COMMUNICATION RESEARCH METHODS – CM321 EXERCISE 1 – PEER REVIEW Reading, understanding, and critically evaluating the work of others is an important component of research that lies at both ends of the study process: Before beginning a new project, researchers should review the existing literature on their subject and identify both the current state of understanding, and gaps or deficiencies in past research. Then, once the study is complete, it is typical for any findings to be subjected to intensive review by the researchers’ peers before they are published. WHAT WILL YOU DO? For this exercise, you will take on the role of a peer reviewer for a published piece of communication research. While you will continue to grow your understanding of effective research methods throughout this course, you already have the conceptual tools to begin to evaluate the methods used by others. STEP 1: SELECT A PUBLICATION First, choose a publication to evaluate. This can be any journal article, conference paper, or other peer-reviewed publication that is relevant to the field of communication research. If you’re not sure where to start, try looking through recent publications of flagship communication journals for something that looks interesting to you: • Journal of Communication • New Media & Society • Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly • Social Media + Society • International Journal of Communication • Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication • Human Communication Research (You may want to seek out a publication that is also related to the topic of your final presentation, so that you can re-use your notes from this exercise!) Make sure to indicate the publication that you decide on when you turn in your review! STEP 2: READ AND ANNOTATE Next, read through the publication thoroughly and take notes. You may choose to either take bullet-point notes on another page, or to annotate the article directly, whichever approach is more natural for you. As you read through the publication, keep a few key questions in mind: 1) What are the authors of this publication trying to say? What broad questions are they trying to answer? 2) What theories are they referencing or drawing upon? 3) Is this research exploratory, confirmatory, or both? • If the research is exploratory, what research questions are the authors addressing? • If the research is confirmatory, what hypotheses are the authors testing? 4) What variables are the authors dealing with? • How are they defined? • What are the relationships between them? • How are they measured and at what level of measurement? 5) What conclusions do the authors come to? • So what? Your notes at this stage need not be overly detailed or organized. These should just be your raw first impressions after reading through the article. STEP 3: SUMMARIZE AND ORGANIZE COMMENTS Once you have read through the publication, go back over your notes and flag any sources of concern so that you can point these out in your review. Some examples: • Claims made by the authors that didn’t seem to be supported • Conceptual or operational definitions of variables that didn’t seem valid • Methods that seem ethically problematic • Components of the study that you don’t feel comfortable evaluating STEP 4: WRITE YOUR REVIEW In practice, peer review can take many different forms, from lengthy essays to short notes exchanged between reviewers. Some organizations use standardized questionnaires to try and ensure consistency between reviewers. For this review, you will be provided with a questionnaire and asked to fill out each section to the best of your ability (one paragraph per section). WHAT TO SUBMIT • The filled-out questionnaire • word or pdf file • name the file “yourlastname\_exercise1” (e.g., “dederichs\_exercise1”) • Notes or annotated article • name the file “yourlastname\_notes1” • Reference for your article (in comments section) • Example: Kramer, A. D., Guillory, J. E., & Hancock, J. T. (2014). Experimental evidence of massive-scale emotional contagion through social networks. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 111(24), 8788- 8790. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1320040111 • Make sure to include the link WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR? The purpose of peer review is twofold: 1. A good review helps the editors of a journal, the organizers of a conference, or the administrators of a funding agency to decide the merit of the study in its current form. 2. A good review also provides valuable feedback to the authors of a study that they may incorporate into a revised version or as a basis for improvement in their future research. From your review, a reader should be able to get a clear sense of: • What hypotheses or research questions are addressed by the publication o What the relevant variables are o What the proposed relationships are between them • What conclusions were reached by the authors of the publication o What answers were given to any research questions o Whether any hypotheses were supported • Whether those conclusions have practical significance • What ethical concerns were raised by the study o How those ethical concerns could be addressed • What limitations were apparent in the approach taken by the authors o How these limitations could be addressed • Which parts of the publication you were able to evaluate and which you weren’t. WHAT WILL YOU LEARN? From going through the process of evaluating a research publication through the lens of a peer reviewer, I am expecting that you will learn: • How to read and evaluate scientific publications • What elements make scientific reporting easy or difficult to understand • How social scientists support their conclusions with evidence • How to consider ethical problems that may arise during the research process HOW WILL YOU BE EVALUATED? Each section of your review will be graded on a scale of 5 according to the following rubric: (Note: I don’t expect you to give a rigorous critique of the methods used in the study, and you won’t be graded on your methodological or statistical knowledge at this point. Rather, you should be able to identify those parts of the publication that you don’t yet feel ready to critique, as part of the last section of your review. This is a common expectation among peer reviewers, even those who are experienced and well-established researchers!)