

CJN 691: Media Effects
Final Exam Essay Questions

In addition to the multiple choice/short answer exam, please prepare the following essay questions. **One** of these questions will appear on the exam, which you will write in essay form in a blue book. You **may not** bring notes to the exam, but you may find it useful to study by writing an outline or mock response. Be sure to be as specific as possible and use examples to clarify your answer.

Essay Questions

A lot of attention has been paid lately to the causes of obesity, excessive thinness, the sexualization of teen and pre-teen girls, and the increase in smoking among young people. Although media are not the sole cause of unhealthy habits, explain what role the media have played in promoting poor health in the United States. Your answer should include issues of eating, addictive substances and sexuality, referring to material covered in class and in the textbook. When you look at the world in which you live, do you feel the media promotes unhealthy living? Use examples to illustrate your answer.

The main criticism of Steven Johnson's book, *Everything Bad is Good for You*, is an issue of validity. He claims that the increasing complexity of (some) television and (some) video games is actually improving our cognitive skills – making us smarter – and thus “bad” popular culture shouldn't be so quickly dismissed. However, many social scientists have argued that Johnson never clearly defines intelligence and, worse yet, does not provide evidence that understanding the intricate plot twists and multiple storylines of shows like *Lost* demonstrates increases in intellect. His supporters counter argue that what Johnson is really discussing is a new kind of intelligence, cultivated by popular culture and the multi-tasking world of today, so old definitions and measures of intellect do not apply. What do you think? Ground your comments in the scientific method, evaluating Johnson's thesis and conclusions by how solid his method. In addition to questions of validity, does Johnson's work hold up to questions of reliability? Can his conclusions be broadly applied (deduction) or do they only work in specific cases (induction)? I'm not asking for a full review (you did that already), but more specifically for your critique of his work as an example of solid or weak social science. Just a few points will suffice.