ABSTRACT

THESIS: Performing Gender Reveal Parties on Social Media

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It was not unusual for parents to celebrate the gender of the baby upon its birth. This would present itself not through a party, but rather by putting signs in lawns and taking cigars into work that are wrapped with blue or pink bands to correspond with the child's gender. A fairly recent phenomena, gender reveal parties are the sharing and celebration of a child's sex before it is born made possible through ultrasound technology. Another unique aspect of the gender reveal party phenomenon is that while it occurs in face-to-face parties, the wide appeal and impact that it is having is because it is broadly consumed through the digital space of social media. Using a content analysis of 200 online videos of gender reveal party, this study addresses the following questions: who participates in these parties, where are they held, how often they are viewed (as a measure of potential impact of media effects), what are the emotional reactions of those who attend the parties, and what is the intensity of these emotions? Using the theoretical lenses of dramaturgical performance, impression management, and ritual, findings suggest that in gender reveal parties, participant racial background is diverse, virality is common, and the level of emotional extremity displayed in videos is indicative of the emotional ritual buildup. This study helps to put the abstract social media trend of gender reveal parties into a larger theoretical context and explore the emotional path and implications of the ritual and

performance. The findings suggest that in gender reveal parties, participant racial background is diverse, virality is common, and the level of emotional extremity displayed in videos is indicative of the emotional ritual buildup.