

Conspiracy theories in *Loose Change**

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After September 11th, several conspiracy theories arose, with a primary assumption of the government's involvement in the terrorism attacks. With the release of the controversial documentary film, *Loose Change* (Avery, 2003), this particular conspiracy theory climaxed. The film suggests several conspiracy theories; its primary assumption is that the government planned and orchestrated the attacks on the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon on September 11. Dylan Avery and Korey Rowe's online documentary influenced many of its viewers and convinced them to adopt their beliefs. Some believers have created websites adopting Avery's theories, while others such as ScrewLooseChange.com have refuted their ideas. Skeptics however, dispute and question the film. The film *Loose Change* does not provide sufficiently credible arguments that the government took part in the events of September 11, 2001. The film's unreliable sources, poor editing techniques, narration, music, and faulty logics themselves all contributed to its failure. Successful use of these techniques is essential in swaying the viewer's overall experience and believability of the film. If these techniques were better utilized, the director's message may have been more effective to a larger group of people. Overall, the film's power, believability, and credibility as a documentary would be enhanced if director Dylan Avery took careful consideration of these aspects.

Believability is an important factor in producing documentaries such as *Loose Change*. Viewers must trust the director's sources and how he uses these sources to make the film believable and therefore successful. With conspiracy theory documentaries documents, articles, and video footage are extremely important in order to make a convincing statement. Most of the documents shown here are never cited. Viewers see the article itself,

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but the source of the website is not revealed. Sources displayed at the end of the film are no more than a listing of websites, such as Wikipedia. With only such a listing, viewers are not informed what information is credited to which website, if any. For example, the film's opening information about the history of our government's participation in terrorist acts lacks sources; viewers have no sense of credibility. Certain sound clips (as the one by Jenny Carr, who apparently in a building across the street from one of the World Trade Centers caught sounds of explosions on tape) lack explanation. Who is Jenny Carr? And why should we believe her? Why is there no evidence or pictures accompanying her clip? Other sound clips sounded falsely recorded, with background noises inconsistent to the film's events. Websites are also notoriously unreliable as other sources, such as published books or film. The medium as a whole can be untrustworthy because so many outsiders can edit, add, or subtract information. "But there's a big problem with *Loose Change* and with most other conspiracy theories. The more you think about them, the more you realize how much they depend on circumstantial evidence, facts without analysis or documentation, quotes taken out of context and the scattered testimony of traumatized eyewitnesses" (Grossman, 2006). One of *Loose Change*'s cited websites used throughout the film is Wikipedia. Wikipedia is one of the most unreliable sources on the Internet today. Wikipedia is untrustworthy since anyone can log onto the site and edit certain subjects, with no one knowing where or how the information was gathered or changed. News footage used in the film is questionable as well, and not cited. One scene in particular discredits the documentary. Avery injects a clip of an Asian flight attendant on the phone reporting the hijack as the sound clip plays. However, the clip of the woman is does not come from any September 11th, footage, but instead is a clip from the Japanese version of *The Grudge, Ju-on* (Shimizu, 2003). As viewers we are subject to believe what we see in this documentary as truth, but what we are taking as truth from *Loose Change* is never credited to particular sources. As a result, many do not buy into Avery's theories. "Much of Avery's film has been debunked even by fellow 9/11 skeptics, and some of its theories verge on the bizarre" (Manjoo, 2006). Director, Dylan Avery, could have more credibility had he cited web page sources, people, and film and news clips. The title and web addresses should have clearly listed, examined, and detailed for viewers in order to give credit and reliable proof of an actual site. The names and positions of the people interviewed should have been both listed and stated by the narrator. Most importantly, the film and news clips, should have

complete listings of where they were found, who released them to *Loose Change*, and when and where they were shot, not to mention the clips should only be September 11th footage rather than clips from movies. Perhaps visual footnotes during the film would add to the viewer's believability of the film. Had these things been incorporated into the documentary, *Loose Change* would have been more effective.

These discreditable sources, as well as other scenes, are also edited poorly, adding to the poor quality of the documentary. Certain websites are presented with articles and statements made by several witnesses, and government officials, but are not credited, and have poor visual quality. "For evidence, they mainly point to grainy photographs, dubious sources, and quotes taken out of context" (Sullivan, Latif, & Morrison 2006). These statements are highlighted in certain areas, and the surrounding text is blacked out so we cannot read the documents in their entirety. Certain quotes highlighted in white, and gray are difficult for the audience to read. We ultimately read what he wants us to read. "A documentary brings with it automatically a sense that what you're seeing is true," said Syracuse University adjunct professor and filmmaker David Coryell. "The fact is that documentaries are almost never neutral. They are a matter of many choices made by the filmmakers" (Seely, 2006). Some editing techniques displayed quotes, and then scratch them out with a white squiggly line to imply the quotes were false. Some reviewers believe that *Loose Change* can be set apart from other 9/11 pieces because it is so visually pleasing, slyly edited, and easily accessible on the internet. Critics also consider the film to have "an anti-authoritarian edge that might appeal to someone who admires Michael Moore or Jon Stewart" (Curiel, 2006). This also discredits the film, and gives viewers an immature, unprofessional feeling. Documents shown throughout the entire documentary are also grainy, blurry, and difficult to read. Since the web-based documents are the most important evidence next to the footage, they should be clear and legible. Poor zoom-in effects are evident when certain maps were displayed, and lacked smoothness. To transition from certain scenes is another poor editing technique used. The blue waves were used to transition scenes. These waves, which resembled a screensaver, were unnecessary and tacky transitional pieces. During one scene viewers listen to a tape of what happened with the policemen and firemen during the attack and implosion of the World Trade Centers. We see the narrator put the cassette into the cassette player. This scene gives the impression that the documentary is homemade. Perhaps the worst

editing skills surface during footage of the supposed explosions in the World Trade Centers. To display the explosions, Avery tinted the background, and the World Trade Centers blue. He also added small boxes to outline the explosions. However, the explosions within the boxes are shown in black and white, making it difficult to view the explosions. Based on editing skills presented, viewers are either instantaneously persuaded, or unconvinced. Because editing is an essential component that forms documents shown should be clear and reliable; the background and text should be black and white, and the highlighted quotes be in yellow, rather than in gray or white (with the background black). Three-dimensional computerized transitions, and special effect tools should be avoided, and smooth cuts should be incorporated instead. The narrator should never be present, especially their hand to put a cassette in a cassette player. As an alternative the narrator's hand should be omitted, and the shot should display the policemen and firemen who were conversing rather than a cassette player. This adds credibility to the scene, and is a more effective informative tool. In order for viewers to see the suggested explosions in the World Trade Centers, the entire scene should be in color (including the boxed in explosions) and tightly framed to make the explosions more visible, apparent, and emotionally convincing to the audience.

Dylan Avery was not only unsuccessful with his editing tactics, but with his narrating skills as well. Narrators are an essential component of a documentary. Unfortunately, Dylan Avery's narration fails to do so in *Loose Change*. First and foremost, his voice is unconvincing because the audience can easily identify him as young. Narrators such as Morgan Freeman in *March of the Penguins* (Jacquet, 2005), are extremely convincing since we can identify with him from his previous works, we trust him, his age is a convincing factor as someone older and wiser, and most importantly, because he has experience speaking to audiences. Dylan Avery lacks these vital qualities. During several scenes of *Loose Change*, Avery's narration sounds as if he is reading it from a script, with awkward pauses. His youthful twenty-three year old voice fails to sell as a documentary as well. The script itself contains simple words and sentences, which are unconvincing and juvenile. Avery has several lines which discredit and lack authority and professionalism in the film, such as "For your consideration," "Guess what?," "A.k.a.," "Do ya still believe...?," "Check it out," "Fragile material known as paper," "Oooh, that's right," and "Are you angry yet? You should be." Slang such as "a.k.a." and "ya" discredit not only the

narrator, but also the documentary as whole and the audience becomes unconvinced. Not only does Avery make poor language choices throughout the documentary, but he curses as well. Avery says, "Give a damn" during a scene, gives little effect to the story. Cursing in the film and by the narrator is probably a poor choice with the subject matter he has chosen. Had Dylan Avery hired a noteworthy person, or a better, older speaker to narrate, *Loose Change* would have been more persuasive, influential, and convincing as a documentary.

Soundtracks are strong, influential tools in the filmmaking. Techno music is commonly used in scenes to portray either a dance sequence, or a when something is spiraling out of control, like in *Requiem for a Dream* (Aronofsky, 2000), *Run Lola Run* (Tykwer, 1998), or *Groove* (Harrison, 2000). Some dramatic scenes in *Loose Change* have techno music playing as the soundtrack. Rarely is techno used in documentaries to add emphasis to scenes. This genre of music is inappropriate and distasteful for a film about 9/11. Dylan Avery uses unknown disk jockeys such as DJ Skooly, Nick Tha 1DA, SWAE, and SMOKE. The music is present throughout the duration of the documentary. Avery first injects the techno music in *Loose Change* in scenes showing the collapse of several buildings. His choice of music fails to lend a message to the film. It does not support any of the scenes in the documentary. Dylan Avery's music selection for *Loose Change* gave the documentary an adolescent feel, and gave a vibe that the events of September 11th were childish out of control and outrageous, rather than tragic and involved the government. A more appropriate soundtrack would have included instrumental music. Instrumental music would have added a solemn, more sophisticated touch to the film. With instrumental music, audiences' acceptance of conspiracy theory of the documentary is enhanced. The scenes where Avery added techno music as viewers watched the World Trade Centers fall, or when the planes hit the buildings, should have been left silent to add a more poetic feel to the documentary. Overall, *Loose Change* would have been more successful had instrumental music been used.

Loose Change might have been better composed and believable had certain things been tweaked or replaced. Conspiracy theories in general can be hard for some viewers to grasp, or believe. However convincing some of the scenes might be, they are still outlandish claims. Some of Avery's theories have already been disputed and proven wrong. Periodically, Avery's narration during a

scene contradicts the footage or picture shown. For example, when Avery suggests right before the World Trade Centers collapsed one sees the government pushing objects out of the windows. One can clearly recognize that what is falling out of the windows are in fact, people. Another outrageous claim is that no one was on board United Flight 93 because no bodies or blood was found. Since the plane exploded on impact, it is highly unlikely for bodies, or blood to remain. As for the people who were reported as dead or missing from United Flight 93 had they not been on the plane, where are they now? "The only thing they (the filmmakers) seem to have gotten right about the Sept. 11 attacks is the date when they occurred," says Debra Burlingame, whose brother was the pilot of American Flight 77 that crashed into the Pentagon" (Welch, 2006). If they are back at home with their families wouldn't someone recognize them and report it? What are the chances that the government would be able to pull off an operation of that size, which would require hundreds or military and civilian participants without being caught? Without leaving any evidence behind? Although these are just some glitches of the conspiracies, why would the government do this to us? Another supposed fault was the theory that the Twin Towers collapsed due to governmentally planned explosions. "**The Claim:** Explosives brought down the Twin Towers. Critics of the official explanation point to such clues as the pattern and timing of dust and debris blown out from the floors, the vertical fall of the towers and two seismic tremors that coincided with their collapse. **The Facts:** The impact of the Boeing 767s damaged support columns and steel floor trusses, causing the inward collapse of perimeter columns, which pulled floors straight down. A misquote of a demolition expert propagated the explosives *theory*. Seismic spikes, caused by debris hitting the ground, were recorded 10 sec. after each tower started to fall" (Masters, 2006). Dylan Avery and Korey Rowe's techniques were not sufficient, smooth, and creditable; nor did they convince the audience that their conspiracies they had are true. "For all its amateur production values--it was created by a pair of industrious twenty-somethings using a laptop, pizza money and footage scavenged from the Internet" (Grossman, 2006). Their theories would have been more effective had their sources been credited properly, their editing skills been better and more professional, used instrumental music instead of techno, and chosen a different figure other than the director as narrator.

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