanatory in nature, providing additional information that better educated the audience about the images they were presented with. For example, at 1:10:30 in the film, Kenner interviewed David Runyon, a farmer, who described how his fields had been contaminated by his neighbor's use of Monsanto soybeans, which subsequently resulted in the Monsanto Corporation levying a series of lawsuits against him. Kenner supplemented this interview with contextual footage laid under subtitles that explained, "David doesn't plant Monsanto crops, but his fields have been contaminated by genetically modified seeds (GMOs). If Monsanto finds contamination, the farmer must prove he did not violate Monsanto's patents." In this way, Kenner used the marker to help the audience better comprehend the legal troubles Runyon was experiencing. Blitz, meanwhile, exhibited limited use of subtitles in *Spellbound*, but his uses were all of an informative nature. For example, at 1:18:35 of the film, while interviewing contestant Georgie Thampy, Blitz added a subtitle that merely stated "Last year, out of 249 spellers, Georgie placed 4th. He was ten years old." The subtitles served to authenticate Georgie as one of the tougher competitors by informing the audience of his past success.

Finally, the voice-over was used in both manners that enhanced authenticity and manners that propagated truthiness. Moore used the voice-over in *Bowling for Columbine* almost exclusively in an opinionated manner that reflected a high level of

truthiness. He mostly did this through the use of a sarcastic, persuasive, and sometimes ironic tone of voice that not only provided the audience with supplemental information about the images presented on-screen but also conveyed his stance on the subject matter. For example, at 1:15:00 in the film, Moore attempted to discern why Canada had drastically fewer gun-related murders than America and stated, “the reason why Canadians have so few murders must be because they have fewer guns.” He then proceeded to show interviews with citizens at a gun range in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada who confessed to owning more firearms than the Americans Moore interviewed earlier in the film. The scene served to underscore Moore’s point that a lack of gun ownership is not an adequate explanation for Canadians having fewer gun-related murders than Americans.

In *An Inconvenient Truth*, Guggenheim primarily utilized Gore’s voice-overs to help solidify his argument that the audience should view Gore as an expert on the topic of global warming. For example, at 1:01:15 in the film, Gore talks about China’s economic growth and subsequent increase in pollution and environmental decay. Guggenheim supplements Gore’s voice-over with images of Gore riding in a car in China, Gore meeting with Chinese scientists about the environmental decay that has been caused by the proliferation of coal mining, and Gore giving his PowerPoint presentation to Chinese citizens. The voice-over operates in a manner of truthiness in that it does not directly relate to the imagery presented and instead only serves to support the assertion that Gore holds the credentials to be considered an expert on worldwide environmental decay because he has been to China and talked with Chinese scientists.

Spurlock, meanwhile, used the voice-over in *Super Size Me* to quickly and efficiently explain complex ideas like the “Toxic Environment,” which Kelly Brownell, Professor, Yale Center for Eating and Weight Disorders, touched on at 0:24:25 in the film. Spurlock’s explanation helped the audience better comprehend the argument behind Brownell’s assertion that “we live in an environment that almost guarantees we become sick.” While the majority of Spurlock’s uses of the marker were done in this authentic fashion, there was one recurring use that emerged as an unequivocal representation of truthiness: the call to action, discussed above. Spurlock’s aforementioned use of the technique in his dénouement as well as an additional call to action at 0:25:20 in the film, in which he urged smokers to stop smoking for health-related reasons that he personally related to as a former smoker, reflected a direct address of the audience on the part of the documentarian. This made it difficult for the audience to make its own educated judgment on the subject matter and instead actively attempted to persuade them to act in a manner preferred by the documentarian. The pre-end credit sequences in *Food, Inc.* and *An Inconvenient Truth* acted in a similar manner by urging the audience to take a particular action.

To summarize, Kenner’s use of the marker in *Food, Inc.* (with the exception of the pre-end credit titles) and Blitz’s use of the marker in *Spellbound* showed high levels of authenticity that enhanced the reliability of the images presented on-screen. Spurlock’s use of the voice-over primarily served to better educate the audience about complex topics; however, his multiple uses of the call to action did reflect a noteworthy level of truthiness as well. Moore’s use of the marker hit both ends of the spectrum in

that he used the voice-over to convey his sarcastic and/or ironic viewpoints of his subjects, but used subtitles to provide the audience with reliably informative commentary. Finally, Guggenheim's use of the marker primarily served to propagate truthiness in that most of its uses consisted of personal retrospectives from Gore that only served to further Gore's views on the presented subject matter.

Manipulation of Footage

As previously noted, the manipulation of footage marker was the second most frequently used of the four main markers I studied. In evaluating five films that combined for a total screen-time of 511 minutes, I documented 132 instances where the marker was used, which represented an average of 26.4 uses per film and an average of one use every 3.87 minutes. The marker was the most consistently used of the main four markers with a high use of 38 instances in *Spellbound* and a low use of 13 instances in *An Inconvenient Truth*. As noted in my method, I only documented the following types of uses of the marker: the montage used to show the passage of time, the presentation of subject matter in non-chronological order, the juxtaposition of contrasting images, the juxtaposition of an image with voice-over, and the ironic use of song.

Spellbound

In a battle with heavyweights like *Bowling for Columbine* and *Super Size Me*, Blitz's *Spellbound* came out on top as the film that featured the most manipulated footage with 38 instances. Seemingly, Blitz's use of the marker achieved two effects: it either enhanced the entertainment value of a scene in either a comedic or dramatic way, or conveyed an alternate or additional message to the audience than the one than the images

might have conveyed without manipulation. Both uses displayed a level of truthiness, but in degrees that varied from benign to overt.

For example, at 0:14:55 in the film, near the end of the introductory segment of the second contestant, Nupur, Blitz presents the audience with a short interview with the owner of a local Hooters Restaurant. The owner enthusiastically mentions that his establishment is proud to be able to recognize Nupur's achievements in past spelling competitions because she is a "part of their community." Blitz then immediately cuts away to an image of a Hooters sign with a misspelled message that states "Congradulations Nupur." The juxtaposition of images – while amusing and ironic given that the film is about nationally recognized spellers – is nonetheless a perfect expression of how, even in a relatively harmless manner, images can be manipulated in order to convey a message that is completely different than what the images themselves represent. To take a step further toward using the marker as an element of truthiness, some could argue that this example represents a certain violation of the participant consent of the Hooters' owner. The owner certainly would not have consented to have his interview footage included in the film if he had known that Blitz was going to use it simultaneously to make fun of him and make a point about the level of intelligence present in Nupur's hometown of Tampa, Florida.

However, even considering the potential violation of participant consent, the aforementioned example does not nearly represent the same level of truthiness that the following example does. From 0:31:45 to 0:38:00 in the film, Blitz presents the audience with the introductory piece for Neil, the sixth of the eight featured contestants. Unlike

the other seven segments, the main focus is not on the contestant; rather, the focus is on Neil's parents and the army of individuals that were tasked helping him capture the Scripps National Spelling Bee title. In the six-minute segment, Neil is featured on-screen for roughly only one minute. Meanwhile, various confessional interviews with his parents, his sister, his spelling coach, and his French tutor take up the remaining five minutes of his segment. By weighting the amount of footage during the segment so heavily away from the contestant, Blitz put the emphasis on Neil's parents and their beliefs in hard work, coaching, and studying as keys to success in spelling competition and in life in general. The decided emphasis on Neil's parents, and the revelation that his older sister had participated in the competition in previous years and placed as high as fifth in the nation, positioned Neil as a type of spelling machine that – backed by his parents' ambitions and his strict study habits – would be the contestant to beat during the competition. This creative editing and/or omission of footage did not allow Neil to adequately speak for himself and instead attempted to persuade the audience to accept Blitz's personal view of Neil as the contestant to beat.

While the majority of Blitz's uses of the manipulation of footage marker served to persuade the audience of a particular viewpoint on a subject or put a new comedic or dramatic spin on a subject, there were some instances where Blitz's manipulation of footage enhanced the authenticity of the images presented on-screen. In the previous section I mentioned the scene at 0:07:31 in the film where Blitz uses a series of subtitles to reflect the passage of time through the 54 rounds of spelling that Angela and Neelima battled through in an effort to earn their region's bid to compete in the Scripps National

Spelling Bee. The associated montage of footage, which featured the contestants repeatedly spelling words correctly, effectively moved the narrative along to its eventual conclusion when Angela earned the right to move on to the National competition. The editing of the footage together into a montage, and associated subtitles showing the number of rounds that had transpired, preserved the authenticity of the fact that the two spellers battled for a long period of time without having to present that entire period on film in the finished product.

In another scene, at 0:53:15 in the film, April is on stage deciphering how to spell the word she's been given during the second round of the National competition. Blitz cuts away to a confessional interview taped prior to the competition with April and her parents in their kitchen at their home in Ambler, Pennsylvania. The three discuss how intense it is to compete in an event like the National Bee because unlike other sporting events, like baseball, "there are no second chances;" if you spell one word wrong, you are eliminated. Blitz then cuts back to April on-stage where, after a few apprehensive moments, she correctly spells the word to stay alive in the competition. Blitz's insertion of the confessional interview in non-chronological order serves to authenticate April's on-stage trepidation and helps the audience better understand why competing in the National Bee is such a nerve-wracking undertaking.

Super Size Me

With 33 instances during his film, Spurlock was not far behind Blitz in his use of the manipulated footage marker. While Blitz primarily used the marker by juxtaposing

images or omitting footage, Spurlock went a different route by creatively or ironically using music and illustrations to enhance the power of the images he presented on-screen.

For example, at 1:17:00 in the film, Spurlock presents the audience with a 90-second montage of footage from the weight-related gastrointestinal bypass surgery that a heavily obese man, Bruce Howlett, endured at a Houston, Texas hospital. The footage itself, which consists of up-close images of fat being removed from Howlett's stomach and graphic displays of blood and intestinal fluid, could be considered pretty gruesome for the average viewer. However, it authentically illustrates the unfortunate reality of the damage being obese does to a person's internal organs. Where Spurlock manipulates the footage is through his choice of music. Instead of preserving the native audio of the surgeons and nurses conversing during the procedure, Spurlock decides to set the entire series of images to Johann Strauss' "Blue Danube Waltz." The use of such a well-known orchestral piece, which has been repeatedly used to comedic effect in films such as *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997), *Dogma* (1999), and *Heavy Weights* (1995), transposes a completely different meaning to the montage altogether. Instead of being presented as a serious medical procedure that, if not performed, could leave Howlett prone to a wide array of weight-related maladies, the montage trivializes the surgery and its potential repercussions through the use of a familiar song. While Spurlock might have done this inadvertently, the fact remains that the audience is presented with an entirely different interpretation of the footage than they would have been presented with had the footage been left unaltered.

Many of Spurlock's uses of the manipulation of footage marker are done in a similar manner. Often, in order to create entertainment value for the audience, documentarians must manipulate scenes in such a way that the authenticity of the original footage is compromised. That's not to say that documentarians have to choose between being persuasive or educational, entertaining or informative, though. As Moore stated during a private seminar with students and faculty at San Jose State University on October 14, 2010, "I think that the problem with why most people don't go to documentaries or don't like them is that they're not entertaining. Too many documentary filmmakers think that that's a dirty word, to make it 'entertaining.' Why are you making a movie then? You're trying to have it both ways! 'I'm a documentary filmmaker.' Yeah, but you just said you're making a film, you said 'filmmaker.' A film is entertainment; it's art and its entertainment. They don't have to be mutually exclusive" (Moore). Spurlock's use of the manipulation of footage marker shows an avid subscription to Moore's assertion that documentarians can be simultaneously entertaining and informative, and thereby simultaneously persuasive and authentic. A perfect example is at 0:59:25 in the film when Spurlock uses an illustration of the United States to list America's top 15 "fattest cities." Spurlock reveals that five of the top 15 "fattest cities" happen to reside in Texas with Houston taking the cake as the "fattest city in America." While a level of truthiness existed in the fact that Spurlock did not properly cite where his statistics came from – an issue that permeated all five documentaries I studied, discussed below in Chapter 5 – the footage Spurlock featured leading up to the statistics-laden illustration provided ample support for his assertions. The informative

illustration was then supplemented by a short scene, which featured Spurlock being served by two heavily obese McDonald's employees at a Houston establishment. The juxtaposition of the illustration about Houston being the "fattest city in America" and the footage of Spurlock being served by two heavily obese McDonald's employees is simultaneously informative and ironic, with irony serving the purpose of entertainment and truthiness.

Bowling for Columbine

Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* landed in the middle of the ledger with 27 uses of the manipulated footage marker. Moore's use of the marker was primarily concentrated into three prototypical iterations: the juxtaposition of images for desired effect, the film montage, and ironic use of music.

An example of his use of the juxtaposition of images came at 1:29:00 in the film when Moore concluded the aforementioned seven-minute segment about the six year-old first grader who inexplicably shot and killed one of his classmates in Buell, Michigan. The segment featured a narrating voice-over from Moore to supplement Moore's on-screen interviews and confessional interviews with school administrators, police, and members of the media. The last footage we see from the segment is of Moore in the hallways of Buell Elementary School with the school's principal, Jimmie Hughes. As Hughes is describing her recollection of the shooting to Moore, she begins to choke up, has trouble continuing, and starts crying. Moore consoles her and they walk away from the camera to end the powerfully tragic sequence. However, before Moore cuts away to the next scene, which features Charlton Heston giving a speech at an NRA-sponsored

pro-gun rally in neighboring Flint, Michigan just days after the shooting at Buell Elementary, he overlays Heston's famous "from my cold, dead hands" rhetoric. Heston's words, juxtaposed over the footage of Moore consoling Hughes, seem to thunder through the hallways of the elementary school, which is particularly chilling considering the emotional series of scenes that had been presented beforehand. The cinematic presentation of Heston's rally immediately following Moore's recapping of the Buell shooting is a completely authentic organization of images, which provided additional credibility to why Principal Hughes was so deeply affected by her attempted retelling of the story. However, by editing the footage so that Heston's words were heard while the audience was still viewing Moore and Hughes walking down the hallways of the elementary school, Moore made it appear as if Heston were somehow commenting on the shooting; that he was supporting the idea that, in spite of the tragedy, the right of the child's parents to own a gun, and the rights of Americans in general, should not be infringed upon – a sentiment that was later confirmed by Moore's interview with Heston in the film's climax, discussed below. Heston's words took on an increased level of insensitivity, which enhanced the polar opposition that Moore cultivated throughout the film as he attempted to convince the audience to side with him against Heston and the NRA, whom he presented as the film's tactless, misguided antagonists.

Moore's use of the film montage was done in a similarly polar fashion; a perfect example of which can be seen at 1:37:30 in the film. During the 150-second sequence, Moore provides a personal voice-over, which most prominently discusses how the American President at the time, George W. Bush, had made social programs "take a

backseat to fear” before describing the fallout of Bush’s policies. The voice-over is juxtaposed with a montage of images, including police riots, people running through the streets in panic, people crying, news footage about terrorist threats, and news footage about the Enron scandal, all cross-cut with carefully selected Bush rhetoric. The entire sequence is constructed to support Moore’s argument that Bush’s policies have had a negative trickle-down effect on society that have indirectly resulted in an increase in the American populace’s “fear,” which Moore argues helps explain why American society continues to be so gun-violent. The sequence’s viewpoint presents one argument, that of Moore, and purposefully does not provide counter-arguments in support of Bush and his policies that would have allowed the audience to make a more educated decision about Bush’s policies on their own. Instead, the audience is presented with the binary choice to either agree or disagree with Moore based solely on the limited information Moore has provided them with. Moore’s deliberate limiting of opposing viewpoints displays a high level of truthiness and leaves the audience with an unbalanced choice to make.

Finally, Moore features a few particularly ironic uses of song, including the comedic use of Fred Rogers’ “Won’t You Be My Neighbour” in the film’s climax as Moore nervously walked the grounds of Heston’s home in Beverly Hills before meeting the man for a dramatically awkward face-to-face interview. However, none of Moore’s choices were more ironic than his use of Louis Armstrong’s “What A Wonderful World” during the aforementioned extended subtitle/montage sequence at 0:26:00 in the film. The sequence featured a wide array of film footage, including photos and video of prominent world leaders that had been removed from power over the past 60 years by

American military force, graphic images of people being shot in the head, terrorists carrying heavy weaponry while riding tanks, buildings being blown up by air raids, and protesters being silenced by gunshots from police riot squads. Needless to say, a song that talks about seeing “skies of blue” and “red roses, too” is not exactly representative of the carnage that was displayed during the sequence. While the ironic song choice might have made the montage a bit more compelling for the audience, it also significantly altered the way it was presented to the audience, thereby exhibiting a level of truthiness through associative misrepresentation.

Food, Inc.

Kenner made use of the manipulated footage marker 21 times and almost every instance was used in conjunction with a confessional interview. Unlike Moore, Kenner made use of the marker in both authentic and persuasive manners, sometimes exhibiting both qualities simultaneously. Early uses of the marker were relatively authentic in that they enhanced the reliability of the images presented on-screen, such as the crossfading of images of cattle and agrarian landscapes with photos of the same images on computer-generated food labels during the opening pre-title sequence. These types of uses of the marker enhanced the reliability of their associated voice-overs or confessional interviews without transposing any specific message from Kenner. For example, at 0:24:40 in the film, Pollan describes how at many Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) Centers cattle are often left standing knee-deep in their own manure for days at a time which consequently has led to increased instances of tainted, diseased beef in the American food supply. Kenner juxtaposes a portion of Pollan’s interview over footage of

cattle at CAFO Centers standing knee-deep in manure and then illustrates how those animals are moved from the feed lot, through the slaughterhouse, and into grocery stores as beef patties. This series of images authenticates Pollan's statements by presenting a visual representation of the circumstances he describes.

On the other hand, like most of the documentarians I studied, Kenner did use the juxtaposition of images in order to convey a specific message to the audience. For example, at 0:25:00 in the film, Kenner presented news footage about E. coli outbreaks in 1993, 1998, 2002, 2006, and 2007. The images were juxtaposed with a voice-over and subsequent confessional interview with Eric Schlosser, author of *Fast Food Nation* during which Schlosser discussed the curious phenomenon that corporate food representatives had attained key positions in the American government. Wrapping up the segment were subtitles over contextual footage that stated, "In 1972, the FDA conducted approximately 50,000 food safety inspections...in 2006, the FDA conducted 9,164." The news footage and statistics lent authenticity to one another, but the sandwiched inclusion of Schlosser's confessional interview altered the meaning of the segment entirely.

Schlosser's contention presented the audience with an argument that tied the three pieces of the segment together; an argument that posed, in a conspiracy-theory fashion, that there was a correlation between corporate food representatives acquiring positions of power in the American government to serve the interests of their former employers by loosening the oversight of the FDA. The loosened oversight then led to increased food contamination and an increased number of E. coli outbreaks. The argument was not substantiated, at least until later in the film, by any other evidence to the contrary.

Kenner organized the three different parts of that segment to provide the audience with an implied message that the corporate food industry was controlling aspects of the government, and in doing so, were subjugating their responsibility to protect the health and safety of the American people in exchange for larger profits and greater autonomy. This way this message exhibited a level of truthiness in that Kenner used the manipulated footage marker to try to persuade the audience that Schlosser's opinion was plausible.

An Inconvenient Truth

Guggenheim used manipulated footage least of the documentarians I evaluated with only 13 instances; however, as with the voice-over/subtitle marker, his use was very consistent. Guggenheim used the marker in one of two ways: in a film montage or as supplemental footage to a Gore voice-over. The use of the film montage was done in a primarily authentic fashion that enhanced the reliability of the previous image, which in most cases was something Gore had said about his past or about a particular part of the global warming issue.

For example, at 0:02:15 in the film, Guggenheim presents Gore taking the stage for the start of the PowerPoint presentation that embodied the bulk of the film narrative. Gore introduced himself, to a round of cheers and applause, as "I'm Al Gore, I used to be the next president of the United States of America." Guggenheim then immediately cut away to footage of a much younger Gore on the campaign trail in 1999. The scene only lasts a short while, about 20 seconds, but provides supporting evidence for any members of the audience that might be unfamiliar with Gore's past or Gore's claim that he actually ran for Presidential office.

Similarly, at 1:09:35 of the film, Gore discusses through voice-over his family's past as tobacco farmers, his fond memories of harvesting tobacco as a child, and the smoking habit his sister developed that eventually led to her death due to lung cancer. Guggenheim complements the vivid, life-changing experiences Gore describes with photos of Gore harvesting tobacco as a child and photos of Gore's sister before presenting present-day footage of Gore on his farm discussing his family's past travails as tobacco farmers. The juxtaposition of photos from Gore's youth with present-day footage of Gore on his family's farm provided a steel-clad reliability to his anecdote and provided the audience with an opportunity to better empathize with Gore's rejection of the tobacco industry. The entire sequence also lent credibility to Gore as an authoritative voice on the subject of the tobacco industry, which positioned him as sufficiently educated on the topic to mount a sociopolitical argument about how the American tobacco industries have negatively contributed to the global warming threat.

Synthesis

The use of the manipulated footage marker in the films I evaluated was heavily skewed toward propagating truthiness. This was not surprising given that most documentarians view the selection of footage in the editing room as the most essential part of making their films. As filmmaker Ken Burns described, the postproduction part of the filmmaking process "is the most defined and longest of all things. It's where you prove the great truth that no matter how beautiful the images you've collected...no matter how good on paper the story might be, no matter how compelling the interviews are – until you find a way in which they can organically fit together, you have nothing" (Stubbs

79). Burns' thoughts echoed the aforementioned views of Dziga Vertov, who believed that individual scenes had to be "thematically organized" (Barnouw 58) in order for the entire piece to be meaningful for the audience. That being said, the documentarians I analyzed used the different elements of the manipulated footage marker in varying degrees of truthiness in an effort to provide selected scenes with specific connotations.

The ironic use of song was the most overt representation of truthiness the documentarians exhibited in using this marker. As discussed above, Moore's uses of Fred Rogers' "Won't You Be My Neighbour" and Louis Armstrong's "What A Wonderful World" in *Bowling for Columbine* provided the audience with a different reading of their respective scenes than would have been the case if the scenes were presented without music. Spurlock used Johann Strauss' "Blue Danube Waltz" in a similar fashion. Other uses of song were done in a neutral manner, adding little to no authenticity to the scenes they accompanied. In the few instances where song choice made a significant impact on the audience it was done in a manner of truthiness.

The juxtaposition of images was primarily used to propagate truthiness, most notably in *Super Size Me* and *Bowling for Columbine*. Spurlock often arranged his scenes in a way that maximized comedic value while also emphasizing a particular point. For example, at 1:24:55 in the film, Spurlock presented the audience with images of people struggling to recite the "Pledge of Allegiance" in front of the White House. Spurlock cross-cut images of himself eating a McDonald's burger and a close-up of McDonald's toys in front of the Capitol Building before presenting a final image of one of the women who had struggled with reciting the "Pledge of Allegiance" quickly and

easily reciting one of McDonald's slogans when prompted. The way the scene was organized provided support for Spurlock's implication that food corporations like McDonald's had permeated our society to the point that their slogans were more well-known than the National "Pledge of Allegiance."

However, there were some uses of the marker that enhanced the authenticity of the images presented on-screen. More often than not, the montage was used in a way that aided in audience comprehension of the events transpiring on-screen. This was most notably done to denote the passage of time. For example, in *Spellbound*, at 1:22:15 in the film, Blitz presented the audience with a montage of Dr. Alex Cameron, National Spelling Bee Pronouncer, reading words to participants. Dr. Cameron's readings were supplemented by footage of the ringing of a bell, which denoted incorrect responses, and then footage of participants subsequently leaving the stage. The montage, which lasted under a minute, effectively moved the audience through the competition from the point when 104 spellers remained in Round Four to when eight spellers remained in Round Seven. The montage presented the audience with authentic snippets from the competition to show that a large amount of time had passed and did not provide any general commentary about the events that had transpired.

Additionally, the juxtaposition of images with a voice-over was often done in a fashion that enhanced the overall authenticity of the scene. This was most notably accomplished in *Food, Inc.* where Kenner was able to pair an image or a series of images with a voice-over from one of his two main subjects, Schlosser and Pollan, and did so in a way that the two markers worked in conjunction with one another to provide a more

authentic representation of reality than they would have been able to separately. For example, at 0:05:10 in the film, Schlosser discussed the how McDonald's had helped in the "assembly line-izing" of corporate food production. Kenner presented the audience with a series of still images and file footage of early drive-in eateries, workers behind the counter at McDonald's in the 1950s, a variety of food processing plants, and an elegant computer-generated illustration that showed the corporatizing of the fast food industry that had occurred over the past half-century. The images Kenner chose complemented the information Schlosser provided the audience that helped to better educate the viewer without providing commentary that contrasted in any way with what Schlosser described. In this way, Kenner's imagery and Schlosser's commentary melded together to provide the audience with a reliable story that could be judged on its own merit.

To summarize, Blitz used the juxtaposition of images early on in *Spellbound* to exert a certain level of truthiness in his representation of the eight main contestants the film followed. However, he also showed a high level of authenticity through the use of the montage. *Super Size Me* and *Bowling for Columbine* exhibited almost exclusive use of the marker in a manner of truthiness, most notably through the ironic use of song and the juxtaposition of images for a desired effect. Guggenheim primarily made use of the montage in *An Inconvenient Truth* and did so in a manner of truthiness with the goal of providing support for the personal voice-overs Gore supplied. Finally, in *Food, Inc.* Kenner focused much of his use of the marker on the juxtaposition of images with voice-overs and displayed a mixture of both authenticity and truthiness.

Talking Heads or Confessional Interviews

As previously noted, the talking heads or confessional interview marker was the third most frequently used of the four main markers I studied. In evaluating five films that combined for a total screen-time of 511 minutes, I documented 124 instances where the marker was used, which represented an average of 24.8 uses per film and an average of one usage every 4.12 minutes. The marker was used in wildly varying degrees in each of the five films with a high use of 45 instances in *Spellbound* while being left unused in *An Inconvenient Truth*. The marker was used in both formal and informal settings, with subjects directly addressing the camera in pretty much any place imaginable, including schools, offices, residences, hotel rooms, and hospitals.

Spellbound

With 45 instances, Blitz made more use of the confessional interview marker than any of his fellow documentarians. Each interview was shot under mostly under organic, informal circumstances that kept the subjects in their natural environments. For example, the featured contestants were interviewed at home, in the classroom, on the playground at their school instead of sitting in a chair or behind a desk in an office. Off-screen questions from Blitz to his on-screen subjects were more readily included than in *Super Size Me* or *Food, Inc*, but were not used in a large number of instances. More often than not, the subjects were allowed to speak for themselves with little to no prompting from Blitz.

Similar to his use of the manipulated footage marker, Blitz was very consistent in his use of the confessional interview. During each of the introductory segments for the

eight featured contestants, Blitz presented a combination of confessional interviews with the contestant, their parents, their classmates, and/or their teachers. Based on the responses of the subjects, it became clear that Blitz used a similar set of questions for each set of subjects in order to elicit similarly formatted responses. Accordingly, Blitz was able to include the following elements in each segment, solely through authentic interviews with the subjects themselves: a description of the contestant's study habits, insight into the contestant's school and home environments, explanations of the contestant's motivation(s) for competing in spelling competitions, and accounts of how the contestant's success had impacted their local community.

Blitz did give each segment its own unique flair, though, and featured a few carefully selected moments from each of his confessional interviews in order to creatively highlight an aspect of each contestant's background or personality that set them apart from one another. For example, at 0:03:20 in the film, the first contestant featured, Angela, is revealed to be a first-generation daughter of Mexican immigrants. Blitz then presented a series of interviews that included testimony from Angela, her brother Jorge, her father Ubaldo, her father's employers (Mr. and Mrs. McGarraugh), and Angela's teacher, Ms. Slaughter. The combined testimony revealed that Angela's parents had illegally immigrated from Mexico in order to provide better educational opportunities for their children and that Angela had latched on to the English language in spite of her parents primarily speaking Spanish. The selected portions of each interview and the order in which they are presented reflected a small level of truthiness in that they were organized to specifically highlight why Angela's Hispanic heritage played such a large

role in motivating her to succeed in local, regional, and national spelling competitions. However, the fact that the information was communicated to the audience through first-hand testimony by Angela and her family members instead of through post-produced voice-overs or added subtitles preserved a high level of authenticity in the images and the information presented.

Food, Inc.

Kenner's *Food, Inc.* came in a distant second in terms of use of the confessional interview marker with 33 instances. Unlike *Blitz*, the majority of confessional interviews Kenner featured were conducted in formal interview settings and about half of the interviews presented were portions from extended interview sessions with Eric Schlosser and Michael Pollan, the authors of the two books on which the film was based: *Fast Food Nation* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Schlosser and Pollan's interviews were rarely featured on their own; rather, they were usually featured before, after, or laid over a piece of footage that contained a cursory relationship to the subject on which they were speaking. In this way, the two authors' confessional interviews were positioned as "commenting" on the imagery the audience was presented with when, in reality, their words were manipulated to make it appear as if they were making observations about the footage presented on-screen. Use of their interviews in such a fashion of truthiness served to reinforce whatever overall point Kenner was attempting to make in each particular segment of the film.

One example of Kenner's manipulation of confessional interviews occurred at 0:41:55 in the film when Kenner presented the audience with Pollan's discussion of how

the human body is engineered for “three things: salt, fat, and sugar.” While Pollan expands upon his discussion of how the human body is genetically-predisposed to want salt, fat, and sugar, Kenner underlays commercials for popular fast food restaurants, including McDonald’s, Arby’s, and Burger King. In doing so, Pollan’s commentary – unbeknownst to him – becomes an indictment of the American fast food industry in support of Kenner’s viewpoint that the industry is negatively contributing to the American obesity epidemic. While all the evidence might point in the direction Kenner attempts to lead the audience, he still, nonetheless, leads the audience in a particular direction instead of allowing the audience to form their own viewpoint based on Pollan’s commentary.

Not all of confessional interviews Kenner featured were manipulated in order to reinforce the documentarian’s viewpoint on a given subject. Many of his interviews provided important information about complex topics and sufficiently educated the audience in such a way that they could judge the images that followed on their own merit. For example, at 0:20:12 of the film, Kenner featured a 30-second interview with Larry Johnson, a scientist at the Center for Crops Utilization Research at Iowa State University. Johnson discussed the engineering of corn over the past half-century and the emergence of high fructose corn syrup. Johnson’s interview, and the subsequent computer-generated image that illustrated all of the common food products that now contain some form of corn in their preparation, sufficiently informed the audience about the level of penetration into our food supply that corn and its by-products had achieved. With this information in mind, the following scene’s explanation of the negative side effects that American cattle

had experienced since corn had replaced grass as the main ingredient in livestock feed – specifically, poorer overall health and increased outbreaks of E. coli – allowed the audience to draw their own conclusions about how a corn-heavy diet might negatively affect the human population in the future.

Super Size Me

Spurlock used the confessional interview marker 33 times, three-quarters of which came in the film's first 60 minutes. Spurlock's primary purpose in featuring confessional interviews was to provide expert testimony to support the results he had been documenting during his 30-day binge of consuming only McDonald's food. For example, at 0:40:55 in the film, Spurlock confessed during an on-screen segment that by Day eight of his binge he could not mentally fight the urge to want more McDonald's food, despite his personal feeling of boredom with the lack of options on the McDonald's menu. Later, at 1:10:48 in the film during a segment titled "Addiction," Spurlock featured a confessional interview with Neal Barnard, a doctor representing the Physicians' Committee for Responsible Medicine. Barnard testified that the feeling of addiction to McDonald's food that Spurlock had experienced earlier in the film had been repeatedly documented in cases where subjects consumed a high amount of fast food. Barnard stated that the "addicting components" in McDonald's food had a drug-like effect on subjects; an assertion that was supported by scientific studies that had used Naloxone – a drug used to counter heroin overdoses by blocking opiate receptors in the brain – on food addicts with a high level of success (i.e., chocolate addicts' interest in chocolate had been significantly reduced through the use of Naloxone). Spurlock's

inclusion of the confessional interview with Barnard served to validate the personal feelings of addiction he had expressed in his earlier on-screen appearances and authenticated much of the testimony of his other subjects that had expressed a compulsion to consume McDonald's food, including schoolchildren in Texas (0:30:20 to 0:33:30 in the film) and Don Gorske, "Big Mac Enthusiast," in Los Angeles (0:42:20 in the film).

While the confessional interview was primarily used to authenticate the results Spurlock experienced during his personal journey of fast food indulgence, he was not afraid to use the marker in order to make an opinionated statement. At 1:23:15, Spurlock featured a second portion of a confessional interview with Gene Grabowski, Vice-President of the Grocery Manufacturers of America (GMA). Spurlock had previously interviewed Grabowski about the poor state of nutrition and physical education in American schools, asking what, if any, responsibility Grabowski and his company held in improving those two areas of emphasis. In the second segment, Grabowski stated "we're a part of the problem, but we're also part of the solution." Spurlock immediately freeze-framed the interview and, in reference to Grabowski's admission that "we're part of the problem," he added a personal voice-over that stated, "Did you just hear what I heard?" He then inserted a series of upward-scrolling subtitles that listed all of the companies Grabowski represented in order to make it very clear to the audience that Grabowski's Freudian slip in admitting that his company was "a part of the problem" made each of the companies he represented, by association, guilty of contributing to poor standards of nutrition and physical education in American schools. The point Spurlock made by

manipulating Grabowski's statement was obviously in contrast to the point being made by the subject and by focusing on the first half of Grabowski's statement, Spurlock exercised a high level of truthiness by essentially using the subject's words him.

Bowling for Columbine

With a strong emphasis on voice-over/subtitles, manipulated footage, and his own on-screen presence, Moore did not really have much room left in his film for the inclusion of confessional interviews. He did squeeze in 13 interviews and they were split relatively evenly between formal and informal settings. All of the interviews included some sort of off-screen prompting from Moore as he asked multiple questions to each subject in rapid succession.

For example, at 0:20:50 in the film, Moore presented the audience with a series of interviews with citizens of Littleton, Colorado as they reflected on the Columbine shootings. Interviewed on their front lawns, their doorsteps, or at various locations around town, the citizens testified that their town was a "tight-knit community" and a "great place to live" that had been "marred by a terrible incident." The interviews authenticated Moore's presentation of Littleton as "small, quiet suburb of Denver" and set the stage for his subsequent description of the tragic events that took place at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999.

Later, at 1:02:00 and 1:14:45 in the film, Moore interviewed Arthur Busch, Flint, Michigan's County Prosecutor, and Mayor Mike Bradley, Sarnia, Ontario, Canada, respectively. Both interviews took place under formal circumstances at the subjects' places of work and both interviews featured discussions about how the media has a

tendency to distort stories to fit their sensationalist goals. Busch discusses the media's tendency to take a particular interest in stories that involve African-Americans and guns while Bradley discusses little known similarities between Canadians and Americans in terms of gun violence and media exposure. Moore's use of the confessional interview in formal settings essentially served the same purposes as his informal interviews in that they supported claims he had made through voice-over and/or contributed reliability to the arguments he made in subsequent sequences. Accordingly, Moore's use of the confessional interview was done almost exclusively in a manner of authenticity.

An Inconvenient Truth

My analysis of Guggenheim's usage of the confessional interview marker was the one of the easiest of any I performed due the fact that he never used the marker! There was not a single instance of a confessional interview in *An Inconvenient Truth* as the film consisted entirely of Gore's on-screen presence, Gore's voice-over, and limited instances of manipulated footage. The only conclusion I could draw from the absence of the confessional interview was that Guggenheim felt that Gore's PowerPoint presentation was compelling enough that it did not need supplemental testimony from other well-known authorities on the global warming issue. Guggenheim's decision to not include confessional interviews with any other subjects effectively targeted the audience's focus solely on Gore and his argument. The side effect of the relatively one-sided narrative was an elevated level of truthiness in that Gore's testimony was the only testimony presented. There were no competing arguments presented, so the audience was forced to make the binary choice to either accept what Gore presented as fact or to reject his

presentation outright and form their own conclusions based on their own interpretation of the data and anecdotes Gore presented.

Synthesis

In the films I evaluated, the confessional interview marker was used in a manner that exhibited the highest collective level authenticity of the four main markers I analyzed. More often than not, when the documentarians used the marker they did so in a way that helped to better educate the audience on complex issues or provided expert testimony to authenticate the images that were presented before or after the featured interviews. This was most noticeable in *Spellbound*, where Blitz used the marker to help provide a consistent narrative for the entire film. Described in detail above, Blitz used a consistent set of questions in order to elicit similar responses from his interview subjects; the use of which resulted in similarly formatted responses that served to adequately describe each contestant's experiences, motivations, and expectations. Blitz also refrained from using voice-over in his film and was very limited in his use of the subtitle, which left the bulk of the narrative to be carried by the confessional interviews with his subjects. The fact that the subjects were able to speak for themselves with little to no commentary from the documentarian – and the additional fact that they were interviewed in their native environment, such as a residence, classroom or playground instead of in a more formal interview setting, such as an office or library – created an observational, uncensored feeling for the audience in understanding the images they were presented with and, consequently, enhanced the overall level of authenticity present in the film.

Moore's limited use of the confessional interview in *Bowling for Columbine* was similarly authentic in that his uses of the marker primarily provided expert testimony that enhanced the reliability of the images that had been presented before or after the interviews. Unlike Blitz, though, Moore's interviews were split relatively evenly between formal and informal settings. Formal examples were noted at 1:02:00 and 1:14:45 in the film when Moore interviewed the Flint, Michigan County Prosecutor, Arthur Busch, and the Mayor of Sarnia, Ontario, Canada, Mike Bradley, in their respective places of work. Informal examples were noted at 1:11:55 and 1:25:00 in the film when Moore interviewed Canadian high school students in a Taco Bell parking lot and Jeff Rosson, a local news reporter, about the Buell Elementary School shooting, respectively.

Food, Inc. and *Super Size Me* exhibited mixed use of the confessional marker in manners that either enhanced authenticity or propagated truthiness. Both films conducted interviews in formal and informal settings, but leaned more toward the formal approach. In *Food, Inc.*, Kenner's primary use of the confessional interview was with two subjects: Eric Schlosser and Michael Pollan, authors of *Fast Food Nation* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, respectively. Whether Kenner's interviews created an increased sense of reliability or served to support a directorial opinion depended on how the interviews were edited. For example, at 0:17:05 in the film, Kenner featured a portion of his interview with Pollan in which Pollan described his quest to trace the source of where his food came from; a quest which ultimately led back to some type of use of corn. The following scenes featured interviews with Troy Roush, Vice-President of the American Corn

Growers Association and Larry Johnson, a scientist at the Center for Crops Utilization Research at Iowa State University. The fact that Kenner presented Pollan's interview almost in its entirety with only limited use of contextual footage and then followed up his interview with two more interviews with subjects who provided testimony that authenticated Pollan's assertions about the role corn played in the production of modern food created a solid chain of reliable information for the audience to follow without the use of overt or implied pontification from the documentarian. As discussed above, though, there were several instances where Kenner edited Schlosser and Pollan's interviews so that it appeared that they were commenting on certain pieces of footage when in reality they were making statements that had no direct relationship to the footage Kenner associated them with in the finished product. A perfect example of this came at 1:05:30 in the film when Pollan discussed how the output of the common farmer had been significantly increased due to the corporatizing of the industry and the emergence of new technology. Kenner modified the impact of Pollan's words by editing his interview in such a way that it served as a voice-over for disconnected images of modern farmers working in fields.

Finally, in *Super Size Me*, Spurlock routinely used the confessional interview to provide expert testimony from reliable sources that authenticated the results he personally experienced during his 30-day binge. For example, at 0:48:05 in the film, Spurlock featured a portion of an interview with Margo Wooten, Center for Science in the Public Interest, in which she addressed the lack of availability of nutritional information at fast food restaurants. Spurlock then featured a compilation of his personal failures to obtain

nutritional information at multiple McDonald's restaurants across the country. In this way, Spurlock's interview worked in reverse to provide testimony from a reliable source that then authenticated the subsequent compilation of footage from McDonald's restaurants. As discussed above, though, Spurlock did manipulate some of confessional interviews in order to make an opinionated statement, including the freeze-framing of a portion of his interview with Grabowski at 1:24:00 in the film. The creative editing featured in such examples highlighted the points Spurlock was trying to make at the expense of providing a reliable representation of the subjects.

To summarize, *Spellbound* and *Bowling for Columbine* featured almost exclusively authentic uses of the marker by providing consistent formulas for posing questions to their subjects and by primarily allowing the subjects to speak for themselves with little to no additional commentary through voice-over or subtitles. *Food, Inc.* and *Super Size Me* exhibited mixed use of the marker in manners of both authenticity and truthiness primarily through the juxtaposition of confessional interviews with manipulated footage. As noted above, *An Inconvenient Truth* featured no instances of the marker.

Documentarian's On-Screen Presence

As previously noted, the documentarian's on-screen presence marker was the least frequently used of the four main markers I studied. In evaluating five films that combined for a total screen-time of 511 minutes, I documented 99 instances where the marker was used, which represented an average of 19.8 uses per film and an average of one usage every 5.16 minutes. The marker's use, or lack thereof, displayed the most

polarizing results of any of the four main markers with a high use of 46 instances in *Super Size Me*, median uses of 27 instances in *An Inconvenient Truth* and 25 instances in *Bowling for Columbine*, and outright rejections of the marker in *Food, Inc.* (one instance) and *Spellbound* (no instances).

Super Size Me

With the main narrative of the film taking the form of a “personal diary” account of documentarian Morgan Spurlock’s 30-day binge of only consuming food from McDonald’s, it was not surprising that *Super Size Me* featured heavy use of the documentarian’s on-screen presence marker. Spurlock appeared on-screen 46 times and did so in a variety of ways. It should be noted, though, that while there was a large volume of on-screen appearances that edged the film toward the “video diary,” and truthiness, there was an equally large volume of confessional interviews and/or segments featuring voice-over and/or manipulated footage that tempered the feelings of personal retrospective and, more often than not, supported and/or enhanced the reliability of the imagery he presented through his on-screen segments.

Spurlock’s first appearance was during a montage of photos, at 0:02:15 in the film, that showed Spurlock in his youth, in the kitchen with his mom, and eating around the dinner table with his family. The montage provided support to Spurlock’s statement that his family “rarely ate out.” At 0:04:40 in the film, Spurlock approaches the camera on an empty urban street and directly addresses the camera while posing the question, “Where does personal responsibility stop and corporate responsibility begin?” Spurlock’s acknowledgement of the presence of a camera is done throughout the film,

most notably through direct address. The open-ended dialogue he creates with the audience through the use of this technique proves that the experiences he documents are genuinely his and also serves to create a level of intimacy with the audience so that they may feel like they are experiencing the binge with him. However, the use of this technique also presents the audience with the “personal, clearly subjective view of things” (Nichols, *Introduction* 14) that Nichols cautioned against.

Subsequent on-screen appearances by Spurlock generally fell into one of three categories: check-ups with his physicians, street interviews with the general public, or footage from his 30-day binge. In almost every one of these instances, Spurlock chose to present the footage through the use of a hand-held camera. Similar to the use of the direct address of the camera, Spurlock’s use of the hand-held camera enhanced the feel that the audience was along for the ride as he documented his 30-day adventure. The common thread in most of Spurlock’s appearances on-screen was that he was merely documenting the results of his consumption of McDonald’s food. There were limited instances, though, where Spurlock took advantage of his on-screen presence to heighten the dramatic impact of the images presented on-screen. For example, at 0:45:05 in the film, Spurlock visits an elementary school in Worcester, Massachusetts and plays a game of flash cards with a few of the first graders. He seated himself across the table from the children and showed them a few different cards to test how well they were able to associate the images with what they actually represented. On the whole, the children were hit-and-miss with George Washington and completely failed to recognize Jesus, but had no problem recognizing Wendy from Wendy’s Restaurant and Ronald McDonald

from McDonald's. The children's responses were cross-cut with Spurlock's reactions, which varied from dismayed to surprised to amused. The point Spurlock was trying to make was that the children's ease in recognizing fast food mascots was disappointing, given their difficulty in recognizing historical/religious figures like George Washington and Jesus, and was also representative of a greater societal concern in that our children had a better chance of recognizing a fast food mascot than a legitimate historical figure. Spurlock's on-screen presence helped make the scene more comedic, but also lent an air of truthiness to it in that he potentially could have tampered with or influenced the kids' reactions.

An Inconvenient Truth

As previously noted, the film's main subject, former American Vice-President Al Gore, was not the director of the film. However, he was an executive producer who likely had a large hand in the finished product and his on-screen presence was so overwhelming I considered him to be a "co-documentarian" with the film's credited director, Davis Guggenheim. That being said, *An Inconvenient Truth* exhibited a large drop-off from *Super Size Me* with 27 instances of the marker. While Guggenheim's focus was on the lengths Gore had gone to in order to educate the world about the impending global warming crisis, his use of the documentarian's presence marker was evenly split between scenes that enhanced the reliability of the images presented and scenes that propagated the argument Guggenheim was trying to make. Half of the marker's instances simply featured footage of Gore working on his laptop, compiling his PowerPoint Presentation. The footage of Gore in hotel rooms or riding in cars did not

exude any air of truthiness; however, the fact that the footage was paired with personal voice-overs from Gore in which he described how the material he was presenting in the presentation related to him and his family heavily skewed the impact of the scene to truthiness. The scenes served as an attempt to convince the audience to value the arguments Gore presented in the PowerPoint presentation due to Gore's personal connection to the material rather than presenting concrete evidence as to why Gore should be considered an expert on the material.

Conversely, the other half of instances of the marker featured Gore on-stage giving his PowerPoint presentation. These scenes exhibited a high level of authenticity due to the material presented and the manner in which the material was captured for the theatrical audience. Guggenheim chose to not interfere with Gore's presentation and captured it in an observational, "fly-on-the-wall" manner. There were four different ways Guggenheim re-presented Gore's presentation to the theatrical audience: one, he featured reaction shots of audience members; two, he featured close-up's of Gore; three, he featured medium or long shots of Gore with material from the PowerPoint presentation looming on the projection screen behind him; and finally, he featured shots of the presentation screen by itself that enveloped the entire theatrical screen. The way these types of shots were edited together enhanced the theatrical audience's feeling that they were a part of Gore's on-screen audience and subsequently increased the authenticity of the entire film. Also enhancing the audience's feeling of being a part of the presentation was Guggenheim's choice to feature long, uninterrupted segments of the presentation in

the finished product, including nearly 11 minutes of screen-time from 0:14:00 to 0:24:50 in the film.

Bowling for Columbine

Given Moore's reputation, I found it very surprising that *Bowling for Columbine* landed in third place in terms of use of the documentarian's presence marker with only 25 instances. While he did not appear on-screen as many times as Spurlock or Gore, Moore's overall screen presence was exponentially more powerful than the other two. Most of Moore's appearances were interactive interviews where his prompts were featured as readily as his subjects' responses. Notable interview subjects included James Nichols, brother of Oklahoma City bomber Terry, at 0:11:35 in the film, Matt Stone, co-creator of *South Park*, at 0:38:30 in the film, and shock-rocker Marilyn Manson at 0:45:20. Moore exhibited a palpable mix of tone in the way he posed questions to his subjects. On the one hand, Moore asked pointed questions that were obviously meant to elicit a certain response from his subjects. Questions framed to lead the subject in a direction the documentarian desired is a clear element of truthiness that Moore repeatedly used. The responses he acquired from these questions, more often than not, provided support for the over-arching arguments Moore made throughout the film. However, Moore also conducted an equal amount of open-ended dialogues with his subjects, most notably Stone and Manson, which provided the audience with unique insight into the subjects and their opinions about the critical social issues Moore was exploring. In this way, Moore enhanced the reliability of the subjects and their honest, voluntary opinions provided authentic support for Moore's arguments.

The perfect example of Moore's use of both tones was his climactic encounter with Charlton Heston at 1:47:50 in the film. Moore solicited an interview with the former actor, who also served as the outspoken former president of the National Rifle Association (NRA), and eventually met with him at his home in Beverly Hills, California. When Moore sat down with Heston he began the interview cordially by sharing that he was a card-carrying member of the NRA, which understandably pleased Heston. Moore also shared with Heston the affinity he had developed for guns as a child. In the minutes that followed, Moore asked Heston relatively straightforward questions about gun-owning rights, gun use, and gun violence in America. Heston's responses authenticated his stance on the issues, which Moore had alluded to throughout the film. Where the interview took a turn, though, was when Moore questioned Heston about the shooting at Buell Elementary as well as why Heston felt the need to hold a pro-gun rally days after such a tragic event. Heston danced around the questions momentarily before awkwardly walking away from the conversation. Moore essentially chased Heston down and, from afar, presented him with a photo of the girl who had been killed in the elementary school shooting. Heston merely turned retreated to a secluded part of his complex. The duality of Moore's on-screen presence was perfectly represented by his evolutionary change during the interview from a reporter – soliciting authentic responses from an interview subject – to an advocate – badgering an interview subject to elicit a desired response. In this way, Moore was able to provide the audience with authentic responses from Heston while also using truthiness to propagate the arguments he had made throughout the film.

Food, Inc.

Kenner's presence was felt on-screen in only one instance, at 1:20:10 in the film, during his confessional interview with Barbara Kowalczyk, a Food Safety Advocate whose son Kevin had died at age two due to an E. coli infection. Kenner asked Kowalczyk whether she and her family had changed their eating habits in response to her son's death. When she showed reticence in answering the question, due to the fact that her answer could potentially violate the financial settlement she had reached with the food corporation that was responsible for her son's death, Kenner became an active participant in the interview and repeatedly tried to coax an answer out of her. Kowalczyk referred to Kenner by name, stating "Robby! You know I can't answer that," which was the main reason why I classified this instance under the documentarian's presence marker instead of under the confessional interview marker. Regardless of how it was classified, Kenner's use of the marker was extremely limited and had little impact on the overall level of authenticity present in the film.

Spellbound

Blitz used the documentarian's presence marker like Guggenheim used the confessional interview marker: he chose not use it at all. Blitz instead constructed his film primarily around confessional interviews and manipulated footage with limited use of titles and subtitles. The result was a film that featured a noticeably subject-driven narrative. While Blitz's influences could be seen in which pieces of footage were used and the way scenes were organized, there was no over-arching perspective, per se, emanating from the documentarian himself. Instead, the words and actions of the

contestants were prominently featured and the audience was, for the most part, allowed to draw their own conclusions from each segment of the film without Blitz having to knock the viewer over the head with whatever point he might have been trying to make.

Synthesis

While the documentarian's presence marker might have manifested itself the least of the four main markers I evaluated and might have only been used in three of the five films I screened, there were still plenty conclusions to draw from its use. In *Super Size Me*, Spurlock often directly addressed the camera to record his experiences and observations during his 30-day binge. This approach cultivated a level of intimacy with the audience that edged those scenes toward the personal "video diary," and truthiness. However, the same scenes also authenticated the results he eventually reported to his physicians, which included a 25-pound weight gain in a 30-day period and a slew of medical maladies. Spurlock's other on-screen appearances, including street interviews, cold calls to McDonald's representatives, and visits to elementary schools and high schools across America, reflected a similar level of authenticity through the presentation of subjects in their native environments.

In *An Inconvenient Truth*, Guggenheim presented the audience with two distinctly different sets of on-screen appearances by Gore. The first set featured Gore on-stage giving his PowerPoint presentation. These scenes, captured in a highly observational manner, provided authentic representations of Gore and the information he conveyed. The second set of scenes featured Gore working on his PowerPoint presentation while sitting in hotel rooms or riding in cars as well as meetings with foreign diplomats. These

scenes, supplemented by voice-overs from Gore, served as a platform to Gore to speak freely about his personal experiences in relation to the impending global warming crisis. These scenes propagated truthiness through the conveyance of Gore's personal viewpoints that were unsubstantiated by statistics or testimony from other sources.

In *Bowling for Columbine*, the majority of Moore's on-screen appearances were for interviews in which he was an active participant. As discussed above, much of the determination with regards to the level of authenticity exhibited in the scenes came from evaluating the manner in which Moore posed his questions to his subjects. If his questions were posed in order to elicit a desired response – in order to support a point Moore was trying to make – then the scene edged toward truthiness; however, if the questions were relatively open-ended and the subjects were given a chance to properly explain their opinions then the scene exuded authenticity.

To summarize, all three films that utilized the marker did so in both manners of authenticity and truthiness. *Super Size Me* edged toward the “video diary” at times, but the majority of Spurlock's interviews were conducted in a way that enhanced the authenticity of the film. Guggenheim's use of the marker in *An Inconvenient Truth* was authentic when Gore was on-stage but truthy whenever his personal voice-over was added to the scene. Moore's use of the marker in *Bowling for Columbine* varied depending on the way he framed his questions. Finally, *Food, Inc.* and *Spellbound* did not make significant use of the marker.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

The ultimate goal of my research was to create a more comprehensive definition of the word truthiness as it pertains to representations of authenticity in the documentary film genre. The identification of four prominent markers of authenticity – the use of voice-over narration and/or subtitles, the manipulation of footage, the use of confessional interviews, and the documentarian’s on-screen presence – and the study of those markers’ use in five documentary films released in the 21st century – *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Bowling for Columbine*, *Food, Inc.*, *Spellbound*, and *Super Size Me* – provided me with the necessary results to accomplish this goal. In addition, I formed a better understanding of how each of the markers functioned and how each could be put to use in contemporary documentaries in manners that enhanced the reliability of the images presented on-screen, propagated truthiness by emphasizing a documentarian’s viewpoint, or worked in both ways simultaneously. Finally, I was made a few general observations about marker use that could eventually be explored in future research on the topic.

How Each Marker Exhibited Truthiness

The manipulated footage marker exhibited the highest level of truthiness of the four markers evaluated, which was understandable given that the marker dealt with varying forms of altering footage. The element of the marker that exhibited the most definitive representation of truthiness was the ironic use of song. Repeatedly featured in *Bowling for Columbine* and *Super Size Me*, a high level of truthiness was present any time the use of a song significantly altered the way a scene was presented to the audience. However, the most frequently used element of the marker that exhibited truthiness was

the juxtaposition of images, or juxtaposition of image with voice-over. Whether it was to achieve additional drama, comedy or irony or just to provide additional support for an argument that was being made by a subject or the documentarian, a high level of truthiness existed in any instance where images were edited in order to achieve an effect that was contrary what would have been achieved had the images been left unaltered. Blitz's *Spellbound* displayed an example of this phenomenon at 1:27:30 in the film, Nupur, one of the main eight contestants the audience had been following, was revealed as the winner of the competition – through the presentation of post-Bee interviews and news footage – before the audience was actually presented with the footage of her spelling her final word to win the Bee. The way Blitz edited the sequence added a cinematic quality to the organization of images in that they were purposefully edited so that the most powerful image – that of Nupur lifting the trophy over her head – was the one the audience was left with.

The voice-over/subtitle marker was used in a few different ways that exhibited truthiness. The most notable was the call to action, which was used multiple times through voice-over by Spurlock in *Super Size Me* and through pre-end credit title sequences by Kenner and Guggenheim in *Food, Inc.* and *An Inconvenient Truth*. A high level of truthiness was present whenever the documentarian directly addressed the audience and urged the group to take action in a certain way. A similar level of truthiness was present in instances where the documentarian used a non-neutral tone in his or her voice-overs to convey feelings of sarcasm, irony, or sympathy. Most frequently used by Moore in *Bowling for Columbine*, the marker heavily influenced the manner in which the

footage was presented to the audience. Finally, a high level of truthiness was also present in instances where the voice-over was used to convey the documentarian's personal viewpoint rather than provide commentary on the images with which the voice-over was juxtaposed. This most notably occurred in *An Inconvenient Truth* where Guggenheim almost exclusively used personal retrospectives from Gore that only served to further Gore's views on the presented subject matter.

The documentarian's presence marker was used in a few distinct ways that propagated truthiness. First, the use of the marker in *Super Size Me*, which prominently featured Spurlock directly addressing the camera throughout his 30-day binge, edged the film toward the "video diary." This created a level of personal connection with the audience and served to further Spurlock's argument that his experiences represented what could happen if corporate irresponsibility in the fast food industry were left unchecked. Second, Guggenheim used the marker in *An Inconvenient Truth* by presenting the audience with disconnected imagery of Gore traveling the world and giving his PowerPoint presentation. These images of Gore, coupled with Gore's personal voice-over explaining what the images represented, served to fabricate an enhanced level of expertise for Gore on the topic of global warming. Finally, Moore used the marker in *Bowling for Columbine* in order to enhance his own representation as a crusader for stricter gun control and an advocate for finding solutions to reduce gun-related violence.

The confessional interview marker showed the most authentic use of the four markers I evaluated and only exhibited truthiness when used in combination with one of the other markers. In most cases, confessional interviews were used to provide expert

testimony to authenticate the results of personal experiences, most notably in *Super Size Me*, or to provide subjects with the opportunity to express their viewpoints without interjection from the documentarian, most notably in *Spellbound*. However, instances where the interview subjects' responses were manipulated in postproduction to provide commentary for indirectly related images, most notably in *Food, Inc.*, exhibited a small level of truthiness.

General Observations

Through the course of my research, I was able to make a few general observations with regards to how truthiness was used in the documentaries I analyzed. First, the four main markers of authenticity were noticeably interrelated and were often used in combination with one another to either enhance the authenticity of a scene or, more often than not, in order to increase the level of truthiness of a scene. The aforementioned example in *Super Size Me*, at 1:24:00 in the film, where Spurlock presented a confessional interview with Gene Grabowski, manipulated his interview by freeze-framing the footage after Grabowski stated “we’re part of the problem but we’re also part of the solution,” and then used voice-over and scrolling titles to illustrate the companies that Grabowski represented, was a perfect display of how multiple markers of authenticity could be used at once in order to enhance the level of truthiness in any given scene. In this case, Spurlock sought to emphasize his viewpoint that Grabowski had admitted a level of guilt on behalf of his companies, and that those companies should be held partially responsible for the growing obesity epidemic in America. The combined

use of three of the four main markers of authenticity propagated a level of truthiness in the scene that could not have been attained by the singular use of any one of the markers.

A second observation I made was that the citation of sources, particularly for statistics, was nearly non-existent in each of the films I analyzed. In my opinion, this represented an enormous propagation of truthiness in that there was little to no attribution to the source material the documentarians and their subjects drew upon in formulating their arguments. This created a smoke screen between the audience and the documentarian, which forced the audience to either accept or reject the presented statistics based solely on whether they believed the testimony of the documentarian and their subjects was trustworthy. Listing the source of where their statistics came from in the end credits of the film would have sufficed; however, this was not adequately done by any of the five documentarians I analyzed. Guggenheim was the only one that came anywhere close to satisfying this requirement in *An Inconvenient Truth* through his end-crediting of source material for some of the still images and video footage Gore featured in his PowerPoint presentation. The quotations Gore used during his presentation were properly credited as they were shown during the film, but of all the statistics used throughout each of the films, only one of them was attributed on-screen and it was actually done during the middle of the film instead of in the end-credits. In *Food, Inc.*, at 1:08:50 in the film, Kenner presented a set of titles juxtaposed over manipulated footage that stated, “Monsanto has a staff of 75 devoted to investigating and prosecuting farmers (Center for Food Safety).” Kenner’s credit that the statistic came from a neutral, third party source lent an immeasurable level of authenticity to the subsequent subjects

presented on-screen and their argument that the Monsanto Corporation had been unjustly targeting small farmers in an effort to monopolize the soybean industry.

A final observation I made was that regardless of the form of truthiness employed, one of the main goals the documentarians attempted to achieve was to forcibly place questions in the minds of audience members. The ultimate goal of this technique seemed to be to challenge the audience's perception of the scene they were presented with, thereby redirecting the audience's attention from comprehending the subject matter to the implied question the documentarian had posed with regards to the subject matter. This was done in an attempt to convince the audience to accept that the documentarian's answer to the implied question posed was the correct one. Moore accomplished this feat better than any of the other documentarians I studied. The aforementioned example in *Bowling for Columbine*, at 1:29:00 in the film, in which Moore manipulated Heston's "from my cold, dead hands" rhetoric to make it seem as if Heston was commenting on the shooting at Buell Elementary School is a perfect representation of how Moore often used a combination of markers of authenticity in a manner of truthiness to influence the audience's perception of a scene. During the private seminar at San Jose State University, I asked Moore whether he felt that it was more important to educate his audience and shed light on a particular piece of subject matter or persuade the audience of the rightness of his position. He responded, "Neither...I want to present you with a series of facts, indisputable facts that I'm giving you in my film...The facts in my film are very important because I'm trying to convince you of my opinion. Now, my opinion may be right or wrong. I think it's right, but I may not be right. But I'll do my best job

using the facts...to make my point” (Moore). This bifurcated response reflected Moore’s commitment to presenting the audience with “indisputable” factual information, so long as that information helped strengthen his argument.

A More Comprehensive Definition of Truthiness

As previously mentioned, the American Dialect Society defined truthiness as "the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true" (January 2006). Based on my research, I believe that a significant addition can be made to this definition to better represent how truthiness has been used to alter representations of authenticity in the documentary film genre. Through the identification of the aforementioned markers of authenticity, analysis of how each of those markers have been used to propagate truthiness, and my general observations, I have found that an instance of truthiness in documentary films occurs whenever one or more markers of authenticity are used to emphasize the documentarian’s viewpoint on a subject more prominently than the exposure, explanation, and/or education of the audience about the subject matter itself.

As Barsam explained, the influx of the documentarian’s viewpoint on a film is an important part of documentary as “it is a film with a message” and the documentarian’s role is to create “an effective blend of entertainment and instruction” as “he wants to persuade, to influence, and to change his audience” (Barsam 4-5). That being said, Barsam also noted that in order for the film to retain its classification as a “nonfiction film” and not stray toward the “fictional film,” the documentarian’s viewpoint had to remain subjugated to the point that it did not “take precedence over the other aspects of

the film” (Barsam 5). Consequently, through the course of my study, it became clear that regardless of how well the information and testimony of subjects might have been authenticated, the subjugation, or lack thereof, of the documentarian’s viewpoint was the key determining factor in identifying the level of truthiness present in any given scene. During the private seminar at San Jose State University, Moore discussed the role his opinion has played in the construction of his films and the audiences he has attempted to reach through his work:

“Of course I want you to support universal health care for everyone, I want you to believe that [the war in Iraq] is wrong, I wanted you to vote for [Barack] Obama. Of course, I want all these things. My films work on two levels for two different groups of people: it works for the choir, the ‘church’, that is already with me. And that’s cool because I think the choir needs a song to sing...But at the same time I think there are people in the theater that aren’t quite sure, so I want to make my best effort to them...to just kind of lay it out and say ‘here’s the situation’” (Moore).

Moore’s statements represent the viewpoint of many of modern documentarians in that they have a distinct opinion about their subjects and are equally concerned with educating the audience as they are with persuading the audience that their viewpoint on the subject matter is the most appropriate. This type of approach to documentary filmmaking is one that conflicts with the approach used by many earlier documentarians, including Albert Maysles, who discussed why he felt that the subjugation of the documentarian’s viewpoint in the construction of a documentary film was so important:

I react strongly against the so-called ‘point-of-view’ documentary because I think that it limits the outcome to the point of view that you start with, no matter what that is...I feel that in a documentary film, which has one obligation above all, it has to be factual. For me, it has a second obligation, that is, to be fair so if there’s a judgement [*sic*] to be made, it should come from the viewer. And, the viewer should have a good deal of information from which to make the judgement [*sic*]. (Quoted in Bell 1999: 255) (Saunders 97).

In Maysles’ view, the primary goal of the documentarian is to put their personal opinions aside and, as Butchart put it, “create unbiased depictions” of their subjects in order to allow the audience to make their own judgments (Butchart 428-429).

Based on my research, I believe that much of Maysles’ expectations for the creation of a “factual,” non-opinionated film is no longer achievable in the contemporary documentary film. It is true that contemporary audiences still expect a high level of authenticity from their documentarians as they enter the theater with the expectation of being presented with an ample amount of statistics, expert testimony, and reliable footage in order to make their own judgments of the subjects presented. However, audiences also now *expect* their documentarians to have an opinion about their subjects. The fact that each of the documentarians I studied used at least one of the markers of authenticity primarily in a manner of truthiness reflects an inherent attempt to fulfill that expectation. In recent years, some American politicians have been crucified in the public realm for being “flip-floppers,” as those that either take no stance or repeatedly change their

position on an issue. Whether they agree or disagree with their opinion, Americans hold a higher level of respect for their politicians if they actually *take* a stand on an issue. The public no longer views a neutral stance as respectably objective: they view it as dull and boring, as it does not facilitate discussion on a subject as well as an opinionated stance. Similarly, Americans want their documentarians to convey an opinion about their subjects as an opinionated take on a subject is more entertaining and provides fuel for more stimulating discussion. That being said, some of Maysles' concerns are still valid and documentarians must be wary of compiling their films in a manner that is too truthy; one where the documentarian's argument is so overwhelming that the film becomes a personal diatribe, drowning out the factual, educational information that is required for the film to fit the traditional definition of a "documentary."

Suggestions for Future Research

My research was primarily based on a content analysis of contemporary documentaries and, with the exception of the few quotations from Michael Moore, lacked direct commentary from the documentarians themselves. Given the time and the proper access, further research that included interviews with each of the documentarians I studied could result in a more comprehensive exploration of the intentions each documentarian had when compiling their films. This type of research could also yield some insight into whether the documentarians realized that they have made consistent use of the markers of authenticity I identified in this thesis, and, if so, how they used those markers to enhance the authenticity of their film or further propagate truthiness.

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