

Carolinas Communication Annual

Volume XXX

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IN MEMORIAM

In Memory of Lloyd Rohler
Richard Olsen

CRITICAL ESSAYS AND RESEARCH REPORTS

Republican Motherhood, Black Militancy, and Scorching Irony in
Sara Stanley's "What, to the Toiling Millions There, Is This Boasted Liberty?"
Jason Edward Black & Adam J. Sharples

Voices of Grassroots Activists: Dollars and Sense in the City
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Communicating Community:
A Culture-Centered Approach to Racial/Ethnic (In)equality
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The "Typical" in Stereotypical: How Black Masculinity Trumps Black Womanhood in *The Ultimate Merger*
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Sibling Communication in Emerging Adulthood:
Young Women's Articulations of Relationships, Identity and Conflict
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GIFTS INC (GREAT IDEAS FOR TEACHING STUDENTS IN THE CAROLINAS)

Using *The Hunger Games* to Teach Impression Management Theory
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Musical Thesis Statements
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Editorial Policy (2015)

The *Carolinas Communication Annual*, the peer-reviewed, state/regional journal published by the Carolinas Communication Association (representing both North Carolina and South Carolina), accepts the submission of scholarly articles (both critical essays and research reports) on an ongoing basis. While articles by authors in the Carolinas and about topics relevant to the Carolinas and the surrounding region are particularly relevant for this journal, the call is open to authors from around the country, and to a wide range of topics from multiple methodologies and perspectives within the larger Communication Studies disciplines. Furthermore, the journal is interested in submissions regarding pedagogical ideas for our GIFTS INC (Great Ideas for Teaching Students in the Carolinas) area. Those submissions should generally be modeled after activity essays published in *Communication Teacher*.

Critical essays and research reports should generally be no longer than 6000-7000 words in length and should follow the latest editions of MLA, Chicago, or APA style manuals. GIFTS INC essays should generally be no longer than 2000 words also utilizing a specific citation style. Authors should submit their essays electronically (in Word format) to the editor at jmunsell@columbiasc.edu by May 11, 2015. Please include abstract, author identification information and correspondence information in a separate cover sheet or cover letter to ensure blind review. Authors should only submit one work per year to the Annual and the work should not be under review with any other journal. Authors should also note in the cover letter the history of the submitted essay as well as indications that, when necessary, the research meets ethical standards of research (ex., IRB approval if relevant). The editor reserves the right to reject any submission that does not meet the basic standards above or seems to indicate a lack of ethical work.

The *Annual* became contracted with EBSCO in 2014 and the journal's acceptance rate is appropriately 25%.

Jason Brian Munsell, Editor
Carolinas Communication Annual
Communication Studies Program
Columbia College
1301 Columbia College

Editor's Letter

Dear Members and Readers,

I am pleased to present the 2014 volume of the *Carolinas Communication Annual*. Using Roman Numerals, therefore, this is indeed Volume XXX; but I promise there is no smut in these pages, only excellent scholarship. This is the second year of my three year term and I continue to be blessed with so many wonderful colleagues who support my service with their own. We have a somewhat new and expanded editorial board. As always, I'm very thankful to the reviewers for their generous service to the Carolinas Communication Association. Additionally, this is the second year for our new section called GIFTS INC (or Great Ideas for Teaching Students in the Carolinas). I have envisioned these essays modeled after activity essays in *Communication Teacher* and useful in my own meager pedagogical practices. I'm delighted that we were able to accept more GIFTS INC essays this year. Indeed, you will notice that the journal has more essays than usual and our treasurer will likely kill me, but the level of quality of our submissions warranted the number of essays. Each essay submitted goes through a rigorous blind review process; and our rejection rate was quite high again with only about a 25-30% acceptance rate. Readers might also note the continued new look of the journal. I reformatted a few things last year, but I have continued to work with Sun Printing to make our journal look more like other academic journals published by NCA and other, larger regional organizations.

Additionally, I'm very thankful to inform the reader that for the first time in the journal's history we will be indexed. We have now contracted with EBSCO to be searchable on their appropriate databases. We are not yet searchable at the time of the writing of this brief letter, but EBSCO assures me we will be up and running soon (it takes some time it seems). In fact, the whole matter was no small feat. I'm so very thankful to the helpful folks at EBSCO, the CCA officers who helped me deal with contractual issues, and Dr. Laurie Hopkins, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Columbia College for allowing me to use Columbia College's physical address for the contract. There was some hemming and hawing amongst us officer types about which physical address to use and what the legal ramifications might be; but we decided on Columbia College. EBSCO has told us the physical address doesn't matter all that much anyway and we can change it as editorship changes.

As with all of our volumes, this one is diverse and authors come from the Carolinas, but also throughout the country. Methodologies and approaches and topics are, too, diverse. I will let the essays speak for themselves and will refrain from a play by play introduction. However, I do want to offer a note about our first piece, an *in memoriam*. We have a tradition of doing this in our journal and it is right and fitting that we do so. We mourn the loss of longtime CCA member, Lloyd Rohler. I appreciate Richard Olsen for penning a moving tribute.

I am very pleased with the quality and diversity of this volume of our Annual and I hope readers find the works useful. Readers might notice, as well, a goodly number of co-authored paper and papers co-authored by faculty and students. It just sort of worked out that way, but I think it is telling about the nature of our membership and submitters as Teachers/Scholars.

One final note of thanks to my tech guru friend, Angie White; she helped me a great deal with some technical formatting issues as she did last year. I'm also once again thankful to Sun Solutions for printing the journal. And as I wrote last year, I do hope everything, after printed, is in good shape. I did my best to catch all typos and generally ensure that essays were well written and conformed to stylistic standards. In the end, though, if readers see any errors whatsoever, I will refuse to blame myself.

Sincerely,
Jason Brian Munsell
Columbia, South Carolina
September 2014

Remembering Lloyd Rohler

Richard Olsen

“For all of my adult life I have been a teacher. I enjoy teaching. My role as a teacher defines me. I am still growing as a teacher as I meet new students who have different life experiences. I enjoy talking to them and gaining new perspectives. I think teachers must be very adaptive to their students.”

- Dr. Lloyd E. Rohler, 2006 Post-Tenure Review

Dr. Lloyd E. Rohler (November 10, 1945 –May 23, 2014) had an expansive and full academic and professional career. In 1968 Rohler received his B.A. in English at Indiana University and continued on to earn his M.A. in Speech (1971) and Ph.D. in Speech-American Studies (1977). While completing his Ph.D., Rohler worked as Assistant Professor/Director of Debate at Hanover College – Hanover, IN (1973-1977). Upon completion of his Ph.D. Dr. Rohler became Assistant Professor/Director of Debate at Duke University – Durham, NC (1977-1982) before settling in to his position at UNC Wilmington in the Fall of 1982.

Throughout his career at UNC Wilmington, Dr. Rohler delivered yearly presentations at and was deeply involved in communication association conferences including NCA, SCA, CCA, CSCA, ACA and more. He published multiple written works including reviews for the *Southern States Communication Journal* and three books; *Great Speeches for Criticism and Analysis* with co-author Roger Cook (Alistair Press. 1988), which is now on its 5th edition as of June 2013, *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Preacher and Lecturer* (Greenwood Press. 1995) and *George Wallace: Conservative Populist* (Greenwood Press. 2004). He also worked closely with the Educational Video Group beginning in 1986 publishing essays to accompany their video series “Great Speeches.” To complete these works of publication, UNCW presented Dr. Rohler with a number of awards and grants including the Summer Initiative Grant, Faculty Research Reassignment Award and the Charles L. Cahill Award for Faculty Research and Development. Outside of the university Dr. Rohler also received the Betty Jo Welch Award presented by the Carolinas Communication Association in 2001. He was also the editor of the *Journal of Communication and Religion*.

In his post-tenure review in Spring 2006, Dr. Rohler defined himself as a teacher and despite his many other accomplishments that was the role he enjoyed most. Dr. Rohler was involved in the students’ academics. He served as Internship Director, oversaw multiple DIS students, was a Graduate School representative, coordinated the American Studies Minor, and took part in the Honors Scholars program and Cornerstone Learning Communities program. Over his thirty years of teaching at UNCW numerous graduating seniors identified Dr. Rohler as having had a significant impact on them during their academic careers.

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So many in fact, that the Dean of CAS remarked in the notification letter “it comes as no surprise to me that you have once again been recognized by graduating seniors.” And these student comments didn’t waiver over the years. Despite his calm demeanor there remained a sparkle in the eyes and genuine excitement for the teaching-learning process and the concepts he was helping students to encounter.

Since Lloyd’s love of teaching may have only been challenged by his love of books, I’ll say that my relationship with Lloyd had many chapters. I was a student of his for several classes early in his career at UNCW. Of our many interactions, two moments stand out. First, he had us read *In Cold Blood* and then engage in a mock trial as a means of applying what we were learning about argumentation. Staying up late with my legal team trying to work the “if they say this, then we’ll say that” plan for cross examination out on index cards was impactful. Second, he elaborated in class on the rhetoric of cults. While doing so, he acted as a recruiter for a cult. With his calm demeanor he began to enact the rhetorical strategies he’d just outlined. My best friends and I left the class all saying “That was scary! I would have gotten in the van!”

He taught a lot of classes at UNCW. Doing some rough math at 30 year of teaching times 6 classes a year of 30 students each that’s about 5, 400 students. Lloyd was famous for giving essay exams of about 8 short essays each. And he gave exams at a minimum of twice a year. At 16 essays per student, he graded 86,000 essays. And he did all of this for a starting salary in 1982 of 22,500.

Lost in the numbers and his calm demeanor is the fact that Lloyd was also an innovator. He helped launch the Great Speeches series long before the integration of media into pedagogy was common place. He also was one of the first faculty members at UNCW to have a web presence and to post his student essays to the internet. He was doing wikis and blogs before the terms even existed.

I later was fortunate enough to join the faculty at UNCW and the next chapter with Lloyd began. He was quite but not without strong commitments to what he thought was right and true. On those occasions when he was compelled to share his perspective he was measured but eloquent, passionate but reasoned and we were a better department for it. He mentored on both content and pedagogy and a personal highlight was co-authoring a book chapter on failed rhetoric. His encyclopedic mind and experience were invaluable resources, yet he did not dominate the co-authorship.

The third chapter was when I assumed the role of department chair. Chairing folks you once took classes from could be, as they say . . . “awwwwwwkward!” But neither Lloyd nor others whom I took classes from made that transition difficult. Lloyd was supportive and never “pulled rank” even when things did not go his way. At one point Lloyd suffered a small stroke that led to a serious fall in which he broke his neck. His efforts to return to the classroom after his surgery were amazing. Even while in the hospital, partially sedated his concern was for his students. As I went to visit him to talk about his classes he was reminding me (while adjusting tubes and his pillows) exactly what was being covered, what was due and reminding me to assure the students all was OK. The welfare of his students’ learning remained his central concern.

Unfortunately, the complications from his accident were never fully overcome and led to his retirement. His life remained rich as several years earlier he had bought a used book store with his daughter, Gwennyfar. She,

like her dad, is an eclectic lover of books and local culture. At the celebration of his life (held at the bookstore) Gwenyfar shared a story that her father was working the register one summer day when a potential customer came in. Lloyd conversed adroitly with the customer resulting in a sale. When Gwenyfar commented on his salesmanship Lloyd replied with a laugh “Gwenyfar, I’ve been teaching rhetoric for 30 years. I ought to be able to sell a book!”

Since rhetoric has been compared to love and lovers, I’ll conclude with this. Lloyd was a lover of teaching, Lloyd was a lover of books and ideas, but most fundamentally, Lloyd was a lover of people and goodwill toward others. Our longtime administrative assistant, Patsy Odom, captures this well:

“As the department secretary in Communication Studies, I found Dr. Rohler to be the lowest maintenance of all the faculty members I served. He just mostly took care of himself. Yet, even though I did little work for him, he never neglected gift-giving on Administrative Assistants Day or Christmas. Something else I will always remember are his frequent inquiries of concern about my son, a UNCW student at the time. Dr. Rohler offered thoughtful suggestions for enhancing my son’s college experience. Lloyd was a pleasure to work with, and I am proud to have known him.”

Additionally, Bruce McKinney, a longtime colleague of Lloyd’s offered this remembrance which illustrates Lloyd’s integration of his family into his life as an academic:

“I remember quite clearly in 1990 when I came to interview for a position at UNCW. I was given a tour of Wilmington by Lloyd and his daughter. Evidently Lloyd had this tour well-rehearsed because Gwenyfar cut into the tour and was repeating everything Lloyd was saying. I could tell Lloyd was not amused, but in typical Lloyd fashion, he simply continued on. Later that night Lloyd and Dianna took me to my first dinner in the area which was at King Neptune’s in Wrightsville Beach. They did everything they could to make me feel comfortable; I thought they were such nice people. I was right. Throughout my career at UNCW Lloyd was my “go to” person. I knew no matter what problem I had Lloyd would silently listen (and man was he a good listener), smile and sometimes give me feedback, sometimes not. But I think he knew that by simply letting me get things off of my chest he was doing his part. Lloyd was one of the Earth’s gentle creatures, and the world was better off with him in it. He will be missed.”

Bruce’s insights and sentiments are echoed by another longtime colleague, Steve Pullum which perhaps speaks to the consistency of his care for others and his desire to bring them into not only his department family, but his own family as well:

“I remember Lloyd Rohler fondly. When I first interviewed for my position at UNCW in May, 1988, it was Lloyd who picked me up at the airport and gave me a brief tour of Wilmington and the surrounding

area. Later that summer when I moved to Wilmington, he and his young daughter Gwenyfar, who at the time was about eight years old, were there to help me unload my rental truck. That night he and his wife Diana, who preceded his death, invited my family and me in their home for dinner. Professionally, Lloyd was a mentor and a role model. If I ever had any questions about the tenure process, Lloyd was always there to offer advice. I knew if Lloyd said it, it must be right. I looked up to him as a scholar and teacher. His reputation had preceded him, and now I was his colleague. I felt honored to be on the faculty with him. On occasion I was able to watch him teach. I was struck by his intelligence and the lucidity with which he presented the material. Students were lucky to have sat at his feet. Even today, I occasionally quote Lloyd in my classes and reference some of his works as examples for students to follow. We miss him in our department. I miss his collegiality. Our department is certainly poorer without him.”

Lloyd’s impact on the discipline, the CAA and the UNCW department are significant but perhaps his most important legacy is more difficult to measure: his gentleness, his affirming nature, his encouragement to others, his humor, his careful engagement of the ideas of others. My hope is that we can internalize some of those characteristics into our own journeys as scholar-teachers as a way of honoring his memory.



Republican Motherhood, Black Militancy, and Scorching Irony in Sara Stanley's "What, to the Toiling Millions There, Is This Boasted Liberty?"

Jason Edward Black & Adam J. Sharples

This essay explores the ways that Black intellectual and abolitionist Sara Stanley's 1855 speech "What, to the Toiling Millions There, Is This Boasted Liberty?" directed appeals to her audience to act based on a maternal militancy that positioned Black women as empowered agents in terms of both familialism and morality. Moreover, we contend that she accomplished her powerful "charge" by enacting a Douglassian "scorching irony" wherein she spotlighted the hypocrisies of American ideological promises as they failed to manifest in lived Black experiences. The implications of such rhetorical moves point to the complicated positionalities of Black women, but concurrently locate nineteenth century Black women reformers' ethos at a nexus of political critic, militant agent, and familial/moral actor.

Keywords: African American Rhetoric; Black Women's Activism; Motherhood; Militancy; Enfranchisement

Oberlin College in the 1850s was a hotbed of progressive thought surrounding issues of Black liberation and women's rights. Indeed, the college was "one of only a handful of antebellum institutions" then available to Black men and both Black and White women (Lawson and Merrill 1984, 49). One of the strongest traditions at Oberlin was its teacher training program designed not just to place Black women into slave and free Black schools as instructors, but to inspire in these critical pedagogues an urgency to advocate for social change in Black communities.

One of the first graduates of Oberlin's teacher program was Sara Stanley, a free Black woman from New Bern, North Carolina who brought with her a familial tradition of reform related to the issue of enfranchisement for free Blacks. Stanley originally did not aim to work as a teacher. Rather, she attended Oberlin expressly for the purposes of accessing a safe, respected avenue through which she could impact the various pockets of the Black liberation movement. Weisenfeld writes that "for Stanley, failure to act on behalf of the slaves could not be tolerated in light of this infidelity [oppression] to the claim of Christian Democracy" (1995, 505). Stanley's response was to teach, and she did so by enlisting with the American Missionary Association, a religious organization that took on secular reform issues as a part of its guiding ideology.

At the time, roles for Black women in Black men's and White women's reform circles were severely limited. Access to the public for women overall was stymied, but for Black women, stereotypes of feminine weakness merged with dominant constructions of Black inferiority to mesh into a double oppression. That is, reform activity exposed them to the "scrutiny of whites and heightened the expectations" among Black men that they would fail.

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Even within like-minded groups (i.e., White women's abolitionist societies), Black Women's "participation was constrained by attitudes and conventions that they had little power to control" (Boylan 1994, 120). During the first half of the nineteenth century, some Black women were able to break through the double barrier to reach an audience on, at least, the issues of abolitionism and enfranchisement. In a way, lyceum speakers were trusted, approachable exceptions to the rule because they turned a blind eye to the auxiliary position into which Black male abolitionists and White abolitionists pushed them. These women tended to openly accept their roles as moral centers versus political firebrands; basically, they functioned as symbolic mothers. Though a gendered construction, the "moral center" allowed for some semblance of a rupture into reform circles. For instance, Hoganson argues that "moral participation in public life was not contrary to womanhood ... it was an essential condition of womanhood" (1993, 586). Public access was, therefore, not outright denied, but was unquestionably limited through motherhood.

This essay attends to the larger issue of Black women's public activism in the 1850s through a rhetorical strategy of motherhood. We are specifically interested in a brand of motherhood that balanced nurturing with vehemence and aggressive appeals. This was a type of motherhood that took advantage of Republican Motherhood (the empowered role of nineteenth century White women to teach their sons morals and community virtues) and the militant tradition of the Black liberation movement. Specifically, the essay engages Stanley's employment of militant motherhood as a rhetorical tactic to motivate a group of free Black men to fight for their own enfranchisement at an 1855 meeting of the State Convention of Colored Men (Columbus, Ohio).

We argue that Stanley's speech "What, to the Toiling Millions There, Is This Boasted Liberty?" directed appeals to her audience to act based on a maternal militancy that positioned Black women as empowered agents in terms of both familialism and morality. Moreover, we contend that she accomplished her powerful "charge" by enacting a Douglassian "scorching irony" wherein she spotlighted the hypocrisies of American ideological promises as they failed to manifest in lived Black experiences. The implications of such rhetorical moves point to the complicated positionalities of Black women, but concurrently located Black women's ethos at a nexus of political critic, militant agent, and familial/moral actor. The essay proceeds by briefly discussing the juncture of motherhood, militancy, and irony before turning to a rhetorical examination of Stanley's most famous speech. Implications are then offered for Stanley's case of militant motherhood.

Motherhood, Militancy and Scorching Irony as Cultural Frameworks

For the women of Oberlin, the classroom and Black women's reform groups became the vehicle through which they could enter the public sphere. Stanley engaged in both venues, and relied upon a moral center – that of a veritable mother figure – to engage in efforts to end slavery and encourage citizenship rights for free Black men. Note that such efforts of Black women typically elided gender reform for a focus on race reform. According to Sklar, while "many white and black women abolitionists spoke out against racial prejudice, black women dedicated themselves to the improvement of African American communities – a project that distinguished them from most, though not all, white abolitionist women" (2000, 10). Thus, Black women tended to work for abolitionism and enfranchisement to help improve the larger community. Undoubtedly, many engaged in women's reform efforts and even more aspired

to agitate for women's rights, as well. Clearly, though, a vast number of Black women worked in/with Black liberation efforts. Given the limited position that women like Stanley were offered, symbolic motherhood appeared to be a vigorous way to enter the reform conversation. These empowered roles seem counterintuitive considering what historians have pointed to as numerous "constraints" on Black women's voices (Hoganson 1993, 586). Still, as Yee contends, "adherence to these [motherly] virtues, which supposedly gave women the power and responsibility to maintain morality within the household, served as the model for constructing a female sphere of influence in public activism" (1992, 40).

The rhetorical tactic of motherhood was incredibly powerful for Black and White women in the nineteenth century. This is so for many reasons. First, if women's standing was rooted in the domestic sphere, then relying on the positive qualities of nurturing and care could potentially become a safe way to engage in public issues. Peebles and DeLuca write that "[r]eferences to motherhood mark women's roles in giving and maintaining life ... the 'good mother' means performing activities outside the home" that model the inside (2006, 69). In a way then, motherhood comported with gender norms of the time, but functioned through detournement to turn around those norms for the empowerment of women.¹ Second, motherhood was oftentimes figured as a universal dimension of human life – biological and social. Motherhood could provide additional gendered ethos for Black women, in particular. Harris contends that in "terms of race, motherhood provided a point of unification beyond racial difference. The constructed persona of the mother remained relatively stable across races" (2009, 312). Third, motherhood, as a universal experience, functioned as a type of pathos to recruit women to get involved in reform efforts. The "mother" proved useful in abolitionist campaigns and was frequently employed to attract women to roles where they could motivate change among the male leadership of community efforts (Sanchez-Eppler 1988, 32). Speaking of changing the perceptions of male reformers, these male leaders could relate to the universal "mother," especially in an age steeped in Republican Motherhood.

Republican Motherhood

Motherhood as a mode of ethos strengthened in an American context during the Revolutionary period with the idea that women would raise up the next generation of male leaders. Through Republican Motherhood, mothers provided their sons the moral grounding to "civilize them and soften them, to instill republican virtue" (Allgor 2000, 55). The paradox here was that women were publicly disempowered, but could train up men to hold the very power women lacked. According to Allgor, though, women "were promised extensive influence through social dominance" (2000, 55). (Here, "social" or "domestic" as descriptors fill in for public or political, as public and political spheres were reserved for men.) Republican Motherhood was mostly a middle-class and upper-class White construction, but the normalization of the domestic sphere following the Revolutionary period popularized the role of women as the purveyors of family morals for both White women and free Black women of all classes. Ultimately, nineteenth century women's roles were "couched in women's superior moral virtue [and] ... this supposed moral virtue opened

¹ Detournement, popularized by cultural studies scholar Guy Debord, is a "resistive rhetorical strategy through which subaltern groups appropriate dominant discourses and turn them around to expose the problems and duplicity of these discourses" (Black 2009, 70).

space for women's limited entry into the public sphere during the Revolutionary period where the language of Republican Motherhood provided the justification for women's political behavior" (Harris 2009, 295). Motherhood began with a biological base, but became socialized in the public sphere, wherein nurturing was vital to reform communities; that is, a "mother" – whether or not biological – could guide, protect, and support activists' efforts.

Militancy and Motherhood

Republican Motherhood was certainly important as grounding for the "moral center" position that Black women found themselves in during the 1820s-1850s. Along with Republican Motherhood, Black women's maternal social roles also benefitted from a militant position. Militant motherhood worked from a veritable "tough love" approach to parenting – we are speaking here of socialized mothering (in addition to biological maternalism). Whereas traditional motherhood fostered, comforted, and protected insularly, militant motherhood urged "children" to enter the public sphere vigorously to work hard in an effort to accomplish a public goal. Militant motherhood has been foundational to women's work in social efforts throughout U.S. history, especially as part of motivating social change was the encouragement of rebelliousness or insubordination – an overt demand that reformer-wards break with public norms of culture. Tonn writes that "as expected, militancy and defiance demand assertive, even aggressive, modes of presentation. Militant mothers ... must also train their children to do likewise ... the discursive and non-discursive 'nurturing' by such mothers typically contains aggressive modeling cues as well as other means of facilitating resistance and survival" (1996, 5). This position was apt for Black women motivating change in the nineteenth century, for the rhetorical channels through which they could penetrate the public sphere were starkly limited. Seemingly, the Black "mother" figure could bridge nurturing with vehement demands from her "charges" to consider her appeals.

"Scorching Irony"

Related to militant motherhood was the nineteenth century tradition of Black militancy. There were several genres of this ideological position, especially in the contexts of the anti-slave trade, anti-colonization, abolitionist, and anti-fugitive act movements. These ranged along a spectrum from moderate discursive tactics (Frederick Douglass) and edgier, more direct discursive arguments (Henry Highland Garnet) to radical, literal tactics of violence (David Walker). The one discursive strand that related closely to nineteenth century Black militant mothers was the biting trope of irony. Perhaps the most quintessential reformer who drew upon irony as a rhetorical move was Douglass. His famous speech "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" stated explicitly the need to resort to a complete demystification of the American system when all other normative means had been exhausted and had broken down. In speaking to an all-white abolitionist group in 1852 about the absurdity of having to repeat arguments for slaves' and free Blacks' humanity and rights to liberty, he demanded: "What, then, remains to be argued? Is it that slavery is not divine; that God did not establish it; that our doctors of divinity are mistaken? ... The time for such argument is past" (Douglass 1999, 90). Instead of logical syllogistic reasoning, he insisted that "at a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. Oh! had I the ability, and could I reach the nation's ear, I would today

pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke” (Douglass 1999, 90). Irony functioned here to show the ends to which an argument had collapsed.

At that point, pathos-centered rebuke (not just minds, but “hearts”) might have been necessary. In some cases, invective was drawn upon. According to Engels, invective is “a railing speech or expression; something uttered or written, intended to cast opprobrium, censure, or reproach on another; a harsh or reproachful accusation” (2009, 311). The power of invective is that it “can take the shine off our heroes, bringing them down to the level of the people” (Engels 2009, 11). Invective can tear down the principles that a system lauds as triumphant when, in the face of lived experience, the opposite is the case.

Scorching irony and invective were a part of the Black militant tradition and the militant motherhood tradition, as well. If a mother could prove that a system was so incredibly bankrupt that rational argument had been exhausted, then this became a warrant for her “wards” to engage more fulsomely and actively in a reform effort to protect her. For Black women, the system absolutely fell apart in the face of the double oppression of their subjectivities as women and Black citizens. Black “mothers” could potentially draw on irony to underscore their arguments for the ways that a system needed remedying. Guilt-tripping a Black male audience into recognizing that they were violating their duties as men by not fulfilling a mother’s request – especially if the system harmed that very mother – arose as a key rhetorical step for Black women during the abolitionist and enfranchisement movements of the nineteenth century.

Stanley’s Militant Motherhood and Ironic Tactics

Stanley’s Reform Tradition

Abolition and enfranchisement were on the minds of the organizers of the State Convention of Colored Men when they met in Columbus, Ohio in 1855 to confirm their platform. The platform of this advisory political action group would soon be presented to the Ohio State Legislature, and the inclusion of planks had to be considered carefully so as to not disrupt the favor that the organization had curried with White progressives in the legislature. One such plank was abolition, and the Convention eventually signed off on that demand after considering moderate and radical positions. Another, more contested plank was the insistence on enfranchisement – citizenship rights as well as the vote – for free Black men. Some in the Convention thought it might be pushing things too far to demand absolute rights and privileges before first ridding the nation of slavery. Ultimately, the enfranchisement plank was included, but for a time the affirmative vote was conspicuously questionable.

One piece of evidence read into the record was Stanley’s infamous speech. As discussed previously, Stanley came from a strong reformist tradition, as her family engaged in mostly educationally-based and religiously-based abolitionist and enfranchisement campaigns. Stanley seemed a sure study in the Black militant and militant motherhood traditions by the time she left Oberlin and entered into teaching jobs around the less-than-egalitarian South in towns like Norfolk, Virginia and Mobile, Alabama. Importantly for the present discussion, it should be noted that she has been characterized in numerous studies as being steadfast and “ever-present” in more radical affairs. “Stanley did not shrink from view,” writes Lasser, but rather “embraced [her] responsibilities for another

critical form of radical abolitionism” (2007, 334). That is, she used her Oberlin training to become a teacher, “thereby enlisting in the project to make racial equality a reality (Lasser 2007, 334). She saw herself bound to former slaves “by the ties of love and consanguinity; they are SOCIALLY AND POLITICALLY my people” (Ripley 1991, 176).

Stanley also helped form the Delaware (Ohio) Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society, a group she led when she forwarded her speech titled “What to the Toiling Millions There, Is This Boasted Liberty?” to the men’s Convention. The speech itself was read by a member of the convention named William Harris, as women were not allowed into the civic hall. This, of course, was a tangible example of the double oppression that Stanley and her contemporaries experienced in the 1850s. Regardless, historians have written that her speech “was an example of black women’s antebellum militancy and shows evidence of Stanley’s strong religious conviction, her belief in action, her sense of the importance of women’s supportive role, and her insistence on a leadership role for educated black.” Her exclusion from the Convention and her acceptance of an auxiliary role in the process of determining enfranchisement underscored the feminine sphere in which Stanley had to work. Even so, as Yee contends, “most free black women occupied a supportive, auxiliary status in social interaction with men, but when they had to, they defied the social prescriptions of femininity by taking a militant, even physical stand against injustice” (1992, 59). In other words, women like Stanley were not afraid to take a militant stance. They likely felt that this kind of guiding, supportive, motherly activism was their “duty, as well as their right, as free women” (Yee 1992, 59). With this agency in mind, Stanley addressed the all-male audience in Columbus through militant motherhood and scorching irony. Her singular speech – as a case study – was emblematic of Black women’s public intellectual discourse in support of enfranchisement. Most vitally, it was, as I have noted above, Stanley’s most famous speech.

Stanley’s Charge to Her (Black) Spartan Warriors

Generally throughout the discourse, Stanley worked from gendered norms of auxiliary femininity – especially as figured by Black men in various Black liberation movements – to plead to her audience for action. She opened, for instance, by relating that the Delaware (Ohio) Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society understood that “unjust legislation has deprived you,” thereby showing how men were centered as the target of the oppression (Stanley 1979, 313). This instantiation masked the oppression similarly suffered by Black women. She continued that “this testimonial [represents] our sympathy and interest in the cause in which you are engaged – a cause fraught with infinite importance ... [we] express our earnest hope that such determination and invincible courage may be evinced by you” (Stanley 1979, 313). Thus, she concurrently looked to the men as the potential agents in the effort to end slavery and to motivate enfranchisement. Though Stanley’s opening at first blush appeared ingratiating – especially as women were pleading for protection – we will soon see that her conclusion brought to bear not so much a supplication for, but a vehement insistence on, men charging into the fray of oppression for the entire Black community – for both men and women alike.

As Stanley moved into a direct address to the men, she employed metaphors of bellicosity in framing her militant charge to the Convention. For instance, she positioned Black men as soldiers in a war with “the demon Slavery.” She remarked:

Truth, Justice, and Mercy marshalling their forces sound the tocsin which summons the warrior in his burnished armor to the conflict against Error and Oppression. On earth’s broad arena – through Time’s revolving cycles – this warfare has been continuous ... now ... bands of [“the most brilliant star in the galaxy of nations, where Christianity and civilization” flourish] ... enter into a bond sacred and inviolable, ever to wage interminable intellectual and moral war against the demon, and to demand the restoration of their birthright – *Liberty* – kindred of Deity (Stanley 1979, 313).

Such a construction of this veritable band of brothers protecting Black interests (though, mostly of their own birthright) elevated the men’s cause to secular-religious heights. Secularly, Black men were analogized to freedom fighters from time immemorial – presumably descending from the Jews of the Exodus myth, the Spartans of Ancient Greece, Toussaint L’Overture of Haiti, and revolutionary forebears of the American colonies. Their ethos as sentinels of the Black community’s rights was set alongside their duty to maintain the larger ideals of “Truth, Justice, and Mercy.” And, to do so intellectually and morally placed them beyond the pallor of literal, war-like resistance. Spiritually, they were the ephemeral representatives of a Deity – a Judeo-Christian god who seemed to manifest in terms of “Liberty.” These were great responsibilities, and they were not to be taken lightly; that is, conservative approaches seemed to be eschewed for immediate action.

On the latter point above, Stanley set Black women up as victims to be protected. However, she – representing other women – was no mere petitioner. Rather, she acted as an exhorter, urging the men, “Then press on! Manhood’s prerogatives are yours by Almighty fiat!” (Stanley 1979, 313). Stanley was not positioning herself as a weakened ward of these sons and brothers, but as an active agent as a fellow citizen. In fact, she worked through distinctions of masculinity and femininity to call out the Black men. If they figured themselves to be the superior sex, then they ought to act the part. The prerogatives were the men’s to behold, for sure; but failing to act on the fiat potentially rendered them neutered. Absent performing with determination, they would appear “nugatory” and “unimportant” (Stanley 1979, 314). Such a gendered *detournement*, or turnaround, held the promise to motivate men by urging them to fulfill the roles they, themselves, scaffolded.

While characterizing her audience as soldiers of God, she also provided them with an ethos of purveyors of truth. Their ability to behold “truth,” she averred, came from the morals taught by the “Christian mothers” (Stanley 1979, 314). Here, she relied on Republican Motherhood (albeit, as mentioned earlier, the concept almost solely applied to White women in the early to mid Republic). For Stanley, the truth-seeking role for men was shored-up by noting that they alone could find “one truth, the only essential truth, the incontrovertible: -- The Omnipotent, Omniscient God’s glorious autograph – the seal of the angels” (1979, 313). This seal was written across their brows. They could find, enact, and defend this “rational, mysterious and inexplicable soul” that so “animates our frames” (Stanley 1979, 313). In this connection with truth, Black men could also defend the overall Black community. Their stature as warriors and truth-seekers put them on a borderland that straddled the ephemeral battle

for political rights and the ethereal fight for God's favor. In the end, these men were sure to form a "phalanx of truth" in the service of propagating Black liberation (Stanley 1979, 314).

The enemy in Stanley's war for freedom (against which the Black men struggled) was, of course, American ideological promises. She did not necessarily indict the White public or the U.S. government, but rather called into stark question the sham ideographs ("Liberty," "Independence," "Free Government") upon which the nation was founded.² Here was where she brought into play the Douglassian concept of "scorching irony" in order to challenge the hypocrisy of American ideals. She reminded the Black men in the audience that they had exhausted their options in terms of rational argument with the dominant public. The system could not hide, she insinuated, under some veil of veneration. Stanley repeated the militant abolitionist claim that American Republicanism, "disregarding equity, humanity, and the fundamental principles of her national superstructure, has rendered a nonentity, while on her flag's transparencies and triumphal arches, stood beautifully those noble words 'Liberty and Independence'" (1979, 313). The irony here, of course, was the supposed beauty of the "system" paired with the stark reality of its duplicities. Similarly, Douglass noted to a White anti-slavery society in 1852 that "The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice are not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity, and independence bequeathed by your fathers is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought light and healing to you has brought stripes and death to me" (1999, 90). His stripes, literally the flag's symbols and metaphorically the lashes of slaves' bodies were overt, visible. For Stanley, these stripes were also visible, but appeared as a veneer – a sham to be demystified for its deeper implications of hypocrisy.

Stanley further retrenched her claims of hypocrisy with a story that situated the disconnection between American ideologies and practices within a related elision – what she called "But strange incongruity!" (1979, 313). Stanley talked of the immigrant experience, noting how for White Europeans "their first paean in 'the land of the free'" was the sight of "briery mountain, sparkling river, glassy lake [that] gives back the echoes soft and clear as if the melody was borrowed from the harps of angels" (1979, 313). This idyllic vision of the United States for European immigrants "wafts" over the so-called perfection of the American system. However, as this song "verberates and reverberates," the symphony "quivers on the still air and then sinks away into silence, a low deep wail, heavy with anguish and despair" punctuated always by the inexorable "mournful cadence" of the "clank of chains on human limbs" (Stanley 1979, 313). The contrast of the White experience steeped in Edenic perfection and the Black experience saddled with a dank, reprehensible stagnation was confirmed not by nature or happenstance. Rather, it was American Republicanism – that "Citadel of Error" – that ironically accepted and rejected, sustained and subjugated, included and excluded, nurtured and killed.

Stanley's "scorching irony" soon turned to invective – this was not a soft-sell, so-called weakened, feminine argumentative norm, but a militant jab that blatantly and proudly lacked comportment with both gendered and raced standards of the time period for White and Black women. Indeed, Stanley's censure was made abundantly

² Ideographs are common terms that a given culture has been conditioned to believe and understand; they tend to be one-term orientations of the culture's ideology. Or, as McGee puts it, "An ideograph is an ordinary-language term found in political discourse. It is a high order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal. It warrants the use of power, excuses behavior ... and guides behavior and beliefs" (1980, 15).

clear as she militantly, and maternally, exhorted her all-male audience to action. They were not the target of her opprobrium, but the system surely was; she sarcastically dubbed the framers and adherents of these American ideals “The Genius[es] of America!” (Stanley 1979, 314). To her own question, “what to the toiling millions there, is this boasted liberty?” she answered: nothing but pure evil. She clarified that “this ideal reduced to a reality” was “a phantom, a shadowy, and indistinct disembodied form, impalpable to our sense or touch.” Because of this, “there is no spot ... where the colored man can exercise his God-given rights” (Stanley 1979, 313-4). Here is where invective became a key rhetorical move, as Stanley spiritualized the secular ironies of the American system. She argued, “Oh Genius ... How art thou fallen, oh Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou fallen!” (Stanley 1979, 314). Lucifer, the angelic form of Satan before falling from grace, became the system itself. And, this satanic structure had twin minions: “the demon of Slavery” and “tumult ... of religion and science” that justified both slavery and disenfranchisement of free Blacks. Her Black militancy of confronting the system would later be ushered into a maternal charge for Black men to engage in arduous efforts, to “Work! Work!” (Stanley 1979, 314).

In a way, Stanley was not doing anything new in terms of her use of the good/evil trope in an American context. Such distinctions were a part of the American rhetorical tradition long before the Revolution, though certainly they were spotlighted above all in the Declaration of Independence as the Crown was deemed a tyrant and devil (Declaration of Independence 2002, 9). However, one point should be mentioned about the invective as an ironic turn: it was rare for a Black woman to issue such a rebuke in the 1850s. According to Yee, White women abolitionists were “merely following in the patriotic traditions of their foremothers in the War of Independence” by overstepping the so-called delicacy of their gender “in their readiness to aid husbands, fathers, and brothers” in like-minded invective” (Yee 1992, 129). But for Black women, such an empowered move smacked of scandal. Particularly, Black men and White women in the abolitionist cause “burdened black women with white notions of ladylike behavior, whether they were appropriate or not” (Jeffrey 1998, 192). Conventions of propriety could be used to silence Black women. However, given the acceptance of Stanley and other Black women during the 1850s – on the eve of the Civil War – I agree with Boylan that because of these constraints they had nothing to lose (1994). In fact, Black women may have been able to be “more adventurous in speaking out on public issues, combining abolitionism with community uplift, and challenging” indirectly the all-male leadership of most associations for social change (Boylan 1994, 135). This is a decisive rupture – that is, taking negative constructions of disempowerment and turning them around to evidence the very opposite.

Another way that Black women gained empowerment through this type of rupture was the rhetorical tactic of Black motherhood itself. Combined with the radical Black tradition and Republican Motherhood, Black motherhood became doubly safe and powerful. We see Stanley’s Black motherhood on a subtle, nurturing level as she moved into her final charge to the all-male audience. She said “to you, gentlemen, as representatives of the oppressed thousands of Ohio, we look hopefully.” These mothers “in our fireside circles, in the seclusion of our closets, we kneel in tearful supplication in your behalf. As Christian wives, mothers, and daughters ... we pledge ourselves to exert our influence” on your efforts “in the cause of Liberty and Humanity” (Stanley 1979, 314). Here, Stanley situated mothers at home – heart and hearth – and centered Black women’s power in the domestic sphere.

These Black mothers had raised-up the very sons to whom Stanley was appealing. Supporting the sons in the present – as they reared them in the past – she guaranteed that Black mothers would rally for the men. In fact, Stanley’s exhortation, representing other Black women, might be the only way in which their militancy for the cause of abolition and enfranchisement could bear presence and, hopefully, yield results.

The power of Stanley’s militant motherhood came with her final charge. Recall that Tonn argued “maternal roles were particularly apt rhetorical strategies for [reform] because agitation and mothering often share two essential dimensions: nurturing and militancy” (1996, 2). Indeed, as Stanley smoothed her way into a nurturing role in the final charge, she just as soon took the militant turn toward exhortation. She called to the Black men to “Work! Work!” She noted that there is only a singular road to freedom: “it is embodied in one potent word – ACTION!” (Stanley 1979, 314). From here, Stanley turned back to the warrior personae she framed her audience in at the speech’s beginning. Working through modes of war and competition – both manly investitures – she insisted: “Agitation of thought is the beginning of truth ... True, you may be numerically small; but the race is not always gained by the swift, nor the battle by the strong, and it has become a truism that greatness is the legitimate result of labor, diligence, and perseverance” (Stanley 1979, 314). Stanley rooted her audience’s power in resoluteness and hard work. Ostensibly, these were motherly carry-overs of militant mother positionality. After all, motherhood was about protection, guidance, and moral training, but it was “also a call to action” (Harris 2009, 301).

Stanley’s appeal reached an apex as she literally and metaphorically sent her troops out to battle. Again, invoking what Tonn calls “a militant protective love” that started with an “ethic of care” and moved to “include aggressive confrontation and occasional bodily risk” (real or imagined) Stanley concluded (1996, 5):

It was a Spartan mother’s farewell to her son, ‘Bring home your shield or be brought upon it.’ To you we would say, be true, be courageous, and be steadfast in your charge of duty. The Citadel of Error must yield to the unshrinking Phalanx of Truth ... Again we say ... unfurl your banner to the breeze – let its folds float proudly over you, bearing the glorious inscription, broad and brilliant as the material universe: ‘*God and Liberty!*’ (Stanley 1979, 314).

Herein was realized the definitive power of a hybridized Republican Motherhood and Black Militancy. That is, the call to the audience was to take what the mothers had taught, what they had nurtured; to use those moral bearings in the service of a secular cause for freedom through combative means; and to unwaveringly know that the truth was attainable given their alliance with the divine (“let Excelsior be your watchword!!,” she had exalted earlier) (Stanley 1979, 314). What made Stanley’s brand of militant motherhood robust was the way she reflected how Black women possessed an ethos at the nexus of political critic, militant agent, and familial/moral actor.

Historians have titled Stanley’s speech, “What to the Toiling Millions There, Is This Boasted Liberty?” though it had no original heading. To her own question from whence the title derives, she implied that liberty meant nothing until militant, assiduous work could be marshaled in favor of freedom’s celebrations. In essence, Stanley enacted her own charge by engaging in a militant motherhood that functioned safely, powerfully, and (sometimes) ironically to motivate “ACTION!” (Stanley 1979, 314).

Navigations, Motherhood Tactics, Maternal Forms, and Recovery

Stanley's redress to the State Convention of Colored Men brings to light a number of fascinating considerations concerning Black women's activism during the 1850s. This was a time period bookended on one side by the failure of Garrisonian abolitionists to work through discursive means to end institutional cruelties and on the other side by the ascension of violence as a supreme remedy to both slavery (Thirteenth Amendment) and disenfranchisement (Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments). Within that crucible, though, rose up a generation of Black women who pushed through multiple internal and external oppressions to press into action their fellow citizens – Black men and White folks, the very agents behind the very internal and external oppressions.

These gains did not come easy and certainly without rendering complications. One of the interesting observations about Stanley's context and case is the extent to which Black women had to navigate gendered and racialized lines in enacting their voices. In terms of race, they had to contend with the perceived views of inferiority (supposedly) inhering in Black women of White abolitionists, the American public, and the U.S. government. As Jeffrey reminds us, Black women were not urging too much more beyond "combating the prejudice that adversely affected the lives of [free blacks] ... they supported self-improvement and assistance to the 'needy' members of the [black community] and felt a duty to elevate their race" (1998, 41). Black women hoped, according to the public record at least, that once poverty, lack of education, and bad habits disappeared that prejudice was close behind. At each turn, though, they realized that "northern racism and the southern slave system were linked by the belief that blacks were inferior" (Jeffrey 1998, 41). This was the carried-over realization that affronted abolitionist and women's rights activist Maria Stewart two decades before. In talking about Black women's empowerment, she asked a White women's audience, "What if such women [historical Black pillars of history like Cleopatra and the Queen of Sheba] as are here described should rise among our sable race? And it is not impossible; for it is not the color of the skin that makes the man or the woman, but the principle formed in the soul" (Stewart, 1998, 140). Principles and morality were elevated above all humanly qualities. This deleterious complex steeped in race was also tied to gender.

Gender dynamics certainly obstructed Black women's progress as social reformers. Most of these problems grew from White women's conceptions of what pure femininity looked like and from Black men's failure to accept them as equals in reform circles. White women set up a bind wherein Black women were expected to perform feminine virtue; once they did, however, they were critiqued as imperfect or disregarded all the same. To these White women, "African American women never endorsed standards of feminine respectability ... [and] insofar as they adopted those standards in order to establish their claim to feminine virtue, they found themselves constrained by narrow definitions of appropriate behavior" (Boylan 1994, 135). Similarly, Black men were often intractable about allowing Black women into the public conversation on abolitionism and enfranchisement. Even when entry was granted, writes Yee, their "public speaking gradually became socially acceptable, as long as they stopped short of direct criticism of black men or challenges to male authority" (1992, 127-8). This is telling when considering Black activist Mary Ann Shadd's reaction to nineteenth century Black hierarchies. She once chided a group of Black male abolitionists in the 1840s that "[w]e cannot successfully evade duty because the suffering

fellow woman be only a woman! She too is a neighbor ... The spirit of true philanthropy knows no sex” (Shadd 1998, 120).

All of this speaks to the complications Black women activists endured during this era. Though these oppressions have been discussed, debated, and revised by historians and cultural scholars, Stanley’s case is yet another reminder about the pervasiveness of multiple consciences in Black women’s public lives.

A second interesting matter related to the study of Stanley’s rhetoric is her use of motherhood as a discursive tactic, allowing her an ethos that gained entrée to the public sphere. Harris calls motherhood a “topos,” or starting place, for argumentative invention. She contends:

Although the concept of mother does not necessarily entail specific argumentative conclusions in the antislavery debates, it commonly functions as a starting point for women’s antislavery arguments. This site of invention worked in fairly complex ways – both meeting with and departing from cultural expectations of gender and race. The persona of the mother operated in the same argumentative landscape, shaping the identity of the implied author, reader, and subject of the text (Harris 2009, 296).

In other words, motherhood was a generative warrant from which to draw to begin asserting public voice. Motherhood, thus, was organized as a mode of nurture, care, concern and sacrifice, but it could then be massaged into a powerful familial construct and a political construct naturalized as a family tie. The latter transformation of motherhood allowed Black women to draw on the hearth for ethos; the authority that came with parentalism might then be used in the service of voice, even in a Black cultural value system where men were elevated as leaders.

A great deal of nineteenth century motherhood studies focuses on White women’s social reform efforts. Perhaps Stanley’s rhetoric might open the door for future exploration of this rhetorical tactic in Black women’s resistance. One of the endearing characteristics about motherhood is that it is universal. Motherhood is “an ideal that anyone” could potentially meet, at least in a socialized, resistive form (Harris 2009, 298).

A third implication involves the competing phases that motherhood can take in a moment of social change. Heuristically, tracing the ways that motherhood as a rhetorical tactic meanders between the intensely supportive and personal and the stringently authoritative and militant might yield fruitful results about Black women’s activism. Tonn writes that although the “coercive aspects of agitation may be most salient, the intensely personal and relational demands of mobilization efforts” bear resemblance to roles typically figured as maternal, such as “physical preservation, fostering of emotional and intellectual growth, and development of group identity and social responsibility” (1996, 5). Motherhood might begin in this moment of preservation, growth, and social responsibility. But, as Stanley demonstrated, the ingratiation of social maternalism can quickly turn to reproach and militancy. The ethos granted Black women as biological mothers, but most vitally social mothers, helped to squeeze in edge-wise militant charges for action – not just for the inclusion of women’s articulations, but in the service of lifting up Black communities. If motherhood is strategic, as Peeples and DeLuca indicate, parsing-out the way the strategy reveals itself might shed light on even more intricacies of Black women’s public lives (2006, 69).

Finally, this essay is an attempt to recuperate Stanley’s rhetorical voice through one of the very few pieces of her discourse that remains extant in the public record. Our study of Stanley is one of those that began by

happenstance while poring-over the massive African American discursive anthologies in search of Black women abolitionists beyond Shadd, Stewart, Sojourner Truth, and their contemporaries. Stanley's story replete with travels around the South and Midwest in the quest to educate and liberate through the classroom resonated with me as a critical pedagogue (although our contexts are vastly different). Her discourse was powerful. Her strategy of maternal presence was brilliant. In our reckoning, Stanley's "Spartan mother" is as striking, commanding, and beautiful as Stewart's "flowers ... born to bloom unseen" or Truth's universe-altering "Eve" (Stewart 1998, 226).

One of the hopes of this essay is that more of Stanley's discourse is uncovered and studied, and that her keen participation in the activist circles of the mid-nineteenth century elevates her not so much to *iconology*, but at least to *recognition* – someone whose words should be considered. We must also mention that though this is a recovery project, the aim is not to speak *for* or to make claims of intent *about* Stanley's voice. Rather, the goal is to unpack her rhetorical contributions in the midst of a context saturated with the rhetoric of White reformers and of free Black men in the antebellum era. Though anachronistic (some 160-plus years later), Stanley leaves us with a poignant lesson for such recuperative discursive endeavors: "Continued and strenuous effort is the basis of all greatness, moral, intellectual, and civil ... Work! Work! Thou hast all eternity to rest in" (Stanley 1979, 314).

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Voices of Grassroots Activists: Dollars and Sense in the City

Spoma Jovanovic & Vincent Russell

Where 21st century activists target their actions for social justice and change, government officials interested in maintaining the status quo inevitably invest their material and human resources to preserve stability and authority. In this article, we discuss a community effort by a grassroots association to launch a radically democratic process into municipal budget decision making, Participatory Budgeting. Organizers relied on the tripartite power of rhetoric, collaboration, and participatory democracy with the goal of empowering historically underrepresented communities to contribute to budget decision making. This community-based research effort reflects a three-year ethnographic project wherein our contributions have been both as scholars and activists. We rely on the theory, Coordinated Management of Meaning, to ask how grassroots organizers effectively tack back and forth between community outreach efforts and local politics. Throughout, we show that efforts for social change increasingly resist the tensions inherent in the bifurcated model that pits us (community) against them (government) in an attempt to shift a civic culture. Finally, we draw attention to the need for grassroots associations to be persistent, transparent, equitable, and inclusive, exceeding the bar for other groups, in order to effectively build alliances, even where resistance is evident.

Keywords: Grassroots Associations; Activists; Democracy; Participatory Budgeting; Collaboration; Rhetoric

Where 21st century activists target their actions for social justice and change, government officials interested in maintaining the status quo inevitably invest their material and human resources to preserve stability and authority. It is thus at best an uneasy relationship between grassroots organizers and government officials where tensions are palpable between agitation and control (Bowers, Ochs, Jensen & Schulz, 2010).

As grassroots organizations seek to generate interest and support for new, sometimes revolutionary ideas, they are subject to, or enter into the bifurcated model of old, of us (community) versus them (government or establishment). More specifically, even when grassroots organizations seek to work cooperatively with established leaders and government officials, their commitment is often rebuffed as impractical, unreasonable, or without merit. In turn, this can set off what anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1935) famously termed complementary schismogenesis. This communicative style is marked by negative, even pathological interactions that disparage the other's differences (Watzlawick, Bavelas & Jackson, 1967). Within the grassroots-status quo relationship, a class struggle of dominance and submission often ensues and with it, hope for collaborative enterprise quickly evaporates. Our research here draws attention to a more hopeful grassroots effort, one launched by a loosely-knit band of volunteers to introduce a radically democratic process into municipal budget decision making.

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The people named themselves and their community project *Participatory Budgeting Greensboro* (PB GSO). To effect the social change they desired, their project would require a cooperative spirit from the onset through completion. PB GSO's communicative practices and actions thus intentionally sought to avoid the more common us-versus-them struggles with government leaders by instead investing considerable time to strategize about and broker partnerships with government officials. In doing so, PB GSO members insisted on adhering to high standards of transparency, inclusivity, and equality, even in the face of conflict. The lessons learned from PB GSO highlight the impact of ethical communication to advance social justice by illuminating differences as positive resources for democracy and deliberation.

In this article, we offer an overview of the efforts of PB GSO to organize itself over a period of three years and in relation to worldwide progress to bring people into government budget decision making. PB GSO effectively modeled some features of direct democracy, while recognizing some limitations to meaningful collaboration. We conclude with some concrete communicative practices gleaned from PB GSO operations that may be helpful to other like-minded social justice groups as they work to build strong enough foundations from which to persuade often-resistant government officials into cooperative venture.

The Communicative Demands of Grassroots Organizing

To talk about social change is to underscore the challenges facing grassroots associations, “locally based, significantly autonomous, volunteer-run, formal nonprofit (i.e., voluntary) groups that manifest substantial voluntary altruism as groups and use the association form of organization” (Smith, 2000 p. 7). Without paid staff, stable operating budgets, or secure material and human resources, grassroots organizations most often rely on face-to-face communication to both sustain internal processes and carry out public outreach activities (Curnalia, Mermer & Tyus, 2011). The foundations of grassroots associations thus are vulnerable to the time commitments (or lack thereof) of volunteers, the skills base of the volunteers, and importantly, the ability to reach a wider audience.

Activists do the painstaking work of people-to-people organizing and community building to garner support for their causes and programs (Harnett, Wood & McCann, 2011; Peeples, 2011; Pezzullo, 2011). At the same time, activists must also be attentive to the needs of government leaders who have the ability to ensure that proposed programs and projects take root in sustainable systems and structures. To achieve the ends grassroots organizers have in mind, they necessarily rely on the tripartite influence of rhetoric, collaboration, and participatory structures to promote justice, empower communities, and create social change (Ganesh & Zoller, 2012; Jovanovic, 2012). We note here that other, less celebrated forms of communication—disruption, protest, and antagonism, for example—are also important rhetorical tools that are particularly useful when action is required to wedge open patrolled borders of political action (Young, Battaglia & Cloud, 2010). Whatever the rhetorical means used to achieve social change, at root is a focus on social justice, defined here as a concern for, and deliberative processes used, to change unfair or inequitable conditions that are accepted and reinforced in policies, systems, and structures within our communities (Young, 2000).

Our communities provide the greatest hope for experiencing democracy in action. Yet local democracies are under siege where people have “little control over their local economies and environments” (Holland et al., 2007, 242). PB GSO and other social change organizations are operating all over the globe, often without much public recognition, to marshal the resources of people who desire ways of interacting that are inclusive, deliberative, and meaningful enough to create more equitable communities (Hawken, 2007). Doing so does not happen without struggle, however. In fact, “antagonistic interests (material stakes in a conflict) are undeniable features of society” (Lozano-Reich & Cloud, 2009, p. 222). Still, by upholding public participation and deliberative processes, PB GSO and other social justice-oriented programs recognize that the strong democracy they desire is possible when the collective will of the people is ignited (Jovanovic, 2012).

Participatory Budgeting—Deliberative Democracy in Action

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is an open, democratic process of participation that builds the capacities of ordinary citizens to deliberate and make decisions collective about public policy, specifically municipal budget allocations (Schugurensky, 2004). PB has been used successfully in more than 1,500 cities around the world to deepen the capacities of ordinary people to research, deliberate, and decide how their public money is spent. It was first introduced on the world scene in 1989 in Porto Alegre, Brazil (population 1.4 million) as a project of the Workers’ Party. Today, approximately 20% of Porto Alegre’s budget is given to citizens for PB decision making and spending. PB is common in Latin American countries, and its supporters have been awarded grants by the Ford Foundation to share their experiences in the hopes of advancing more of this direct democratic action around the world.

In the United States, PB surfaced for the first time in 2009 in the 49th Ward in Chicago. There, more than 1,600 residents, ages 16 and older, proposed and voted on \$1.3 million in capital improvement projects including murals, bike lanes, solar trash cans, and a dog park (Lerner & Antineau, 2010). In 2011, New York City piloted its first PB process involving four districts and nearly \$6 million of discretionary funds for people-directed budget proposals, assemblies, and voting. According to PB NYC’s web site:

Almost 6,000 NYC residents came out and took part in what the *New York Times* called “revolutionary civics in action”—NYC’s first experiment with a new form of hyper-local democracy, participatory budgeting (<http://pbnyc.org>).

By 2013, PB had expanded in Chicago and New York City, and had been implemented in six other large, U.S. cities and territories: San Francisco, Boston, Vallejo (CA), St. Louis, Rochester (NY), and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Additionally, PB processes were successfully launched in a middle school in Lawrence, MA and colleges in Brooklyn, NY and San Antonio, TX. In 2014, more cities were considering how to put PB into practice, including 14 low-income communities in California.

In the United States, PB has generally involved an annual cycle of meetings and voting to: 1) Brainstorm ideas for community improvements; 2) Deliberate in neighborhoods to identify popularly supported projects; 3)

Develop project proposals in collaboration with city staff; 4) Vote on the developed, vetted projects; and 5) Monitor the funding and implementation of the winning projects.

Scholars recognize that the “budget is government in the miniature” (Franklin, Ho & Ebdon, 2009, p. 52), articulating the city’s values, priorities, and future hopes. While many cities include public participation processes in municipal budget setting, these processes most often seek only citizen consultation, not direct decision making as PB dictates (Franklin, Ho & Ebdon, 2009). The hope and promise of PB is that when residents voice their own ideas, and hear what others have to say as well, those original ideas are transformed into something better yet (Baiocchi & Lerner, 2007). People learn about the potential of democracy by doing democracy—engaging their creative capacities, participating in critical thinking, developing new knowledge, deepening their compassion for their fellow neighbors, and supporting collective action.

PB depends upon dialogue and deliberation as central practices to cultivate new community leaders and build stronger relationships between government and residents. Advocacy training is essential as well to make more transparent the largely incomprehensible budget process in order to ensure that projects benefit segments of the community typically without political clout or muscle.

PB GSO Establishes its Organizational Dimensions

In Greensboro, North Carolina, talks surrounding PB began in 2011. PB GSO started with full funding and support from the Fund for Democratic Communities (www.f4dc.org), a local private foundation that has made over \$1 million in grants since 2007 to support grassroots democratic organizing efforts. In the beginning, the foundation paid expenses for expert speakers to visit with local activists, planned and hosted bi-monthly community meetings, and leveraged its contacts with other economic justice efforts to secure opportunities for presentations about PB GSO to be included in area conferences.

When the foundation’s priorities shifted in 2012, support for PB changed to a smaller, line item expense. The change was dramatic, constituting a critical moment (Pearce, 2007) that led to discussion and debate about among the activists if and how to continue advocacy for PB. The group discussion was frank, recognizing that progress in getting PB for Greensboro had been slow. The foundation’s co-director asked, “Should we recognize we have not been able to rally sufficient grassroots support for PB and thus focus instead on broader participatory democracy questions?” After considerable dialogue and introspection over a period of several more meetings, the activists agreed to establish itself as an independent, semi-organized group that would continue to push for PB in the city (see www.greensboropb.org). That decision brought with it planning for the next phase with three priority projects:

- ***Collaborating with other PB efforts in the U.S.*** to bolster the impact of organizing in Greensboro.
- ***Introducing nationally-recognized PB experts and politicians to the Greensboro City Council and staff*** to add credibility to the process.
- ***Hiring a part-time employee*** to deliver the quality outreach work that the volunteers failed to produce on their own consistently.

PB GSO now operates with a small, rotating membership of organizers ranging in age from 24 to 74, with a balance of males and females. PB GSO is not a formal organization with any legal existence such as a 501(c)3 or an LLC. Instead, it is an informal coalition of politically astute people that operates with a flat organizational structure to allow anyone present at a meeting to potentially affect the work and direction of the group. This way of functioning has been noted as a tried and true, successful tactic among grassroots associations (Curnalia, Mermer & Tyus, 2011; Smith, 2000).

Not surprisingly, PB GSO's efforts to welcome new people to the meetings were not conflict-free. In the summer of 2012, tension arose when activists with Occupy Greensboro urged the use of processes that defined the revolutionary movement, specifically eschewing any vestige of hierarchical leadership. This position was contested by proposals to form a steering committee, use majority vote for decision making, and to rotate leadership.

The conflict reflected differing views of democracy. One activist said, "We were getting mired in group process issues without doing any work towards getting PB." Another member echoed the concern:

A low point was definitely when the members of Occupy attempted to turn our meetings into abstractions, arguing that we had to dig deep into our ideas about society before we could move forward with any concrete projects to better the community. I was worried at the time that our process, and all of our progress, was being hijacked by the people with no skin in the game.

The features of democracy most salient to this contingent of members were efficient, inclusive methods for decision making and concrete action steps toward the public good.

For the members who affiliated with Occupy, the democratic mooring of PB would be best expressed in talk of mission, vision, and group process. One twenty-something woman said:

We have to constantly be evaluating the process as it unfolds. That needs to be tasked to specific people and there needs to be space for that to happen at a deep level... I'm feeling a lot of what comes next will be easier to understand if the next step is ground rules and visioning—what brings people to the table.

For those in the group who agreed with her, there was a desire to publicly recognize that people, not leaders and not organizations, provide the strength needed to create social change.

In response to the arguments forwarded by both sides, a young male about to enter graduate school attempted to bridge the growing divide:

I do see value in setting ground rules, but we've had an extremely inclusive, democratic process for the 12 months I've been attending meetings. We've invited a lot of people. I don't think there's any anti-democratic sentiment here. We're headed in the right direction.

The issue of establishing organizational structure continued for the next four months.

Eventually, and somewhat reluctantly, PB GSO members elected official "roles" in PB GSO—president, secretary, and treasurer—as a nod to the need for point people to ensure completion of specific communication processes. The caveat was that the roles would be in place for 90 days only and then rotated, according to group

consensus or vote. The president would maintain contact with external requests for PB information and manage meetings. The secretary would keep notes of the group's organizing progress. The treasurer would communicate with the fiscal sponsor and PB GSO activists about monetary commitments and goals. We, co-authors of this paper, were selected for two of those positions in early 2013. Vincent was elected president while Spoma, who had already received the group's permission to collect research on "the discourse of participatory budgeting," was elected secretary. She would modify her research field notes for use as the organization's meeting minutes.

Method

Our community-based research emerges from three years of time with PB GSO, involving more than 450 hours of participant-observation, 192 pages of field notes, dozens of interviews and casual conversations, the collection of data from over 500 community residents, and the organizing of 22 community educational events as part of a community ethnography. Our mode of engagement reflects a desire to work with the community to participate fully in addressing the tensions evident in social relationships (Sprain & Boromisza-Habashi, 2013). We also remain active agents in contributing creative strategies for political and economic change. That is, from the very beginning, we have participated in brainstorming, strategic plan development, and reflection with others to refine and realign the process of introducing PB to the community. Of note is that the PB GSO organizers themselves have decades of experience in social change efforts, research, teaching, and evaluation surrounding concerns of civil rights, education, economic reform, and human rights. Thus, our contributions as researchers have been just one part of the process in building mutually beneficial relationships based on closeness, equity, and integrity—hallmarks of strong community-campus partnerships (Bringle, Clayton & Price, 2009). A cooperative spirit, not hierarchy of knowledge claims, guides the roles, resources and methods of this research project (Boyte, 2009).

Among the questions that PB GSO organizers had that influenced this ethnographic investigation were, how do grassroots organizers effectively tack back and forth between time spent on community outreach efforts and cultivating relationships in local politics? How does privileging inclusivity over efficiency in local political action change the values and goals for community work? Will advocacy by people for projects of their choosing reflect a collective concern for the community or special interest politics to benefit a few? Our research, then, has been designed to lift up issues organizers have raised, driven by community interests for community change (Stoecker, 2013).

Making Meaning of Deliberative Processes

PB's communicative dimensions offer rich opportunity to advance our understanding of democratic discourse practices. PB is a hopeful enterprise, representing a "liberating rhetoric" or counter-discourse that has the potential to create new thought, opportunities and experiences needed to reclaim an active citizenry (Swartz, 2006, p. 2). As a project of "communication activism," our research situates the academic researcher(s) in the community alongside community members to secure social justice through political and economic reform (Frey, 2006, p. 44).

We rely on W. Barnett Pearce's theory of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) to ask, how can we make our communities better by improving and coordinating our communication practices surrounding budget decision making (2007)? CMM's insistence that communication makes, not merely describes, our social world, recognizes the critical, constitutive dimensions of stories, deliberation, questions, and other discourse forms. With an eye to culture, episode(s), self/identity formation and relationships (Pearce, 2007), our research considers how a grassroots organizing effort advances its goal of increased citizen participation. When CMM is used to interpret, critique, and practice ethical public discourse practices, what we look for are instances of how people demonstrate concern for the well-being of others, not just themselves, to build strong, vibrant communities (Block, 2008). In doing so, this research advances social justice where the voices of historically underrepresented community members can be fully integrated into conversations for social change and meaningful public involvement.

The grassroots organizers relied on rhetoric, collaboration and participatory democracy to promote justice in the city and empower historically underrepresented communities to contribute to budget decision making. The ethical dimension of rhetoric recognizes the phenomenologically situated character of speech that reflects our lived experiences (Bakhtin, 1993). That is, people's stories are important in both describing and in changing the cultural conditions that give rise to experiences of justice and injustices. Then, to achieve the meaningful civic engagement PB GSO hoped for, policy and budget decisions needed to be informed by a collaborative spirit infused with "discussion, accommodation, and compromise" (Frantzich, 2011, p. 9). All too often, deliberations of public importance are managed not by collecting the many ideas from many people, but instead by allowing a few who put profit or efficiency motives before consideration of human life to proclaim how we should live. The pervasive market-based thinking, philosopher Michael Sandel argues (2010), has detached ethics from everyday life, giving rise to social inequality and corruption. Finally, participatory democracy requires people to assert agency and seize opportunities that contribute to community problem solving. Today, we need to actively work against "the rise of unquestioned authority of experts and specialists (Hessel & Morin, 2012, p. 36) and the individualistic orientation to society that has disenfranchised us from determining our collective fate.

By examining PB through a communication perspective, communication practices are regarded as "...generative: a way of doing things and making things, not just talking about things" (Pearce, 2007, p. xiii). Steeped in a worldview of social construction, our words call attention to the ways in which we name, describe, and differentiate experiences. The power of rhetoric, collaboration, and participatory democracy, in this sense are communicative tools that create opportunities for social change.

Rhetoric as Dialogic Ethics

In considering key moments in PB GSO's history, one that the members point to was in December 2012, at a brunch hosted by the group for three city council members. Following that shared meal, PB GSO met with the then-mayor who agreed that \$2.5 million of the city's budget was a reasonable goal for PB. PB GSO organizers thought they had closed the deal, but in fact, that hopeful meeting amounted to just that – hope and nothing more. To move the social change dial a notch forward, PB organizers urged city council members to attend the 2013 International

Participatory Budgeting Conference, six months later. Though one council person agreed to attend and another suggested she would likely go, neither made the trip. It was a low point, and one that could have left the PB organizers feeling tamped down by the power elite. Yet, that did not happen.

The organizers recognized that social change action requires education to build the critical consciousness necessary for people to confront issues and imagine new possibilities (Freire, 1998). So, they continued to keep open the door for spaces of dialogue where cooperation, even with dissenting views, could emerge. That is, the activists sought to interact as equals with elected representatives to broker a PB program that could work in response to the needs of all. PB supporters were advancing education as ethical, democratic practice through group encounter reliant on dialogue (Ray, et al. 2011).

Later, PB GSO invited experts from Chicago and New York to meet with the nine city council members in Greensboro. The PB supporters made personal contact with all the elected officials to secure commitments from eight of the nine council members and three staff members to attend the scheduled briefing.

On the day of the scheduled briefing, however, only five of the 11 city officials and staff members who were committed to the meeting, actually met with the out-of-town guests. Instead of berating the city officials, the PB organizers seized upon the positive outcomes of that meeting. A senior council member and former Greensboro mayor respected for her advocacy for minority rights and social justice pledged to jump start the PB process. At that point, PB GSO focused its efforts on working with her as the champion for PB GSO.

Of note is that throughout more than three years of starts and setbacks, PB GSO supporters asked themselves what more they could do, what other modes of outreach could spark greater interest, what pressure points should they activate to engage elected leaders? They employed what are considered best practices—they did not cast blame for stalled action, or retreat from another round of conversations and planning, or withdraw support from each other when inevitable conflicts arose (Del Gandio, 2008). Instead, they saw the inherent struggle in discourse as a worthy endeavor. For instance, while the PB organizers wanted to hold onto the goal of \$2.5 million for a PB process in Greensboro, subsequent talks with city staff suggested that figure may have been unrealistic. To acknowledge the situation fully, a long-time PB GSO member weighed in through email with his fellow organizers to comment on how best to proceed with advocacy efforts.

The city manager has already voiced concerns about taking money from the operating budget, since that budget goes almost exclusively to salaries...I suggest being ready to lower our ask to a percentage of discretionary funds within the (city's) capital budget—this gives the city more breathing room. We just want to stay at or above \$1 million in order to have an amount (for PB) that seems significant to the public.

The other PB supporters agreed, and it was that approach of being aware of the challenges yet holding onto the goals of the social change project itself, that prevailed. PB GSO's organizing style comports with philosopher Emmanuel Levinas' conception of dialogic ethics where radical alterity, or the extreme differences that mark us, offer the route to imagining new possibilities, perspectives, change, and transformation (1974/1981). This rhetorical sensitivity signaled interest to continue collaborating with city officials.

Collaboration: The Backbone of Communicating for Social Change

One effective means of bringing much needed attention and capital to PB GSO was through the use of a crowdsourcing promotional campaign to increase opportunities for collaboration with an external audience. Communication scholar Lori Britt says, “Collaboration involves collective responsibility and the joint ownership of decisions” (2014, p. 7). The crowdsourcing campaign, it turned out, was another critical moment (Pearce, 2007) for PB GSO that required members to articulate concrete goals for the first time. Two college students in full collaboration with the other PB GSO activists, wrote, produced, filmed, and edited a video to highlight the organization’s goals and how a PB process could benefit the city. The video was posted online and promoted through national and international networks of established PB list serves. A social media campaign targeted local and regional community members. The campaign netted \$4,750, exceeding slightly the money needed to fund the three priority projects.

As they unfolded, the projects were reviewed collaboratively for impact. PB GSO’s involvement in the international PB conferences was deemed highly successful for the learning that was gleaned from days of presentations by experienced PB organizers from Kenya, South Korea, London, Arizona, New Mexico, Buffalo, NY, St. Louis, Vallejo, Porto Alegre, and other cities around the world. PB GSO members were part of panels sharing knowledge on how to secure political support, develop creative organizing techniques, and integrate scholar activists into PB efforts. In assessing the collaborative opportunities afforded by the conference, one under-40 activist pointed out how happy he was to see other young people leading the charge for change. He said, “One of the great things about PB is that it is valuable as a dreaming activity, as a community building exercise. Just talking about PB is valuable...we’re helping people dream about possibilities to the problems, in the community.”

PB GSO’s success in contacts with city officials also was affirmed positively. A female organizer said, “We’ve had a consistent dosage of conversation with city council—showing up at budget meetings and having informal meetings with them, one-on-one.” PB GSO activists did more. With the volunteer-turned paid staff person they secured for three months, the group was moved to present educational sessions on the basics of PB to elected leaders and held public events to model PB processes. Members prepared fact sheets, designed appealing graphics, developed educational materials, and shared updates as well, as “speakers from the floor” at public meetings. As a result of the activities, interest from city leaders grew, collaboration was evident, but still PB GSO lacked a firm commitment from city leaders to institute PB. A new wave of collaborative activity was thus organized.

Based on previous collaboration with national PB efforts, PB GSO was one of a handful of cities asked to participate in a 2014 White House-sponsored roundtable exploring PB as a civic engagement model for the country. PB GSO seized the opportunity to again reach out to local elected officials, this time with an offer to go to Washington, DC. The White House invitation signaled a heightened legitimacy for PB. Two city council members joined PB GSO on the trip and were inspired by its possibilities. One councilman, the youngest ever elected to that post in the city’s history at age 25 said, “Other people that are talking to us are saying (participatory budgeting) changed the game because people from the community understood the budget. They became part of the process,”

(Lehmert, 2014, p. A2). In other words, this councilman saw how PB was a collaborative opportunity that could attract new levels of participation and transform citizen understanding and involvement in local politics.

Participatory Democracy and Getting to “Yes” with City Council

For PB GSO organizers, democracy is “a political goal and a social process, rather than a pre-existing political condition” (Artz, 2011, p. 47). Thus, participatory decision-making processes like PB are a means to affect social change “by creating space for marginalized voices within larger social discussions among a range of publics and counterpublics” (Ganesh & Zoller, 2012, p. 78). To “get” PB in Greensboro represented, for the organizers, a cultural shift, one where people would be engaged actors with government officials to acknowledge and discuss the problems, issues, and opportunities in the community.

With forward progress in Greensboro finally in place by the end of 2013, as evidenced by the city council’s new “working group” to study how PB could be implemented within the legislative and budgetary regulations for the city, another critical moment (Pearce, 2007) surfaced to renew, albeit cautiously, optimism for participatory democracy in the city.

To keep PB GSO relevant, and to foster greater community support, the group used the remaining money from its fundraising campaign to host a miniature, simplified PB process. College students from three different institutions in the area organized the event that drew 60 people. Seed money of \$500 was added to an additional \$350 in donations that were collected that night. As a result, \$850 was awarded to three projects out of the nine that were proposed by diverse nonprofits to the group. PB “grants” were given to: 1) A student-initiated mobile market to sell fresh produce in food deserts; 2) Publication of a newspaper written by and for people experiencing homelessness; and 3) A higher education prison initiative for inmates to earn college credit. The event promoted dialogue about issues facing the community—homelessness, food insecurity, the role of public art, labor organizing, the rise of low-income families—issues about and with people who are commonly left on the sidelines of civic engagement activities.

The PB event demonstrated the benefits of popular education and the low barrier of entry into the budgeting process (Davis, Dickson, Green & Raeder, 2013). The mix of vibrant conversation, deliberation, and decision making permeated small group discussions among elected officials, college students, community members, senior citizens, and nonprofit organization volunteers in attendance. A city council member who witnessed and applauded the process told a local reporter, “I think it [PB] has the potential to engage citizens in the governing process” (McLean, 2013, ¶ 6). Her comments echoed what we know about PB more generally:

PB thus represents an important step in the political improvement of the relationship between government and society... The effects of participation are knowledge, mastery of relations and competencies to intervene in social processes. People are no longer spectators, but become subjects committed to public matters. On the other hand, a shared management forces members of the government to pay more attention to people’s demands. (Weyh & Streck, 2003, p. 25).

That miniature PB process proved instrumental in securing unanimous support from the city council's working group to advance the resolution to the full city council for a vote that if passed would at last jumpstart PB in the city.

The PB Push: A Worthwhile Endeavor or Waste of Time

In examining PB GSO's critical moments of the past three years, it is clear that the activities have yielded mixed results. It has successfully fostered the development of student activists, completed a fundraising campaign, educated residents and elected officials about the benefits of participatory budgeting, garnered positive media attention, and executed PB events that funded several community improvement projects. Some allies on city council have been formed, and relationships with national partners have deepened. PB GSO organizers met the social change challenges that 21st century activists face: the need to use decentered movements and new forms of leadership to communicate across contexts to build alliances and work with the media (Del Gandio, 2008). That is, using democratic creativity, and tapping into opportunities to form partnerships, PB GSO introduced possibilities for new political engagement by citizens, inspired by the work of PB worldwide.

Yet, even with those positive developments, PB GSO has had to admit that the road to social change has been paved with somewhat capricious moments. Delayed responses in communication with other community groups and city officials, lack of full enthusiasm for PB by professional city staff, competing demands for elected leaders' attention, unsettled negotiations over minimum funding levels for PB GSO, and difficulties in retaining more community organizers have been the basis of protracted conversations and at best, slow, incremental progress.

A core principle in Saul Alinsky's now famous community organizing effort, IAF (Industrial Areas Foundation), is "anything that drags on too long becomes a drag" (Chambers, 2003, p. 103). PB GSO wonders if its persistence and patience have been catalyst enough for a social change effort. The organizers can point proudly to equity as a defining value of their own operations as well as a feature of their outreach activities. No one member, even those occupying leadership roles, occupies a privileged seat in decision making. The group's deliberations have been infused with "inclusive exchange, based on trust, in which participants examine the issues, evaluate a range of options, and open their minds to new perspectives" (Clark & Teachout, 2012, p.87). As a result, new friendships have been formed among the members, and meetings in the homes of one another have been the rule, rather than the exception. While the enthusiasm for PB persists, there has been a need to slow down advocacy to accommodate the needs of others. To effectively build the partnerships needed for PB GSO to be successful when it is finally implemented in the city, organizers admit that their commitment has had to be a long-term one, not a one-shot opportunity. At present, PB GSO faces new challenges of reinvigorating its membership absent the accomplishment of its ultimate goal.

Remaining open to possibilities, compromises, and new ideas, yet holding fast to a goal of participatory democracy, PB GSO organizers demonstrate a hopeful stance in citizen action that goes far beyond the reach of voting in the polling booth to actively engaging elected representatives and community members to cultivate positive social change. Engaging the public in public decisions is imperative if we are to retain the democratic

character of our society that is increasingly under siege by forces of exclusion and the ideology of corporate rule (Holland, et al., 2007).

Conclusion

PB GSO has generated some small and some greater successes in drawing attention to the city's need to increase resident participation in decision making, particularly involvement by historically underrepresented sectors of the community. These successes can be attributed to the group's adherence to its values of inclusion, transparency, and equality. Though PB GSO lacks many of the resources available to more established non-profits such as funding streams, paid staff, and longstanding relationships with influential community members, it has still been able to promote collaboration between residents and city officials. As demonstrated in this research, grassroots groups eager to ignite social change without haste, must inevitably invest the time to build relationships and broker new ways of thinking.

PB GSO demonstrates that a group's values are an inexhaustible resource in motivating activists to work toward their goals. By striving to honor its own ideals of inclusion, transparency, and equality both internally and externally, PB GSO has been able to reimagine the us-versus-them tension that so often manifests between social change agents and city officials.

What PB GSO organizers continue to express is a national situation in need of repair. According to the International City/County Management Association's 2012 State of the Profession Survey, only 57% of local government respondents reported that it is important or highly important to partner with the public in the development of alternatives, identification of the preferred solution, and decision making. In other words, barely over one-half of government leaders believe citizen-government partnerships are a priority. Worse, only 19% said it was important or highly important for the public to be involved in decision making (Vogel, Moulder & Huggins, 2014, para. 8-9). Instead, the survey reported that public officials believe they should simply inform the public, consider concerns, and solicit feedback from citizens. While these activities are necessary for public engagement, they are undermined when government officials restrict participation from developing into full partnerships and direct decision making by citizens in matters of community importance. "Citing complexity of issues and the breadth and depth of knowledge needed for sound policies local government officials often express reluctance for expanding the public's direct role in decision making" (Vogel, Moulder & Huggins, 2014, para. 19). PB seeks to provide a viable antidote to that position by offering meaningful education and involvement opportunities for ordinary residents to speak their minds, participate with others in research and deliberations, and make collaborative decisions to influence the community's future.

PB is designed to make tangible the structure and content of democratic values that for many are merely abstractions. As Gradinaru (2012) articulates so well, "Sometimes, the main issue is not how we provide a solution to an urgent problem, but how we re-design our participatory practices in order to get better results" (p. 136). That is, PB GSO organizers recognize that PB is a social change process that provides a space and the tools for the creative expression by ordinary people who want to be active agents in making their towns, communities, and cities more responsive to the needs of all people. It is a process, built on the pillars of social justice that is literally

changing the world. That “participatory turn” (Gilman, 2012) at the local level is where we are most likely see the equitable distribution of resources to meet the challenges facing us today.

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Communicating Community: A Culture-Centered Approach to Racial/Ethnic (In)equality

J. Jacob Jenkins

Racial/ethnic inequality is still a significant concern in our world today. In spite of religion's potential to address this issue, both race and religion remain largely unexamined by organizational communication scholars. In the present study I address each of these realities by investigating bottom-up interpretations of daily life to reveal how diverse organizational members of an intercultural congregation co-constructed the concept of "community." Using the model of community of practice and the culture-centered approach, I code more than four years of ethnographic field notes, while integrating an innovative approach to photography-driven research methods. Four specific themes emerged from this data including: (a) articulations of a common cause, (b) representations of cultural diversity, (c) acts of genuine dialogue, and (d) opportunities for crossing social categories.

Keywords: Race/Ethnicity, Community of Practice; Culture-centered Approach; PhotoVoice

Racial/ethnic inequality is still a significant concern in today's society, meriting theoretical and pragmatic consideration from theorists and practitioners alike. In recent years, racial/ethnic disparities have shown to influence most every aspect of daily life, ranging from healthcare standards to education levels to incarceration rates to income inequality to discrimination in the workplace to name but a few (Allen, 2007). As Allen (2011) notes, race/ethnicity is a fundamental source of social organization in the United States that results in instances of white privilege, white supremacy, and even discriminatory silence. Stanfield and Dennis (1993) further explain: "From census interviews to job applications to school reports to affirmative action reporting, Americans are bombarded with presumptions about their racial identifications. Therefore, race matters because it is an ongoing organizing principle of our lives" (p. 15).

This project is part of a larger and ongoing research agenda regarding the role of religious and faith-based organizations in addressing the concerns surrounding racial/ethnic inequality. Churches not only act as mediating institutions, but also wield a significant amount of hegemony within contemporary society. There are, in fact, more than 300,000 faith-based congregations in the United States alone (Cnaan, Brody, Handy, Yancey, & Schneider, 2002). More than one hundred million Americans are involved in church to some degree (Emerson, 2008), and one half of America's social capital is estimated to be religious or religiously affiliated (Jenkins, 2014a). Blanchard (2007) goes as far as to characterize the Christian church as an entry point for community participation and social

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integration, with the potential to diminish racial and residential segregation. Putnam (2000) elaborates on this reality by writing:

Faith communities...are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America... Nearly half of all associational memberships in America are church related, half of all personal philanthropy is religious in character, and half of all volunteering occurs in a religious context. So how involved we are in religion today matters a lot for America's social capital. (p. 66)

In spite of religion's potential for positive social change, organizational communication researchers have traditionally limited their foci to for-profit and professional contexts (Ashcraft, 2011). Given the importance of race/ethnicity in our culture today, matters of difference have also been severely understudied by organizational scholars, prompting Cox and Nkomo (1990) to characterize racial/ethnic minorities as invisible in organizational research.

Given religion's potential influence, combined with the lack of communication research on religious organizations' ability to address racial/ethnic inequality, the present study examined an intercultural congregation located in Tampa Bay's urban corridor. Specifically, this study investigated bottom-up interpretations of daily life within Central Community Church³ in order to reveal the way racially/ethnically diverse members discursively co-constructed the concept of "community."

I begin this process, first, by outlining the model of *community of practice* and the *culture-centered approach*. Building upon more than four years of ethnographic fieldwork, I then outline the study's innovative use of photography-driven research methods. Next, I reveal four specific themes that emerged from the data: (a) articulations of a common cause, (b) representations of cultural diversity, (c) acts of genuine dialogue, and (d) opportunities for crossing social categories. I conclude with potential implications for future research and practice.

The present study is especially significant for communication scholars in light of the United States' changing racial/ethnic landscape. By decade's end, no single racial/ethnic group will comprise a majority of American children under the age of 18 (Cooper, 2012). By exploring the way racial/ethnic minorities communicated within Central Community Church, this study offers unique insight into how others can communicate more effectively in their own diverse organizational settings. It will enable religious and faith-based organizations to better address the issues of racial/ethnic inequality that continue to plague today's society.

Review of Literature

Humans share an inherent desire for personal interaction and belonging. As Peck (1987) writes: "There can be no vulnerability without risk; there can be no community without vulnerability; there can be no peace, and ultimately no life, without community" (p. 233). Despite community's import, few people seem able to clearly articulate the meaning of this term (Adelman & Frey, 1997). The conventional view of community is often defined by physical space: cities, towns, and neighborhoods. Young (2003) writes, "In ordinary speech for most people in the U.S., the term community refers to people with whom I identify in a locale" (p. 244). Beyond physical

¹ The organization's name is a pseudonym, as are all names used in this study

distinction alone, many scholars view community as a disembodied concept: a shared set of values, interests, attitudes, and/or emotional responses (Putnam, 2000). This conception of community has become especially salient in our current media age. Through the use of cellular phones and social networking services, it is now possible for communities to operate beyond the spatial and geographical limitations that bound previous generations (Kim, 2000). Finally, within the field of communication, community is typically viewed as the constitution and reconstitution of communicative practices. In the words of Rothenbuhler (1991), “Communication and community grow in each other’s shadows; the possibilities of the one are structured by the possibilities of the other” (p. 76). As a result, communication scholars define community as more than mere internal and/or emotive processes, but rather the external and demonstrative (inter)actions that those processes entail: social rules, communal norms, and patterns of speech (Purnell & Jenkins, 2013).

Communication patterns help to establish and standardize values, priorities, and expectations within communal contexts. Communication is also the process by which communities induct new members, select new leaders, etc. Furthermore, communication characterizes the socialization process wherein new community members learn communal rules and norms. Wenger’s (1998) model of *community of practice* builds upon this third, communicative view of community. His model outlines three distinct dimensions through which community is communicatively constituted: (a) mutual engagement, (b) joint enterprise, and (c) shared repertoire. Each of these dimensions is outlined more thoroughly in the following section.

Community of Practice

Mutual Engagement. Wenger (1998) defines mutual engagement as shared action that works to sustain the community. This dimension is exemplified through engaged diversity, social complexity, and community maintenance. By working together, community members connect in meaningful ways and socialize members. Wenger specifically mentions that these community members need not be analogous. Rather, “What makes engagement in practice possible and productive is as much a matter of diversity as it is a matter of homogeneity” (p. 75). This particular feature, as outlined by Wenger, makes the model of community of practice particularly relevant to the study of an intercultural organization.

Joint Enterprise. The second dimension of the model of community of practice is joint enterprise – defined by negotiated enterprise, mutual accountability, and local response (Wenger, 1998, p. 73). Within this dimension, community members define and identify their collective goal or endeavor in the very process of pursuing it. This communal negotiation is a “response to [the community members’] situation and thus belongs to them in a profound sense, in spite of all the forces and influences that are beyond their control” (p. 77). As a result, cultural diversity is viewed as a creative process and “a productive part of the enterprise” (p. 82). Again, this detail makes the model of community of practice especially relevant to the present study.

Shared Repertoire. The final dimension of the model of community of practice is *shared repertoire*. Wenger (1998) defines shared repertoire as shared narratives, vocabularies, and routine actions that are shared by and among community members, created through the course of interaction over time. Wenger is quick to point out,

however, that shared repertoire is a dynamic phenomenon. Reminiscent of *structuration theory* (Giddens, 1986), community members are inherently bound by the personal repertoires they bring to the group, as well as those repertoires shared by the community; however, community members are simultaneously creating and reinforcing new repertoires. Each of these dimensions – joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire – work together to produce the model of community of practice (Figure 1).

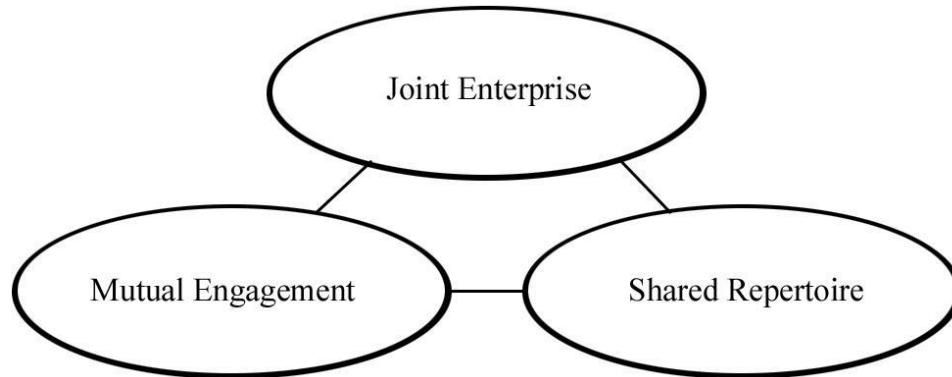


Figure 1. The model of community of practice (adopted from Wenger, 1998, p. 73).

Culture-Centered Approach

In addition to this work by Wenger, I also took a culture-centered approach. For this study, an intercultural congregation is defined as one in which no one racial/ethnic group makes up “more than 80 percent of the attendees of at least one of the major worship services” (Yancey, 2003, p. 15). This definition is largely attributed to the work of Pettigrew and Martin (1987), who argue that minority groups attain critical mass when they reach twenty percent of an organization’s population. By this standard, a mere eight percent of American congregations are intercultural (Chavez, 1999).

Communication researchers have attempted to address the cultural disparity that persists within modern American congregations by exploring shared narratives among diverse congregational members (Dhingra, 2004), by identifying the way dialectical tensions are managed (Driskill, Meyer, & Mirivel, 2012) and by revealing best practices for cultivating and sustaining racial/ethnic difference (Dougherty & Huyser, 2008). Apart from Driskill and company’s (2012) dialectical work with the Nehemiah Project, however, many of these studies serve only to reify the traditional top-down, managerial bias that plagued early studies of organizational communication (Eisenberg & Eschenfelder, 2007). As a result, their foci and research questions are often derived from a dominant value system, concerned primarily with the leadership’s ability to “make” or “produce” a desired organizational culture. As Pal (2008) writes, it is typical for “dominant academic knowledge [to be] invested in understanding what the dominant system wants to know” (p. 3).

In contrast to previous investigations, this study counteracted the top-down approach to understanding intercultural congregations. Rather, it used a *culture-centered approach* to communication research, co-constructing the meaning of “community” through direct, in-depth engagement with racially/ethnically diverse organizational members.

The culture-centered approach to communication research suggests that the way we communicate about a given concept is based upon our taken-for-granted assumptions about that concept (Basu & Dutta, 2008). For this reason, the culture-centered approach highlights unobserved, universal logic structures that are rooted within an organization's dominant value system. It brings about "hidden agendas embedded in the top-down frameworks... providing a critical entry point for interrogating them" (p. 3). The culture-centered approach allows access to discursive knowledge structures present among diverse populations. It also centralizes the potentially marginalized voices from within, and stresses the importance of participation by current community members (Basu & Dutta, 2008).

Although the culture-centered approach originated in the field of health communication, it offered a useful lens for which to explore an intercultural congregation. The culture-centered approach suggests theoretical and methodological guidelines for working alongside diverse populations within the long-established structure of a religious organization (Dutta-Bergman & Basu, 2007). This approach also allowed the voices of diverse cultural members to be included into the way "community" was understood, interpreted, and communicated by/among the participants of this study.

Methodology

Context

The specific context for this study was Central Community Church, a nondenominational Christian church located in Tampa Bay's urban corridor. Central Community was founded in 2006, and has an average weekly attendance of 120 adults. Since its inception, Central Community has striven to be(come) a culturally diverse organization. As a result, 63% of the church's congregation self-identified as white. Sixteen percent identified as African American and 12% as Hispanic/Latino; the remaining 9% identified as Multiracial.

Such a rare racial/ethnic composition resulted, in part, from Central Community's desire to reflect and impact the specific realities of its surrounding community. Central Community not only adopted "community" as its organizational focus, but also promoted the concept of community via church literature, sermon topics, organizational events, and outreach efforts. During a recent service in which church leaders discussed goals for the coming year, Central Community's lead pastor commented, "We are all growing in our faith. But we can only do that in community... We are made for fellowship, for intimacy. We are made for community" (field notes, January 29, 2012).

The priority Central Community placed upon community is a notable aspiration since the demographic makeup of its neighborhood reflects the projected demographics of America by year 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Of the estimated 160,000 persons living within six square-miles of Central Community, 39% self-identified as Hispanic/Latino, 30% white, 27% African American, and 4% Asian-American/Unlisted (Percept, 2007).

Procedure

Rather than working exclusively with the organization's leadership, this study visually and dialogically engaged the membership of Central Community (Bauman, 2000). In accordance with the culture-centered approach, I explored how diverse organizational members of Central Community communicated their understanding of "community" through an expanded variation of *PhotoVoice* (Haines, Oliffe, Bottorff, & Poland, 2010) – alternatively referred to as reflexive photography (Berman, Ford-Gilboe, Moutrey, & Cekic, 2001), photo interviewing (Hurworth, 2003), participatory photo interviews (Jorgenson & Sullivan, 2010), photo elicitation (Radley & Taylor, 2003), photofeedback (Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007), autodriving/autodriven interviews (Clark, 1999), or photo novella (Wang & Burris, 1994).

Utilizing the rapport I had established with organizational leaders and members, I began by identifying a sampling of twenty-five congregational members who represented the racial/ethnic composition of Central Community. A bag was provided to each participant containing (a) one disposable camera, (b) one sketch pad, (c) a variety of pens, pencils and markers, (d) modeling clay, and (e) one pair of scissors. The participants were then asked to visually represent their understanding of "community" via photographs, drawings/sketches, sculptures, or by cutting/collecting images from other print materials. They were also encouraged to think and work outside the confines of the bag they were given, using whatever visual means they deemed appropriate. Such a variety of representational possibilities expanded upon the past-present methodology of *PhotoVoice* interviewing. It also worked to displace my position of power, allowing each participant to actively co-direct the interview process. Finally, such variety allowed for a broad range of responses without restraining the participants' level of creativity or privileging any one form of representation.

The participants' ages ranged from 22 to 58 years of age ($M = 39.4$). Fourteen of the twenty-four participants were male; eleven were female. Nine participants self-identified as Non-Hispanic White, 9 Hispanic/Latino, 6 African-American, and 1 Native American.

Participants were given a minimum of two weeks to complete their visual representations of community. Once completed, I interviewed participants at a time and location of her/his choosing. The majority of interviews were conducted at one of three local coffee shops; one interview was conducted within the participant's home. I began this process by inviting each participant to reveal her/his visual representation of community and to explain its meaning. Follow-up and clarifying questions were asked when appropriate. The interviews were otherwise unstructured, allowing opportunity for participants to direct the conversation as much as possible.

Each interview lasted between 30 and 57 minutes, totaling 22 hours and 37 minutes in length. The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. The confidentiality of each participant was ensured by removing her/his name from the transcriptions and from all subsequent manuscripts. A digital copy of each interview was stored in a secure location.

Due to the unrecognized status of *PhotoVoice*, this methodology *defamiliarized* the interview process, allowing participants to "see through different eyes from beyond" (Edwards, 1997, p. 54). It helped to establish

rapport with someone who may not otherwise share a taken-for-granted cultural background (Ross, 2010), and it elicited more emotive responses traditional interviews alone (Radley & Taylor, 2003).

The resulting data was analyzed using Morse's (1994) four-stage conceptualization of data analysis: comprehending, synthesizing, theorizing, and recontextualizing. Following transcription, each interview was coded in order to identify dominant themes. The codings were then clumped and re-coded together until a tree of large-order and small-order themes emerged from the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The subsequent analysis focused on theorizing, a procedure characterized by Morse (1994) as the malleable development and manipulation of information until the most suitable theoretical scheme is determined. The final step of this study's analysis involved recontextualization: discovering practical ways in which each of its theoretical schemes could prove applicable to additional organizational settings (Morse, 1994; Gibson & Papa, 2000).

Results

Common Cause

The first theme that emerged from this study was *articulations of a common cause*. During my participant observations, organizational members commonly referred to the need to "gather," "come together" and "work together" in order to pursue a communal goal or vision (field notes, January 22, 2012; March 18, 2012; April 8, 2012). Consequently, several organizational events and initiatives served the role of common cause for Central Community's constituents. These initiatives included providing free school supplies to local elementary teachers and students, feeding and clothing homeless citizens in Tampa Bay, screening a monthly film in one of several public parks, offering discounted groceries to those in need, supplying free tutorial services to nearby elementary schools, and developing the artistic aptitude of local children. In addition to each of these examples, one particularly notable cause included Central Community's annual Fall Festival.

Fall Festival was a free community event held each November on the campus of a neighboring elementary school. It offered families free food, carnival games, and children's rides. Bulletin inserts appeared as early as August in effort to garner interest and momentum for the event. During this time, leaders referred to the festival on a weekly basis, reminding members of its date (field notes, October 7, 2012; October 21, 2012), requesting donations (field notes, October 14, 2012; October 21, 2012), and pledging to make it "bigger and better" than the years before (field notes, October 21, 2012; November 4, 2012). As a result, Fall Festival mobilized approximately 100 volunteers from within Central Community's congregation and attracted as many as 500 people from the church's surrounding neighborhood. Due to the scale of this event, Fall Festival required that a diverse range of congregational members work together in effort to ensure its success. It served as an organizational "rallying cry," and offered both a unified and unifying focus for the leaders and members of Central Community.

The need for a common cause was also evinced during my photography-driven interviews. Whether implicitly or explicitly, each of the participants interviewed for this study indicated the necessity of a communal goal or vision in order to be(come) a true community. One congregational member by the name of Samuel began our photography-driven interview with an image he had cut from a magazine. The image depicted a herd of sheep,

each facing in the same direction. When asked whether the image would still represent community if each sheep faced a different direction, Samuel responded: “No. They’d no longer be looking at the same thing... seeking the same goal” (Hispanic/Latino male).

Another member of Central Community’s congregation, Malik, used the scissors and construction paper I provided to create a collage of images. The collage was comprised of a tree growing from a set of human hands. The cupped hands were filled with seeds to represent the tree’s origins; the tree itself was made of Scripture verses. Meanwhile, each of the tree’s branches were leafed with specific characteristics of what this participant saw as defining community: a family with their hands raised toward the sky, a classroom of school children, a hand-drawn picture of the world, and a quote that read “Get Involved.” According to Malik’s description, the collage’s central theme was “unity” and the communal act of “growing together.” He explained that we all “came from something, from the same thing... And we’re all returning to that same thing in the end, that same cause” (African American male).

A third congregational member named Matthew outlined the importance of communal purpose even more explicitly:

Well, if I was to define community I would say coming together for a common goal...or common purpose... I see [community] as forming a circle and, yeah, I always see something as a focal point. There can be God in the focal point, there could be family in the focal point, and there could be friendship. You could have a tangible in the focal point...family values as a common cause...I always think of people surrounding something when I think of community. (white male)

Kiara seemed to agree:

I see community as coming together for a common vision, a common cause... anytime come together as a community to help our children and our families, to me that is God, that is what we are supposed to be doing... That is one of the reasons I have stayed connected to Central Community. (African American female)

When asked whether Central Community has a strong sense of community, Kiara also used the presence of a clearly communicated goal to gauge her answer:

In regards to whether we have a community, I think it is a growing community, it is a developing community. But is it solid, or is our message clear? I can say that Pastor Steve in my opinion is doing a great job with being clear about the message that he has about us coming together and working together and not just seeing each other on Sunday.

Building upon the assumed necessity of a common cause, John went as far as to describe the clear and simple manner in which such a cause must be communicated to organizational members: “The articulation of the cause... has got to be simple and compelling and can’t be confusing...it has got to be simple” (white male). This member concluded by saying a clear and simple articulation of the common cause benefits the organization because it fosters greater commitment and personal investment from members.

Cultural Diversity

The second theme that emerged from this study was *representations of cultural diversity*. During the interviews, a majority of organizational members referred to diversity as an essential characteristic of community. April even related this theme to the first one by characterizing cultural diversity as critical, yet only possible when the diverse members share a common vision:

Communities must be able to be open-minded and open the doors to all members, even if their viewpoints are different from yours, as long as they are along with your vision. For example, we want to serve our kids, whether you are a Christian, non-believer or whatever... If you are here to serve our kids, then you are welcome because that is our common vision and that is the community we are forming. (African American female)

Meanwhile, Samuel offered an instruction booklet from the video game *Star Fox* as a visual representation of community. *Star Fox* was released in 1993 for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System, and is often considered one of the best video games of its time. The game's booklet featured a broad cast of anthropomorphic characters: a fox named Fox McCloud, a pheasant named Falco Lombardi, a frog named Slippy Toad, and a rabbit named Peppy Hare. Samuel called specific attention to the diversity captured within *Star Fox's* instruction booklet by commenting:

Community is made of people that are not alike... Obviously you got a fox here, got a bird, got a bunny rabbit, and you got a toad or a frog, and they're on a team working... The common goal to save whatever, maybe the home planet. So I guess when I was thinking about community there was two definitions or two – I guess – criteria that had to be met: A group of people working together towards a common goal and none of them are the same. They all have unique characteristics. (Hispanic/Latino male)

A third organizational participant, Kiara, offered a literal depiction of diversity by taking a picture of herself alongside two fellow congregants. The picture showed three adults whom she described as being “closest of friends.” During our interview, Kiara went out of her way to describe the three adults as representing three unique races/ethnicities. She then elaborated on their friendship by saying, “I have learned so much from Jane and Justin. And I think they've learned a lot from me – I know they have. We're so different from one another... And I think that's why [we've learned so much]” (African American female). These comments again built upon the previous theme of a common cause, while also highlighting the importance of heterogeneity. Each of these congregational members emphasized the differences represented in their images – the *Starfox* team members and diverse congregants – while clearly framing that difference in a positive light.

Genuine Relationship

The third theme that emerged during this study was *acts of genuine relationship*. Each participant discussed the value of being able to trust others, of being accepted, and of being able to enter into genuine relationship with one another. One organizational member by the name of Jordan noted, “It's not just religion, but anything you decide to be part of you have to have faith and trust in the people that are in it” (African American male).

Meanwhile, Anthony referred to the significance of genuine relationship by commenting, “Community is giving that helping hand, listening, praying, and being a part of each other’s lives, and just letting everyone know that we are here and if you need us, we can help” (African American male). Bennett, another member of Central Community, had this to say:

[What’s important is] genuine, authentic concern for each member of the community... It is that simple... You have to care about each individual and you have to share the commitment for the cause. There is a value in the genuine caring, the sincere, and the true concern for each member of the community... So typically when you have the values that are implicit in truly caring about other members in this community, any cause that you are working on is going to be based on the same values that represent an agape kind of love, of selfless and serving attitude and heart. (white male)

In addition to offering visual representations of community, Bennett also used the pens and sketchpad provided to write about the need for genuine relationship (Figure 2). His words emphasize community’s “genuine,” “sincere,” and “authentic” concern for the welfare of others.

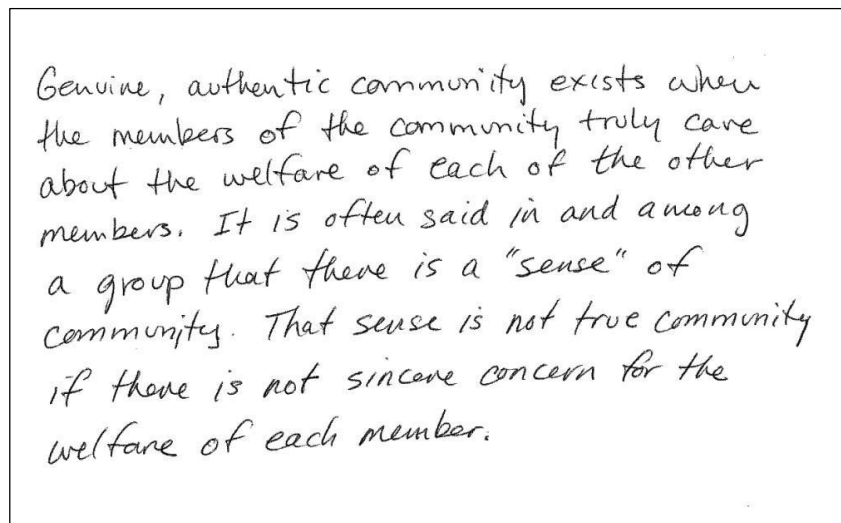


Figure 2. Community as “genuine,” “sincere,” and “authentic.”

This sentiment was reiterated by Samuel’s sketch of an ear (Figure 3), which served to emphasize the need to listen to the lives of others, and the need to be heard: “Sometimes you have to talk, sometimes you have to talk less, and just be there for one another, you know? No matter what” (Hispanic/Latino male). Consequently, Central Community offered several opportunities for relationship building between its organizational leaders and members: monthly men’s breakfasts, women’s luncheons, etc.

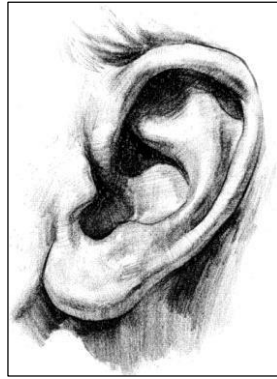


Figure 3. Listening for genuine relationship.

Crossing Categories

The final characteristic of community that emerged from this study was *opportunities for crossing social categories*. This theme revealed the need for community members to interact and interrelate beyond the organization's physical confines. As a result, several participants produced photographs that represented contexts beyond that of Central Community's material structure. Sonya, a Hispanic/Latina female, offered two photographs she had taken in the surrounding neighborhood. One image represented community at a local animal shelter, as two volunteers held and caressed a young Dachshund puppy. Sonya's second image represented community at a local car wash, as two employees lounged together in the shade discussing sports. Another organizational member by the name of Darrian produced the image of a band playing outside a local shopping mall. According to Darrian, the band members both reflected and created community by coming together as one, while simultaneously encouraging others to come together as audience members: "It's both the gathered few and those they cause to gather, to crowd around them... that represents community to me. And that kind of spontaneous get-together can happen anywhere. Anytime. It doesn't have to be on Sunday morning" (African American male).

Malik even spoke disparagingly of Central Community's previously mentioned attempts at relationship building: monthly men's breakfasts, women's luncheons, etc. As a relatively new member of Central Community, Malik discussed the inherent shortcomings of such formal efforts, while simultaneously highlighting the importance of informal interaction outside of church – opportunities to "share life together." Specifically, he referred to a recent fantasy football league that was created by another organizational member, as well as his experience at a past church:

The church I was going to in Georgia...they had something called Girlfriends and they would all get together and do coffee and just little informal activities. They were outside the church but they all shared something in common. (African American male)

Similarly, Kiara discussed the way fellow congregational members of Central Community had recently surprised her at work:

A perfect example [of community] is what Sara and Megan did for me. Man, it had been a rough week for me at work and when I saw my church family come in and bring me flowers and brownies, it was hard to

hold back the tears . . . and to just take a minute out of their busy schedule and day and life to make a difference in my life . . . Sara and Megan were a perfect example of church coming together and they crossed those boundaries and came into my work arena for just a brief moment and that was powerful.

(African American female)

Kiara also pointed to Central Community's weekly Community Group meetings and the way they encouraged her to build friendships beyond Sunday morning worship services:

Pastor Steve has always – for the past three years – mentioned small groups and getting to know someone outside of Sunday morning. So, I can honestly say that if [Amy] had not joined my Community Group I probably wouldn't be a part of this community... Because we were part of that small Community Group together, we were able to form a relationship that allowed us to get to know each other better. And we don't speak every day... but we have such a bond now that I was at her wedding, and I was a part of it.

When I asked the leaders to identify Central Community's best source or cause of community, David also pointed to the church's weekly Community Groups, and the opportunities they offered for members to interact outside of a formal religious framework:

I think [Community Groups] really offer the opportunity to get to know people outside of the normal 'I saw you at church' kind of thing, because there's actual conversation... It's [reflective of] who you really are. I think at some point in a Community Group that you've got to let down the walls you build up. You have to let people see you to some extent. (white male)

Potential Implications

The results of this study revealed four themes of "community," as expressed by the racially/ethnically diverse members of Central Community Church: (a) articulations of a common cause, (b) representations of cultural diversity, (c) acts of genuine dialogue, and (d) opportunities for crossing social categories. When each of these results is organized according to Wenger's model of community of practice, one theme aligns with the dimension of joint enterprise and three themes align with mutual engagement (Figure 4). Specifically, "articulations of a common cause" aligns with the dimension of joint enterprise, which is defined by collective goals and endeavors. Each of the remaining themes – "representations of cultural diversity," "acts of genuine relationship," and "opportunities for crossing social categories" – aligns with the dimension of mutual engagement, which is defined by engaged diversity and social complexity. None of the themes that emerged from this study's results aligns with the dimension of shared repertoire, which is defined by organizational routine and tradition (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002).

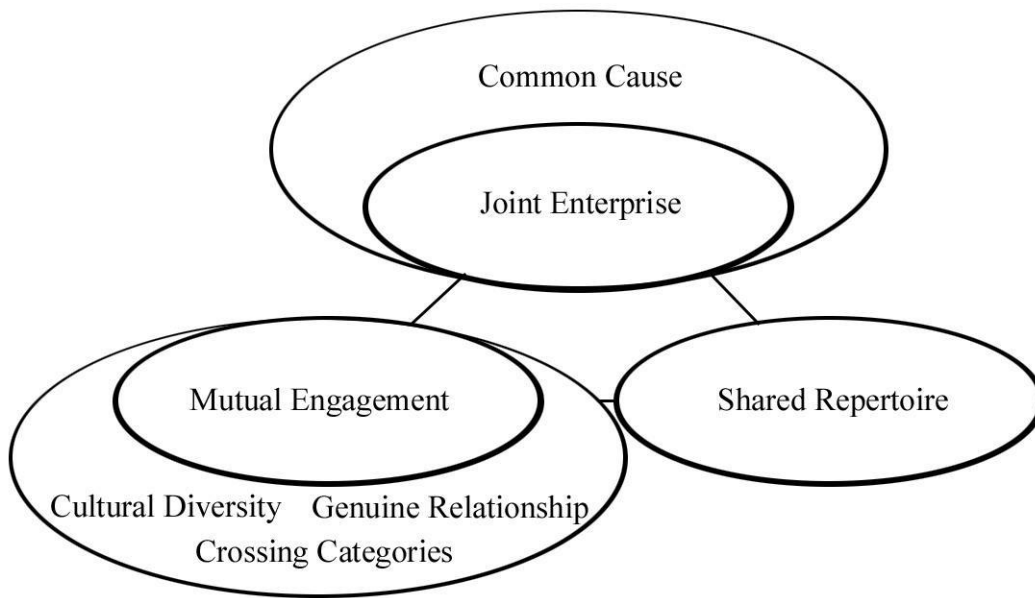


Figure 4. The model of community of practice with study results.

The emphasis that participants placed upon mutual engagement is significant because it stands in stark contrast to the historical emphases religious organizations have placed upon the dimension of shared repertoire. Participants of this study valued cultural diversity, genuine relationship, and social interaction. Historical Christian congregations, however, have typically sought to define and differentiate themselves via particular belief structures, rites, and practices. This reality is evidenced by the sacraments of Catholicism (e.g., baptism, confirmation, communion, confession, etc.) as well as the ordinances of most other Christian denominations (e.g., foot washing for Anabaptists, baptism and confession of faith for Baptists, temple endowment for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, etc.) Such a disparity of emphasis between traditional religion and the findings of this study suggests that organizational leaders and members who desire to promote an organizational metaphor of community, as Central Community has attempted to do, should focus primarily upon the three themes of mutual engagement: fostering cultural diversity, encouraging genuine relationship, and offering opportunities to cross social categories.

When viewed individually, the four themes that emerged during this chapter reveal their own additional insights about the co-construction of community within racially/ethnically diverse contexts. Particularly, they reveal the significance of a superordinate goal, the recursive necessity of diversity, the centrality of communication, and the inadequacies of an organization-as-container metaphor.

This study's first theme – "articulations of a common cause" – highlights the need for a superordinate goal within racially/ethnically diverse organizations like Central Community. Muzafer Sherif, a founder of Social Psychology, defines a *superordinate goal* as a shared aim or objective that is of a higher rank, value, or condition. In a classic study by Sherif et al. (1961), two competed groups of campers were united by the mutually beneficial (i.e., superordinate) need to repair their campsite's disrupted water supply. On a related note, Tajfel and Turner's (1979) *social identity theory* argues that people perceive those with similar characteristics as being "in-group" members and those with diverse characteristics as "out-group" members. People are more likely to prefer

association with those that they perceive as being in-group. Research has shown, however, that a superordinate goal or identity can supersede in-group/out-group discrimination (Rabinovich & Morton, 2011). In other words, out-group discrimination diminishes when a superior objective is established (Gaertner et al., 1993). For this reason, articulations of a common cause may offer the potential for organizational members to overcome certain instances of in-group/out-group discrimination, namely those related to racial/ethnic difference.

By creating and cultivating a communal goal, vision or cause, intercultural organizations like Central Community can simultaneously develop a superordinate goal for its diverse congregants. By focusing on an ideal or concept that is of a higher order than racial/ethnic difference, its leaders and members can come together beneath this concept's banner of unity. In contrast to many other types of organizations, most religious institutions have an inherent or built-in common cause – whether it is referred to by the label of “God,” “love,” “worship,” “service,” or a number of other possibilities. This reality bodes well for Central Community's community metaphor. In many ways, the community metaphor itself also supplies Central Community with a potential superordinate goal. Thus, the community metaphor paradoxically necessitates a common cause among its members while simultaneously supplying that cause to its members.

The second theme of community – “representations of cultural diversity” – also played a paradoxical role among Central Community's leaders and members, while contrasting the historically homogeneous view of community (see Fessler, 1976). Throughout my participant interviews, Central Community was regularly referred to as a “diverse community.” Such a common use of this phrase revealed the perceived difficulty of having one without the other. Diversity promotes genuine community; conversely, genuine community promotes diversity. Diversity fosters community by interweaving a variety of people, each with their own unique skills, views, and perspectives. Community fosters diversity by building bridges of communication and acceptance which, in turn, welcome those with unique skills, views, and perspectives. Therefore, within an intercultural organization such as Central Community, the possibility of one (organizational community/cultural diversity) is necessitated by the possibility of the other (cultural diversity/organizational community).

Meanwhile, a need for cultural diversity serves to contradict the view of community as “any area in which a *common culture* share common interests” (Fessler, 1976, p. 7, emphasis added). Fessler characterizes his definition as a generally accepted view of community among sociologists of his time. According to the participants of this study, however, community is constructed by way of diverse cultures, rather than a common culture. It could be hypothesized that such a contrast in understanding owes itself to the changing demographic landscape of America since Fessler first penned this definition in 1976. Consequently, this shift highlights the increasing role and influence of race/ethnicity in today's society, as well as community's ever-evolving meaning.

The third theme that emerged from this study – “acts of genuine relationship” – highlights the central role of communication in the community building process. It suggests that true community cannot be forged via spatial relations or shared values alone, thus, challenging the first two views of community outlined in this study's literature review. According to research participants, communities built solely upon proximity or shared interests are shallow at best. At worst, these so-called communities offer an illusory and disingenuous depiction to both its members and

outside observers as to what it means to be in true community with others. As a desire for community swells in the heart of many Americans, it is not surprising that certain developers and entrepreneurs have tried to capitalize on that need. However, those who wish to experience real community must engage in genuine and prolonged interaction with one another, characterized by authenticity and vulnerability. They must meet one another's needs and be actively involved in the day-to-day lives of others. In the words of one participant by the name of Trevor: "I don't see any other way" (white male).

The final theme that participants identified – "opportunities for crossing social categories" – is significant in several ways. This theme serves to further counteract the traditional metaphor of *organization-as-container*, while again positioning the act of communication as the genesis for true community. It is common for theorists and laypersons alike to define an organization by its physical location (Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996). A small business, for instance, is often thought of as the building it occupies. A school is often thought of as its classroom space and recreational areas, a hospital is often thought of as the sum of its various wings, etc.

The communal need to cross social categories, however, expands upon this limited understanding of organizational milieu. It positions the communicative act itself as the site of community – hence, the site of organizing – rather than within the limited confines of any particular space (Ashcraft, 2011). These results suggest that community can be cultivated among Central Community's members in an infinite variety of physical contexts. In addition to Sunday morning worship services, a sense of community can be developed over a shared meals, intramural teams, bowling leagues, fantasy leagues, running clubs, cycling clubs, movie nights, exercise classes, yoga classes, ballroom dance lessons, and the list goes on. Expanding the physical and social contexts in which organizational members seek to build community will, in fact, serve to foster stronger ties with one another.

Wenger (1998) characterizes *strong ties* as sustained, dense relations of social engagement (p. 73). Similarly, Easley and Kleinberg (2010) describe strong ties as having a "greater frequency of interaction" (p. 53). Such an understanding owes itself, in part, to *social interactionism*, as pioneered by the American sociologist Anselm Strauss (1978) and colleagues. Social interactionism explores the communal configurations that are created by shared interests in seemingly unrelated categories: art, baseball, and business (Wenger, 1998, p. 283). In much the same way, by crossing social categories of interaction (e.g., mutual hobbies, weekend activities, political interests, civic affiliations, etc.), organizational members of Central Community Church will identify overlapping spheres of interests and forge shared identities with one another beyond that of religion alone. They will come to see each other not only as members of the church, but also as members of Tampa Bay's larger social fabric – not only as part of one another's religious life, but as part of life writ large.

Each of these implications, as indicated by the congregational members of Common Point Community Church, is essential to the co-construction of community within intercultural contexts. Such an understanding has the potential to expand upon current perception(s) of community: the way it is formed, managed, and maintained by/among diverse populations. The results of this study can also be recontextualized to other intercultural milieu, thus, helping to alleviate racial/ethnic inequality in our world today/

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The “Typical” in Stereotypical: How Black Masculinity Trumps Black Womanhood in *The Ultimate Merger*

Anita J. Mixon

This paper examines the reality television dating genre and the intersection of race and gender by examining episodes from the first season of The Ultimate Merger, a reality television program produced by Donald Trump that aired on TVOne. Reality television scholarship traditionally focuses on reality television as a contested space in which conversations about race can be explored, reinforcing of stereotypes, and the centering of Whiteness. With the bulk of reality television casting of Black men and women focused on the entertainment and sports industry, however, scholars assert that it should reflect more diverse examples of black masculinity and black womanhood. As a predominantly Black cast shown on a cable channel geared towards a Black audience, The Ultimate Merger appears to answer that call. In the end, however, the diverse images of Black masculinity come at a cost to black women.

Keywords: *Reality Television; Black Womanhood; Black Masculinity; Race; Gender*

“[Relationships] are much more than physical [and] I put the physical part last. Maybe physical is more at the forefront for her; I’m sorry, but we aren’t talking about a booty call,” explains Lyle, a bachelor in the reality television show, *The Ultimate Merger*. This rhetorical “gem” and others demonstrate the tenable relationships between a Black woman, Omarosa Manigault, and a group of Black men, like Lyle, in their efforts to create canonical narratives of love in *The Ultimate Merger*, a reality television program produced by Donald Trump. With the mounting costs of production and the increasing competition for viewership, the lower cost of reality television has made that genre of programming far more visible during prime-time hours. During the 2010-2011 television rating season, four out of the top five television series were reality television (RTV) programs.¹ The staying power and popularity of RTV indicates that there is a need to uncover what makes this particular genre attract and keep viewers despite existing scholarship that cautions audiences about the problematic nature of its programming.²

In RTV, Black men and women are noticeably absent, tokenized, and/or stereotyped. Scholars highlight the stereotyped ways in which Black men are portrayed on RTV – as sexually aggressive, comedic buffoon, and/or violent (Orbe, 1998 & 2008; Hopson, 2008; Pozner, 2010), issuing a call for audiences to interrogate those images and for RTV to provide greater diversity. In some ways, *The Ultimate Merger* answers their call by offering heterogeneous images of Black men. Taken as a whole, RTV constructs and reinforces social norms in gendered and

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¹ The top five programs ranked in order of ratings/share among adults, ages 18-49, are American Idol – Wednesday (8.8/24), Sunday Night Football (8.0/20), American Idol-Thursdays (7.7/22), The Voice (5.4/14), and Dancing with the Stars (4.8/12). Please see <http://www.deadline.com/2011/05/full-2010-11-season-series-rankers/#more-135917>.

² See Boylorn (2008); Dubrofsky (2006, 2011); Hopson (2008); O'Donnell (2007); Orbe (1998, 2008); Pozner (2010)

racially biased ways; however, *The Ultimate Merger* attempts to disrupt this notion by offering heterogeneous images of Black men. However, I argue that the show's emphasis on illustrating the complexity and diversity of Black masculinity and articulating the necessity of patriarchy in "taming" Black womanhood is accomplished at the expense of Black women. The show's careful construction of alternative images and backgrounds of Black men, Omarosa's subordinated relationship with Donald Trump and her spiritual advisor, Dr. Jamal Bryant⁴, and the complicit ways in which Omarosa manages her "brand" work to foster the notion that Black men are not responsible for the failure to establish loving relationships with Black women.

RTV, Gender, and Race

Several definitions have been offered to describe and define RTV. For the purposes of my research, I use the definition offered by Butler (2007). RTV is a "genre with an ostensible base in reality – featuring non-actors in unscripted situations" due to the definition's utility and application to a variety of types of RTV shows (p. 490). There are several categories of RTV – competition, docusoaps, transformative improvements and shows that use hidden cameras (Orbe, 2008). Initially, scholarly research on RTV was limited to documentary film. Because of its staying power and pervasiveness, academics across disciplines understand the viability of critically researching RTV. Its medium – television – and its marketing as "reality" or "real" has important implications with regards to its influence on culture.

Similar to other televisual genres, RTV has been cited as a way of "present[ing] itself as an unmediated picture of external reality" (Fiske, 2009, p. 17). Fiske (2009) goes on to say that "television is seen either as a transparent window on the world or as a mirror reflecting our own reality back at us" (p. 17). Viewers come to believe that television is an accurate reflection of the world especially when it is a part of the RTV genre. Unlike the scripted genres of television series, viewers regard reality television as "real" despite the reality that all television is constructed. RTV is often the production of dominant ideology and "our reality, not *the* reality that is reflected; in other words it admits that reality is the product of people, and not a universal object that people merely observe from the outside" (Fiske, 2009, p. 17). RTV is a carefully constructed production that is often manipulated by producers and commercial advertisers. To that end, studying RTV and the messages that the genre creates is important because audiences take those messages as real.

During primetime, at least one RTV program shows every night of the week. Despite the recent uptick in the number of available programs, RTV can be traced back to *Candid Camera* in 1948 (O'Donnell, 2007). *Cops*, a reality program that has aired since 1989, is considered to be the longest running RTV program (O'Donnell, 2007). This accessibility and "staying" power speaks to the pervasiveness and potential influence of this particular genre of television.

Although RTV has become a mainstay of the television viewing experience, most research has primarily focused on defining RTV, interpreting reasons that people watch it, and questioning its authenticity to be "real" (Homes and Jermyn, 2004; Hill, 2005; Biressi and Nunn, 2008). Recent scholarship has explored the ways in which

⁴ Dr. Jamal Harrison Bryant is a spiritual advisor and life coach for the Empowerment Temple African Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore, MD. He serves as Omarosa's life coach and spiritual advisor on *The Ultimate Merger*.

race is used as a source of conflict within the shows by positioning the White and Black binary in dramatic and contentious ways (Dubrofsky, 2006; Bell-Jordan, 2008; Dubrofsky and Hardy, 2008; Pozner, 2010). Dubrofsky (2011) does investigate the portrayal of race in reality television; however, because she focuses on *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*, her ability to fully flesh out a critical analysis of the portrayal of race is limited to the interactions of racially identified women as “window dressing for white women” (p. 35). That is, the women help to highlight the unsuitability of potential partners and do so from a position of anonymity – least amount of camera time, dialogue, and interactions with the bachelor. Critical analysis and reflections on the images and performance of Black femininity and Black masculinity have also been investigated in television through the analysis of several shows that have targeted Black audiences (Orbe, 1998; Boylorn, 2008; Hopson, 2008). However, prior to the creation of *The Ultimate Merger*, there was little opportunity to examine an RTV program that features an educated, mostly Black cast in a competitive dating program. Most of the RTV that featured a Black person as the eligible bachelor or bachelorette relied heavily on the music and sports industries – Flava Flav, a former hype man of the rap group, Public Enemy; Chad Ochocinco, a wide receiver for the Cincinnati Bengals; Terrell Owens, a wide receiver for the Cincinnati Bengals; Rozonda Thomas from the music group TLC; and Tiffany Pollard, who gained celebrity status because of her infamous relationship with Flava Flav on the RTV series *Flavor of Love*.

Scholars have differing views on RTV – some believe that RTV can be a useful platform to promote constructive dialogue while others disagree, stating that they reinforce existing stereotypes. For example, Park (2009) analyzes two episodes of MTV’s *The Real World: Philadelphia* in order to critically evaluate the significance of the strategic placement of individuals from different racial backgrounds, an urban Black male with a rural White male, within the same household. Park argues that “[w]hile racial conflict on [RTV] does not [solve] racial problems or close the gap between audiences’ discrepant views, it may make race a focal point, potentially helping some viewers [understand the value] of open and candid dialogue about different racial perspectives and experiences” (p. 169). Building on our culture’s reductive black:white dichotomy and the impact of cultural perceptions, Orbe (2008) uncovers ways in which hegemonic power reinforces cultural perceptions of Black masculinity in episodes of *The Real World*. Casting call efforts to select individuals for potential conflict and edited footage, reveals that *The Real World* helps to legitimize the image of Black men as inherently angry, violent, and sexually aggressive. So, while Park asserts that the strategic placement of individuals from different backgrounds creates an opportunity to open the dialogue among races, Orbe contends that the placement has more to do with reinforcing cultural perceptions already in place than fostering an open space for deconstruction of socially constructed identities of Black masculinity. Extending on the work of Park and Orbe, my case study examines how *The Ultimate Merger* might function as a space for marginalized groups to open dialogue and/or be a counter-narrative to stereotypical notions of Black masculinity.

The Ultimate Merger is a RTV competitive dating program that was produced by Donald Trump. It aired on TVOne, a small boutique channel available via paid cable subscription, from June 17, 2010 – September 22, 2011 (spanning two seasons). In the first season, Omarosa Manigault is the eligible bachelorette who must decide which of the eligible bachelors is “the ultimate merger,” which implies not only that they must be in love but that

they must also be equals financially. Manigault is in her late thirties, Black, physically fit and described by TVOne, the official website host for Donald Trump's *The Ultimate Merger*, as "reality TV's most-loved villainess."⁵ Prior to participating in *The Ultimate Merger*, Omarosa's first foray into reality television was on Trump's *The Apprentice*, where she competed for the opportunity to win the role of Trump's business apprentice.⁶ Using her business acumen and strategy, Omarosa earned a reputation for having a "sassy no holds barred [sic] business savvy."⁷ Her character is central to understanding how Black masculinity is manifested in canonical narratives of love.

Although many of the bachelors on *The Ultimate Merger* might provide fruitful case studies for exploration, I selected two bachelors, Lyle and Jarvis, because on the surface they appear to serve as exemplars of the diversity of Black masculinity exhibited on *The Ultimate Merger*. Additionally, they were bachelors who interacted with Omarosa more frequently on one-on-one dates and group dates.

In addition to the bachelors, Omarosa's relation to others on the show is also important. I unpack the relationship of Omarosa and Donald Trump to underscore that patriarchy is a part of the way in which the show's relationships are negotiated/or managed. Extending the idea of patriarchy to the relationship that Omarosa shares with her spiritual advisor, Dr. Jamal Bryant, further allows us to recognize the ways in which Black men have used their positions to *teach* Black women what types of relationships are best for them.

I would be remiss if I did not include a discussion of Omarosa's complicity in the construction of her "brand" which reinforces the argument that RTV is not unscripted, rather its characters carefully construct their images. Her previous RTV experience and the notoriety that she received as a participant on *The Apprentice* may open up questions about her overall "authenticity" from viewers. However, as noted by previous scholars, RTV has always been a site of contestation over authenticity and, while there may be an effort to construct a particular image, it does not take away from the diverse ways in which Black masculinity is illustrated or the ways in which patriarchy functions within the narrative. Through the exploration of masculinity and its role in perpetuating particular stereotypes and gendered norms and expectations, it helps to set the foundation for understanding the critique of gender in *The Ultimate Merger*.

Black Masculinity in The Ultimate Merger

Trujillo (1991) defines hegemonic masculinity as having characteristics of occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, and heterosexuality (p. 291). Occupational achievement refers to career success "in an industrial capitalistic society" (p. 291). Men are responsible for providing for their family. Messner (1988) defines the "breadwinner ethic" as the perceived responsibility of the man to provide financially for his family (p. 205). By enacting familial patriarchy, men who are deemed as "sensitive father[s]" are elevated to an even higher level of masculinity (Trujillo, 1991, p. 291). This imbalance that allows a man to take part in a nurturing role without having

⁵ See: <<http://ultimatemerger.tvoneonline.com/>>.

⁶ *The Apprentice* is produced by Mark Burnett and Donald Trump for NBC studios. It features business people who compete to win the opportunity to win a contract to run one of Trump's magnate businesses.

⁷ For more information, please visit www.omarosa.com

to sacrifice his legitimacy as a man speaks to the historical inequities in gender roles. The characteristic of heterosexuality place firm boundaries around who can and cannot participate in “masculine” spaces or “enact masculinity.”

Black hegemonic masculinity deviates from White masculinity. Although Black masculinity includes features of Trujillo’s definition of hegemonic masculinity, a discussion of the historical (and present day) tensions that exist when studying Black masculinity is important to explore. Historically, the construction of “Black masculinity in popular culture not only illustrates negative representations of Black men” but also prevents Black people from “having control over the images that represents them” and is a “form that creates, reproduces, and sustains racial ideologies” (Brown, 2008, p. 68). Because of the lack of control that Black people have over their own images in popular media, particular stereotypes are privileged. The overwhelming and prevalent image of Black men is “that they are aggressive, angry, prone to violence and sexually aggressive” (Brown, 2008, p.67; Orbe, 1998). These stereotypes not only affect the way that Black men are viewed but can also potentially affect their relationships with Black women. “Black men are seen as having large sexual appetites and being ultra-endowed to perform sexually, but psychologically too immature to have meaningful relationships” (Brown, 2008, p.75). If this premise is true, then canonical narratives of love are unavailable to Black men or Black women since Black men are incapable of giving love. Brown (2005) adds also that “covert [practices of constructing Black people] as being sexually driven people who do not have loving and mature relationships [gives society and especially] dominant culture [the right to perceive] Black people as sex-crazed buffoons who are on public display” (pp. 75-76). Because these negative stereotypes of Black men are embedded within dominant society, Black masculinity is in a constant state of struggle: “U.S. Black men encounter contradictory expectations regarding manhood” (Collins, 2000, p.156). They are expected to have all of the trappings of manhood afforded to White men in terms of power, financial success, and providing for their families, but institutionalized racism prevents them from being able to completely fulfill those expectations (Hurt, 1998).

Black masculinity has been a site of struggle because of the contradictory images on television and in communities. Dyson (2003), discussing the impact of *The Cosby Show*, says that “Cosby brought to America in an ingenious fashion...the notion that [Black] people are a diverse community” (p. 229). However, Dyson also notes that it is “difficult to get the mainstream to identify with complex [Black] representations of reality, niche, or otherwise” which speaks to the persistence of Black stereotypes in popular media (Dyson, 2003, p. 242). Despite the negative stereotypes found in RTV programs (by Dubrofsky, Dubrofsky and Hardy, Pozner, and Schroeder), *The Ultimate Merger* takes a different approach and highlights the heterogeneity of Black masculinity.

In *The Ultimate Merger*, the bachelors exemplify the diversity of Black manhood through their financial success, relationship with their children, and their expressed desire for intimacy with Omarosa. By representing a variety of occupations (an attorney, a foreign currency trader, a massage therapist, a fashion designer, a model/author, and an entrepreneur), *The Ultimate Merger* gives the audience an opportunity to view Black men in ways that contradict the stereotypical sources of success. The foci of this analysis are the ways in which the bachelors, Lyle and Jarvis, negotiate Black masculinity.

Lyle is a successful attorney. As such, he is asked by Dr. Bryant, Omarosa's spiritual advisor, to review the prenuptial agreements and explain what it means for the bachelors. Relishing the attention, Lyle exclaims that he will "make sure they are all right." His occupation not only affords him the opportunity to make sure that the bachelors' interests are protected, but also helps to construct Lyle's image. Throughout the season, his ability to debate provides ample opportunity for Lyle to "perform" masculinity.

A component of Lyle's image construction is that he is combative. In the "Verbal Combat" episode, Lyle wins the challenge of debating Michael on the health care reform law. As a result of winning, he is given the opportunity to debate Omarosa. Because both of their personalities can be considered domineering and aggressive, a majority of the debate is spent talking over each other. In a candid discussion with the other men, Lyle says, "If you are a debater, it is about just running your opponent into the ground to the point where you get him off track with[out] giving him a point. That's what she was doing." While he was able to successfully defend against Michael in the debate, he acknowledges that Omarosa beat him in the challenge. But rather than seeing her argumentative skill as an asset, he questions how that would translate in a relationship. He explains to the other men, "If you're a brother and you're dealing with a woman like that, you're gonna be like 'yo!'" He goes further to say that as a man, "You have to stand up or she's gonna walk all over you." Asserting one's masculinity, in Lyle's opinion, is to have control over conversations and not allow a woman (in this case, Omarosa) to dominate. Lyle's response echoes an assertion by an interviewee in Hurt's documentary that "there is a pecking order, so we [Black men] have to maintain it by keeping our foot on someone else's [a Black woman's] neck" (Hurt, 1998). By implying that Omarosa's aggressive debating skills should take a back seat for the success of a potential relationship, *The Ultimate Merger* encourages Black women who want a successful Black man to conceal their intellect.

In another episode, "Champs and Chumps," Lyle and four other men leave Trump Towers for an excursion on the town. Their exit is discovered by Trump security and Omarosa holds a mediation to grill the men who left without permission. Prior to the mediation, in a one-on-one confessional with the camera, Lyle does not shirk responsibility for his actions or the consequences that he potentially faces as a result of leaving. He states, "I was aware that we had been caught leaving the night before. We're gonna have to face the music." During the mediation, Michael questions Lyle's integrity by insinuating that because Lyle is an attorney, he cannot be trusted and that Lyle was the only man to leave the hotel room. Rather than allow Michael to disparage his character, Lyle responds by questioning Michael's manhood. He tells Omarosa to "look at how he is dressed" and that "[Michael] is a clown." In the background, the audience can hear one of the bachelors say that Michael "threw [Lyle] under the bus." Lyle admits that he was one of the four men that left and apologizes for breaking the rules. He takes responsibility for his part but does not share the names of any of the other men, including the name of an undisclosed fifth person. Not "selling out" the other bachelors and apologizing, as Omarosa put it, positions Lyle as a man of personal accountability and integrity. Michael's assertion that Lyle was the only one to leave (despite evidence proving the contrary) made Michael look weak and like a "snitch." This brief exchange between Michael and Lyle creates the opportunity for Lyle to protect his character and assert his masculinity.

While there are moments when Lyle comes across as domineering and combative, the audience also has an opportunity to see a softer side of his personality. In the episode “Mommy Issues,” it is apparent that, at some point, Lyle discussed with the other bachelors that he has a troubled relationship with his mother. While Omarosa’s mother, Mama O, visits the bachelors, Lyle starts to cry. Isaac comforts him by placing his hand on his shoulder and Ray tells Omarosa’s mother that she “needs to talk to him because he has an issue with his mom.” Turning to Lyle, Ray continues, “And, I think you need to talk about it, Lyle.” What is particularly interesting about this scene is that Omarosa’s mother remarks that “there is no better love than a man and his mother” and that “sometimes it can be hard [to express emotions] because, you know, guys...they gotta be strong.” Understanding the dichotomy of either being perceived as weak or strong in Black communities, Mama O acknowledges that Black men are in a difficult position. Lyle shares with her (and the audience) that he fears for the safety of his mother. The audience learns that despite Lyle’s individual success, his mother is addicted to drugs. He says that, “Every day, even when I am here, I think about getting *that* call...she is a woman that takes care of everyone else but can’t take care of herself...and every day I fear that I’m gonna get the call that my mother is dead.” Seeing Lyle’s breakdown, as Al B. Sure!, another contestant, intimates, gives the audience an opportunity to see a Black man who is concerned about the welfare of his family and his willingness to disclose his fears allows the other men to be open about their own relationships with their mothers. Al B. Sure! states that “it struck a chord with everyone” and made them “want to check on their mothers.” Opening up about his family gives the audience an alternative image of Lyle, which helps to illustrate the complexities of Black masculinity.

Lyle’s insistence on forming a friendship before developing a physical relationship also helps to dispel the stereotype that Black men are sexually aggressive. In an elimination round, Lyle makes no excuses about “placing the physical part last.” He explains that “this is about a merger and the ultimate merger is more than physical.” Omarosa also tells Lyle that she heard about his visit with her mother and that he could have shared that with her. Lyle responds that “it’s not the kind of information that I am going to talk about in a nightclub or a hot tub or while giving you a backrub.” In “Roughin It,” Omarosa questions Lyle’s love for her. Lyle appears to be honest when he says they (the bachelors) came into the competition “blind...not knowing who she was or if there would be a connection.” Omarosa then asks why he has not taken their relationship to the next level. Lyle answers that they had only been on three dates and “they [the bachelors] may move at different pace than him... [and that he] could not speak for them.” He also points to her kissing other men as one of the reasons that he cannot have “love-y love-y feelings” about her. Addressing the pastor, he says that he makes no apologies for putting sexual intimacy last. He adds that “we aren’t talking about a booty call... [the merger] is a prize.” Lyle alludes to the previous dates as not being romantic or conducive to sharing intimate feelings. His explanation also indicates that he wants something more than a sexual relationship with her. This exchange positions Omarosa as the sexual aggressor and Lyle as the person more concerned with romance and love.

Javis, an entrepreneur, has a different background from the other men on the show. In the episode, “Verbal Combat,” Omarosa visits the bachelors in order to spend one-on-one time with a few of the men that she has not had an opportunity to get to know. She asks Javis about the hardest thing he has ever faced in life. He reveals to

Omarosa that he spent seven years in federal prison for guns, drugs, and armed robbery. In a one-on-one interview with the camera, Jarvis states that he was sentenced to eight years and one month for an armed bank robbery charge. Jarvis shares that what he “regrets most are the people that he hurt, [his] family, [his] friends, and those people that believed in [him].” He continues that, most importantly, was the impact it had on his son. He articulates that he “cannot put into words the hurt and the regret that [he] has for leaving [his] son out there to the world.” Jarvis acknowledges that he made an error in judgment that cost him not only his freedom but also limited his ability to protect his child. This admission by Jarvis allows the audience to see a Black man who has made a mistake but is acutely aware of what that mistake cost him. His self-made success as an owner of a record label and a moving and storage company demonstrates the possibility of redemption. And, while Jarvis acknowledges that what he did in the past is a part of him, he contends that it is not the complete picture of who he is as a man.

It is clear in another episode, “Blizzard,” that Jarvis holds the idea of family in high regard. In a one-on-one interview with the camera, Jarvis states that he was “happy to learn that Omarosa came from a large family because [he] came from a large family too.” He believes that, their similarity gives them an immediate connection. On a group date with Michael, Sterling, and Jarvis, Omarosa asks the bachelors if they have children. Jarvis discloses that he has two children, ages fourteen and one. Omarosa tries to clarify his response by asking him if that means that he “has a baby mama from last year.” Jarvis responds, “Such is a term that I don’t use.” Preferring to use the term, “the mother of his child,” Jarvis privileges a more positive image of unwed mothers. By correcting Omarosa, he also shows his commitment to not allowing anyone to denigrate his family or extensions of his family.

Throughout Jarvis’ time on *The Ultimate Merger*, the bachelors and Omarosa comment that he is quiet. He is never shown being boisterous or jockeying for position next to Omarosa. Because he does not actively pursue Omarosa, it encourages her to believe that Jarvis is more of a follower. In the mediation room during the “Mommy Issues” episode, Omarosa asks Jarvis to explain his contribution in the failed challenge. He responds that he was responsible for the fragrance and collaborated with Al B. Sure! and Isaac on the remaining parts of the competition. Following his response, Omarosa questions Jarvis’ ability to be a leader. Explaining that the challenge “wasn’t about finding the weakest link,” Omarosa states that it was about her finding the “strongest person” for her. Because he did not demonstrate leadership skills in the task or assertiveness in their interactions, Omarosa eliminates him. After checking out of Trump Towers, Jarvis shows understanding when he discusses the fact that Omarosa felt that he was not as committed to the process. However, Jarvis also deduces that Omarosa will not end up with anyone because “she’s found a flaw in every person and continuously brings that flaw up.” His assertion that all of the men left are great men indicates that he is a team player and that he has bonded with the men, but it also places the blame for Omarosa’s inability to find a partner squarely on her shoulders.

The Ultimate Merger shows a variety of men from various backgrounds that can be argued to be a reflection of the diversity found in Black communities. The show illustrates the numerous ways that Black men have achieved financial success. It also helps to exemplify the range of emotions and personalities that Black men have. While previous RTV competitive dating programs played on stereotypes, *The Ultimate Merger* did not fall into that overdone constructed view of Black men. It shows each of the bachelors negotiating their masculinity and defining

what *that* masculinity meant for them. Lyle exhibits his masculinity through the use of professional skills developed as an attorney to argue and win challenges. Because of his intellectual prowess he is able to reveal his emotional connection with his mother without appearing weak. Indeed, it is his story of overcoming the odds of being raised by a drug-addicted parent that adds to his strength. Jarvis' masculinity is bound up in his being formerly incarcerated. Without formal post-secondary education, Jarvis has carved out a space as an entrepreneur within the same communities in which he was raised. His role as a provider for his children is highlighted as noteworthy given his criminal record. He is, in a sense, a redeemable character.

Patriarchy and Omarosa

Throughout *The Ultimate Merger*, Omarosa is depicted as needing the guidance of a man or father-figure in order to find a suitable mate. Omarosa's experience in the "staging" of the RTV show is portrayed in a way that positions Trump – an older White, upper-class male, who summons Omarosa to New York – and Bryant – an older Black Christian pastor who offers Omarosa guidance and advice for selecting a partner – as the only people capable of finding Omarosa a suitable mate. The show thus privileges patriarchy.

During a particularly open moment with Jarvis, Omarosa makes the admission that her father was murdered. Because of the unexpected death of her father, Omarosa assumed the position as the head of the household and took on the responsibility for financially supporting and caring for her mother. Her role as the provider for her family undercuts the notion of familial patriarchy, which sanctions the "manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general" (Lerner 239). The absence of her father makes Trump's "stand-in" as a paternal figure especially interesting. Omarosa's masculinized persona – aggressive, domineering, and a provider for her family – indicates that Trump is needed in order to correct the "natural" order of a gendered society.

At the beginning of the first episode, Trump asserts that he "made" her on *The Apprentice*. Her success is predicated on his authority – he hired her on his show to compete. The show also demonstrates that despite her education and "real world" work experience as a staffer in the White House, she *owes* her status, visibility, and celebrity to Trump. Several times Omarosa talks about how close she and Trump are, yet throughout every vignette that she is viewed talking with him, it is in his office or over the phone. When Omarosa is in his office, he is seated behind a massive desk and a handshake is the only form of personal contact between them. This "business-like" demeanor demonstrates Omarosa's usefulness lies as a commodity or business transaction more so than as warm friend. Although the premise of *The Apprentice* is based on the intellectual capability of the contestants, Omarosa was most often constructed as a conniving and domineering strategist. Her over-the-top personality on *The Apprentice* played into the stereotyped notions of successful Black women as overly assertive and incapable of having a man because "they either have no time or they fail to understand how to treat them" (Collins, 2000, p. 9). The overwhelming amount of sexual language used by Omarosa (and others) to describe her and the situations in which she finds herself throughout the season of *The Ultimate Merger* reinforces the idea of a sexualized Black body which, in turn, makes the case that even with success, Black women are still reduced to sexual objects. Contemporary scholarship continues to interrogate the commodification of Black female bodies through the analysis

of media representations of Black women on RTV programs (Joseph 242; Hasinoff 324). As such, the branding of Omarosa as a Trump commodity positions her as *his* product over which he has complete control, reinforcing the idea that White men have the right to the use and misuse Black bodies.

Even the use of names demonstrates Omarosa's subordinated position. Throughout their conversation in his office, he uses her first name and she uses "Mr. Trump." This greeting, including the formal handshake, is played at the beginning of the opening credits of each episode. The repetitiveness of their formal relationship reinforces their respective positions – him as the authoritarian (who is owed a sense of respect) and her as the subordinate (who must provide that respect). In addition to the way that the opening credits are constructed and because Omarosa "plays" her part, their initial conversation in the office continues to place Trump as the patriarch who has an unquestioning right to tell Omarosa whom she can date.

Trump dominates the conversation during the entire interaction with Omarosa. He explains to her that he has selected 12 bachelors that he has pre-screened as individuals he feels are eligible partners for her. Without hesitation, Omarosa takes the briefcase with the dossiers and flies to Las Vegas. Missing from this storyline is any mention of a meeting where it appears that Omarosa has asked Trump for help to meet men. Her presence on the show implies her acceptance of his offer but not that she explicitly asked for *his* help. Furthermore, there is no discussion in which Omarosa provides Trump with a list of qualities that she would expect to have in her potential life partner. In fact, once the audience has an opportunity to meet the bachelors, it is apparent that *they* do not even know whom they are meeting. Despite her inability to vocalize her choices, she "trusts him" to put together a group of men who would meet her needs. This gives the impression that her failure to find a partner is because she lacks the proper judgment to know who is right for her, but that with male guidance she will be able to find her perfect mate. While it is commonplace in the RTV genre to select a group of bachelors for the bachelorette, unlike other competitive dating programs, there is a previous relationship that Omarosa has established with the producer (Donald Trump) that invites the opportunity for Omarosa to be more engaged with the selection process. This is especially true, given the emphasis that Donald Trump, in their interactions together, places on the "history" of their relationship.

In addition to Trump's seeming ability to know what Omarosa needs and wants in a partner (or more accurately, *deserves*), the way that the mediation sessions are arranged continue the idea that, as a Black woman, Omarosa is incapable of deciding on her own who would make the best partner. At the end of each episode, the men go to the mediation room to determine whether they will survive elimination. In each episode, Omarosa is accompanied by a man who helps her decide who to eliminate. In the first mediation, she uses inclusive language. She explains to the bachelors that "we will decide who will go and who will stay. I have a difficult decision to make and here to help me make that decision is my most trusted spiritual advisor, Dr. Jamal H. Bryant." This admission tells the audience that she is relying on the guidance of Bryant for assistance on deciding her mate. Again, Omarosa has been framed as a woman who lacks the ability to understand the complexities of relationships and men; therefore she needs the guidance of a man to help "make sense of it all."

This strategic placement of a man in the elimination rounds alongside Omarosa is different from the elimination rounds in other competitive dating RTV programs. In each of the episodes analyzed, a man accompanies Omarosa to the mediation room. The primary figure is Bryant. Because of church obligations, he is temporarily replaced by George Wallace, an older Black comedian, and Nick Wornoff, a White former contestant on *The Apprentice*. When he returns, another former White male contestant from *The Apprentice*, Troy McClain, joins him in the mediation room. This distinction subtly implies the idea that the inclusion of both White and Black men in the elimination round may not be just Omarosa's gender that renders her incapable of making a "sound" decision, but also her race. The implication of Omarosa's race being a factor in her inability to make good decisions warrants a closer exploration of Bryant's role in her decision-making process.

As a Black Christian pastor, Bryant is uniquely positioned as having the authority to direct the flow of the elimination round along with the interrogation of the bachelors. Because the Black Church is predominantly headed by men, it also helped to shape the patriarchal attitudes that subordinate women (Ward, 2005; Clawson & Clark, 2003). Bryant's presence and active involvement in guiding Omarosa's decisions is considered appropriate given the historical role of ministers as a father-figure and head of the "church family."

One example of Bryant's role in Omarosa's decision-making process occurs during the first mediation. Bryant takes control of the mediation by stating that "there are two more chairs to be filled." Michael, one of the bachelors, raises his hand and says that he's "up for a challenge." He responds, "That's appropriate." Despite Omarosa's statement at the beginning of the mediation, in which she states that she has not made her decision, it appears that Bryant has decided that Michael should be one of the men selected for elimination. Once Michael is seated, Bryant addresses Michael about his behavior on the group date with Omarosa. By talking to Michael about his "behavior," Bryant is exerting his older, more affluent status over the younger Michael. Bryant, whose race [Black], gender, education, and occupational status position him as a paternal figure, directs the flow of the conversation.

Similarly, when the final person, Darrell, is asked to be seated in the O-chair⁸, Bryant again takes the lead and asks Darrell why he believes that he is in the chair. Omarosa passively sits while Bryant grills Darrell. This demonstrates that he is in control because he directs the flow and pace of mediation. For each of the mediation sessions of which he is a part, Bryant is always the last person to call the session to a close. Omarosa's willingness to let him guide the elimination rounds may, at first glance, seem contradictory to the aggressive and over-bearing construct that has been offered up as a description of her character. However, given Bryant's status as a Black Christian leader and the historical roots of patriarchy within the Black church, Omarosa's deference to Bryant comes across as an appropriate and expected response.

From the first episode, Omarosa is positioned as subordinated to Trump and to Bryant, both older and affluent men. Despite being older and White, Trump determines that he has the right and sensibilities to select a group of men for a Black woman with whom it is unclear that any authentic or personal relationship has been

⁸ The O-chair is the seat in the mediation room that bachelors sit on when they are selected for elimination. The bachelor must answer questions and justify his right to continue in the process.

established. By Trump's declaration, he and Omarosa made "a lot of money together." That speaks to an understanding of what sells from a business perspective, but it does not indicate that he has any knowledge of Black women's experiences and their love relationships, which speaks to the preoccupation with generating money rather than a sincere effort to find Omarosa a mate. Bryant, who is a Black man, may understand the diversity of Black communities, but still exerts his position as an older Christian minister to take over the direction and flow of the mediation sessions while helping to decide the fate of the men. Bryant and Trump's similarity in positioning themselves as patriarchal figures is expected because of their shared maleness and adoption of Eurocentric values.⁹ Both of the men work to establish Omarosa as "helpless" without their wise and expert opinions.

In terms of negotiating Black masculinity and patriarchy, *The Ultimate Merger* advances the notion that Black men and Black women are incapable of having loving relationships. However, the burden of that failure falls squarely on Black women. Omarosa becomes the scapegoat for the reason why Black men and women cannot experience canonical narratives of love. *The Ultimate Merger* shows the range of emotions and personalities that gives the bachelors authenticity. With Omarosa, however, the audience cannot peel back the layers of her personality. She is framed as either sexually aggressive or domineering. Her intellect is portrayed not as an asset but, rather, a hindrance to her ability to connect with the bachelors. By demonstrating the diversity of Black masculinity and the necessity of patriarchy in the "taming" of Black womanhood, *The Ultimate Merger* portrayal seems to respond to previous scholars' calls for a diversity of what it means to be both Black and male. It does so, however, at the expense of Black womanhood.

Conclusions

My analysis adds to the growing scholarship that investigates the implications of race and gender in popular media. Because popular culture is a "form that creates, reproduces, and sustains racial ideologies," it is important to actively engage and question the messages that RTV conveys (Brown, 2008, p. 68). While research by Dubrofsky (2006; 2008), Dubrofsky and Hardy (2008), Orbe (2008), and Pozner (2010) (among others) focused on RTV programs that positioned White and Black people in contentious settings, my study examines an instance of representations that seemingly interrogate and contradict those stereotypes.

Park asserts that RTV provides a space to work out contentious relationships while Orbe contends that it is a site where Black men (and women) are stereotyped. My analysis of *The Ultimate Merger* enters into that conversation and allows audiences a glimpse into the complexity of Black manhood from a variety of perspectives – including the relationships that they have with each other and Black women and that effort should be applauded. However, while the *Ultimate Merger* offers a diverse array of the roles that Black men may play, it does so by relying on the limited and trite Black female stereotype. Hence, there is still more work to do. *The Ultimate Merger* takes two timid steps forward in (re)constructing the images of Black manhood while simultaneously taking a giant step back in providing more progressive and diverse images of Black womanhood.

⁹ Griffin examined the influence of Black men on the oppression of Black women through their adoption of White patriarchal values which include the subordination of women, authoritarianism, and intellectual superiority.

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Tumblr Femme: Performances of Queer Femininity and Identity

Nichole Nicholson

Named the 2013 Word of the Year, selfies seem to have taken over our internet practices and the discourse surrounding those practices, in both positive and negative ways. This paper examines how selfies are used by a specific community via a specific medium. The identity in question is femme, a queering of feminine presentation and gender identity imbued with a feminist politics. The medium is Tumblr, a micro-blogging site. In this paper, Judith Butler's concept of performativity and Elin Diamond's work on feminist Brechtian methods is used to analyze and understand how selfies function on Tumblr as a construction of subversive femme identities through performative defamiliarization.

Keywords: Tumblr; Femme; Selfies; Queer; Identity; Performance

Scholars researching computer mediated communication have long been interested in the issue of identity. A Google Scholar search reveals about 207,000 results for these “computer mediated communication and identity,” from as far back as the late 1980s, and scholars like Sherry Turkle have made a name for themselves doing this kind of work. I am, however, more interested in a specific instance of identity in a specific digital space than in identity in the abstract. The identity in question, in this case, is “femme.” The place is Tumblr. This essay will argue that 1) Tumblr provides a platform for performative enactments of femme identity and 2) the visual aesthetic of this identity operates in a feminist Brechtian mode, as described in the work of Elin Diamond. After a brief introduction of Tumblr, I will discuss some of the definitional issues surrounding the identifier “femme.” Then I will move on to specific analyses of femme selfies on Tumblr through Butler's performativity and the blog “fuckyeahsubversivekawaii” through Diamond's work on Brechtian methods. At this point, I will begin synthesizing the two to argue that selfies and other image postings, taken together, create the possibility for a femme identity that is subversive to mainstream, stereotypical femininity, one that is inherently political.

Tumblr: What it is and How it Works

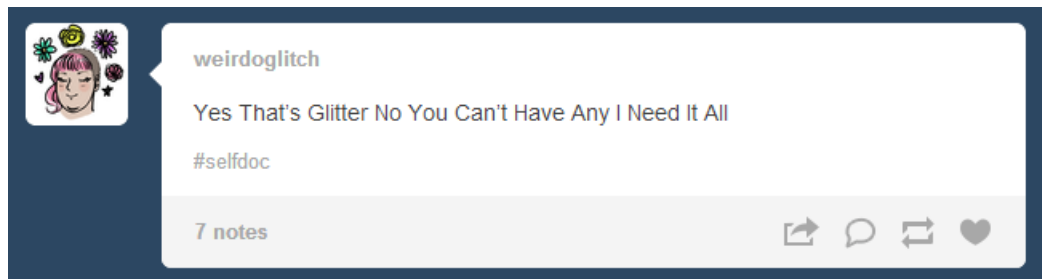
Tumblr was created by David Karp in February 2007. As of November of 2013, Tumblr had between 30 million and 50 million active users, with upwards of 300 million hits on a monthly basis, each of these by a unique user (Bercovici, “Why Didn't”). At the beginning of the year, registered users created “120,000 new blogs every day, for a total of 86 million and counting” (Bercovici, “Tumblr”). Though jokes about how many hours the average user spends on Tumblr each day abound on the website itself, there is no hard data to this effect. According to tech writers, “the people that self-selected Tumblr was [sic] the artist and designer crowd” (Bercovici, “Why Didn't”).

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This micro-blogging site is somewhere between Twitter and more conventional blogging sites like Blogger or Wordpress, where longer blocks of text appear. Like the Facebook newsfeed, Tumblr appears to the user as a stream of posts, “but it's far more sensory and emotive [than Twitter or Facebook], a swirl of photographs, songs, inside jokes, animated cartoons, and virtual warm fuzzies” (Bercovici, “Tumblr”). In May of 2013, Tumblr sold itself to Yahoo for \$1.1 billion (Bercovici, “Why Didn’t”). In other words, it is big business and even bigger user-interaction.

When users log into Tumblr, what they see is a blue background with a stream of individual posts from users they have chosen to follow. This is called the “dashboard” or “dash.” At the top of the dash, the user has the option to post original content in the form of text, photos, quotes, links, chats, audio, or video. To the right, the user can see a list of their blog or blogs, the number of posts they have made, how many followers they have, and an activity meter, as well as a few other statistics about their usage. Additionally, there is an inbox for “asks” or “fanmail”—the two methods Tumblr users can access to message each other. Though it is possible to look at an individual user's blog, this dashboard is the core of the Tumblr experience, a personalized, near-infinite feed of content from users all over the world.

Here is an individual text post as it appears in the dashboard feed:



In this instance, there is no source in the upper right corner, because this is original content with no source listed. As it gets put onto other blogs, this user will be listed as the source. To the left is the user's icon photo. At the top of the post, the user name is indicated, followed by the content. Below the content, there is an area for “tags,” a system which makes use of hashtags in order to make material across Tumblr, and on specific blogs, searchable and sortable. In this case, the tag is “#selfdoc.” At the bottom of the post, there is a light gray bar, containing clickable buttons. On the far left is the number of notes, which can be clicked to expand a list of every person who has interacted with the post beyond simply looking at it. To the right are probably the most important parts of the post: the options for user interaction. The first of these is “share,” which allows a user to link this post on Facebook, Twitter, or other social networking sites. The second is the “reply” button, which allows a user to respond via text or image to this post without it showing up on their own blog; this option is not always available. The last two are how posts circulate on Tumblr: “like” and “reblog.” “Liking” a post gives the poster a notification that another user approves of the post—though certainly it is used for simple acknowledgment, as well—and puts the post in a list of other “liked” things the user can go back to and peruse. “Reblogging” adds the post to the user's blog content, thus inserting it into the feed of every person who follows them.

The tagging system also allows users to explore content in another way, by searching for collections of specialized content marked with a specific tag. Aside from reblogging, liking, and mutually following users who share a similar content interest, tags are one way community forms and operates on Tumblr. When users search a tag, such as, for instance, “femme,” their personalized feed of people they follow is replaced by a feed of every post containing original content that is tagged with that word. Reblogs, even if the user uses the tag, are not included in this feed. This creates a relatively inexact feed, because posters self-select tags, but it is one way, nonetheless, that users find those who post similar or interest-worthy content. Additionally, these posts can be reblogged or liked whether the user follows the poster or not, creating a more open network of communication and an even wider array of users and content. For example, though I follow several blogs that regularly post “femme” content, I also “track” the tag; every time a new post is made with the tag, I receive a notification to that end, and this way I am able to see that content, even if I am not interested in following the blog that posted it.

The Femmes of Tumblr

Though Tumblr allows for a huge range of expression in a variety of different formats, this writing will focus in on one particular identity group using the website and their aesthetic engagement made possible through the site: femmes. In French, the word “femme” simply means “woman,” but the word has gathered a more complicated definition around it. In LGBT communities, the designation femme, or fem, has long been used to identify people in the community who exhibit feminine traits, whether a lesbian who performs the “stereotypically feminine” role in a relationship, or gay men who perform femininely. These days, the usage on Tumblr and the broader internet seems to reflect an even further exploding of that definition. Tumblr user guesswhatsvegan ascribe's a definition to Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's keynote speech at Femme Conference in 2009: “It is about finding a way to be a girl that doesn't hurt” (guesswhatsvegan). Bevin Branlandingham writes similarly that femmes “will reclaim the power and dignity of femaleness by any means necessary. We are girls blown up, turned inside out and remixed.” Brandlandingham also writes that “femme means my feminism and my femininity walk hand in hand.” Furthermore, for blogger B. Morgan, “femme has nothing to do with being a woman, being interested in fashion, or being the matching set to a butch. [...] I'm talking about something that queers femininity.” Morgan goes so far as to classify two types of femmes: “queers who use ultra-feminine expressions to denote that they're queer, and genderfuckers who use ultra-feminine expressions to parody femininity.” Still another user offers a definition from Lesley Kinzel: “Femmeness...[sic] is interrogated femininity. Femmeness is femininity dragged through some mud, kicked in the stomach, given a good scrubbing, teased into a bouffant, doused in glitter, and pushed onstage in search of a spotlight” (Laura). Other users, like femmeffirmations, find it important to include a whole list of folks who get to participate in femme community: “queer femmes, femmes of color, femmes with disabilities, trans* femmes, working class femmes, male identified femmes, dapper/masculine femmes, non-English speaking femmes, high femmes, low femmes, and femmes from all countries” (femmeffirmations).

Though these definitions emphasize or highlight slightly different things, they all seem to point to a similar phenomenon: people using subversive, heightened, purposeful feminine expression to resist oppressive or

normalizing gender discourses and roles. According to Chloe Brushwood Rose and Anna Camilleri, editors of the only book to cover this unique brand of femme¹, “femme might be described as ‘femininity gone wrong’ – bitch, slut, nag, whore, cougar, dyke, or brazen hussy. Femme is the trappings of femininity gone awry, gone to town, gone to the dogs” (13). In this sense, the identity is an explicitly political one. It is related to queerness, or at the very least, an active process of queering gender expression. It takes the trappings and interests of stereotypical femininity, turns them on their head, and reclaims their value against a culture that denigrates the feminine. In particular, it fights the notion that femininity is vapid, lesser, or weak, even going so far as to question why one must be “strong” in order to be considered worthy. It also resists the dismissal of so-called vanity as a valuable expression of self and a coping strategy for political disenfranchisement and erasure. In short, it celebrates what white supremacist heteropatriarchy maligns².

Though almost all femmes agree that femme is related to queerness, debates abound on the appropriateness of cisgender³, heterosexual (or cishet) women claiming femme as an identity⁴. For many queer-identified femmes, cishet women claiming the label is a kind of cultural appropriation that divorces the identity from its home in queer community. As one Tumblr user writes, “their [cishet women] fashion style may involve the word ‘femme’ but as an identity and a label they should not call themselves ‘femmes’” (gohomebiphobia). Another blogger writes that she “tend[s] to come down hard on the side of femme is [sic] a queer identity, is property of queer folks/culture and is inherently queer” (sassafras lowrey). Some of her readers agree with her. One writes in the comments that “femme as an identifier was born of the queer community and therefore het cis women have no right to ‘reclaim’ as it never belonged to them” (sassafras lowrey). A different commentator, Victoria, believes that a cishet woman:

who wears dresses, makeup, heels is described as feminine. Their sexuality is implicit (or explicit, depending), conventional, acceptable, not questioned. I believe queer, dress- and makeup- wearing women are already marginalized because of their ability to ‘pass’ as straight because they’re not butch. Let us use ‘femme’ as a marker of queerness. Let us subvert queer identity by how we dress. (sassafras lowrey)

What seems to be at issue here is the simultaneous disparaging of femmeness, and the centering of masculinity, in both mainstream heteropatriarchy and the queer community out of which the identity arose. Blog entries abound lamenting the invisibility of queer femmes within the queer community itself, and the ways misogyny operates in queer spaces to the benefit of men and masculine-of-center gender presentations. Queer femmes seem to be arguing

¹ Other books written on fem or femme identities discuss it in relationship to butch identities in lesbian culture. These include works such as *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader* edited by Joan Nestle, and *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender* edited by Sally Munt. Other books have begun to address femme identities on their own, but still remain tied specifically to lesbian community.

² This phrase, and others like it, is used to point to intersections of racism, heterosexism, and misogyny. A good example of this phrase in use in the femme community is the blog post entitled “On Being Fat, Brown, Femme, Ugly, and Unloveable” by Caleb Luna, posted on the blog *Black Girl Dangerous*.

³ To be cisgender means to identify with the gender one was assigned at birth. To put this another way, it means, simply, “not trans.”

⁴ A similar, though much smaller debate exists regarding the appropriateness of men adopting the label. It has not taken on the same weight in the community, however, presumably because the number of heterosexual, cisgender men claiming the label is so small as to be negligible, and queer men who use the label are already part of the queer community from which the phrase originates.

that because they are not only marginalized in mainstream culture, but also within their own communities, the galvanizing force of the femme identity is inextricably linked to their struggle for recognition, while cishet women escape this altogether by being ostensibly within the bounds of normative behavior and presentation.

Other bloggers are frustrated by this argument, which they call “identity policing.” One fat, femme blogger asserts that she identifies with femme “as a fat woman who's always found [herself] excluded from traditional femininity” (Laura). Laura, or dusty_rose, believes that femme is a visible form of resistance in a “society that would rather [she] be invisible” and leads to discovering how to do femininity on her own terms, “not the terms that the beauty industrial complex and the weight cycling industry want to sell” her (Laura). She quotes another commentator who writes:

[Q]ueer women are not the only women who have ever been told they aren't really women and who have labored to reclaim themselves from misogynist, femininity despising overcultural norms. The women I grew up around were poor, rural, working class women, some of whom were mixed bloods and/or gimps, too, who were told by almost every overcultural message that they were not real women because they didn't qualify for the incredibly narrow, absurdly constrained category of “appropriately feminine.” (Janine deManda qtd. in Laura)

The crux of the argument for these cishet women is that “femme is large, [sic] it contains multitudes” (Laura). Because normalized femininity is alienating on a number of axes, including disability, class, size, and race, femme as an identity is productive, political, and subversive for a number of people who may not identify as queer. Importantly, this comes with the important acknowledgment, at least from some bloggers, that “queer spaces—including those designed to celebrate femmes—don't owe [cishet femmes] access” (Laura).

Though the debate is sure to continue, policing the fuzzy border is a daunting task at least in part because of the nuanced ways of describing gender and sexuality in relationship to this identity, which sits somewhere between the two. Femmes can be boys or girls, bois or grlrs, men, women, genderqueers, agender people, two spirit, gender-fluid, or a myriad of other ways of identifying. For some femmes, femme *is* a gender identity. Though femmes most often identify as queer, it is not unusual to see asexual (or “ace”), lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, or straight femmes and sometimes this gets paired with a separate romantic orientation, such that a femme could be bisexual but homoromantic—sexually attracted to genders both the same and different from the femme, but only romantically attracted to (desiring to date or be in committed relationships with) people of the same gender. Femmes might further identify as any of the following: “hard femme, soft femme, andro-femme, tomboy femme, and high femme,” among possible others (Femmegasm).

At its core, perhaps the only thing certain is that femme is a politically charged identity. Femme blogs often post on topics ranging from femmephobia (the hatred of femininity, related to misogyny), racism, fat-shaming, slut-shaming, rape culture, queer love and activism, disability and accessibility, non-conforming gender presentation, trans rights, bisexual erasure and biphobia in and out of queer communities, and class struggles. “Intersectionality” is a common vocabulary word, as is “feminism.” Blog posts about how users' bodies and gender presentations interact with power and oppression are as commonplace as “selfies,” or pictures they take of

themselves. Critiques of typically masculine appearances being upheld as “true” androgyny and the privileging of masculinity in queer spaces appear side-by-side with candid photos of fat bellies covered in glitter. Fashion advice merges with class-conscious resources on how to locate the nearest thrift store or food pantry, and how to use stilettos as weapons for self-defense.

In other words, femme is a complicated, fierce, fabulous, queer identity. Though it presents a number of possible artifacts for analysis on Tumblr through an active network of bloggers, I focus on two things: the practice of posting and reblogging selfies, and the blog “fuckyeahsubversivekawaii.” Limiting my focus on these two things allows me to make two distinct arguments: 1) the posting and sharing of selfies creates performative femme visual aesthetics and identity through stylized repetition and social affirmation, and 2) art like that housed and submitted to “fuckyeahsubversivekawaii” uses Brechtian defamiliarization towards feminist ends.

The Age of the Selfie

In 2013, “selfie” was chosen as the Oxford Dictionary Online’s “Word of the Year” (Cohen). In terms of popularity, it beat the words “twerk,” “bitcoin,” and “bedroom tax.” (Diu). It stands to reason that if this was the most popular new word of the year, it reflects on our changing practices, or at least which practices we are noticing and naming. On Instagram alone, there were an estimated 90 million photos posted with the tag “me” (Freedland), and this does not account for cross-platform sharing to Twitter, Facebook, or Tumblr, nor the amount of selfies posted with different hashtags, such as “gpoy” (gratuitous picture of yourself).

At its most basic, the selfie is simply a self-portrait, usually taken with a hand held device like a cellphone. However, the practice itself has gathered much attention by journalists, media analysts, and opinion bloggers. For these writers, the selfie points to something deeper about our culture. “This is the Age of the Self!” they proclaim (Cohen). Cohen writes, in one opinion article, “Today our currency is self-aggrandizement” (Cohen). The so-called “Selfie Generation” has been accused of sharing too much information through social networking, as well as being incapable of fact-checking (Collins). This “vanity lauded as virtue” is cited as corroding “serious culture,” tearing down Generation Y in a cloud of “moronic introspection” (Bantick).

Yet there are writers jumping to the defense of selfies, too. One columnist believes that selfies are just an extension of the human desire to capture their own image. Whether that image comes in the form of a cave painting, a sculpture, or a selfie makes no difference; there is something human in the call towards connection that selfies represent. They are typically intended to be shared on social networking, after all. James Franco, a famous actor nicknamed the “King of the Selfies,” defends selfies as a form of communication, more than a mark of vanity, in the New York Times. Franco writes that, in our visual culture, “the selfie quickly and easily shows, not tells, how you’re feeling, where you are, what you’re doing” (Franco).

Tumblr users in the femme tag assign even more importance to selfies in their defense of the form. They note that famous artists have long engaged in the practice of self-portraiture, including such celebrated figures as Picasso, Van Gogh, Rembrandt, and da Vinci. More importantly for this community, perhaps, are the women artists, particularly women of color, like Frida Kahlo and Carrie Mae Weems, who have engaged in self-portraiture as a

form of resistance. One Tumblr user, kitchen-goth, writes on an image that selfies are “a way to control how we are seen and by whom” and “reminders that we are actually real” (kitchen-goth). Another blogger points out that the critique of self-portraiture really only comes now that queer folks and women have easy access to the form, “girls and queers sitting alone in their bedroom and trying to convince themselves they still exist in a world that regularly erases their existence or only let’s themselves define themselves [sic] on a white man’s terms” (“Selfie”). Laci Green, an internet-celebrity and informal sex educator on both Tumblr and YouTube, even calls for a feminist “selfie revolution” (lacigreen). In the words of another Tumblr user, “Society fears selfies because if we love ourselves, what can they sell us?” (kendrawcandraw). For femmes on Tumblr, then, the selfie is not just an innocuous practice of self-indulgence, or the sign of a cultural downfall as predicted by columnists for mainstream news, but a viable political and personal engagement.

Femme Selfies: What They Look Like and What They Do

So if selfies fulfill a function for the femme community on Tumblr, what is that function? To get there, we first have to examine their aesthetics and how femmes interact with the posting of selfies on Tumblr. We have to be able to move beyond the perspective of the selfie as annoying, individualized narcissism on display, and instead see it as a widespread culture practice, put to use by specific communities in specific ways; we must be able to consider how the selfie comes to hold meaning for particular groups of people in and through its use.

The selfies posted by femmes on Tumblr can look a variety of ways, but the below figures represent a fairly typical selfie. The photos are from the bust up, or focused more closely on the face, usually in relatively casual settings, such as the bedroom visible in the background of Figure 4. Though some selfies feature more or less of the body, some are nude, and others are in special circumstances or locations, it is more common for selfies to appear like the ones below. A quick tag search for the phrase “femme selfie” alone yields thousands of photos similar to the ones on the following page⁵. Figures 1 through 4 also put on display the wide range of intersectional identities possible for a femme. Figure 1 features a white, queer-identified, agender person; figure 2 features a non-binary, gay, disabled latin@ who prefers the pronouns “fae/faer/faer's”⁶ (upthedadpunx); figure 3 is a black, bisexual, cisgender woman; and figure 4 is a white, non-binary, queer-identified person who is specifically attracted to other femmes. Three of these femmes blog explicitly about their mental illnesses; two of them are enrolled in a university; two write about their struggles with chronic pain and illness; and one is quick to point out that they are a princess (princesspunxxx)⁷. Their religious practices span the range from atheism to folk magic. Three of them have written about experiences of being sexually harassed or assaulted. None of them know each other in person, and none of them live in the same area of the country.

⁵ There are also quite a few naked femmes engaged in self-pleasuring or just showing off cute underwear.

⁶ Pronoun use for this chapter reflects the preferences of the users included.

⁷ Since beginning this project, princesspunxxx has deleted their blog.

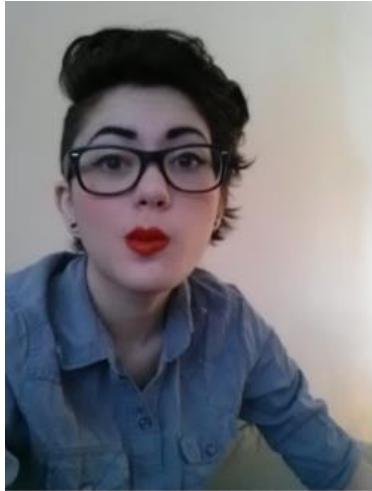


Fig. 1. "A selfie a day keeps the bad feels away." <http://physicisqueen.tumblr.com/post/71021981652/a-selfie-a-day-keeps-the-bad-feels-away>



Fig. 2. "I look like I really need sleep." <http://upthedadpunch.tumblr.com/post/73453931004/i-look-like-i-really-need-sleep>



Fig. 3. "I'm just tryin' to find something worth while." <http://girlslookingforgirls.tumblr.com/post/73086430994/im-just-tryin-to-find-something-worth-while-ig>



Fig. 4. "hello there~." <http://princesspunch.tumblr.com/post/55518749760/hello-there>

These specific facts do not reside in the selfies themselves, however—a user would have to read the poster's blog to know these things about the posters. Yet there is a sense of shared aesthetic across the images. Some of this is perhaps in the bold colors of the makeup, the way attention is focused in the images to the eyes and mouth of the subject. Some of it might be located in the hairstyles, many of which resist normative styles and colors while managing to avoid being specifically masculine. Certain aspects of stereotypical femininity are heightened, as in the Hello Kitty earrings worn in figure 2; these earrings cite the infantilization of women and/or femininity, but are worn in combination with a dark, sensual makeup palette suggestive of sexual maturity. These traits are then often combined with some stereotypically masculine traits or styles, such as the button-up in figure 1 or the spiked punk vest in figure 4. Most importantly, each image in its context presents a way to do femininity, and the subjects

face the camera with purpose, unapologetic. For many of those pictured, images of people like them are virtually non-existent in mainstream media, or are presented as token characters at best.

Though we might be able to trace this sense of shared aesthetics across a huge variety of individual pictures, it is their collective existence, and the behavior/use surrounding them, that gives them broader meaning. On Tumblr alone, the number of selfies posted in the femme tag, or by users who identify as femme, would be nearly impossible to count. A search of the tag reveals more selfies than the average person could even look at in a single day. The users pictured in figures 1 through 4 alone post multiple selfies a day. Additionally, fellow femmes have the option to like or reblog any of these selfies, to interact with them. The interactions are even quantified in the form of notes on each post.

One way to understand how these behaviors are operating is through Judith Butler's now famous concept of performativity. For Butler, all gender is performative. That is, the cultural reproduction of gendered identities takes place via the mechanism of stylized repetition (Butler 32). They exist not as beings, but becomings, without either an originating or end point (33). Butler writes that "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (33). Though this regulatory framework has erected boundaries around acceptable gender practices and presentations, the very fact of its dependence on enacted repetition—a kind of accumulation of stylized bodies over time—creates opportunities for "the parodic proliferation and subversive play of gendered meanings" (33). Specific enactments, then, can disrupt the repetitive pattern, pushing back against the regulatory framework, to expose the means of gender production.

The femme identity is as performative as normalized gender identities (e.g., "man" and "woman"). The volume of posts featuring bodies in a very specifically stylized fashion acts as a kind of repetition. As these selfies proliferate, circulate, and receive social affirmation in the form of likes and reblogs, an identity is constructed around the stylized presentation. And while femme has its own boundaries and rules for stylization, it operates outside the regulatory framework of stereotypical femininity. In this way, the femme identity is constructed by users participating in the community via repetition and affirmation of the aesthetics while simultaneously acting as specific enactments of femininity that disrupt otherwise normative constructions through heightened, parodic feminine elements and a celebration of qualities mainstream culture invisibilizes, denigrates, or maligns. As Lisa Duggan and Kathleen McHugh write, "Fem(me) is put on, a put-on, fetish production at the hands of subject becoming object, becoming fetish, while always retaining a sense of the performance" (165). Amber Hollibaugh asserts, indeed, that "you know that as a fem what you are is not fake but it is profoundly made up" (qtd in Piepzna-Samarasinha 41). Femmes, in other words, are aware, on some level, that their self-stylings are a performance, performative, a construction that they actively participate in to control their own subjectivation, if only in this regard. Tumblr, in this sense, is a perfect medium; it allows for the collection of individual enactments such that the stylization and repetition are obvious on the larger scale while providing means for other marginalized people to provide important positive feedback on specific enactments.

Femme Subversion: fuckyeahsubversivekawaii

Though selfies are central to the construction of the femme identity as it is presented on Tumblr, at least in part because it manifests as a self-presentation, femmes also share other kinds of media in the femme tag, ostensibly to mark a shared or desired aesthetic. The subversive or parodic elements of femme identities might be best explicated by looking at these other manifestations of femme community on Tumblr, as they appear more obvious in nature. In other posts tagged with the femme label, there are pictures of favored celebrities—Beyoncé and Nicki Minaj seem to be especially lauded—that demonstrate femme qualities, songs that present the attitude or spirit of femme, and original art using femme aesthetics to present intersectional feminist politics. There are also, of course, pictures of clothing, make-up, shoes, food⁸, and both long and short political essays. For the sake of argument, I will focus on one specific presentation of femme aesthetics to this end, the blog “fuckyeahsubversivekawaii,” and a theorization of the visual aesthetics through Elin Diamond's work with feminist Brechtian techniques.

In their “about”⁹ section, fuckyeahsubversivekawaii says that “this blog is for everyone who is kawaii as shit and really fucking pissed off;” it is for “everyone who decided that sexism, racism, and queerphobia are not kawaii and neither are you, you piece of shit” (fuckyeahsubversivekawaii). In their posts, they also address issues such as class, disability, and transphobia. “Kawaii” is a Japanese word, roughly translated and used in the American vernacular as a synonym with “cute.” To say that the word simply means “cute,” however, is a simplification.

Kawaii, in this context, is a specific kind of cute. The images on fuckyeahsubversivekawaii capitalize on this by employing certain visual cues. These visuals are often particularly “girly.” They make use of pastel colors, more pink than the Barbie aisle at a toy store, baby animals, unicorns, mermaids, lace, crafts typically associated with femininity (such as needlepoint and sewing), tropes of princesses, and flower print or bows on nearly every post. In some ways, it is an infantile femme aesthetic, colors and imagery more often associated with little girls than grown women. Yet it is how these visual cues get combined with text, political slogans, and even other imagery that makes them interesting in this context. To demonstrate, on the following page is a selection of imagery from fuckyeahsubversivekawaii:

⁸ Pictures of food usually contain pizza or various sweets, like candy and cupcakes.

⁹ An “about” section is where a blog might describe what kind of content is posted, or give contextual information about the blogger or bloggers responsible for the content. On personal blogs, for instance, it is not uncommon to see a list including the blogger's name, age, gender, preferred pronouns, race, ability level, etc.



Fig. 7. "i might be a fragile." <http://fuckyeahsubversivekawaii.tumblr.com/post/62957428119>

Fig. 5. "Dead Men Don't Catcall." <http://fuckyeahsubversivekawaii.tumblr.com/post/64840255317/missmantodea-dead-men-dont-catcall>



Fig. 6. "don't touch me without my permission." <http://fuckyeahsubversivekawaii.tumblr.com/post/62210111075>



Fig. 8. "transphobia is NOT kawaii." <http://fuckyeahsubversivekawaii.tumblr.com/post/65757154075/oolalalonde-i-made-a-thing-because-transphobic>

The overtly feminine aesthetics of the visuals combine with political messages, statements of personal boundaries and consent, threats of violence against sexual harassers, and profanity. None of these are expected or stereotypical in relationship to the other visual cues being presented. That's precisely where the "subversive" part comes in.

Theorizing Feminist Subversion: Representation and Alienation

Elin Diamond, in her work on feminist theory and theatre, proposes a new model of feminist criticism based on the work of Bertolt Brecht, which she calls "gestic criticism" (Diamond 83). According to Diamond, Brecht's theatre technique had certain broad concerns: "attention to the dialectical and contradictory forces within social relations; [. . .] commitment to alienation techniques and nonmimetic disunity in theatrical signification; 'literalization of the theatre space to produce a spectator/reader who is not interpolated into ideology but is passionately and pleurably engaged in observation and analysis'" (83). Diamond acknowledges Brecht's failure to address gendered power dynamics in his own work, but because it is focused on "a theorizing of the workings of an apparatus of representation" (84), it may provide a way to begin addressing the concerns Brecht himself overlooked.

Though Diamond is particularly concerned with theatre as a productive site of feminist engagement, gestic criticism is also a useful framework to understand what is happening with femme aesthetics in online community. Fuckyeahsubversivekawaii and femme selfies may not be theatre, per se, but one could argue that these things are

iterative performances, or at the very least, performative. Both the selfies and the images posted by fuckyeahsubversivekawaii construct, via stylized repetition and social affirmation, a way of doing a specifically gendered identity, and act as representations of that identity. In that way, a theory that seeks to intervene in or understand representation, particularly gender representation, is going to aid our understanding of these phenomena.

Verfremdungseffekt, or defamiliarization, as it is more typically called, is, according to Diamond, the central feature of Brecht's theory. Defamiliarization, simply put, is “a representation that alienates,” that “allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar” (Brecht qtd. in Diamond 84). This technique, for Brecht, “consists of turning an object from something ordinary and immediately accessible into something peculiar, striking, and unexpected” (qtd. in Diamond 84). In other words, defamiliarization takes a stereotypical or normalized feature and makes it strange. The addition of elements or techniques which estrange the stereotypical move the performance from mimesis—mimicking or expected resemblance, in this context—to critique. It is important that this is not simply a rejection of iconicity or mimesis, but an alienation of it, because this process acts to “foreground the expectation of resemblance” in order to expose the expected ideology (84). In other words, the technique foregrounds what the audience expects to encounter *as an expectation* and then turns it on its head to denaturalize the expectation. It exposes how that which is naturalized is, instead, an act of ideological construction.

Diamond writes that “when gender is 'alienated' or foregrounded, the spectator is enabled to see a sign system *as* a sign system—the appearance, words, gestures, ideas, attitudes, etc., that comprise the gender lexicon become so many illusionistic trappings to be put on or shed at will”¹⁰ (Diamond 85). The outward signs of what might be called “feminine” or “masculine” can be clearly seen as behaviors mapped onto bodies, instead of behaviors arising naturally from bodies. In the case of the images posted or reblogged by fuckyeahsubversivekawaii, we can identify the alienation effect, the technique of defamiliarization, at work. The pairing of typically feminine, indeed what could be called hyper-feminine, visual cues in the form of color, patterns, and imagery, paired with other, non-stereotypical elements, such as profanity or explicitly political statements, points to the very constructedness of the feminine aesthetics. In other words, a typically feminine visual “gesture” is denaturalized by its simultaneous non-typical visual or textual “gesture”—messages of aggression and assertiveness. The messages contained in the femme images make strange the presence of feminine visual cues, in resistance to ideologies that would normalize or coerce the performance of these aesthetics or signs.

The second Brechtian theory that gets recapitulated in gestic criticism is the “not, but.” For Diamond, the “not, but” theory means that “each action must contain the trace of the action it represses, thus the meaning of each action contains difference. The audience is invited to look beyond representation [. . .] to the possibilities of as yet unarticulated actions or judgments” (86). That is, what exists in the performance points to what does not exist there as well as latent possibilities for future actions, judgments, or significance. In this way, the audience is asked to continue producing meaning even after the moment of performance is over. In terms of feminist analysis, this is

10 Unlike much of Butler's work, Diamond does not spend time theorizing how gender performance is coerced under systems of oppression, and thus may not be as simple as choosing or not choosing self-presentation. For Butler, our choices in regards to gender presentation are constrained and heavily policed. Diamond, on the other hand, is, for the most part, interested in explicitly theatrical productions, which may account for this difference.

particularly notable in regards to the long debates and discussion of “sexual difference,” which Diamond asserts in the poststructuralist or postmodern frameworks refers to differences within, rather than differences between. Acknowledging difference in this way, as a destabilizer of identity, interrupts the process by which gender identities get framed as polar oppositions. Under this framework, the “not, but” aspect of Brechtian feminist strategies would be in “keeping differences in view instead of conforming to stable representations of identity, and *linking those differences to a practical politics*” (85). This is a deconstructive impulse tied to an analytical spectatorship, one that “congeal[s] into choice and action after the spectator leaves the theatre” (86).

Femme is all about difference, an identity that embraces it. As one femme writer observes, “the language for this is other: otherwise, other-worldly, unlike otherbody else” (Gibb 124). In the images posted and reblogged by fuckyeahsubversivekawaii, the difference is clearly marked, a difference *within*, not between, individuals. The explicit politics referenced in the text accompanying or appearing on their images points to the ways that systems of oppression weigh on bodies in unique and complicated ways, creating a variety of political affiliations and interests across the femme identity, such that the solidarity called for is marked by constant reminders that femmes have so many different things at stake, whether those things involve fat, disability, race, religion, sexuality, or class. The presentation of a clear political message, one of anti-oppression on a variety of fronts, in this aesthetic is also a way of encouraging spectators, femmes watching and participating in the creation of this community, to continue applying these analyses to their everyday lives, to carry the politics with them in the same way they might carry a tube of lipstick in the lacy cup of a bra. Indeed, the femme is “the performer who demands performance in return” (165), the politics and the visual aesthetics so enmeshed as to be co-constitutive.

Brecht and Butler: Femme at Last

Though the Brechtian techniques are more easily identifiable in the fuckyeahsubversivekawaii postings, they are equally a part of the selfies that get posted on Tumblr, especially if we look at it as a collective practice as opposed to an act of individual narcissism. The images of femme folks posted take on some iconic, or stereotypical, aspects of feminine performance, then twist them, make them strange, and wrest them away from mainstream representation. Part of this is in the Do-It-Yourself spirit of the practice, that femmes themselves are controlling how, when, to whom, and in what contexts their images are presented. These are not women constructed through male gaze, but femmes taking the power to picture themselves, to create their own images of identification, and then share, collect, affirm, and praise those images together. They wear red lipstick, black eyeliner, and spikes with their pink lace, on bodies that are often fat, brown, disabled, or otherwise deemed non-desirable by mainstream beauty standards. They stare at the camera, or away; sometimes the angles are flattering and sometimes they are not; their hair is often in unconventional styles, or in styles some women are punished for, such as natural black hair. They are mostly unsmiling, snarling, or smirking; sometimes they are crying. Their faces are featured heavily, often in the center of the photo, instead of the disembodied limbs and torsos of women in advertising and magazines. As they proliferate across Tumblr and other similar platforms, spilling out into “real world” spaces, femmes present a visual and embodied challenge to stereotypical and/or coercive femininity.

All of these elements taken together, the performance of identity happening is one that embraces defamiliarization. The construction of this identity on Tumblr and places like it is also one that explicitly encourages iteration, repetition, and clear stylization, through reblogging, liking, and easy access to posting at any time of the day, as many times as a poster pleases. What we end up with from this perspective is an identity that resists and subverts normalized femininity, that queers it, through performative defamiliarization. Instead of resisting normalization through an individual enactment that breaks the regulatory pattern thereof, femme instead creates its own pattern. The pattern regulates, certainly, but does so by upholding difference and denaturalizing the typical markers of feminine behavior and aesthetics. This serves to expose how gender identities are mapped onto bodies, constructed by bodies in action, in process. The presentation of femme aesthetics through both selfies and other image postings, such as those on fuckyeahsubversivekawaii, also present a practical political program, a powerful one given that it is in constant repetition and tied so closely to the identity itself, as a part of what it means to be femme. To participate in femme, to take on the identity, is to participate in a political movement, a political movement using performative Brechtian methods towards queer, feminist ends.

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Sibling Communication in Emerging Adulthood: Young Women's Articulations of Relationships, Identity and Conflict

Emily Palombo & Michaela D.E. Meyer

The sibling relationship is one of the most enduring interpersonal relationships individuals experience throughout the lifespan. Sibling relationships often change in emerging adulthood once siblings no longer live under the same roof. While adolescence often creates strain between siblings, emerging adults are able to establish their own mature identities and renegotiate and redefine their relationships with their siblings (Myers & Bryant, 2008). Our study explores sibling relationships in the emerging adults years through qualitative interviews. Female emerging adult participants were interviewed about typical communication patterns, behavior, and issues related to their experiences with sibling conflict. Important findings reveal how age differences, personality factors, unequal material resources, and differential parental treatment produce feelings of envy and competition between siblings. Ultimately, this study provides evidence that competitive and/or negative feelings about siblings can persist into emerging adulthood.

Keywords: Siblings; Conflict; Sibling Relationships; Emerging Adults; Interpersonal Communication

Communication helps create unique family structures and often shapes the experiences of its individual members (Myers & Bryant, 2008). The sibling relationship is unique within family systems, and often constitutes the longest relationship an individual maintains throughout the lifespan (Lamb, 1982). Despite its longevity, little is known about conflict in adult sibling relationships. Often referred to as “sibling rivalry,” scholars have found that unequal parental treatment, differences in age, and other comparisons made between siblings still cause tension and jealousy (Connidis, 2007). While young siblings have traditionally been studied in family conflict, there is a lack of research pertaining to conflict among adult siblings (Milevsky, Smoot, Leh, & Ruppe, 2005). However, scholars also note that sibling relationships improve in the emerging adult years (ages 18 to 25) (Myers & Bryant, 2008).

The purpose of this case study was to examine how individuals negotiate conflict with their siblings in emerging adulthood. According to Arnett (2004), emerging adulthood is a unique life stage where individuals focus on identity exploration and a renegotiation of relational roles, particularly within families. To understand how emerging adults navigate changes in their relationships with siblings, we first examine the extant literature on communication within sibling relationships. We then conducted qualitative interviews with female emerging adults about conflict patterns in their relationships with siblings. Utilizing an emergent thematic analysis, we discovered that conflict and competition in sibling relationships is largely influenced by parental communication. Moreover, difference in age, achievement, and personality factors among siblings was indexed as a rationale for differing parental communication, showing that sibling competition is a result of many complex variables.

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Review of Literature

During one's life, the longest lasting relationship an individual will develop is the sibling relationship. Unless a significant tragedy occurs, many of these relationships last the entire lifetime (Milevsky, et al., 2005). Siblings live through many developmental stages together, including childhood, adulthood, and elderly years, and also experience most major family and life transitions simultaneously (Corti, 2009). However, unlike voluntary friendships, sibling relationships are forced. Therefore, different dynamics are involved that must be taken into account when studying sibling relationships (Volkom, Machiz, & Reich, 2011). In addition, relationships between siblings change and develop from childhood to later years. Instead of simply focusing on critical events in childhood, many researchers have become interested in understanding siblings across a lifespan (Lamb, 1982), particularly adult sibling relationships (Cicirelli, 1995). Focusing on siblings in later years has become popular only in recent decades, and many believe there is still a lot to be learned (Volkom et al., 2011).

There are aspects of evolution and human nature that affect the sibling relationship. Many psychologists believe the root of all sibling discord stems from a child's attachment to their caregiver and wanting to have one's parent's attention fully, without the distractions of other brothers or sisters (Edward, 2011). Hart & Legerstee (2010) suggest that infants are genetically programmed to view the other sibling who is being given parental attention as a rival or a threat. The behavioral display of this adaptation is what is commonly called sibling rivalry (Hart & Legerstee, 2010). In a study of children who had lost their parents shortly after birth because of the Holocaust, Freud and Dann (1951) observed that the sibling relationship was quite different than any sibling relationship previously observed. The children not only shared resources and were strongly attached, but did not compete or demonstrate possessive behaviors over their caretakers. This well-known study has shown that parents' attention may be one of the most stimulating factors driving sibling rivalry (Edward, 2011).

Mothers and fathers can make harmful contributions to the development of their children through differential treatment. In one study, differential treatment and perceived favoritism were associated with higher levels of hostility among siblings, and more parental differential treatment from one specific parent led to more intense sibling rivalry (Meunier, Roskam, Stievenart, Moortele, Browne, & Wade, 2012). Children report feeling jealousy when parents side with one sibling over the other in conflict, give gifts to one sibling and not the other, or give one sibling more recognition for abilities and talents. In addition, adolescent girls more often express feeling jealous of their siblings than do boys (Thompson & Halberstadt, 2008). Children compare the extent of aid and attention they receive from a parent with what their brother or sister receives. If a brother or sister perceives a difference, that child will show more ill will toward the sibling even if the parent adequately met his or her own needs. What is interesting, however, is that both siblings express this negativity, not only the sibling who feels their sibling has received more parental resources (Lamb, 1982).

These hostile emotions turn into feelings of jealousy and envy, which causes inner turmoil when the sibling understands they are inappropriate to express (Strom & Aune, 2008). Psychodynamic psychologists like Freud, often discuss the ambivalence one may feel for a sibling. The child can love and admire their brother or sister, while at the same time envy and hate them. Thus, the sibling may be playing the role of an intimate friend and hated enemy

simultaneously (Edward, 2011). These inner conflicts take a toll on a child's development. Since jealousy is a social emotion, children enact communicative strategies to help them cope with their feelings in their everyday environment. Examples include avoiding the situation, seeking support from others, or interfering with the relationship between caregiver and rival sibling (Thompson & Halberstadt, 2008). These adolescent inner feelings and coping mechanisms show the importance of early family life on later behavior. They also provide insight into the ways in which siblings may carry the weight of their past feelings about their siblings with them for the rest of their lives (Lamb, 1982).

While rivalry among siblings peaks in childhood and adolescence, there is evidence that prior feelings of competitiveness persist well into adulthood (Strom & Aune, 2008). However, research on adult sibling relationships has limited information (Volkman et al., 2011). While there is evidence that more positive feelings often emerge in later years, the likelihood of this happening is lower in siblings who experienced a lot of conflict and hostility towards one another in childhood (Strom & Aune, 2008). In addition, internalizing feelings of jealousy and inadequacy from differential parenting can affect self esteem and self worth, which may affect interpersonal relationships outside of the home (Crocker & Park, 2004). For example, unequal parenting may lead to insecure attachment styles and a high level of distress in later romantic relationships (Rauer & Volling, 2007). Often, this leads to an inability to establish stable relationships with future friends or romantic partners (Crocker & Park, 2004).

Some researchers believe that sibling rivalry has positive effects over the lifespan by reinforcing values such as compromise and sharing, while giving siblings continued opportunities to create a more realistic self-concept by learning the difference between their sibling's strengths and what they can actually achieve (Edward, 2011). In many family structures, living in the same environment and interacting with caregivers allows siblings to understand, empathize, and relate to one another. In certain unhealthy family dynamics and after certain traumatic events, siblings may even begin to rely on one another more closely and view one another as attachment figures and support systems (Rauer & Volling, 2007). In addition, most adult siblings have reported having a relational commitment to their sibling that extends beyond biological obligation (Myers, 2011).

Arnett (2004) defines emerging adulthood as a period of uncertainty and identity exploration, often encompassing the ages of 18 to 25 years old. Emerging adulthood is an interesting time in a person's relationship with his or her sibling, as peer and romantic relationships start to take precedence over other family relationships. This creates more physical and emotional space between the siblings, allowing them to take a step back and better reflect on their relationship (Myers & Bryant, 2008). Typically, this is the time when a person will attend college and move away from home, gaining a new sense of independence. Milevsky et al. (2005) encourages researchers to explore emerging adulthood because the emerging adult's new sense of autonomy, exploration, and changing roles leads to unique changes in one's relationships.

Thus, our study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do emerging adult women categorize and rationalize conflict within their relationships with siblings?

RQ2: What impact does the perception of parental treatment have on self-reported instances of conflict within women's emerging adult sibling relationships?

RQ3: How do emerging adult women see enrollment in college and/or physical distance from their sibling contributing to potential conflicts in their relationship with siblings?

Method

The method chosen for this study was qualitative interviews. Participants included ten women enrolled at a small liberal arts university recruited through snowball sampling. Each woman reported having at least one sibling and reported experiencing conflict and/or competition with at least one sibling. The number of siblings for each participant varied and not all siblings were the same sex. All participants were emerging adults, with ages ranging from 20- 22. All of the women identified as White. This is congruent with the general demographics of the university where over 85% of the population identifies as White. Upon obtaining formal consent through an informed consent form approved by the university IRB, we conducted individual interviews with each woman. Participant responses are identified by pseudonyms throughout the manuscript to protect confidentiality.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed, with the transcriptions serving as the primary data for analysis. Thematic analysis was employed as the method of analysis. Thematic analysis is helpful in discovering themes that emerge within each participant's responses, as well as themes that are common across participants (Zorn & Ruccio, 1998). Both authors served as coders using open coding, and employed Owen's (1984) thematic analysis categories of repetition and recurrence. Repetition involves the "explicit repeated use of the same wording" while recurrence involves "an implicit recurrence of meaning using different discourse" (p. 275). In order for recurrence to occur, multiple utterances must contain the "same thread of meaning, even though different wording indicated such a meaning" (p. 275). Both authors coded the transcripts for specific themes independently, and produced very few (<5%) discrepancies. We jointly resolved these discrepancies by discussing the language we used for coding and collapsed codes where necessary. Through this process we identified six dominant themes: 1) age differences, 2) personality differences, 3) unequal material resources, 4) parental influence, 5) conflict communication, and 6) improvement of relationship in college years. Individual themes are discussed, as well as their specific influence on the sibling relationship.

Results

Our study was guided by three primary research questions. The first sought to understand how emerging adult women categorize and rationalize conflict within their relationships with siblings. This research question was answered by our first two themes: age differences and personality differences. The women reported that differences in age and personality strongly impacted their relationship with siblings. In general, emerging adults identified

having more in common with other emerging adults. Thus, if the sibling was not also an emerging adult, the relationship produced more strain or conflict. Our second research question asked how these women perceived parental treatment as part of sibling conflict. This question was answered by our second two themes: unequal material resources and parental influence. Participants strongly located financial and emotional resources from parents as a site of conflict with their sibling. Finally, our third research question sought to discover whether or not these women perceived physical distance from their sibling as contributing to relational conflict. This question was answered by our final two themes: conflict communication and improvement of relationship in college years. Some women reported that distance influenced whether or not the conflict was aggressive or passive, and others reported a general improvement in the quality of their relationships with siblings (in that they produced less conflict than they had in the past) as a result of the transition to college and emerging adulthood. Each of these themes is discussed independently in more detail below.

Age Differences

Participants frequently described “age gaps” as a primary reason for not being relationally close to their sibling. Language such as “not being able to relate” appeared across responses as an explanation for conflict episodes. For example, when asked about her relationship with her sibling, Amy explains, “we just have an awkward age gap so it’s hard to like..we’re like going through different things in our life right now so it’s hard to really be like personal with each other.” Amy attributes her distance from her brother to this “age gap” which regulates the types of situations they may or may not have in common. Similarly, Allison discusses how the age gap between her and her sister created both physical and emotional distance between them: “She’s 4 years older so like my whole high school like she wasn’t even around since she was in college so um I guess that was kind of weird because like I became like an only child.” Thinking of different developmental stages as being qualitatively different, especially during the emerging adult stage, could explain why siblings who are experiencing different milestones in their lives have trouble finding the common ground that is often necessary for intimacy (Milevsky et al., 2005). Sharing common experiences can bind siblings together, as siblings share perspectives about family and home life that they might feel outsiders will not understand (Corti, 2009). Similarly, going through different life stages than their siblings made participants feel as if they could identify better with friends who were going through similar experiences than with their sibling.

Birth order also had an impact on participants’ self-reporting of their sibling relationships. Parental communication was interpreted differently by participants who identified as oldest, middle or youngest children. Older siblings discussed more responsibility, expectation, and scrutiny for their wrong actions. For example, Ashley described how she sees herself as a “role model” which shapes the way she treats her sister. She articulates:

I kind of become like a Mom figure and I’m like ‘Pick up your stuff, you’re being messy’ um and so she’s, I guess that’s like what comes up a lot now and she basically just comes back with ‘You’re not my Mom like get off my back’ like stuff like that and I’m like ‘Well, like I like am the only one telling you to pick up your stuff so you need to do it’ so I think right now that’s kind of like the biggest conflict between us.

Ashley's description of this conflict with her sister situates her as "a Mom figure," offering specific advice or direction which causes tension with her sibling. This reference to functioning as a "co-parent" was shared by other participants identifying as the oldest sibling. Another interviewee, Katie, explained that her mother instructed her to tell her younger brother to study more frequently because he was not doing well in school. Similarly, Hailey described her relationship with her younger brother as "closer to a parent and kid relationship," explaining that her mother often communicates with her as if she is a co-parent. In these instances, mothers are perhaps hoping that the older sibling's intervention in the conflict will help solve the problem, as siblings are closer in age and are not direct parental figures. Our participants, however, frequently reported that this communicative approach produced conflict between themselves and younger siblings because younger siblings perceived that the older sibling was "not my mom."

Personality Differences

Though family structure and communication play a strong role in sibling conflict, personality differences add another complicated dimension to sibling relationships. In fact, personality differences that affect a child's behavior may play a greater role than sex or birth order in how a parent treats a child (Meunier et al., 2012). Even dating back to infancy, some psychologists argue that a child's individual temperament influences parent interaction more than maternal sensitivity. As a result, this determines whether or not a secure attachment will develop between the child and caregiver, which can have long lasting effects as the child grows older (Braithwaite, 2006). This can ultimately impact sibling communication. For example, one interviewee, Allison, describes her older sister as being the "crazy one in the family", saying "she always did things how she wanted whenever she wanted, she didn't care what my parents said." Older siblings are often given characteristics such as "responsible" and "obedient", yet Allison describes her sister acting more similarly to someone stereotypically lower in birth order. This behavior causes her parents to treat Allison and her sister differently:

They are more like demanding or more serious with my sister and like have not like set rules but like, I don't know they just kind of like expect...I don't know what the right word is...but they just...I don't know like get more frustrated with her so I guess they treat her differently in that way.

Labeling family members such as "the crazy one" in Allison's family situation, affects the way parents communicate with her. As a result, conflict between Allison and her sister could result from how the parents frame each child's personality.

In addition, if a child's personality is more compatible with one parent over the other, it can divide the family. For example, Elizabeth described herself as being a "people pleaser" and her half-sister, Kendra, as being "argumentative" which may account for some of the disagreements that occur within her family. Elizabeth believes her father prefers spending more time with her because they both have calm temperaments, unlike Kendra. This interrelatedness between members of the family and the sibling relationship can be explained using systems theory. "With this approach, a social system such as the family represents an integrated, unified whole based on the mutually influencing relationships between the family members" (Braithwaite, 2006, p. 118). Each relationship

influences and is influenced by the family system as a whole. Therefore, a child's personality influences behavior, which may impact the specific interpersonal relationships within the family. This difference may cause resentment and perceived favoritism, which can lead to sibling hostility.

Unequal Material Resources

Unequal material resources was listed as a consistent issue fueling sibling conflict. This stems from both the competitiveness between siblings and from the influence that parents have in choosing which sibling receives more resources. One interviewee, Elizabeth, talked about how her relationship with her step-sister, Nikki, suffers because of the money her mother has spent on Elizabeth instead of Nikki. Although Elizabeth justifies this by saying that her mother did not have the same amount of money when Nikki was young as she did with Elizabeth, it still causes some hostility:

I think my Mom has like a big influence on it because she kicked [Nikki] out of the house when she was younger cause she couldn't afford her anymore so she lived with someone else, and because like my sister ended up living with someone else that caused a lot of hostility between them two. So it's like I still have to deal with it even though I'm not in the picture with it.

Elizabeth discussed other material items, such as getting a new car when Nikki did not, as a source of conflict. This example illustrates how unresolved issues of specific material resources in adolescence may still be relevant over the lifespan of a relationship (Strom & Aune, 2008).

Disparity between adult siblings, including education, income, and occupation, has increased over time, yet most research assumes these factors are fairly egalitarian between siblings (Connidis, 2007). Especially in Western society, adult siblings are often characterized as equal when this is not always the case. Minimizing the significance of material differences in sibling relationships is challenging, and doing so may perpetuate the feelings of inequality and hostility felt in younger sibling relationships (Connidis, 2007). Molly describes her relationship with her older sister as one without much conflict; however, she says that shopping is still one "petty" issue they continue to experience, "We don't really fight about serious things, just petty stuff like...my Mom will be like take me shopping and I'll come home and be like 'Ooh look what Mom got me'." Molly's gloating about her new purchases from her mother still causes a negative reaction from her older sister. This demonstrates the role that unequal material resources play in creating a competitive atmosphere and how they may be considered symbolic for parents' love and affection.

In addition to tangible material resources purchased by parents for their children, other types of material support, particularly with respect to education, were salient for participants. For example, Sophia describes an example of the competition she feels with her step-sister over their differences in lifestyle:

I'm a college student and she's not in school, she's about to have a baby and I'm looking to have a career before I start a family, um so I think with that it's difficult because we kind of try to like see which lifestyle is better, like 'Oh, I'm in college and I'm getting good grades and this is what I'm doing' and then she'll try and one up me and be like 'Oh, well since I'm not in college this is all the stuff I can do' and stuff like that so it kind of become difficult to get along with her.

In this scenario Sophia believes her step-sister envies the success she is having in school and will most likely have in her future. While these differences are not as obvious as material inequality, competition based on lifestyles or other immeasurable traits still cause siblings to view one another as rivals. This was also true in Samantha's family circumstance. Samantha is a triplet, and as a result, reported consistent conflict with her siblings. She and one of her siblings traveled away from home for college, while one of her siblings chose not to attend college and continued living with her parents:

My sister at home is definitely competitive with us, cause she being "the odd one out" going to school, she always feels like she's one step behind us, so I feel like there's like a lot of anxiety and stuff built up there, just cause she doesn't feel at the same level as us, so there's always like talking about college and our majors and stuff there's always competition where she feels like she needs to be like better or on the same page as us.

Both of these examples indicate that education, whether or not fully subsidized by the parents, is seen as a material resource that potentially causes conflict. Participants perceived their siblings who were not enrolled in higher education to envy their "collegiate" lifestyle. As a counterpoint, Kim reported on the lack of rivalry between herself and her sister, both of whom are currently enrolled in college:

Um not really competitiveness because we do different things, cause I'm more like girly and like I did sports and stuff and she's very artsy, so we just kind of divided so we didn't have to compete because I think she felt that she didn't want to compete with me so she didn't do the same things as me.

Kim and her sister seem to differentiate themselves from one another as a means to secure their individual identities, ultimately reducing conflict. Since both women are enrolled in college, they received equal material resources and were able to differentiate. In the previous examples, siblings differentiated based on life choices, but conflict appeared around education for one but not the other.

Parental Influence

Almost all participants acknowledged the role that parental favoritism and/or increased communication played in the development of their competitive feelings toward one another.

Often, this type of communication seemed to be unintentional on the part of the parents, but still yielded powerful feelings of lower self worth in the participants. Amy describes the constant struggle she faces trying to measure up to her brother:

Well, my mom will make comments about my brother's grades when she knows I'm like not doing so great and it makes me feel really bad about myself. And, um, he's really involved in band and like she always talks about how talented he is but never tells me I have any talent or anything. So yeah I feel like I'm competing to be talented and get good grades and then he's always the one who does that.

In this instance, Amy reports that her mother fails to communicate support of Amy's accomplishments, thus, making her "feel really bad about myself." Katie also acknowledges the way her parents influence her relationship with her brother as a result of competition over grades:

I think they will actually inadvertently promote being competitive just because, I mean they don't do it intentionally obviously, but we'll be at dinner and they'll be like 'Oh my gosh congratulations [Katie] for like making such good grades!' hint hint cause like Jack is like, didn't do well, I mean he just started college but, so they're like trying to be nice to me but it's like awkward for him because they're praising me so it kind of promotes a competitive environment.

Grades were a common topic of conflict between siblings. Grades are similar to material resources in that grades are measureable way of discovering inequality, and are seen as a quantitative evaluation where siblings can be easily compared. Participants seemed more distraught over their parent's comments about talents or grades than about actual time spent with the parents. For example, Ashley recalls how her parents will make comments to Heather, her sister, such as "Oh, you should get good grades like [Ashley]". Even though Ashley's parents are spending more time with Heather while Ashley is away at college, their choice to talk about Ashley and her grades still made Heather feel inferior and caused conflict in their relationship.

Parental comments made to one sibling about another are often perceived as indirect comparisons, even when the siblings recognize that this may not be the parent's intention. One of the most complicated parts about family relationships is the low level of agreement between parents and their children on parental behaviors (Meunier et al., 2012). It may be hard to tell whether or not parents actually influence sibling competition, or whether natural sibling competition causes children to perceive their parents as treating them unequally. However, these results seem to indicate that both are possible.

Conflict Communication

Participants frequently reported using both aggressive and passive aggressive tactics in communicating during conflict episodes with their siblings. Kim reported passive aggressive communication as the most common form of conflict communication between her and her sister, but said that most often they avoid conflict altogether. She even describes having separate floors to "get away from each other." Elizabeth describes fighting with her brother as "bucking heads" but reported not fighting with her sisters, while Hailey listed "name-calling" as a speech pattern she utilized with her brother during arguments. Molly described texting her sister instead of yelling at her during times of disagreement, which could be considered tempering aggression through technology into a more passive aggressive form. Using a mediated form of communication instead of having a face-to-face disagreement also occurs between Sophia and her sister:

I definitely think because we are both girls a lot of the conflict is underlying in like passive aggressiveness and she'll never say out in the open like 'Oh I'm mad at you because of this', it's all like short text messages and short e-mails and short phone calls and things like that um which kind of makes things difficult sometimes because then we don't ever resolve things like really quickly.

As a result of this communicative interaction, she acknowledges the unproductive results of avoiding direct confrontation since they "don't ever resolve things" quickly. The use of passive aggressive communication was also common in Katie's relationship with her brother:

Now that we're in college we don't actually get in like yelling fights or anything, um but sometimes if he's like making a rude comment um, usually I'll just kind of ignore it and just like go away from him cause I don't like really fighting with him, um but yeah its kind of like more passive aggressive now I would say.

These results may not be so surprising, given that sibling conflict rarely ends in compromise, and destructive tactics are more often used over constructive ones even after childhood (Ross, Ross, Stein, & Trabasso, 2006). Often childhood conflicts end in submission or without resolution. A mindset may begin to develop within siblings that direct conflict is not useful, leading to more indirect measures of dealing with conflict (Ross et al., 2006). Thus, it appears that both verbal aggressiveness (i.e., name-calling, verbal fighting) and indirect tactics (i.e., avoidance, use of mediated communication) were employed by participants during conflict episodes with siblings. However, it is interesting to note that many of these women utilized technology as a means of enacting the conflict – as physical distance often prevented face-to-face confrontation.

Improvement of Relationship in College Years

All participants believed their sibling relationship had improved from adolescence to emerging adulthood, especially since entering college. Participants listed distance, getting older and maturing, and becoming equals as the main reasons for why the relationship has gotten better. Molly describes how living apart impacted her feelings toward her sister:

Oh, we definitely get along so much better cause we don't see each other that much, so we'll like talk on the phone every once in awhile and like I actually miss her now which is good, but I think living apart was a lot better for us. We appreciate each other.

Many proposed theories involving the sibling relationship, including attachment theory, posit that there is an emotional bond that always exists between siblings throughout the lifespan, even as contact becomes less frequent (Volkom et al., 2011). As siblings start to withdraw from one another's lives during emerging adulthood, their frequency, breadth, and depth of communication decreases. However, it is also common during this period for siblings to reevaluate familial ties and see their sibling relationships as important (Myers & Bryant, 2008). In Molly's case, living apart gave her and her sister a chance to "appreciate each other."

Emerging adults are also able to create a more sophisticated view of their siblings as they mature (Myers & Bryant, 2008). Elizabeth describes how she noticed her relationship with her older half-sibling, Sherri, had changed when she came to visit her college. She felt that they "hit it off really well" and "connected", which Sherri attributed

to Elizabeth's maturing. As the youngest in her family, Elizabeth agrees that her maturation has improved her relationship with all of her siblings. Several participants also indicated feeling more comfortable disclosing information to their sibling or talking to them about more serious topics in emerging adulthood. For example, Amy said:

We've gotten a lot closer, like because he's gotten older we've been able to become, like have a more like personal relationship and I've been able to talk to him about more things, but it's still not like I can tell him everything. But I'll talk to him when I'm having a problem and I wouldn't have done that before.

Amy indicates that her relationship with her brother had improved in terms of self-disclosure, though she admits she still doesn't feel comfortable telling him "everything." Disclosing personal information can create bonds with siblings in emerging adulthood, paving the foundation for adult relationships among siblings. Siblings feel as if they can begin to discuss information with their sibling that they would feel uncomfortable telling their parents. This seems to unite siblings and may help them view one another as allies more so than competitors, which can help the relationship improve dramatically. In addition, viewing one another as equals can relieve the tension caused by age differences. Older siblings revealed feeling better about not having to "baby" the younger sibling, and younger siblings were open to a friendly relationship when they stopped viewing the older sibling as "being the boss." Katie explains:

We've definitely become closer and I guess like since he's older, he's kind of like..he always used to like hate me being the boss of him and like have this animosity because I was older but now he'll still like come to me for advice so it's definitely like a lot better of a relationship.

As their age differences become less significant, Katie and her brother begin to feel like they have more in common. In addition, maturity causes Katie's brother to be able to come to her for advice and to be respectful rather than resentful of her being the oldest.

Discussion

Our analysis presents six major themes identified by emerging adult women about their relationships with siblings. Age differences formed a foundation for competition that was exacerbated by perceived or actual distribution of material resources from parents. In addition, parents praise or comparison of siblings could spark conflict between emerging adult siblings, leading to the use of both verbally aggressive and indirectly aggressive tactics to resolve conflict. Moreover, as the emerging adult siblings defined their own personal identities, personality differences came into play within family communication. Overall though, emerging adults report that moving into emerging adulthood and out of their family home reduced conflict and increased their communication with siblings. Very little research has been done on emerging adult sibling relationships. In fact, emerging adult literature often focuses on the importance of the relational transition between emerging adults and their parents (Arnett, 2004; Nelson, Padilla-Walker, Carroll, Madsen, Barry & Badger, 2007), but neglects to include siblings as part of this family communication transition. Our findings support that the transition to emerging adulthood does, in fact, impact communication with siblings.

Our findings are similar to previous research on sibling communication in terms of generational conflict and perceived parental treatment, but specifically contribute two new pieces of information: the location of unequal material/emotional resources and the use of relationally aggressive behaviors in sibling relationships. Often, research characterizes adult siblings as equals since they were members of the same originating family environment, however, disparity in education, income, and occupation between siblings is on the rise and can impact the sibling relationship (Connidis, 2007). The women in our study were particularly eloquent about perceived differences in financial and emotional resources from parents, and that these perceived differences were almost always the locus of conflict in their sibling relationship. Moreover, it stands to reason that if emerging adulthood is a time of identity exploration and discovery, emerging adults seeking to define themselves in relation to siblings may produce more conflict if one sibling is seen as “succeeding” more than another. This leads to the second finding of significance, that conflict episodes involve both verbal and nonverbal messages. Myers and Bryant (2008) found that siblings commonly use verbally aggressive messages in during emerging adulthood, but our study indicates that siblings also use several indirectly aggressive tactics when dealing with sibling conflict. Given that our participant pool was entirely female, it stands to reason that their reports are linked to relational aggression. Research demonstrates that girls engage in this type of aggression more so than boys (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), and that girls’ relational aggression increases in adolescence and early adulthood (Crick & Rose, 2000). Direct and indirect forms of relational aggressions are often constructed as “rites of passage” among girls that will eventually be outgrown (Mikel-Brown, 2003). However, these studies are usually tied to friendships and peer groups. Indirect aggression against siblings is an understudied area that would provide an interesting avenue for future research.

Despite our contributions, the study certainly had limitations. First, we selected a small, highly homogenous sample for the study, and as such our findings are quite limited in terms of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic standing. Part of this was purposeful, as the authors had only one semester to complete the project. Thus, time was an important factor. Given additional time, a greater sample size with more questions would improve the depth and quality of themes.

Moreover, future studies should consider paired interviews with both siblings. Our data are limited to self-reports from one member of the relationship only, and as a result, can only reflect one view of the sibling relationship. Also, even though family structures varied, there were certain experiences that would not actually be shared by all emerging adult populations, such as college attendance. Differences in geography/regionalism may also impact the perceptions of and expectations on the sibling relationship. Therefore, our picture of sibling relationships is incomplete and future studies should build on the findings in this case study to determine how sibling relationships develop in emerging adulthood.

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Using *The Hunger Games* to Teach Impression Management Theory

Michelle Epstein Garland

Courses: Interpersonal Communication, Communication Theory

Objectives: To exemplify an understanding of impression management theory and to illustrate and critique concepts of Impression Management Theory in practice.

Rationale

Studies have shown that film has been used as an effective teaching tool since the 1970s: “Film scenes can offer a valuable portrayal of abstract theories and concepts.... Showing concepts through different film scenes also shows the application of these concepts in different situations” (Champoux, 1999, p. 206). This activity uses the film *The Hunger Games* to portray and apply intercultural concepts through interpersonal communication.

For those who have not seen the film, the story centers on the character of Katniss, a 16-year-old girl from District 12 of the nation of Panem, surviving a dystopian society. Panem is a totalitarian nation composed of 12 districts, each known for a specific trade, and the Capital. Each year the 12 districts send two tributes, one male and one female, to participate in *The Hunger Games* as a reminder of rebellion’s consequences. *The Hunger Games* serves as entertainment for Panem leaders and the Capital citizens; it is brutal retribution for the district citizens as the 24 tributes are forced to eliminate each other until only one survivor remains.

Theoretical Grounding

Impression Management Theory (IMT) refers to the processes individuals use as they attempt to control others’ perceptions of them by managing their verbal and nonverbal communication. The concepts of front stage (behaviors exhibited in the presence of others)/back stage (behaviors behind the scenes) and expressive (behaviors presented in a way that corresponds with one’s self-concept/instrumental (behaviors that attempt to influence others or gain social and/or material rewards) are central to applying IMT in this activity.

Activity

Part One

While watching key scenes from *The Hunger Games*, as listed below, students are asked to identify concepts of Impression Management Theory as they relate to the tributes’ strategies and the games’ outcome, using the definitions and explanation provided by Eichhorn, Thomas-Maddox, and Wanzer (2008, p. 28) “Our day-to-day choice of dress, hairstyle, choice of words, and artifacts are selected strategically to project a specific desire image of ourselves to those around us.” More specifically, students are asked to identify examples of tributes strategically aiming to express certain images of themselves.

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While students are viewing the scenes, they should be writing down specific examples to address the questions below, which serve as the foundation for an application and analysis reflection paper to be written by each student.

1. Based upon impression management theory, how do we make sense of district 12? The capital? The tributes?
2. How did impression management theory play into the tributes' strategies to survive the games?
3. How did impression management theory impact the games' outcomes?
4. How do you better understand impression management theory and its value as a theory?

Table 1. Impression Management Theory by Scene

Cue Time/Length	Scene Description
11:20-16:50	The quell – capital propaganda shown, gray and white clothing of district 12, Katniss volunteers to save her sister, 3-finger sign of unity and respect (back stage)
25:15-31:30	Conversation between tributes and mentor about getting people to like them to get sponsors; shows body transition for prepare for games; tribute parade – district images and hand-holding/fire for Katniss and Peeta; vibrant, costume-like attire and make-up of the capital citizens (back stage, front stage)
34:50-47:00	Training – sizing up the competition with skill demonstration, tribute scores, Katniss told to have manners because her behavior reflects on them all (front stage, instrumental and expressive strategies)
49:05-57:15	Tribute interviews – fire dress, win for Prim, Katniss attempts to be likeable, star-crossed lovers idea introduced
1:40:15-1:48:20	Star-crossed lovers image played up to get sponsors/things they need to survive (front stage, instrumental strategies)
2:01:20-2:07:35	Star-crossed lover image must continue after games because berry trick put their lives in danger (front stage, instrumental strategies)

Part Two

After reflection papers are submitted, the instructor should lead students in a discussion of Impression Management Theory in practice. The discussion centers upon impression management as it relates to communication strategy, outcomes, and perceptions/interpretations of self and others. Impression Management Theory refers to the processes individuals use verbally and nonverbally to attempt to control others' perceptions of them. Moreover, the discussion should be based on the four foundational questions established for the application and analysis reflection paper.

Debriefing

In terms of grading the reflection papers, the author suggests focusing on quality over quantity. That is, the student's ability to capture every example of each concept is much less significant than the student's ability to analyze the applied nature of the concept and critique the impacts of cultural concepts and impression management theory on communication behaviors.

Sample discussion and paper comments from students are provided and organized by discussion question.

1. Based on impression management theory, how do we make sense of district 12? The capital? The tributes?

The scenes most prevalent in understanding impression management were the tribute parade and the tribute training. In the parade, the tributes from each district were dressed in costumes that reflected their district. Examples: District 1 and 2 were costumed as gladiators because they were trained all their life to fight. Other districts were dressed to reflect their industries of fishing, forestry, and coal mining to name a few.

2. How did impression management theory play into the tributes' survival strategy?

In the tribute training, the goal was to show strength and skill to survive. One example of impression management was when Peeta fell off the ropes and Katniss immediately had him throw the 100 pound ball as the other tributes were laughing at him and he needed to restore his image as a true competitor.

3. How did impression management theory impact the outcome of the games?

This can be seen most readily in the strategy of sponsorship. For example, Cinna, in charge of costuming Katniss and Peeta, was determined to make them memorable, as this is how they would later get capital sponsors who were critical to their survival in the games. For this reason they were dressed in black and were set ablaze to reflect their coal mining district but also as a symbol of strength. Because the capital values theatricality, this stunt was well received by capital citizens, but not well received by President Snow who saw Katniss as a spark that needed to be contained. Katniss became the girl on fire, a later symbol of rebellion. In another example, Haymitch, their mentor, wanted them to be "likeable" and project an image of unity, which again was to attract sponsors. To play to this image, Peeta's interview deemed them the star-crossed lovers, which gave them immediate support. Once in the arena, Katniss kissed Peeta just to get him the things he needed to survive, playing to the image of star-crossed lovers. In the end, the star-crossed lover image allowed them both to survive as dual victors of the hunger games.

4. How do you better understand impression management theory and its value as a theory?

The movie brought the theory concepts to life for me. While I understood them at a surface level from reading the text, being able to use them as a guide for analyzing the concepts in practice allowed me to have a clearer understanding of the theory itself, the concepts of the theory, and how theory works in clarifying real-life interactions.

Appraisal

While showing the film in class in its entirety is ideal, the number of class periods that would be required is likely more than many are willing and able to set aside. The movie would require approximately three 50-minute classes, two 75-minute classes, or one 3-hour class. If the required number of class sessions is not free for film viewing, another option is to have the students view the film on their own time. A final option would be to select key scenes from the film to show in class; it is recommended that the chosen scenes follow the guide presented in the above table.

Despite this limitation, the activity has a wide scope of application. Though the success of implementation into courses beyond interpersonal communication and communication theory courses is untested, other courses with units on impression management would likely provide analogous results. Moreover, additional communication theories could easily be applied to the film, such as accommodation and uncertainty reduction.

Students have responded positively to this activity because of the film's popularity and the activity's applied nature. Many students have seen the film previously and watching the film through an analytical lens provides enhanced understanding of concepts, as indicated in the breadth and depth of discussion prior to and following the activity. Through this activity, students are able to achieve a broader, deeper, and applied understanding of impression management theory concepts, an understanding that goes beyond what can often be achieved just through lecture alone. In fact, this activity centers on three levels of Anderson, Krathwohl, Airasian, Cruikchank, Layer, Pintrich, Rath, and Wittrock's (2001) taxonomy, derived from Bloom's (1956) original taxonomy, including those of higher-order thinking: understanding, analyzing, and evaluating.

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Musical Thesis Statements

Stephanie Kelly

Courses: Business Communication; Workplace Communication; Organizational Communication

Objectives: To reiterate the importance of thesis statements in clarifying meaning, particularly in cover letters, without boring students; and to create a more cohesive learning environment through sharing.

Rationale

The importance of strong writing skills for success in the business world has been well documented (Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2013). When students attempt to emerge into the workforce by sending out résumés and cover letters, potential employers are predicting their worth and fit to the company based on those writing skills (Newman & Ober, 2013; Shwom & Snyder, 2014). As such, it is the responsibility of instructors in business communication and similar courses to nurture clear communication skills, with special practice in perfecting cover letters.

A common challenge for instructors when teaching cover letters is getting students to set up introductions such that their forthcoming main points are clear. More specifically, sometimes students do not recognize the need for a thesis statement outside of essay writing. When composing a cover letter, students often leave out this important road map for their audience because the composition is not among those which they have previously practiced thesis statements. Yet, without a thesis statement, cover letters can read as a jumbled list of the writer's attributes rather than evidence to supplement and clarify specific points.

Because students have previous training in thesis statements, the activity described in this paper is not one which the author uses every semester. Instead, it is a recovery activity utilized only when students fail to bring in writing skills from previous semesters, specifically when they fail to organize the content of their cover letters by omitting the thesis statement. The activity is a short exercise in writing thesis statements based on non-traditional compositions: the lyrics of students' favorite songs.

Secondary to the cognitive learning goal of achieving a better grasp on thesis statements is an affective learning goal: that this activity will make the lesson fun and create a more cohesive learning environment through sharing. The more personally relevant course material is, the more engaged students will become (Frymier, 2002; Frymier & Shulman, 1995). This is why it is important that students be allowed to share their personal favorite song lyrics rather than using only provided examples.

Activity

The following section breaks down the steps of the activity. This activity does require brief preparation, but fits well in a single class period. Depending on the amount of time the instructor wishes to devote to the activity, it can last from 30-75 minutes.

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Step 1: Instructor Preparation

The instructor should check the Billboard Charts (www.billboard.com) to identify one of the most popular songs within the genre most of their students listen to. (Student workers are an excellent resource to verify a popular genre if the instructor is unsure.) The goal is to find a song that most of the students have heard. The instructor should then write a thesis statement to that song as though it were a written composition. The activity typically generates the best student discussion when the thesis statement is written as though the meaning is literal rather than poetic.

Step 2: Student Preparation

Students need to have the lyrics to their favorite song to engage in the activity. If all students have access to the internet during class, then the instructor can begin class by telling students to find the lyrics to their favorite song. If there is a chance that some students will not have access to the internet, then students should be instructed to print a copy of their lyrics to bring to class on the day of the activity.

Step 3: The Activity

To begin class, the instructor should tell students that they are going to write the thesis statement to their song: a statement that previews and organizes the main ideas. Then, the instructor should share the song they have chosen from the Billboard rankings and explain the accompanying thesis statement. (Notably, students are often surprised that the professor has heard of this song.)

For example, a thesis statement for the song Radioactive by Imagine Dragons could be: “I perceive that the environment is in despair and plan to take an active stand on the issue because it isn’t too late.” This is a very literal interpretation of the lyrics. Students are likely to object to the professor’s literally translated thesis statement and insist that, in the present example, the song is about the musician’s fear that he hurts everyone he is close to rather than the environment. Herein lies the point of the activity though.

Given this objection, the instructor has the opportunity to discuss how a thesis statement frames the way that readers will interpret the supporting material that follows it. Students should be invited to propose alternatives to the thesis statement in order to give the lyrics new meaning. This introduction typically takes 10-15 minutes.

Step 4: Writing

Students should next be instructed to write the thesis statement to their own lyrics. This typically takes approximately 5-10 minutes. It is important to remind students that there is no incorrect interpretation of the lyrics because their thesis statement will determine how the lyrics should be read.

Step 5: Team Up

Students should then team up with small groups of peers to share their lyrics and thesis statements. The end goal of sharing is to have peers assist one another in revising their thesis statements to ensure that all of the main ideas are previewed and that the thesis stays true to the logical progression of the lyrics. This process typically takes 10-15 minutes.

Step 6: Sharing

Students should share their lyrics and revised thesis with the class. Students can visually project the lyrics (contingent upon equipment), read them, or summarize briefly. In 75 minute or night classes, there is time to have each student share their song lyrics and thesis statement. In a shorter class, each group can be instructed to present their “best” thesis statement to save time. The class should be encouraged to provide alternative thesis statements and consider how each thesis statement shapes the meaning they interpret from the accompanying lyrics.

Debriefing

Although the practice writing thesis statements is helpful, the bulk of learning in this activity actually comes from discussion of alternative, yet potentially accurate thesis statements. Students often note that they would not have interpreted a particular song the same way that their peers did, but also see the validity of that interpretation after reading the thesis statement. It is easy then to make the transition of how important the thesis statement is in a cover letter where the qualifications presented need to be specifically aligned with a job call. For example, stating in a cover letter paragraph that one is organized, punctual, and thorough could come across as meaning that one is professional rather than experienced if the reader does not have a guide for interpreting the supporting evidence.

Appraisal

Because student success within their future career hinges greatly upon their communication skills (Graham et al., 2013; Hackman & Johnson, 2013), it is of utmost importance that educators strive to refine these business communication skills. In this exercise, students are encouraged to think critically about how their words frame messages to receivers. Students typically respond positively to this activity. Across many years of reviewing thesis statements in class, this is the one activity that has not bored the author’s students. They genuinely seem to learn from this activity, taking extra care to make their points clear in future writing efforts. As a bonus, there is typically a notably more cohesive classroom climate after it is conducted. Students connect to one another through the sharing of these songs, while learning critical communication skills.

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A “Dynamic Knot” of Students: A Classroom Activity for Teaching Relational Dialectics

Tony Docan-Morgan, Dena Huisman & Sara Docan-Morgan

Courses: *This activity can be used in all communication courses that address relational dialectics, such as Introduction to Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Family Communication, Relational Communication, and Advanced Interpersonal Communication.*

Objective: *To offer a hands-on classroom activity that aids students’ learning of relational dialectics through the use of auditory, visual, and kinesthetic approaches.*

Rationale

Relational dialectics, a fundamental and widely taught theory in the communication discipline (Baxter, 2006; Griffin, 2012), asserts that relationships are always in a state of flux and that partners experience tensions between contradictory impulses (Baxter, 1988). The three primary dialectical tensions parties experience in their interpersonal relationships include autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, and predictability-novelty (Baxter, 1988, 1990).

While our students typically understand the basic premise of dialectical tensions and contradictory impulses without much difficulty, they have a more difficult time processing how the dialectical tensions are interwoven among other dialectical tensions in the relationship, interacting and interweaving with one another through communication in the relationship. For example, they struggle to see how autonomy and connection in a romantic relationship might simultaneously impact the couple’s openness and closedness in communication.

Common strategies for teaching relational dialectics theory include providing students with verbal and visual metaphors (e.g., rubber bands). However, we have found that using multiple learning styles to facilitate a more nuanced understanding can improve comprehension of the ways in which dialectics interact through relational communication. This classroom activity is meant to aid students’ learning of relational dialectics through the use of auditory, visual, and kinesthetic approaches, all of which have been shown to be effective in teaching complicated concepts in the classroom (e.g., Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Sankey, Birch, & Gardiner, 2012).

Activity

Preparation

The instructor should come to class prepared with six signs labeled autonomy, connection, openness, closedness, predictability, and novelty. To make each sign, the instructor can simply use large font on standard 8.5” by 11” paper. This activity takes approximately 30 minutes, but may vary depending on the instructor’s coverage of the theory.

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Procedure

Before introducing the theory, the instructor should ask for approximately seven volunteers to come to the front of the classroom, though the number can vary depending on the size of the class. In the end, there will need to be a total of three groups to engage in the activity. Some students may not wish to participate, but instead make observations about the actions of the volunteers. The instructor should have the first set of volunteers create a “human chain” by holding hands with one another for the duration of the activity. At this point, the instructor should tell the class that the human chain symbolizes an interpersonal relationship. To make the exercise more meaningful and applicable to student experience, students may come up with fictitious names for the partners in the relationship (e.g., “Sam” and “Joey”) and a few details about their history (e.g., how they met, nature of relationship, shared interests). The class and instructor can use this information to elaborate on the dialectical tensions being discussed and serves as a means for auditory learners to have verbal scenarios to apply to the theory.

The instructor should ask the person on one end of the human chain to hold a sign indicating one of the tensions, such as “openness,” and the person on the other end of the chain to hold the corresponding term, such as “closedness.” The participants should hold the signs so they face the audience. Because the concepts will be new to the students, the instructor should inform the class that “we have a openness-closedness dialectic here” and offer a brief definition of the dialectic (i.e., tension between wanting to self-disclose and desiring privacy). Next, the instructor should ask the class, “what are some issues Sam and Joey might be experiencing related to this dialectic?” Students often respond with a variety of examples (e.g., one partner wants to proclaim his or her love for the other partner). The instructor should select one or two examples offered by the students to explore further. The instructor might extend a student example by explaining, “lately, Joey feels the need to disclose his love to Sam; however, Sam has indicated that s/he is not ready for such a disclosure.” While explaining and elaborating on this scenario, the instructor should have the human chain (i.e., dialectic) spread out and become visibly taut, demonstrating that at times in relationships, dialectics change or become more noticeable to partners as tension and potential discomfort. The instructor might extend the example and state that Joey’s desire to disclose his love for Sam diminishes over the next week, and therefore the dialectical tension becomes less evident. Subsequently, the students would move closer to one another, reducing the physical tautness of their chain. This visual experience of the dialectic will help kinesthetic and visual learners process the nature of the dialectical tensions experienced in the fictional example and their real-life relationships.

Once these tensions are clear to the students, the instructor should tell the openness-closedness group to remain connected, reminding them that although the openness-closedness dialectic is not “at issue” in the present moment (i.e., it is not taut), it always exists in the relationship. The instructor should solicit approximately seven more volunteers to come to the front of the classroom and form a separate chain, representing the autonomy-connection dialectic. Similar to before, the student on one end should be given the “autonomy” sign and the student on the other end should be given the “connection” sign. The instructor should offer a brief definition of the dialectic (i.e., tension between wanting to be independent and wanting to feel connected) and ask for possible examples that

Sam and Joey might be experiencing. Like before, while the instructor and/or students are elaborating on examples, the autonomy-connection student chain should become more or less taut, depending on the nature of the example.

To highlight the more complicated component of the theory, that dialectics are interwoven rather than independently experienced, the instructor should explain to students that the different tensions can affect one another. For example, “Joey wants to have the ‘love talk’ with Sam, which calls our attention to the openness-closedness dialectic; however, Sam’s statement that she does not want to talk about the ‘I-word’ could also increase her desire for more autonomy or alone time in their relationship.” During this explanation, the instructor should physically weave the autonomy-connection student chain through the openness-closedness student chain. Half the students in the autonomy-connection chain should duck under the two middle students’ arms in the openness-closedness chain, creating an X-shaped formation. At this point, the instructor can offer Griffin’s (2012) illustrative definition of relational dialectics: “a dynamic knot of contradictions in personal relationships; an unceasing interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies” (emphasis added, p. 154). Finally, the instructor should have approximately seven more students form the predictability-novelty dialectic, offer a definition (i.e., tension between desiring predictability and routine and desiring novelty and newness), solicit examples, and verbally and physically weave them into the other dialectics. This offers a kinesthetic and visually strong approach to learning how dialectics interact and interweave in relational communication. After the hands-on demonstration is completed, students should return to their seats.

Debriefing

After the students return to their seats, the instructor should lead a debriefing, which can include introducing and explaining more concepts related to relational dialectics. Some possible debriefing questions are listed below:

1. One of the basic principles of relational dialectics is that relationships are in flux or change—they “can be an erratic process of backward-forward, up-and-down motion” (Baxter, 2004, p. 11). Similarly, we used our bodies to demonstrate some of these changes. What comparisons can we make between how our bodies move and change, with how relationships move and change (i.e., both the human body and relationships experience tension, breaking, turning points)?
2. We all observed a knot of opposing forces at the front of the room. As mentioned earlier, Griffin (2012) summarizes relational dialectics as “a dynamic knot of contradictions in personal relationships; an unceasing interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies” (emphasis added, p. 154).” In what ways are relationships dynamic? In what ways do they represent a knot? How does Joey and Sam’s relationship represent a dynamic knot of contradictions?
3. What are other examples of the dialectical tensions we explored today? What personal or hypothetical examples can you name? How, if at all, do your examples work as a dynamic knot?

4. Baxter (1988) identified response strategies relational partners use to deal with the tensions. These strategies include selection, separation (including cyclic alternation and topical segmentation), neutralization (including moderation and disqualification), and reframing. What are some examples of how Joey and Sam might use these response strategies with regard to the tensions discussed previously?
5. Baxter's (i.e., 2004, 2011) work on relational dialectics is grounded in Russian social theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism. Couched in Bakhtin's work, Baxter offers a number of conceptions of dialogue, including dialogue as a constitutive process, dialogue as dialectical flux, dialogue as an aesthetic moment, dialogue as utterance, and dialogue as critical sensibility. How do these notions emerge in Joey and Sam's relationship? For example, how does Joey and Sam's relationship reflect dialogue as dialectical flux?
6. In what ways is relational dialectics similar to and different from the other interpersonal theories covered in this class?

Appraisal

Students have received this activity positively. Nearly all students participate physically in the dynamic knot and are enthusiastic to verbally participate during the debriefing and discussion. If students are unwilling to physically connect to other students, they are not required to participate in this component of the activity, thereby serving as observers. The activity creates an open and engaging environment where students are comfortable engaging in dialogue about personal and theoretical connections to the material. When asked to identify and discuss concepts from relational dialectics on exams, students have been able to explain the theory and its components clearly using the physical example as a guide, as well as provide personal and hypothetical examples. Further, many students note that the activity was memorable in later semesters in advanced interpersonal communication courses.

One variation of this activity is to have students work in groups of six, where they plan and deliver a classroom performance that includes many of the same steps discussed above. For example, students can be instructed to create a vignette involving two relational partners, share examples of dialectical tensions while displaying the human chain (i.e., two students per dialectical tension), and offer an elaboration of how the tensions constitute a dynamic knot.

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