Ohio Communication Journal
A publication of the Ohio Communication Association

Editor
Amber L. Ferris
University of Akron – Wayne College

Associate Editor
Laura Russell
Denison University

Editorial Board

Theodore Avtgis
University of Akron

Aaron Bacue
Kent State University

Benjamin Bates
Ohio University

Christina Beck
Ohio University

Nicole Blau
Ohio University – Lancaster

Nicholas Bowman
West Virginia University

Devika Chawla
Ohio University

Miki Crawford
Ohio University – Southern

Rebecca Curnalia
Youngstown State University

Purba Das
Ohio University – Southern

Suzy D'Enbeau
Kent State University

John Dowd
Bowling Green State University

Gretchen Dworznik
Kent State University

Jerry Feezel
Kent State University

Lois Foreman-Wernet
Capital University

David Foster
Florida Southern College

Radhika Gajjala
Bowling Green State University

Catherine Goodall
Kent State University

Elizabeth Graham
Kent State University

Lisa Hanasono
Bowling Green State University

Alina Haliliuc
Denison University

Stephen Haas
University of Cincinnati

Erin Hollenbaugh
Kent State University at Stark

Angela Hosek
Ohio University

Ohio Communication Journal
A publication of the Ohio Communication Association

Editorial Board (continued)

Heather Howley
University of Akron – Wayne College

Pamela Kaylor
Ohio University – Lancaster

Jeffrey Kuznekoff
Miami University of Ohio

Seungbum Lee
University of Akron

Lisa Marshall
Muskingum University

Joseph Mazer
Clemson University

David McCoy
Ashland University

Kevin Meyer
Illinois State University

Galina Miazhevich
University of Leicester

Rita Ng
Ohio University - Zanesville

Steve Phalen
Ohio University

James Ponder
Kent State University

Narissa Punyanunt-Carter
Texas Tech University

Nicole Reamer
University of Arkansas at Fort Smith

Valerie Schrader
Pennsylvania State University – Schulykill

Carol Savery
Kent State University at Stark

Rekha Sharma
Kent State University

Matthew Smith
Radford University

Paul Sommer
Kent State University at Stark

Kathleen Stansberry
Cleveland State University

Shawn Starcher
Kent State University

David Strukel
Hiram College

Tang Tang
University of Akron

Candice Thomas-Maddox
Ohio University – Lancaster

Charee Thompson
Ohio University

Lisa Waite
Kent State University at Stark

Thomas Wagner
Xavier University

Heather Walter
University of Akron

Ohio Communication Association

2017-2018 Executive Committee

Liane Gray-Starner
President
Gray Star Communication

Tammy Bosley
Vice President
Lorain County Community College

Theodore Avtgis
Immediate Past President

Michelle Coleman
Executive Director
Clark State Community College

Amber Ferris
OCJ Editor
University of Akron – Wayne College

Laura Russel
OCJ Associate Editor
Denison University

Julie Semlak
Conference Coordinator
Clark State Community College

Alyssa N. Fisher
Communication Coordinator
Bowling Green State University

Jerry Feezel
Archivist
Kent State University

Erin Hollenbaugh
Sponsorship Coordinator
Kent State University at Stark

Jeff Tyus
Awards Coordinator
Youngstown State University

Dan O'Neill
Northeast District Rep.
Youngstown State University

Andrew Hunt
Northwest District Rep.
Miami University

Elycia Taylor
Central District Rep.
Columbus State Community College

Kristen A. Hungerford
Southwest District Rep.
Miami University Hamilton

Shawn Starcher
Southeast District Rep.
Kent State University

Zach Humphries
Graduate Student Rep.
Kent State University

Cody M. Clemens
Graduate Student Rep.
Bowling Green State University

Guidelines for Manuscript Submissions

The *Ohio Communication Journal* publishes original scholarship bearing on the breadth of the field of communication studies. Within this broad purview, it welcomes diverse disciplinary, conceptual, and methodological perspectives, especially:

- Manuscripts covering topics from every facet of the field
- Debut papers from undergraduate and graduate students
- Book reviews

The *Ohio Communication Journal* believes that research must be carried out in an ethical fashion, so we subscribe to the National Communication Association Code of Professional Ethics for Authors and we expect submissions to reflect these guidelines (see http://www.natcom.org/Default.aspx?id=135&terms=ethics). These guidelines enjoin authors to use inclusive and non-defamatory language.

In addition, submissions should be accompanied by a cover letter attesting that the author has met professional standards for any of the following principles as may apply:

(1) The manuscript is original work and proper publication credit is accorded to all authors.

(2) Simultaneous editorial consideration of the manuscript at another publication venue is prohibited.

(3) Any publication history of the manuscript is disclosed, indicating in particular whether the manuscript or another version of it has been presented at a conference, or published electronically, or whether portions of the manuscript have been published previously.

(4) Duplicate publication of data is avoided; or if parts of the data have already been reported, then that fact is acknowledged.

(5) All legal, institutional, and professional obligations for obtaining informed consent from research participants and for limiting their risk are honored.

(6) The scholarship reported is authentic.

Full-Length Manuscripts

The *Ohio Communication Journal* publishes extended, complete studies that generally do not exceed 30 double-spaced pages (including references), except in cases where "thick description" of qualitative/ rhetorical data may require a slightly extended length. The *Ohio Communication Journal* is committed to an eclectic approach and to the publication of high quality articles from a variety of different areas within the field of communication including: critical studies, state of the art reviews, reports of topical interest, supported opinion papers, and other essays related to field of communication. Manuscripts may be philosophical, theoretical, methodological, critical, applied, pedagogical, or empirical in nature.

Brief Reports

The *Ohio Communication Journal* publishes brief articles (approximately 10 double spaced pages or less including references – 2500 words) on a wide variety of topics pertaining to human communication. Appropriate topics include studies of small group, relational, political, persuasive, organizational, nonverbal, mass, interpersonal, intercultural, instructional, health, aging/life span, family, and computer mediated communication. Authors should provide a sentence to a paragraph outlining the theoretical framework guiding the brief empirical report. In sum, theoretical rationale should receive modest coverage in the research report (1-2 paragraphs) along with a brief

review of the representative literature on the topic, with the main portion of the paper devoted to a thorough reporting and interpretation of the results.

Book Reviews

The *Ohio Communication Journal* publishes reviews of books and non-print media on a broad range of topics related to communication. Reviews should not exceed 1000 words, although longer essay reviews of several related works may be considered.

Manuscript Submission Process

After removing all identifiers in the properties of the document (go file-properties-summary and delete your name and affiliation), authors should submit one electronic double-spaced copy of the manuscript and one separate title page in Microsoft Word (preferred). See the Ohio Communication Association website under "Journal" for specific submission guidelines.

All manuscripts should conform to the most recent edition of the American Psychological Association (APA) Style Manual. The cover page must contain: (1) the title of the manuscript; (2) the author's name, (3) author's institutional affiliation, (3) the mailing address, (4) the author's phone number, and (5) author's e-mail address. The second page of the manuscript must include the title and a 50-100 word abstract.

For more information about the *Ohio Communication Journal*, please visit the Ohio Communication Association website at https://ohiocomm.org/ohio-communication-journal/.

Ohio Communication Journal
Volume 56 – March 2018
Click the hyperlink to go directly to the article

Power and Talk in Russian Political Culture
Natalia Kovalyova
pp. 1-18

Framing public memory: Developing moral vernacular discourse through photographs of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School
Katrina N. Hanna
pp. 19-32

Social networks, social support, and mental health: Exploring responses to behavioral cues associated with depression in an online social network
Jessica Moore
pp. 33-46

"It's So Wrong, It's Right!": Analyzing Feminist Humor in Sitcoms
Nancy Bressler
pp. 47-58

Rhetorical Re-Framing and Counter Narratives: An Ideological Critique of the Christian Hip-Hop Artist Lecrae Moore
Robert Razzante & J. W. Smith
pp. 59-68

Waxing the Storyboard: Writing and Performing Stories of Family Loss
Alex J. Patti
pp. 69-78

Broadcasting the Backstage: Essena O'Neill's Facework as an Instagram Model
Julia Schuller & Valerie Schrader
pp. 79-92

#YoSoy132's use of Social Media: Public Screens in a Mexican Youth Movement
Caroline Waldbuesser
pp. 93-105

Playing Like a Girl: Establishing a Virtual Female Social Position through Discourse Building Tasks
Steffi Shook
pp. 106-119

Civil Keystrokes: Examining Anonymity, Politeness, and Civility In Online Ohio Newspaper Forums
Kelly P. Dillon, Rachel L. Neo, & Natalee Seely
pp. 120-135

Uncertainty Reduction and Technologically Mediated Communication: Implications to Marital Communication during Wartime Deployment
Margaret Stewart
pp. 136-148

Ohio Communication Journal
Volume 56 – March 2018, pp. 1-18

Power and Talk in Russian Political Culture

Natalia Kovalyova

The study analyzes Direct Line with V. Putin – an annual televised event featuring the Russian president in conversation with the nation-wide audience – to uncover political advantages of such televised encounters between the president and the public, discursive arrangements scaffolding them, and technical affordances enabling them. The study argues that the televised format arrests the otherwise emancipating potential of public dialog as the program's design depoliticizes conversation, diffuses the power of Putin's interlocutors, and directs the viewers towards a passive listening stance. The discussion evaluates the political effects of the program and conlcudes that television might as well be a medium that engenders passivity in viewers and projects the unchallenged image of the authoritarian leader.

Keywords: politics and the media, depoliticization, public dialog, discourse and power, televisuality, Russian politics

How do political leaders relate to citizens? This rather simple question cuts to the core political beliefs that support a given political system. All regimes depend on the support of the masses even though they secure it by different means. In a democratic tradition, leaders attempt to shape public opinion on policy issues and use public support to ensure success of their initiatives and their own political survival. To lead, democratic leaders often "go public" and talk to people directly.

However, the evidence of their success in this regard has been mixed. Some have found that presidents can lead public opinion (Cohen, 1995) while others have repeatedly qualified presidential leadership (Edwards, 1983), listing confounding factors from popularity of issues to a stage in the election cycle to competition among political actors, media included (Canes-Wrone, 2004; Canes-Wrone & Shotts, 2004). The media environment of contemporary leaders makes control over messages a rather costly endeavor (Edwards, 2006; Edwards & Wood, 1999). Moreover, television, which used to create "a shared national experience" (Wattenberg, 2004), can no longer deliver this result, as the audiences migrate and form alternative publics on new platforms and expect politicians to be available not only on a campaign trail and in the office but also online and through the social media. Still, democratic governments have obligations of responsibility to popular wishes and put efforts to reach the public cutting through the clutter of messages, high costs notwithstanding (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2011).

Curiously enough, mediated political communication is not a signature feature of advanced democracies. Non-democratic regimes too crave popular support to legitimize their rule, and they have not been oblivious of the media trends. Dictators use the media just as frequently and often just as creatively to reach out to their populations as do democrats. Some have adopted or adapted deliberative forums and town hall meetings, the forms long considered staples of democratic governance (He & Warren, 2011). Others imitate democracy in institutional and communicative forms under the international pressure (Shevtsova, 2009). Still others seek to grasp control over the Internet, fearing the democratizing effect of technology itself. Indeed, the web arguably presents a viable alternative space for political discussion and social debate substituting for the missing public sphere although the digital divide and the inertia of the social practices formed around the traditional media (Alexander, 2003, as cited in Ognyanova, 2009, p. 9) insert a cautionary note into praises of the democratizing potential of the new media (Ognyanova, 2009). Moreover, different institutional configurations have been shown responsible for different resonance of communication strategies (Gnisci, Van Dalen, & Di Conza, 2014). For instance, the effects of 'going public' "vary significantly" between the United States where it "fits nicely" and the parliamentary system of the UK (Helms, 2008, p. 54). Comparative studies have also emphasized the co-evolution of governing and the media (Helms, 2008; Miles, 2013) namely, that political actors often adopt the media logics – a process known as mediatization (Garland,

Natalia Kovalyova (PhD, UT Austin) is currently affiliated with the Clinton Institute for American Studies at University College Dublin. Email address for correspondence is Natalia.Kovalyova@ucdconnect.ie

Tambini, & Couldry, 2017) – even though they may at the same time resist media technologies altogether (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014).

Thus, media choices made by leaders of different political convictions and their governing goals might be associated in an intricate way. To focuses on such a relationship, this study explores presidential communication in Russia and the role of television in Russia's governing project. As the country slides to authoritarianism (Balzer, 2003; Gill, 2006; Horvath, 2011; Lukin, 2009; Monaghan, 2012; Tsygankov, 2005; Sakwa, 2013; Sil & Cheng, 2004; Worth, 2009), it becomes even more imperative to understand what messages Russians expect from their leaders and what message they find persuasive, especially since a long-predicted collapse of Putinism due to its innate features (Aron, 2009) has not materialized. Neither has the revolt of the Russian masses. Quite to the contrary, President Putin's approval ratings rarely drop below 60%, standing at times as tall as 89% – a level of support unimaginable by most democratic leaders (Levada Center, 2015b).

In order to understand how Russian leaders lead and Russian masses follow, I select a particularly instructive instance of presidential communication, namely, the annual televised Q&A with President Putin. The choice of television as the medium for this event is central to its communicative and political success. Immensely popular among Russian elites (Burrett, 2011), television is also a primary source of news to about 90% of the population (Volkov & Goncharov, 2014) who trust it more (50%) than they do such staple news providers as friends (20%) and newspapers (14%) (p.4), stubbornly believing at the same time in their independence from television. Thus, 37% of television viewers feel that nothing would change in their lives had they stopped watching, 23% expect only slight change, and only 26% imagine change to be significant (Fond Obshchestvennogo Mnenia, 2014b). It is not surprising, then, that the medium is recruited for political purposes.

Political Effects of Television

As a medium of political communication, television is regarded to be more powerful than newspapers or radio thanks to the so-called "trap effect" – the ability to influence those who know very little about politics but who may increase political knowledge and therefore change attitudes if exposed to political coverage (Benoit, Hansen, & Verser, 2003; McKinney & Warner, 2013; Schoenbach & Lauf, 2002). The political "record" of television is not stellar, though, and its effects are often double-edged (Baum & Kernell, 1999; West, 1991). Televised debates among presidential hopefuls have devolved to curtail the freedoms of the participants to ask any question they want (McKinney, 2005). Phone-in programs designed to solicit participation from ordinary people routinely defuse their power (Thornborrow, 2001). "Grilling politicians" in a studio interview, sanctioned by the roles of journalists as watchdogs of democracy, collides with the cultural norms of politeness observed by the viewers (Ben-Porath, 2010). Presidents have been found most persuasive when they bypass the news media and deliver their message to the public undiluted (Rottinghaus, 2010, as cited in Miles, 2013); yet, frequent coverage threatens to trivialize the image of the public office (Meyrowitz, 1985).

Media scholars have also noted the social patterns of media use ("protocols," as Gitelman (2006) calls them) that develop around the technical core and "tap" into "what is important and what isn't" and "who is significant and who isn't" (Gitelman, 2006, p.2). Such patterns are most effective when the technical core becomes "invisible" and pushes the social meaning to the surface, that is, when the meaning of playing a computer game or of talking on the phone is more important than the coding behind the software or the physics of a sound transmission. In the case of television, she argues, the viewing experience is structured by the "protocols of passivity" whose presence though sunk into the background is crucial to what the audience make of television.

Therefore, we can expect that the "protocols of passivity" underlying the viewing experience of the TV audience would nurture non-rebellious political behavior. A similar and by far a more powerful charge against television is made by Sartori (1997) who argues that the political power of television depends on the primacy of the image which supports viewing without understanding. Unlike earlier media, television – in fact, "televisuality" as he calls it – destroys more knowledge than it transmits and forms a backbone of "videocracy" – the practice of shaping public opinion via television.

In what follows, I will argue that a TV program that puts President Putin and Russian citizens in conversation works as a successful political technology precisely because of the technical affordance of television (its televisuality) and the social practices of its consumption, that is, the protocols of passivity developed around

television. The program I analyze below transposes the norms of television viewing into a new realm, namely, into politics. In such a transposition and in viewing without much engagement lies a deeper meaning of watching the president answering questions from fellow citizens, watching others asking questions or waiting for a chance of being put on air in full view of the "entire" nation.

The Program's Background

Direct Line with V. Putin is a nation-wide conversation of the Russian president with citizens that has run every non-election year during Vladimir Putin's tenure. First aired in December 2001, the program is simultaneously broadcast on the radio and Russia's major television stations. Earlier programs also maintained their own informational websites and published transcripts, audio (then video) recordings, callers' demographics, and thematic lists of FAQs. Currently, full-text transcripts, videos and photos are available on the Kremlin's website (http://kremlin.ru). Every year the program becomes more technologically sophisticated, coordinating millions of questions that arrive by various channels (RIA Novosti, 2014; President of Russia, 2013). On the air, it runs for approximately three hours during which the president answers 75 questions on average, ranging from 49 questions in 2001 and to 112 in 2013 (see Table 1).

Table 1
Three "First" Direct Lines with V. Putin

		Speaking Turn in Words (%)		
Year	**Broadcast Date**	***Audience***	***Hosts***	***President***
2001	24-Dec	1951 (11.51)	3550 (20.94)	11449 (67.55)
2005	27-Sep	2485 (12.69)	3385 (17.28)	13717 (70.03)
2013	25-Apr	5913 (18.23)	5291 (16.32)	21226 (65.45)

The program's name alludes to a phone line that, bypassing a switchboard operator or a secretary, provides access to a powerful individual. It carries the imagery of privilege and promises exclusive experience to the audience. So far, Vladimir Putin has been the only Russian leader who regularly "faces the nation," both in his capacity of President as well as that of Prime Minister from 2008 to 2012, and, as a genre of political communication, *Direct Line (DL)* remains Putin's innovation. The program's regularity suggests its considerable importance to the communicative repertoire of the Russian president and its unparalleled benefits, which this study aims to uncover.

For several days prior to the air time, the public is invited to submit their queries via widely publicized portals and hotline contacts. Questions can be mailed, cabled, posted online, texted, or sent in a video format and are accepted until the end the program. During the program, a call-center facilitates phoned-in questions, and select incoming text messages are displayed on a large screen in the studio and on the TV screens of home viewers. Television crews stationed at several locations across Russia enable live participation of Russian residents. Since 2008 *DL* has also invited studio guests. The program opens with a greeting from the hosts who introduce the president who gives brief remarks on the state of the nation after which the Q&A proper starts.

As many high-profile events, the program is thoroughly prepared and might in parts be rehearsed. To minimize surprises, participants are instructed "how to behave during the broadcast" (Gorham, 2014, p. 142). Commentators also note short delays in the broadcast transmission that would allow editing (Slon.ru, 2016). The *DL* viewers, however, do not seem to be cognizant of planted questions (Gorham, 2014, p. 143), or else they are not troubled by them. In fact, *DL* is considerably well attended and well-received. In April 2014, 55% of respondents confirmed their knowledge of the program (42% attended to it and were familiar with the president's responses), 30% heard about it while 14% never heard about it (Fond Obshchestvennogo Mneniya, 2014a). A year later, even more of them (58%) reported watching the program and 59% would want to ask a question themselves (Fond Obshchestvennogo Mneniya, 2015). Moreover, Russians not only pay attention to the program but also find Putin's performance on it to be improving (Fond Obshchestvennogo Mneniya, 2014a).

Dissecting the program's communicative design, scholars have noted the absence of hard, probing questions, a circumstance that allows *DL* to unfold as a "harmonious and cooperative polylog" with the president as the main participant (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2008, p. 312) and with politics largely gone from the discussion (Stanovaya, 2015). Scholars have also mentioned a father-like figure of President Putin (Gorham, 2014; Ryazanova-Clarke, 2008) and have drawn analogies between *DL* and petitions to the tsar, suggesting the continuation of a cultural practice of complaining to the authorities. Such analogies, however, obscure more than they reveal and weave their own mythologies in lieu of clarifications. Indeed, in the Russian Empire, all written appeals were by convention addressed to the tsar. Yet, aside from crimes on a magnitude of treason, direct presentation of the appeals was prohibited after a legal stipulation dating back to 1497. Sidestepping of governmental agencies "merited punishment" (Bogdanova, 2016). In the Soviet Union, various agencies received thousands of appeals daily (Fitzpatrick, 1996; Fuerst, 2006; Inkeles & Geiger, 1953), but complaining to the head of state "was never a mass phenomenon" (Bogdanova, 2016, p. 6), nor was he seen personally responsible for dealing with complaints. "In comparison," emphasizes Bodganova (2016), current appeals directly to the President or Prime Minister are "legitimized and widely used" (p. 6).

This visibility of power, created and reinforced by television, is key to the political attractiveness of the medium and the effectiveness of *DL,* earning it a label of a political technology (Gorham, 2014; Bodganova, 2016). In the words of President Putin himself, the program is a survey of a popular mood that helps him feel the pulse of the nation, so to speak. In 2001, Putin explained the format in the following words:

> PUTIN: [when preparing this program], one could rightly imagine that today there are more problems than solutions and that people could speak about most unexpected matters. But I think, knowing the need in a dialog, that this form of communication is acceptable. And the top state official simply has to communicate with his [sic!] citizens, has to listen to them and hear them; there must be some feedback loop. You know, I often visit the regions; I see this need on part of citizens. I must tell you that to me it is no less important than to those who ask questions so that I could sense what is going on, sense what worries people**.** (President of Russia, 2001)

In 2013, he praised the program for the same opportunity to provide feedback from the regions and to present a momentous cross-section of popular concerns:

> PUTIN: […] Such a direct contact with citizens gives a very accurate cross-section of what is worrying society and what interests it at the moment. That is why such direct exchange of opinion, direct information, getting feedback from the regions is extremely important and to a high degree useful. (President of Russia, 2013)

This study explores how *DL* works communicatively and what it produces politically and argues that the meaning of the program goes beyond creating and propagating an image of "Putin's nation" (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2008). An autocratic leader with soaring rates of approval, a tight control over the media coverage of political matters (Gehlbach, 2010; Voltmer, 2013, Zasourskii, 2004), and three state-owned television channels that could easily swing the public opinion come the election times needs a program like *DL* and the power of televisuality it provides to structure political behaviors.

To uncover the mechanisms that deliver political benefits of the program, I ask the following questions: (1) Who speaks on *DL*? (2) What topics are discussed? (3) What goals do participants on *DL* accomplish by addressing the president? (4) What rules guide participants' behavior on the program? and (5) What do these patterns reveal about Russian political culture, particularly the relationships between the president and the people?

Data and Methods

To answer these questions, I content analyzed the transcripts from three installments of *DL* in 2001, 2005, and 2013 (see Table 1). Each of these years was President Putin's first year of a new term in office. The selection was guided by the assumption that at the start of the term, presidents are more inclined to launch new initiatives, to

energize public support for the work ahead, to "renew" the contract with the nation if they are reelected, and, overall, to be more hopeful than later in the term (Brody, 1991; Campbell & Jamieson, 2008).

To analyze the topics discussed on the program, that is, the program's agenda, I extracted questions and categorized them according to ten thematic issues: social concerns, political matters, economic issues, security and defense, international relations, infrastructure and development, crime and law, morality and social norms, personal questions, and other/mixed concerns. These categories were established based on prior research on political coverage on Russian television (Burrett, 2011). To estimate the congruence between the agenda on *DL* and the national public agenda, I followed the procedure developed by McKinney (2005). I used the national polls conducted by Levada Center (Levada 2013a; 2013b; 2014b) and categorized responses to the question: "*What worries you most and which one do you consider most acute*?" using the same code-book. For each year, Spearman rho was estimated. The categories for the attribution of efficacy emerged in the analysis. A second coder coded 10 percent of the texts (intercoder reliability = .89). All codebooks are available in the Appendix.

Results

My analysis finds that *DL* works to produce public dialog as depoliticized conversation, citizens' concerns as individualized, the presidential image as that of a capable task manager of multiple projects and an ultimate problem-solver. Overall, as a political technology, it disseminates teachable moments for citizens, elites, and the media.

DL Participants: The Making of a Nation

In contrast to millions of questions reportedly submitted to the program (RIA Novosti, 2014), only a handful of them gets answered. Thus, the portrait of Russia and of fellow Russians as they appear on *DL* is hardly a representative picture. Additionally, the program organizers make no secret out of careful composition of the participating audience:

> *DL* HOST: Vladimir Vladimirovich, to the studio today we invited people who are well known to the entire Russia. Some of them are your representatives [in the regions]. Others … are the people who have been featured in our news reports. They are not ministers or actors; they are engineers, doctors, local nurses – all true heroes of the day, so to speak, living in Russia. (President of Russia, 2013)

Similarly selected are the participants gathered on locations:

> *DL* HOST: […] Getting ready for the program, we invited to the sites of our mobile studios those who formed focus groups of sorts in order to discuss with them the most burning issues of the day: from rising prices, corruption, housing, issues in education, public health, science. (President of Russia, 2013)

Only a small fraction of questions then is put on the agenda by the viewers who call, text, and post online.

With these efforts, the picture of Russia awaiting a conversation with the president turns out to be quite diverse geographically, ethnically, occupationally, and in age. Teachers, students, pensioners, military officers, artists and actors, veterans, athletes, doctors and nurses, managers, entrepreneurs, farmers, as well as workers are regularly featured on *DL*. Although ministers and heads of big corporations are yet to appear, famous actors, media personalities, editors, heads of media organizations, directors of major museums, some politicians, and select governors are among the studio guests, mostly as audience rather than speakers.

Arranging this patchwork of faces and voices, television follows the steps of the "old" technology of print, namely, it constructs the "imagined" community and helps regulate the feelings of attachment to fellow citizens, the vast majority of whom one will never meet. Additionally, this diverse group is presented as sharing similar patriotic feelings, supportive of the president's views, and looking up to him as the sole – and final – authority. The hosts always interpret the volume of incoming questions as an increasing interest in speaking to the president rather than an indicator of growing concerns unresolvable by other means and even less as a wish "to bring the President to account" (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2008, p. 314). Facing such a welcoming audience, the president indeed comes

across as the president of all Russians, embracing all and equally attentive to all concerns. Moreover, with a small number of questions from the viewers residing abroad. The territory under Putin's watch expands beyond the national borders and he emerges as an authority of a global standing.

Divergent Agendas & Depoliticized Politics

While *DL* participants repeatedly raise a set of perennial concerns, such as low pay and allowances, high prices, and poor roads, the overall citizens' agenda on *DL* (see Table 2) is prone to shifts and swings likely to be generated by the events preceding the program. For instance, while economic issues hold a steady place, social issues (health care, education, housing, drugs) fluctuate, and international relations – never among frequently articulated concerns – moved further down the list in 2013 while political matters suddenly rose to the top.

Table 2
Evolution of the Citizens' Agenda on Direct Line

	2001		**2005**		**2013**	
Agenda items	*%*	*rank*	*%*	*rank*	*%*	*rank*
Social Issues	24.49	1	36.76	1	5.36	7
Personal matters	20.41	2	2.94	6	10.71	4
Infrastructure	14.29	3	13.24	2	8.04	5
Economy	14.29	3	11.76	3	13.39	3
Crime and Law	10.2	4	4.41	5	15.18	2
IR	6.12	5	2.94	7	4.46	8
Morality & norms	6.12	5	4.41	5	7.14	6
Other	2.04	6	4.41	5	13.39	3
Security & Military	2.04	6	7.35	4	2.68	9
Political matters	0	7	11.76	3	19.64	1
Spearman rho		.403		.83*		.309

*p<.01

In comparison, the national polls capture somewhat different concerns. Year after year, the three issues (social issues, economy, and crime) make the top of the list (Levada Center, 2007; 2013c; 2014b). Only once in *DL* lifetime did the two agendas correlate (see Table 2), thus undermining President Putin's declarations of the program's value as a "cross-section of current concerns."

Similarly to studio discussants elsewhere (McKinney, 2005; Livingstone, 1996), *DL* participants interpret events and evaluate the proposed policies in terms of their impact on daily life, asking how changes in oil prices might affect their salaries, what national initiatives are planned to assist local farmers, and whether the measures to stop the drug traffic will prevent drug sales to teenagers. Over time, however, their concerns have acquired a definitive "statist" ring, while the intrigue of talking to the president might have worn. By now, Russians have learned plenty of trivia about Vladimir Putin to continue asking questions about his dispositions ("*Do you take offense easily?*"), tastes ("*Which music do you prefer?*" "*What is your favorite soccer team*?"), idiosyncrasies ("*Why do you wear your watch on the left hand?*"), personal history and career ("*What did you spend your first salary on?*"), or family life ("*Are your daughters online a lot*?" and "*What is your wife cooking for Christmas dinner?*"). The shift to questions of a larger scope allows the president to demonstrate command of various aspects of national life, from wages in different lines of work across the country to international politics.

The fate of politically-oriented questions on *DL* merits additional attention. In its first installment, *DL* carried none of such questions. They surfaced only when studio guests seized the opportunity to engage the president in a face-to-face conversation. Still, even the most political questions on *DL* are plainly toothless ("*The authorities are after Navalny* [an opposition leader – NK]. *Are they afraid of him then*?" or "*Do you think that the Stalinist methods of managing the country fit the 21st century?*") as they do not challenge the president's decisions or his rationale for current or proposed policies nor did they start a debate about any issue at hand.

Noting a shift on *DL* from internal issues to international politics, some commentators connected it to Putin's growing disinterest in the national affairs and his excitement about global issues (Stanovaya, 2015). Such reluctance to talk domestic politics, however, might stem from sources other than strict vetting of the questions belonging to a "stop list" of undesirable topics (Lipman, 2005, as cited in Ognyanova, 2008, p. 13). The cultural norms of politeness guiding conversation with strangers (Ben-Porath, 2010) might also contribute to the overall non-political tone of *DL* and make it void of adversarialness found when journalists "grill" politicians (Clayman & Heritage, 2002).

Yet, *DL* becomes depoliticized not only because international rather than internal politics is discussed or because certain political topics are avoided. It is depoliticized in conversation as well, that is, discursively. Of course, the diagnosis of de-politicization depends on how politics and the political is defined in the first place (Straume, 2012; Flinders & Buller, 2005). Following Straume (2012), this study takes politics to be "a way of organizing collective life" that values deliberation and debate in decision-making. De-politicization is comprised of many strands: populism that defuses conflict (Casula, 2013), a shift in the arena on which decisions are made that diminishes the domain of the political (Flinders & Buller, 2005), a promotion of technocratic solutions based on rules and thus eliminating the need for choice (Straume, 2012, p. 116; Flinders & Buller, 2005), and the recourse to a free market as the ultimate solution. Together, these approaches to collective life make the arenas of contestation invisible, power – fugitive, and society – apathetic as citizens no longer play a role in policy-making nor can they pressure the politicians who delegate decision-making to administrators.

Depoliticitization in Russia has been described as "eviscerating" all institutions of real power (Gorenburg, 2011) as well as hyper-centralization of power and a propensity of the elites to implement their own projects (Mart'ianov, 2007; Monaghan, 2012). Its discursive dimension surfaced already on the first *DL* in Putin's explanations that policies should be economically beneficial and law-making de-politicized:

> PUTIN: [responding to a question about immigration] Sadly, this sphere is utterly unregulated. Ours is not liberal but confusing law-making. It is too politicized […] We have to have an immigration policy beneficial to us, I must say. We must attract workforce to [places] where the state needs it rather than allowing anyone to move any place they want to. The cabinet got an assignment from me, and we will be trying to put it through the Parliament. (President of Russia, 2001)

The appeals to the rule of law only intensified with time and with the increasing number of court cases which outside observers consider politically motivated:

> PUTIN: […] these girls from "Pussy Riot" and these youngsters who vandalize our solders' graves -- all of them should be treated equally by the law and held responsible. No one puts anyone behind the bars on purpose for some political considerations. The court sentences not for political views or political actions but for breaking the law. It is for everyone to observe. (President of Russia, 2013).

On *DL*, President Putin claims to be willing to talk to the opposition albeit at a place, time, and in the manner determined by the authorities ("*I am not simply ready to talk with the opposition [leaders], I am talking to them constantly. As for the non-systemic opposition, we offer this dialog to them as well. Some opposition leaders simply avoid such dialogs*"), and his vision of all administrative levels working as a well-oiled machine exhibits a remarkable tenacity despite testimonies to the system's profound malfunctioning that appear on every *DL*:

> PUTIN (to a question about poor roads) […] I will check what is being done there. I cannot inspect all the roads [myself]. This should be arranged at the level of the [federal] government and the regional authorities.
> HOST: But apparently, Vladimir Vladimirovich, without your personal interference, nothing will happen, unfortunately.
> PUTIN: That is Russia's perennial problem. [But] one only needs to arrange a flawless workflow. (President of Russia, 2013)

De-politicization of society has been noted to lead to political apathy. De-politicized conversation on *DL* does not produce the image of a vibrant, energetic, politically creative, and politically invested community either. Instead, interaction patterns on *DL* suggest the ideal of a passive and receptive audience inscribed into the program as well as the image of the president as the only capable administrator and, consequently, the only politician.

The absence of follow-up questions on discussion programs or a ban on a free exchange among participants have been shown to "take freedoms" from citizens (McKinney, 2005) or, in less dramatic terms, diffuse their power (Llewellyn, 2006), although the very existence of such programs is believed to contribute to the democratic public sphere (Livingstone, 1996). The absence of questions challenging the president on *DL* forms a discursive background against which any answer appears complete, final, and ultimately satisfactory, thus creating an image of an agreeable, supportive, and politically unaspiring public which is then broadcast for the national consumption. Serving this end, the program hosts closely monitor the format of Q&A insisting on clear and succinct questions, a strategy whose details will be discussed in the section below.

Questions and Power

From its inception, *DL* has experienced certain tensions of the format. The program's hosts steer it toward a Q&A session, instructing participants to articulate questions, while participants, skilled communicators themselves, tend to share stories of injustice, administrative incompetence, inefficiency, and neglect and call in with grievances and concerns that resist a question form. As a result, in order to maintain the Q&A format, the hosts treat any input as a question:

> PARTICIPANT: I am Rzhanova Antonina Yemelyanovna, a war veteran. My pension is 1000 rubles. Please help me. I was on active duty. But even though I was on active duty, for some reason my pension is only one thousand rubles. I was part of the operation in Kalmykia, and in Poland.
> HOST: Antonina Yemelyanovna, *your question* [emphasis added] is quite clear. (*to Putin*) Please.
> PUTIN: I got it, Antonina Yemelyanovna. Thank you for your *question* [emphasis added]. (President of Russia, 2001)
>
> HOST*:* Judging by the city code, the *question* [emphasis added] is by all appearances from Kuzbass: I was a miner my entire working life, yet the Honorary Order of Labor went to Maxim Galkin and Anita Tsoi [TV personalities - NK]. (President of Russia, 2013)

At first sight, this insistence on questions seems strange since questions usually carry more power in interaction by defining the parameters of an answer (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Clayman, Heritage, Elliottt, & McDonald, 2007). Yet, taking into account the distribution of speaking time on *DL* (see Table 1), the program does not look like a probable platform for the participants to exercise such power and "grill" the president, pressing him on issues of concern. Moreover, each participant is usually limited to one question and is instructed to be brief. The studio guests are the only audience on *DL* that has managed to bend these rules and briefly engage the president.

Therefore, the choice of Q&A is strategic here. It provides the president with a platform – safe of direct challenges – on which to demonstrate his knowledge about all aspects of Russian national life thus contributing to the popular perception of him as the only politician – at least the only trustworthy one. Contrary to the tradition of "grilling" interviews common elsewhere (Clayman, 2004; Clayman & Heritage, 2002), *DL* promotes a harmonious and respectful (deferent, rather) interaction that teaches the public how to "speak to power" and demonstrates to public officials how to work with the masses.

Such modeling of political behavior on a program that by design evades debate and discussion is key to the political benefits of *DL*: a regular, nation-wide conversation sets the norms of political behavior for all important players – citizens, public officials, and the media. It teaches citizens not to question the rules of a political game, but to contact the authorities, present their concerns, and wait politely for a response, instead of staging an opposition to upset or, worse, uproot the malfunctioning system. The public officials get a lesson in how to be accessible and approachable. The media learn to cooperate with the official line and be a reliable channel of transmitting official messages to the masses.

Political Efficacy

Constrained in the manner in which they address the president, *DL* participants manage to accomplish quite a few communicative goals. They put forward stories, describe their predicaments, and ask the president to comment on them and possibly suggest a solution in the nearest future. This communicative prowess, however, does not overshadow low efficacy, that is, a disbelief that one can change the system or influence decisions affecting one's life. In fact, prior research has found that in the absence of contentious politics in Russia, citizens "participate by contacting public officials with individualized requires" (Lussier, 2011), the very behavior bolstered by *DL*. What is remarkable about individual contacts is that they allow authorities not to expand democratic practices but to offer an individualized response – a practice known in Russia as *adressnaya pomoshch* (literary, assistance delivered to one's address).

Overwhelmingly, *DL* participants present things as "happening" to them and onto them either because of the "natural" order of things or because some unnamed actor forced them onto the masses (see Table 3). Moreover, their wishes often aspire to one simple ideal: the irritating factors (often uncooperative officials) be removed and the order installed.

> PARTICIPANT: Hello, Vladimir Vladimirovich. I am speaking on behalf of all entrepreneurs: please, help us. Our taxes have been recently raised. We live in the countryside and we simply cannot pay such high taxes [because] the co-pay to the Pension Fund has raised a lot. I implore you, please help. (President of Russia, 2013).

Table 3
Attribution of Efficacy by Direct Line's Participants

Year	**Self**	**Local/regional authorities**	**Federal authorities**	**President**	**Society in general**	**Natural order**	**Unassigned**	**Total**
	n (%)	*n (%)*	*n (%)*	*n (%)*	*n (%)*	*n (%)*	*n (%)*	*n (%)*
2001	0 (0.00)	2 (4.08)	16 (32.65)	11 (22.45)	0 (0.00)	1 (2.04)	19 (38.78)	49 (100)
2005	2 (2.94)	0 (0.00)	10 (14.71)	15 (22.06)	2 (2.94)	18 (26.47)	21 (30.88)	68 (100)
2013	5 (4.46)	0 (0.00)	8 (7.14)	41 (36.61)	0 (0.00)	24 (21.43)	34 (30.36)	112 (100)

When they do identify actors capable of bringing change, they quickly point to the president first and local government last, with themselves residing on the lower levels in the pecking order of change agents:

> PARTICIPANT: Goryagin Igor Alexandrovich. I am a farmer. Hello, Vladimir Vladimirovich. I have the following question for you. I have been in business for about 10 years and want to ask you this: The agricultural produce today is not in demand. I have three thousand hectares of land [and] my harvest today all sits in my storage facilities. It is not needed.
> HOST: So, you are not able to sell it?
> PARTICIPANT: I cannot sell it, right. Here is my question: is the state going to pay attention to this [issue]?
> PUTIN: I see. I see what we are talking about. I understand you perfectly well and this issue is quite known. (President of Russia, 2005)

DL participants position themselves as only marginally capable of resolving issues on their own through the existing channels. In fact, they often preview their questions stating that they have already exhausted those channels. As individualized requests set the tone for the program, very few participants pose as good citizens united by common grievances. Moreover, the very conventions of *DL* rule out the exchange between participants or the expressions of solidarity among them even when they bring up similar issues. A more prevalent stance is a lone individual asking a question, and accepting whatever answer is given to his or her query.

In their perception of efficacy, however, *DL* participants do not differ from their fellow citizens steeped in pervasive passivity (Levada Center, 2011; 2012; 2013b). Russians report consistent feelings of disempowerment when facing officials and bureaucrats on any level. More than 80% of respondents repeatedly report that they do not feel they can influence decisions regarding the fate of the country, and declining numbers of them feel that

"people like them" could have a say in such decisions. In 2014, only 12% of the respondents admitted their own efficacy on the federal level, a drop by a half from 24% who felt the same way in 2007 (Levada Center, 2007; 2014a). A more troublesome trend, though, is that those 80% do not want to influence anything and claim to be mere spectators in politics. Feeling disempowered on the federal level, Russians do not feel differently towards the local authorities either and do not believe that their creative energy can be turned toward local projects as a similar level of disempowerment (around 80%) is reported for local policies and local decision-making (Levada Center, 2014c).

To a large degree, such helplessness emerges through practices and experiences of dealing with authorities that *DL* – among other types of interaction – normalizes and promotes, disseminating the position that powerful authorities instead of self-organization produce a viable solution. Of course, *DL* is hardly the only platform in contemporary Russia that helps sustain the patterns of passivity. How other media and discourses contribute to apathy is a question for further exploration. It merits to note here that contemporary Russians report a more profound lack of concern for ordinary people among the current authorities than existed under the Soviet regime. Consequently, their expectations of care and support from the state are diminishing as is trust in all institutions, safe the president, church, and the military (Levada Center, 2012; 2015c).

Against this background, Vladimir Putin's appearance on *DL* to face the nation for some three hours is a notable exception. His visibility and accessibility bolstered and broadcast by the televised conversation helps build "personal" relationships between him and the people (Gorham, 2014), as the president repeatedly "takes upon himself" issues, concerns, and requests, and promises to look into the matter himself:

> PUTIN: I am afraid I can't be precise about the reach of this regulation into the Baltics, but if you think that there is too much bureaucracy in resolving these issues according to the existing laws, I promise that I will ask the related agencies to attend to this problem. Today, to be exact. (President of Russia, 2005)
>
> PUTIN: Well, in general, I do not have a complete certainty that everything is executed properly, no. But I think knowing that I myself should simply pay more personal attention to and be more scrupulous about tracing all decisions that have been made to their logical completion, to their implementation. (President of Russia, 2013)

As media and political communication scholars warned earlier, too much visibility might lower the respect for the office (Meyrowitz, 1985) and the practice of watching politicians in the comfort of one's living room might trivialize politics, making citizens more cynical about political life (Hart, 1999). Hypothetically then, going public Putin's style might threaten his position and open the route for the frustration to trickle up and to place blame on the president by association. Surprisingly, however, Putin seems immune from such a development even as people continue bringing their grievances to him on *DL* as other mechanisms created for similar purposes have been largely unsuccessful (Bogdanova, 2016).

The Image of the President

In the section above, I have shown that the conventions of interaction on DL such as limits on questions and follow-ups, on the exchange among participants and the preclusion of arguments diffuse the power of the participants and emphasize the power of the president. The range of issues allows him to pose as a skillful manager as well as "a savvy businessman…, a military commander, a competent technocrat, and a superman" (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2008, p. 326), and the technical affordances of television, masterfully exploited by *DL*, make his multifaceted image even more alternative-proof, so to speak (Levada Center, 2015b)

Responding to participants' concerns and requests, Putin frequently cites the official statistics and, with data at his fingertips, projects an image of himself as well-informed and competent. He also reports personal involvement in resolving individual situations. No request seems to be too small for him – from the burst pipes in a small-town school to a hockey rink to the new military equipment and international relations. Even when questions are ultimately relegated to the local administration (like the accident with the heating system), the audience does not see any other figure of authority by his side nor does it hear alternative solutions.

As the top person of the administrative hierarchy – the infamous "vertical of power" that President Putin vouched to build to make the state apparatus functional, he is inevitably perceived as keeping all controls in his hands and, consequently, as responsible for the lower rungs of the hierarchy. Hence, regardless of the division of labor between federal and regional governments, Russians see local concerns as a legitimate presidential responsibility. But this arrangement requires him to be in the picture – constantly – for the whole system to operate, leaving a loophole for the local authorities to sidestep the issues until they receive a direct order from above:

> PUTIN: Dear Evgeniya Ivanovna and other residents of the Saratov region who happened to be in a similar situation. The arbitrariness of your bureaucrats knows no limits, if everything is as stated here. […] I am simply surprised to hear this question. I am asking the governor to attend to it. (President of Russia, 2005)

> PUTIN: I have pointed it out more than once not only to the company's managers but to the Federal Antimonopoly Agency. I will do it once more so that they keep these issues under control. (President of Russia, 2013)

No matter how poorly the system is functioning, the popular opinion does not link Putin and the wrongdoing. Working errors are excused and his competence in sorting things out remains unblemished so that only 10% of Russians want to see a new person elected as president in 2018 (Levada Center 2015a, 2015b).

Discussion

The disaccord between the public agenda and the issues raised on *DL* demonstrates that gauging the public mood and getting a feel of the concerns in the regions – an expectation placed on the program by President Putin – remains unreachable. Yet, the program's importance is not merely alleged. The form of a televised "meeting" during which the president answers questions offers several supreme benefits. Strategically, it turns public dialog into a governing technology. First, it instills the norm of *a depoliticized encounter with the president (and with authorities in general)*. Second, it *models acceptable political behavior* for the masses, promulgating the patterns of interaction with the authorities that obscure the political efficacy of ordinary citizens, and for the political elites, d*isciplining the infamous "vertical of power"* by setting an example of how to *"work with the masses."* Relatedly, it *reinforces the image of the president* as the only politician in the nation knowledgeable, attentive, capable of resolving problems, and quite personable and likable, an image that stands for the very idea of a functional government. And finally, the program disseminates the image of the discursively produced cooperative *political subjects supportive of the president* since the communicative design of *DL* hides any dissatisfaction of Putin's interlocutors with his responses.

TV is central to delivering these political outcomes and to modeling the norms of speaking and relating between the authorities and ordinary people. Broadcasting the conversation, the program "closes" the distance between people and their leaders presenting the latter as attentive, approachable, and accessible while the conventions of interaction with diverse audiences on multiple locations normalize the absence of follow-ups, requests for further clarifications, or back talk, all of which could potentially trigger a debate. As a result, conversation on *DL* acquires a distinctly non-political character and instead of a free and equal exchange among participants, the program privileges presidential words. Effectively then, despite a growing interest in the program testified by the volume of submitted questions and their geographical spread that crosses the national borders, the program operates as a place and time of political assent. Dissenters, protesters, and the disagreeable public are elsewhere and do not appear on *DL*, where they might be mentioned but never seen.

The analysis above advances the extant research on the media and politics in several aspects. First, it demonstrates the discursive component of depoliticization as it is arranged, normalized, and propagated via the media. Second, it shows that the rhetorical power of certain linguistic forms (in this respect, questions and the adversarial tone) can be arrested and diffused by the rules of interaction. Third, it confirms the potential of the mass media to personalize politics and garner support for politicians. Finally, it dissolves the image of *DL* as petitioning the tsar and presents the evidence of its deeper and more fine-tuned effects that rely on the logic and mechanisms of television involved in the production of the program.

The image of united Russia seeking a conversation with the president is highly important even against the background of soaring approval ratings of President Putin. All regimes need support of their populations, therefore, all regimes benefit when people attend to politics, regardless of how the meaning of politics changes with time. Capitalizing on the power of television, *DL* makes the figure of President Putin into a media personality – even a cultural iron, according to some (Goscilo, 2013) – that stands for effective politics in Russia. In this perspective, watching the president counts as doing politics. Fortunately, the program does not replace politics in Russia. On the contrary, from President Putin it elicits frequent references to the political world that has not disappeared but has merely retreated behind the closed doors as the arena for experts but not for the mass public.

The public-related communication on *DL* is only one element of Russian political culture and, of course, if taken in isolation, it cannot reflect political practices and behaviors on other institutional arenas and among other political actors – parties, legislature, courts, etc. Moreover, the relationship between other institutions and the media might not resemble the relationships between the president and the media. To emphasize, social practices accumulated around the use of particular media are indispensable from the "effects" of those media on society, and patterns of political involvement in contemporary Russia need to be examined together with the media integrated in such activities. Specifically, the relationships between the Russian president and the people can be understood best when the role that television is accounted for. Indeed, mediatization of government as it occurs in Russia does not produce the effects known elsewhere, such as sensationalism, the onset of the "blame world" mentality, the 24-hour news cycle and some others (Cook, 1998; Deacon & Stayner, 2014); yet mediatization is not inhibited in Russia although its patterns and its routes certainly reflect the relationships between the state and the media. One aspect of mediatization highlighted by *DL* is the substitution of the effectiveness of government with the visibility of the president.

Although my data are admittedly small and restricted to a particular site, they are nevertheless longitudinal and shed some light onto the political culture that is cultivated through communicative inventions and projects like *Direct Line*. Most importantly, my findings reveal that President Putin's style of leadership cannot be reduced to giving orders and punishing transgressions. The current political regime recruits the media not only to deliver political messages "undiluted" but also to shape up political culture (Cassiday & Johnson, 2010) that discourages public debate, verbal duels, and open confrontation with the decisions made at the top and praises cooperation, support, and "feedback from the regions."

Commenting on Putin's leadership style a decade ago, Sakwa (2007) pointed out that several of its features stem from its dual legacy of the Soviet leadership and of the excesses of the 1990s that produced "a distinctive type of political guardianship over society" (p.14). This guardianship mentality with its inclination of managing the state for the benefits of the people rests on the vision of the people as infantile and in need of care. My study adds another dimension to this governing logic – the use of television in disseminating the image of a caring leader who listens to the concerns that fellow citizens eagerly bring to his attention.

As any study, this one leaves several important questions unanswered, among which is the question of whether or not there is a different Russia, critical of what it sees on the TV, ready to enter politics and do politics, by taking to the streets if need be. Through focus groups discussing news programs, Ellen Mickiewicz (2008) has shown that Russians have not lost their critical capacity and can view television critically. If so, then re-politicization of Russian politics is quite possible albeit not by means of television with its current affiliation with the establishment and the ingrained protocols of passivity.

If Russians keep watching television though (and the survey results do not suggest otherwise) and the programs like *DL* continue, Russian politicians – presidents, most likely – will continue benefiting from the way of governing with and through television. With its assistance, an image of the masses and the president in an amicable conversation will be periodically dished out for public consumption to offset alternative interpretations of Russian political life and to counterbalance alternative political behaviors that sprout around the country. Strategically, then, participating in the program and reaping all the benefits that it brings, presidents will be reinforcing a protective belt around themselves.

Could a televised meeting with the public with, say, a modification in the form of follow-up questions, move a political regime toward accepting debate, deliberation, and, ultimately, a more democratic way of governing? For now, the answer leans toward negative. Technological innovations on *DL*, announced every year, now include new technologies as well, such as the Internet, streaming video, social media. Yet, as integrated into

the program, they serve mostly to harvest questions and do not promote new ways of dealing with power. The conversation continues following the mode in which the president's response is final. Russian citizens might like more how he handles questions on *DL* and how he behaves on camera but no new relationship among political actors are being forged on the program or because of it. Thus, Russian television continues reinforcing the existing regime and obscuring alternative political practices that are capable of challenging it.

References

Aron, L. (2009, Spring). "Who is to blame?" and "what is to be done?" *Russian Outlook*. Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.

Balzer, H. (2003). Managed pluralism: Vladimir Putin's emerging regime. *Post-Soviet Affairs, 19*(3), 189-227.

Baum, M. A., & Kernell, S. (1999). Has cable ended the golden age of presidential television? *American Political Science Review, 93,* 99-114.

Benoit, W., Hansen, G., & Verser, R. (2003). A meta-analysis of the effects of viewing U.S. presidential debates. *Communication Monographs, 70*(4), 335-350.

Ben-Porath, E. (2010). Interview effects: Theory and evidence for the impact of televised political interviews on viewer attitudes. *Communication Theory, 20*, 323–347. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2010.01365.x

Bogdanova, E. (2016). Complaining to Putin: A traditional way of solving problems in nowadays Russia. Paper presented at Workshop 3: Law-making and Law-interpreting: Russia, 17th to 21st Centuries. Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung/Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin.

Brody, R. (1991). *Assessing the president: The media, elite opinion, and public support*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Burrett, T. (2011). *Television and presidential power in Putin's Russia*. London & New York: Routledge.

Campbell, K., & Jamieson, K. (2008). *Presidents creating the presidency: Deeds done in words.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Canes-Wrone, B., & Shotts, K. W. (2004). The conditional nature of presidential responsiveness to public opinion. *American Journal of Political Science, 48*(4), 690-706.

Canes-Wrone, B. (2004). The public presidency, personal approval ratings, and policy making. *Presidential Studies Quarterly, 34*(3), 477-492.

Cassiday, J., & Johnson, E. (2010). Putin, Putiniana and the question of a post-Soviet cult of personality. *The Slavonic and East European Review, 88*(4), 681-707.

Casula, P. (2013). Sovereign democracy, populism, and depoliticization in Russia power and discourse during Putin's first presidency. *Problems of Post-Communism, 60*(3), 3–15. doi:10.2753/PPC1075-8216600301

Clayman, S. (2004). Arenas of interaction in the mediated public sphere. *Poetics, 32,* 29-49. doi:10.1016/j.poetic.2003.12.003

Clayman, S., & Heritage, J. (2002). Questioning presidents: Journalistic deference and adversarialness in the press conferences of US presidents Eisenhower and Reagan. *Journal of Communication*, *52*(4), 749-775.

Clayman, S., Heritage, J., Elliottt, M., & McDonald, L. (2007). When does the watchdog bark? Conditions of aggressive questioning in presidential news conference. *American Sociological Review, 72*(1), 23-41.

Cohen, J. (1995). Presidential rhetoric and the public agenda. *American Journal of Political Science, 39,* 87-107.

Cook, T. (1998). *Governing with the news: The news media as a political institution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Deacon, D., & Stanyer, J. (2014). Mediatization: Key concept or conceptual bandwagon? *Media, Culture and Society, 36*(7), 1032-1044.

Edwards, G. (1983). *The public presidency: The pursuit of popular support*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Edwards, G. (2006). *On deaf ears: The limits of the bully pulpit*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Edwards, G., & Wood, B. (1999). Who influences whom? The president, Congress, and the media. *American Political Science Review, 93*, 327-344.

Eshbaugh-Soha, M., & Peake, J. S. (2011). *Breaking through the noise: Presidential leadership, public opinion, and the news media*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Fitzpatrick, S. (1996). Signals from below: Soviet letters of denunciation of the 1930s. *The Journal of Modern History, 68*(4), 831-866.

Flinders, M., & Buller, J. (2005). Depoliticisation, democracy and arena-Shifting. Paper given as part of the SCANCOR/SOG Conference "Autonomization of the state: From integrated administrative models to single purpose organizations." Stanford University, Stanford CA.

Fond Obshchestvennogo Mneniya (2014a, April 30). "Pryamya liniya" s V. Putinym. Retrieved from www.fom.ru

Fond Obshchestvennogo Mneniya (2014b, June 3). *Kto ne smotrit televisor? [Who does not watch TV?]*. Retrieved from www.fom.ru

Fond Obshchestvennogo Mneniya (2015, April 15). *«Прямая линия» [Direct Line]*. Retrieved from http://fom.ru/Politika/12138

Fuerst, J. (2006). In search of Soviet salvation: Young people write to the Stalinist authorities. *Contemporary European History, 15*(3), 327-345.

Garland, R., Tambini, D., & Couldry, N. (2017). Has government been mediatized? A UK perspective. *Media, Culture and Society*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/0163443717713261

Gehlbach, S. (2010). Reflections on Putin and the media. *Post-Soviet Affairs, 26*(1), 77-87. doi:10/2747/1060-586X.26.1.77

Gill, G. (2006). A new turn to authoritarian rule in Russia? *Democratization, 13*(1), 58-77. doi:10.1080/13510340500378258

Gitelman, L. (2006). *Always already new: Media, history and the data culture*. Cambridge, MA & London: The MIT Press.

Gnisci, A., Van Dalen, A., & Di Conza, A. (2014) Interviews in a polarized television market: The Anglo-American watchdog model put to the test. *Political Communication, 31*(1), 112-130. doi:10.1080/10584609.2012.747190

Gorenburg, D. (2011). The nature of the Russian political system: Editor's introduction. *Russian Politics and Law*, *49*(2), 3-6. doi:10.2753/RUP1061-1940490200

Gorham, M. (2014). *After Newspeak: Language culture and politics in Russia from Gorbachev to Putin*. Cornell UP; Ithaca & London.

Goscilo, H. (Ed.). (2013). *Putin as celebrity and cultural icon*. London & New York: Routledge.

Hart, R. (1999). *Seducing America: How television charms the modern voter*. Thousand Oaks, CA.

He, B., & Warren, M. E. (2011). Authoritarian deliberation: The deliberative turn in Chinese political development. *Perspectives on Politics, 9*(2), 269-289. doi:10.1017/S1537592711000892

Helms, L. (2008). Governing in the media age: The impact of the mass media on executive leadership in contemporary democracies. *Government and Opposition*, *43*(1), 26–54. doi:10.1111/j.1477-7053.2007.00242.x

Horvath, R. (2011). Putin's 'preventive counter-revolution': Post-Soviet authoritarianism and the specter of velvet revolution. *Europe-Asia Studies, 63*(1), 1-25.

Inkeles, A., & Geiger, K. (1953). Critical letters to the editor of the Soviet press: Social characteristics and interrelation of critics and criticized. *American Sociological Review, 18*(1), 12-22.

Levada Center. (2007, August 2). *Aktualnye problemy rossiyan*. [*Real problems of Russians*]. Retrieved from www.levada.ru

Levada Center. (2011, November 21). *Rossiyane ne doveryayut vlasti i ne nedeyutsya na vybory* [*Russians do not trust the authorities and place no hope in elections*]. Retrieved from www.levada.ru

Levada Center. (2012, June 26). *Grazhdane utrioli nedoverie k vlasti* [*Citizens' distrust of authorities tripled*]. Retrieved from www.levada.ru

Levada Center. (2013a, February 14). *Rol istitutov vlasti [The role of institutions of power*]. Retrieved from www.ledava.ru/14-02-2013/rol-institutov-vlasti

Levada Center. (2013b, August 20). *Kak izmenilis lyudi i vlast za 20 let*. [*What has changed in people and authorities in 20 years*]. Retrieved from www.levada/ru/20-08-2013/kak-izmenilis-lyudi-i-vlast-za-20-let

Levada Center. (2013c, September 3). *Problemy i trevogi rossiyan* [*Russians' problems and worries*]. Retrieved from www.levada.ru

Levada Center. (2014a, February 20). *My vidim asteniyu i apatiyu* [*We see neurasthenia and apathy*]. Retrieved from www.levada.ru/20-02-2014/my-vidim-asteniyu-i-apatiyu

Levada Center. (2014b, March 10). *Rossiyane o problemakh* [*Russians on issues*]. Retrieved from www.levada.ru/10-03-2014/rossiyane-o-problemakh

Levada Center. (2014c, April 29). *Rossiyane o vzaimodeistvii s vlastiyu [Russians on the interaction with authorities]*. Retrieved from www.levada.ru/29-04-1014/rossiyane-o-vzaimodeistvii-s-vlastyu

Levada Center. (2015a, January 15). *Putin bez variantov*. [*No alternative to Putin*]. Retrieved from www.levada.ru

Levada Center. (2015b, June 8). *Reiting Putina – realnost ili vymysel sotsiologov*? [*Putin's approval ratings – reality or a sociologists' myth?*]. Retrieved from www.levada.ru

Levada Center. (2015c, August 19). *Doveriye k vlasti i ofitsialnoi statistike*. [*Trust in authorities and official statistics*]. Retrieved from www.levada.ru

Livingstone, S. (1996). Television discussion and the public sphere: Conflicting discourses of the former Yugoslavia. *Political Communication*, *13*, 259-280.

Llewellyn, N. (2006). Arguing against absent arguables: Organizing audience participation in political discourse. *Discourse Studies, 8*(5), 603–625. doi:10.1177/1461445606064832

Lukin, A. (2009). Russia's new authoritarianism and the post-soviet political ideal. *Post-Soviet Affairs, 25*(1), 66-92.

Lussier, D. N. (2011, September). *Mobilization or resignation? The role of political efficacy in Russia's authoritarian reversal*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Seattle, WA.

Mart'ianov, V. (2007). The decline of public politics in Russia: From public politics to political administration the depoliticization of the regions. *Russian Politics and Law, 45*(5), 67–82. doi:10.2753/RUP1061-1940450504

McKinney, M. (2005). Let the people speak: The public's agenda and presidential town hall debates. *American Behavioral Scientist, 49*, 198-212. doi:10.1177/0002764205279428

McKinney, M., & Warner, B. (2013). Do presidential debates matter? Examining a decade of campaign debate effect. *Argumentation & Advocacy, 49*, 238-258.

Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No sense of place: The impact of electronic media on social behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press

Mickiewicz, E. (2008). *Television, power, and the public in Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Miles, M. (2013). The bully pulpit and media coverage: Power without persuasion. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *19*(1), 66-84. doi:10.1177/1940161213507608

Monaghan, A. (2012). The vertikal: Power and authority in Russia. *International Affairs, 88*(1), 1-16.

Ognyanova, K. (2009). *Careful what you say: Media control in Putin's Russia – implications for online content*. Paper presented at an annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Chicago, IL.

President of Russia. (2001, December 24). Stenogramma pryamogo tele- i radioefira ("Pryamaya liniya s Prezidentom Rossii") [Transcript of live television and radio broadcast ("Direct Line with the President of Russia")]. Retrieved from http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21457

President of Russia. (2005, September 27). Stenogramma pryamogo tele- i radioefira ("Pryamaya liniya s Prezidentom Rossii") [Transcript of live television and radio broadcast ("Direct Line with the President of Russia")]. Retrieved from http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23190

President of Russia. (2013, April 25). Pryamaya liniya s Vladimirom Putinym [*Direct Line with Vladimir Putin*]. Retrieved from http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17976

RIA Novosti. (2014). Pryamaya liniya s Vladimirom Putinym [*Direct Line with Vladimir Putin* in numbers.] Retrieved from http://ria.ru/infografika/20140417/1003292134.html

Ryazanova-Clarke, L. (2008). Putin's nation: Discursive construction of national identity in *Direct Line with the President. Slavica Helsingiensia, 34*, 311-331.

Sakwa, R. (2007). Putin's leadership. In D. R. Herspring (Ed.), *Putin's Russia: Past imperfect, future uncertain* (3rd edition, pp. 13-35). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Sakwa, R. (2013). Developed Putinism: Change without development. *Russian Analytical Digest, 127*, 2-4.

Sartori, G. (1997). *Homo videns: La sociedad teledirigida*. Pensamiento: Taurus.

Schoenbach, K., & Lauf, E. (2002). The "trap" effect of television and its competitors. *Communication Research, 29*(5), 564-583. doi:10.1177/009365002236195

Shevtsova, L. (2009). The return of personalized power. *Journal of Democracy, 20*(2), 61-65. doi:10.1353/jod.0.0082

Sil, R., & Cheng, C. (2004). Sate legitimacy and the (in)significance of democracy in post-Communist Russia. *Europe-Asia Studies, 56*(3), 347-368. doi:10.1080/09668130410001682672

Slon.ru. (2016, April 15). U moskvichey snizilsya interes k "Pryamoy Linii" Putina [*Muscovites show a lowered interest in Putin's Direct Line*]. Retrieved from https://slon.ru/post s/66772

Stanovaya, T. (2015). 'Ne znayu' I 'ne ponimayu': chto ne tak s putinym? ['Don't'know' and 'don't undersntad': What is wrong with Putin?] Retrieved from http://carnegie.ru/commentary/2015/12/17/ru-62311/in7x

Straume, I. (2012). The survival of politics. *Critical Horizons, 13*(1), 113-133. doi:10.1558/crit.v13i1.113

Thornborrow, J. (2001). Questions, control and the organization of talk in calls to a radio phone-in. *Discourse Studies, 3*(1), 119-143. doi:10.1177/1461445601003001006

Tsygankov, A. (2005). Vladimir Putin's vision of Russia as a normal great power. *Post-Soviet Affairs, 21*(2), 132-158.

Volkov, D., & Goncharov, C. (2014, June). *Rossiyskiy media-landshaft: Televidenie, pressa, internet* [Russian media landscape: Television, the press, the Internet]. Moscow: Levada Center. Retrieved from www.levada.ru

Voltmer, K. (2013). *The media in transitional democracies*. Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity.

Wattenberg, M. (2004). The changing presidential media environment. *Presidential Studies Quarterly, 34*, 557-72.

West, D. (1991). Television and presidential popularity in America. *British Journal of Political Science, 21*(2), 199-214.

Worth, O. (2009). Unraveling the Putin myth: Strong or weak Caesar? *Politics, 29*(1), 53-61.

Zasourskii, I. (2004). *Media and power in post-soviet Russia*. Armonk, NY & London: M.E. Sharpe.

Appendix A

Codebooks

A. The Locus of Efficacy on *Direct Line*

1. Self
2. Local Authorities
3. Regional Authorities
4. Federal Authorities
5. President
6. Society at large
7. The natural order of things
8. Unclear/unassigned

B. Topics of Inquires on *Direct Line*

1. Social issues: Housing; Standards of living; Poverty; Social welfare (pensions & benefits); Healthcare; Drugs and alcohol use; Education (access, standards, etc.); Women and family; Disaster relief; Social justice; Migration

2. Law and Crime: Law enforcement services; Crime rate; Mafia; Corruption; Courts and rulings; Clarification of legal issues

3. Political Issues: The president, his duties, and decisions; Political parties; Duma; The Federal Council; Presidential administration; The cabinet; Elections; State apparatus & bureaucracy; Politics in the regions; Citizenship; Political rights and freedoms; Opposition

4. Economic issues: Salaries and wages; Prices; Unemployment; The budget; Banking and finances; Currency; Oil and gas trade; International trade; Taxes; Privatization (including land ownership)

5. Development: Industry; Agriculture; Transportation and infrastructure; Energy sector (old and gas, not trade); Science; Innovations and modernization; Reforms (broadly conceived); Cadres, their competence, and training

6. International relations: International organizations; International agreements and diplomacy; Summits; International leaders; Russian leaders abroad; International security; Foreign policy

7. Security: Internal security; International terrorism; Russian military (including policies and personnel); Defense issues; Wars (including Chechnya)

8. Morality and norms: Values; National dispositions and attitudes; Religion; Public holidays and celebrations; Ideologies; Historical anniversaries; Historical memory

9. Personal questions: Character and habits; Personal life and family; Biography/Personal history

10. Other: Any question that does not fit into the categories above or mixes several topics together (such as ecology, media and entertainment, etc.)

Ohio Communication Journal
Volume 56 – March 2018, pp. 19-32

Framing public memory: Developing moral vernacular discourse through photographs of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School

Katrina N. Hanna

On December 14, 2012, after killing his mother, twenty-year old Adam Lanza drove to Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut and took the lives twenty first-graders and six school teachers and staff members. A few months following the shooting, a committee gathered in Newtown to pass a vote that would demolish the school building to construct a new one. The new Sandy Hook Elementary School was publicly unveiled to journalists on July 29, 2016 which created a pictorial event that allowed the larger public to witness the new building through the medium of online photographs. Through a critical rhetorical reading of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School through online pictures, I argue that the building is a non-memorial that symbolically functions as memorials through online pictures. The analysis illustrates that four of these photographs of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School operate in relation to a moral vernacular public memory by reclaiming the utilization of space, re-conceptualizing the place of memorializing, and permitting rhetorics of affect to remind the public to keep their government officials accountable for their safety. To conclude, the analysis denotes the nuances and new avenues for memorializing through online photographs specific to vernaculars in relation to gun legislation.

On December 14, 2012, after killing his mother, twenty-year old Adam Lanza drove to Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut carrying three weapons with him: a XM15-E2S Bushmaster rifle and two pistols (Vogel, Horwitz, & Fahrenthold, 2012). Upon entering the school building, Lanza proceeded to take the lives of twenty first-graders and six school teachers and staff members (Katersky & Kim, 2014). In less than two minutes, Lanza had corned an entire classroom of first-graders and fired eighty rounds – the entirety of the shooting lasted fewer than eleven minutes (Sedensky, 2013). The shooting ceased once Lanza took one of the pistols he had carried with him into the school and committed suicide (Bell, 2012). To date, the Sandy Hook massacre stands as the deadliest elementary school mass shooting and the second deadliest shooting on a public-school ground (second to the 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech).

A few months following the shooting, a committee gathered in Newtown to pass a vote that would demolish the school building to construct a new one (Kelly, 2013). The new Sandy Hook Elementary School was publicly unveiled to journalists on July 29, 2016 (Furfaro, 2016). Given the recent shootings at Virginia Tech in 2007 and the killing of 49 people in a nightclub in Orlando, Florida on July 12, 2016 (Ellis, Fantz, Karlml, & McLaughlin, 2016), the construction and opening of the new Sandy Hook was situated within a context of bloodshed and political strife over gun control laws. The public opening of the building produced the first series of images of the new school. The photographs of the dark, natural wood façade adorned with hues of orange, red, blue, and yellow glass and similarly colored bars over bullet-proof windows positions the school building as a visually stunning, yet provocative text. Moreover, the new elementary school is the first of its kind: a contemporary school equipped for education and protected by state-of-the-art security measures and the first public building to be torn down and rebuilt following a mass shooting (School Safety Infrastructure Council, 2015).

Rhetorical examinations of public memory and memorials in general have been extensive, but not yet exhaustive. Scholars have made recent moves to expand our understanding of public memory in relation to texts outside of official memorials and museums (for example, Biesecker, 2002; Hess, 2007). Based on the premise that the Sandy Hook Elementary School is a non-memorial that can't help being a memorial, I position the new school building as a public structure situated within competing official and moral vernacular discourses. A larger framing of the critical turn in rhetorical criticism illuminates the nuances that surround non-memorials that symbolically

---

Katrina N. Hanna (M.A., Communication Studies, Kansas State University) is a Ph.D. student in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University. The author is immensely grateful to Daniel C. Brouwer for the guidance and feedback he provided on early drafts of this essay. Additional thanks to the constructive guidance and care provided by the two reviewers and editor. Correspondence to: Katrina N. Hanna, The Hugh Downs School of Human Communication, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Arizona State University, PO Box 871205, Tempe, AZ 85287-1205, USA. Email: Katrina.Hanna@asu.edu

function as memorials through pictures. Specific to the text at hand, the analysis finds that such structures assist in constructing and challenging public memory in relation to gun legislation reform and the possibility for vernacular arguments and judgments. More specifically, as posed by Aaron Hess (2007), this essay contributes to an ongoing discussion related to the query: "What happens to public memory when it is experienced away from public spaces and in private homes?" (p. 341).

In order to support this thesis, my analysis will focus on the first photographs of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School provided by journalists and circulated through various online media websites. It is worth noting that, because of the state-of-the-art security measures, the larger public will not be able to interact with the school building like other normative memorials. This difference warrants a visual reading since most Americans will experience any process of memorializing the shooting by looking at photos of the new building. By the conclusion of the analysis, I illustrate how the images of Sandy Hook articulate moral vernacular stances which attempt to rupture official discourses by making the school building function symbolically as a memorial. In essence, the official discourses surrounding these images produce a rhetoric of acquiescence while vernacular messages rooted in the Sandy Hook images challenge this anesthetization by advancing other possible realities in relation to gun violence. The vernacular nature of the images purposefully creates an official discourse to be questioned: the words and actions of governmental officials that have yet to produce change in relation to gun legislation reform.

Reading the school through the medium of visual images permits the building to commemorate and question – not just a specific historical event, but a series of events involving the mass killing of children (and adults) in modern American memory. Therefore, this analysis of the Sandy Hook Elementary School will advance by first reviewing relevant literature in relation to public memory, critical rhetoric, and vernacular discourses. I then offer a synopsis of the larger discourses surrounding the shooting and arguments in relation to gun legislation reform. These larger contextualizing discourses will situate my critical reading of the contested function of the Sandy Hook Elementary School, as articulated through the medium of photographs. The criticism concludes with a larger discussion on the implications in relation to public memory, online memorializing, and vernacular possibilities.

Tracing Public Memories and Web-Based Vernaculars

The expansion of research in relation to public memory has opened the rhetorical textual vault beyond the exploration of speaker-oriented discourse. The majority of rhetorical inquiry into public memory has focused on public memorials. From a rhetorical perspective, memorials act as living symbolic discourses produced through interaction, manipulation, and contested memories (Bodnar, 1992). Through the analysis of numerous commemorative texts, like memorials, a rhetorical critic of public memory can provide insight into the ideological and political nature of a culture's history. One area of interest is not only how public discourses can establish a collective memory, but how people and smaller publics are able to reject certain memories (Morris, 2004). In other words, contested public memories contain markers of competition or various voices attempting to define and make sense of previous events (Browne, 1993). Historically speaking, the primary avenue that people crafted this shared or contested sense of the past was through narrative history. However, since the mid-twentieth century, cultural critics of memory have noted how the use of visual texts (memorials, monuments, and photographs) has increasingly replaced the oral traditions of the past (Benjamin, 1999; Frisby, 1985; Halbwachs, 1980).

Although this concern is grounded within the study of collective memory, the gradual public shift toward relying on visual texts to articulate meaning and remembering is being noted by contemporary visual critics (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008). What situates visual arguments as a distinct phenomenon within public memory is "how much greater is their potential for rhetorical power than that of purely verbal arguments" (Blair, 2004, p. 52). As a visual rhetorical critic, I am interested in exploring and denoting the influence images have on the viewing public specific to constructions of public memory (Benson & Frandsen, 1982). Since my reading of Sandy Hook Elementary School is guided through a visual medium, I must imagine the online audience that is viewing these images and their subsequent arguments about public memory. As I reveal throughout my analysis, the online visual images of the school elicit a vernacular discourse that is counter to official utterances surrounding the rebuilding of the school and gun control legislation.

In line with these tensions between official and vernacular discourses, the critical turn in rhetoric assumes that society is a contested terrain, a battleground between domination and freedom (Kellner, 1995). Critical rhetoric

emphasizes "the dimensions of domination and freedom as these are exercised in a relativized world" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91). Based on the critique of domination, this outcome recognizes the repressive and productive role of power and ideology within a given rhetorical text and discourse. This particular analysis highlights how the ideological pull between vernacular and official discourse surrounding the school building produces a contested memory and function of the physical place. Here, I understand vernacular as a specific subjectivity that does not occupy an official position. Situated as such, these voices are concerned "with defending the interests and rights of their respective social segments" (Bodnar, 1992, p. 16). Hauser (1999) advocates for a conceptualization of vernacular discourse as rationality expressed through "the use of symbols to coordinate social action, or *rhetoric*" (p. 84, emphasis original). This framing of vernacular is productive to this analysis based on its prioritizing of an "everyday talk" that is rooted within a language of common meaning. Thus, I advance that my role as the critic in this essay is to amplify vernacular rhetorics to expose the opening of and existence of alternative public spaces, judgements, arguments, and memories.

Although a more community-specific approach to vernacular is prioritized through a critical framing, I engage these discourse through a web-based approach recognizing how such participation with public memory cannot directly account for variances across intersectionally oppressed identities (Howard, 2008). In other words, I cannot lay claims to specific, yet equally diverse vernaculars, but instead am interested in how public memory, engaged through online images, creates the space for counter-official statements and realities. The existence of these pictures of Sandy Hook expands the discursive space for a "vernacular web to emerge" that is both difficult to discover and generalize and harder to control (Howard, 2008, p. 501). Subsequently, coupling a school building, as read through online pictures, with contested discourses challenges how rhetorical scholars must conceptualize vernaculars within a pervasively online world.

Hence, the analysis seeks to understand how vernacular discourses attempt to (re)present their own versions of previous events to articulate and instill their values into public discourse. An interest in value prioritizes the understanding of how moral vernaculars are used by individuals not to seek convergence on such values but "agreement on consequences for which there is accountability" in relation to human rights (Hauser, 2008, p. 443). In this case, accountability for the safety of the public specific to gun legislation. For Hauser, this reading of vernacular discourse prioritizes two types of moral discourses. On the one hand, thin moral vernaculars are manifested in official discourses in which the public aims to challenge the official through a rhetoric of accountability. While on the other hand, thick moral vernaculars become embodied rhetorical performances that empower those who have been structurally or ideologically suppressed or disenfranchised. Both forms of discourse are equally important, but when one becomes more prevalent in the reading of a text possible consequences on material and symbolic levels may vary.

When considering the moral vernacular in relation to official discourses, "we begin to understand that resolving the gun debate requires new rhetorical strategies that presume a clash between irreconcilable worlds" (Eckstein & Partlow Lefevre, 2016, p. 14). The moral vernacular rhetoric of accountability recognizes that we do not agree on legality and what "common sense" gun reform means, but we have the capacity to transcend those differences for the sake of public safety and health. When public school becomes the text of interest, this critical paradigm, which frames the vernacular as moral, calls the critic to examine how images produce, contain, or attempt to dismantle political, ideological, and moral interests (Ludes, Nöth, & Fahlenbrach, 2014). Just as discourse (re)produces an ideology that offers an ideal or normal way of living in the world, images can (re)produce this worldview through pictures (Kumar, 2014). In this sense, images that circulate a rhetorical text can operate as facets of a political and repressive ideology that disadvantages and disenfranchises particular groups of people while offering the space for its own critique and potential dismantling.

Ultimately, critical inquiry centered on an online, visual medium should either unveil the discourses of power and oppression at work or uncover how pictures can be channels of social justice and activism by challenging the viewer not to forget (Brouwer & Horowitz, 2015). By focusing on how images can be sites of empowerment, the subsequent analysis of the new Sandy Hook school building is particularly interested in how this pictorial event plays a vital role in the circulation of moral vernacular discourses specific to gun violence and gun legislation reform.

Framing Vernacular (Re)Construction

Within and outside the parameters of Newtown, Connecticut, the aftermath of the horrific shooting of twenty-six victims threw another log into the fire surrounding recent calls for stricter gun control legislation. Rhetorical scholars, Christopher Duerringer and Zachary Justus (2016) note that the civil right to owning a firearm continues to be recognized by the federal and judicial government while this same right continues to be at odds with concerns of public safety. Other rhetorical critics have argued that the shooting that occurred at Sandy Hook is what created a stalemate within larger discussions surrounding gun legislation (Eckstein & Partlow Lefevre, 2016).

Since the shooting in Newtown in 2012, more than 1,890 mass shootings have occurred and 254 shootings have happened on school grounds (Everytown for Gun Safety, 2017; Mass Shooting Tracker, 2017). Given this larger context following the devastating shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, I believe it is imperative to center official and vernacular discourses in relation to gun legislation reform rather than others like mental health. Regardless of the state-by-state changes in gun legislation reform, five years after the shooting more than 100 gun safety measures have been rejected by Congress (Cooper, 2017). The mental health of Sandy Hook shooter, Adam Lanza, continues to receive attention from the media (see Sanchez, 2017). Although enormously significant, utterances about Lanza's mental health focus the dialogue around a lone-wolf scapegoat which undermines any attempt to tackle gun policy reform. In other words, from a political standpoint, it has become the norm for politicians to blame such gruesome violence on the actions and mental illness of an individual rather than addressing larger, structural issues surrounding weaknesses in gun legislation. Ideally, we would address both. However, the status quo consists of officials using an emphasis on mental illness to make honest dialogue about gun access and violence irrelevant and therefore difficult to address.

As these discourses surrounding gun violence permeated within the public sphere, on May 10, 2013, an appointed committee of twenty-eight members unanimously voted to have the Sandy Hook Elementary School building demolished and replaced (Kelly, 2013). In October 2013, an overwhelming vote of 4,504 to 558 by Newtown citizens supported the selected committee's decision to have the school rebuilt (Chappell, 2013). The vote also allocated $49.25 million state funds to cover the cost of demolition and rebuilding (Tuz, 2013). Therefore, on October 25, 2013 almost a year following the shooting, demolition began on the Sandy Hook Elementary School (Miller & Hudson, 2013).

For the students who were attending Sandy Hook on the day of December 12, 2012 as kindergarteners, 70 of them returned to the new school building as fourth graders (Furfaro, 2016). Further, 60 percent of previous staff and faculty returned to their previous jobs (Eaton-Robb, 2016). The new school has been designed to be environmentally friendly, attractive, a place to learn, and above all, safe:

> Visitors will need to pass through a driveway gate with a video intercom, across a moat-like rain garden and past two police officers and a video monitoring system to get inside. Its ground floor is elevated, making it harder to see inside classrooms from the outside. All the doors and windows are bulletproof. (Eaton-Robb, 2016, para. 12)

This new Sandy Hook Elementary School was ultimately built on the same land on which the last building stood, but on a different section (Hussey & Foderaro, 2016). This utilization of the same land will have a compelling role in some of the arguments articulated by official discourses which advocates a particular utility and meaning behind the new building. Broadly speaking, the building itself contains no markers to commemorate the lives lost in December 2012. A task force has been working to erect a memorial elsewhere in Newtown to memorialize those who were slain in the shooting (Furfaro, 2016). With these contexts in mind, the preceding analysis will explicate the official and vernacular discourses in relation to the new building and its online circulated images in relation to how a contested memory is created through claims over space, place, and affect.

The Online Photograph as Vernacular

Continuing the thoughts on how the new Sandy Hook Elementary School will function in relation to public memory, this section provides a reading of four of the photographs that were taken by journalists on July 29, 2016.

I have selected to focus on these online photographs because they speak directly to the building itself. The analysis does not account for other visual images (like memes, for example) that exist in relation to the shooting at Sandy Hook. Although these images may represent another facet of argumentation on gun legislation, their existence as memes presents an entirely different text that I cannot adequately account for here. Consequently, understanding the online moral vernacular of the following pictures begins by mapping the various official discourses surrounding gun legislation and the rebuilding of Sandy Hook. From this perspective, statements from politicians, like Senator James Inhofe, during legislative debates proclaimed, "I think it's so unfair of the administration to hurt these families [of Newtown], to make them think this has something to do with them when, in fact, it doesn't" (quoted in Bendery, 2013). The rhetoric of "this is something beyond citizens" trickles down into the ways other people in official positions talk about the new Sandy Hook school. For example, Newtown's First Selectman Patricia Llodra articulated that despite the tragedy that took place, Sandy Hook "will be a place full of laughter, of love, and learning" (quoted in Furfaro, 2016, para. 3). Llodra also believes that by focusing on that one devastating day "does not erase the wonderful things about our 300-year-old community" (quoted in Hussey & Foderaro, 2016, para. 16).

Further, District Superintendent, Joseph V. Erari Jr., provides that the new building was not meant to be a place for remembering what happened on December 12, 2012, but to be a "warm and calming environment" for students to learn and teachers to work (quoted in Hussey & Foderaro, 2016, para. 13). Both Llodra's and Erari's remarks are reflective of the belief that it would be inappropriate for both the land and building to function as a memorial for the twenty-six lives lost; the new school building symbolically (and perhaps literally) has nothing to do with the lives lost, rather the lives of those who continue. Memorial scholars have explored and noted such rhetorical moves by arguing how the use of physical place can become the basis of an argument for moving on. More specifically, Foote (1997) provides the term *rectification* to explain the public's action when a place of tragedy is "put right and... reintegrated into the activities of everyday life" (p. 23). This process of rebuilding is based in the thought that physical spaces are "innocent bystanders" of violence and tragedy. By treating the land and new school building as an innocent bystander, these official discourses propose that it would be inappropriate to utilize the physical space to commemorate and memorialize.

By emphasizing the functionality of the new school building, these official discourses advocate for a rhetoric of acquiescence by focusing on the town's ability to move on in spite of tragedy and lack of comprehensive gun legislative reform. As noted by Engels and Saas (2013), rhetorics of acquiescence function to disempower citizens by crafting numbness by silencing and limiting avenues for deliberation. In no way am I arguing that these messages diminish or attempt to neglect the massacre that did occur. Rather, this move to think about the new school building in terms of the future instead of the past (re)produces a larger societal acquiescence by highlighting a community's ability to move on and continue with the status quo in which little has changed to make all communities safer through gun control reform. Here, the official discourses of acquiescence prioritize a reading of the space of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School. For example, during the aftermath of the shooting at Sandy Hook, political and public figures denounced eulogies, vigils, and memorials for articulating comments about gun control reform (Duerringer, 2016). For this group of individuals, the comments made by gun legislation reform supporters were shameful and inappropriate; eulogies in particular were indecorous because they attempted to link gun control policy to the murders of innocent people. These remarks only continue the tension between public safety and civil liberties.

Ultimately, the call for civility and respect of the dead crafted a political and social discourse that sought to honor the deceased through business-as-usual tactics. Through statements made about the land and physical building of Sandy Hook, we can see how official discourses relied on rhetorics of acquiescence in order to craft the "ideal way" in which the public is to react to the new school building. In this case, these arguments prioritize an ideology that favors American's ability to move on from tragedy regardless of political talk and legislative change in relation to gun control policies. Therefore, the rhetoric of acquiescence demands that the school building be celebrated for its functionality: students attending classes to learn, while teachers and staff work to earn a living, and a community healing itself. In terms of public memory, official discourses advocate a construction of the past that is less interested in the discursive and material repercussions of little gun legislative change than celebrating a community's ability to pick themselves up, dust themselves off, and move on.

Moral Vernaculars: Space and Pace

First image: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/30/nyregion/new-sandy-hook-school-is-ready-nearly-4-years-after-massacre.html?_r=1
Second image: http://bigstory.ap.org/article/c8def31120c34b228741f661556ab8a4/sandy-hook-school-opening-public-4-years-after-massacre

If this is how official discourses encourage the public to think about the new Sandy Hook Elementary School, a critical lens moves us to consider how online, moral vernacular discourses attempt to rupture the ideology of acquiescence. The images of Sandy Hook provoke moral vernacular meanings which challenge the official renderings of how the land on which the building was rebuilt crafts an ideal utilization of place. By permitting the building to symbolically "gesture outside itself," the first image offers the possibility for the structure to exist as a memorial for the lives lost on that very land (Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, 1991). Based on this assumption of symbolic power, the images challenge what is encouraged to be forgotten so that those memories and bodies can be remembered. The framing of the first image does remind the viewer that the building does have a functional purpose: students do need to learn and people need to do their work. However, given the nature of this school building as a non-memorial that can still work as a memorial, the "place" in which the process of memorializing occurs – the private space of one's home – calls for a kind of moral vernacular discourse that becomes embedded in people reliving their memories in a space unique to other normative memorials. Therefore, arguments over space and place are two-fold: utilization of land and the power of memorializing in private places.

The first image specifically denotes how the capturing and framing of a place brackets what else exists outside the frame. The focus of the image expands rhetorical possibilities, permitting the viewer to make their own claims about the building. A photograph's ability to articulate beyond the spoken language of official discourses evokes a sense of power when the viewer can give their own meaning to the structure through the gaze of an observer. This distancing between actual space and memorializing place transcends the politics of policy and legislation so that the larger public may recall the history that has transpired between then and now. Consequently, this unique private place of memorializing holds the capacity to undermine the functionality of the space in which the building stands. In this particular case, the private places of commemoration mark the memory place (the school building) for "exceptional cultural importance" (Blair, Dickinson, & Ott, 2010, p. 28). In other words, the production of the first image extends the rhetorical and symbolic possibility for the "space" of the building to be called upon as a memorial. These semiotic consequences remind us that the power of a rhetoric of acquiescence has ramifications that influence material day-to-day realities – getting back to work and moving on become powerful forces for official discourses.

The "place" for the process of memorializing evokes postmodern sensibilities in that it deploys an "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv). These images do not tell us what to think which opens the discursive for multiplicity. Provided the postmodern problem of lacking meta-discourses that sanction or legitimize other discourses, visual mediums like photographs grant one possible avenue for the public to invoke clearer rhetorics of monumentality and commemoration. By establishing the "place" for memorialization as outside the space of the structure and land on which it rests, the picture "leaves the functionalism of modernism aside" by placing the viewer outside of the physical structure in order to emphasize the non-functional aspects of the building so that commemoration can be brought to the foreground – further integrating the moral vernacular with the symbolic (Blair et al., 1991, p. 279). By placing the viewer outside the physical location of the building, the functionality of the building becomes secondary to the process of reminding and mourning the lives lost on that December morning. Here, the building maintains its signifier but the signified becomes articulated through the

moral vernacular which disrupts the official signified of functionality and moving forward. For the moral vernacular, functionality becomes a culprit in the continuing discourses that have failed to make necessary changes to federal gun legislation.

By positioning commemoration before functionality, this first photograph works to remind the viewer how the untimely death of children should not be something we should expect to return to. This image reminds us that the norm should be the modern parental experience which provides a sense of a mundane, seemingly predictable lives for themselves and their children (Sloane, 1991). In other words, any gesture towards functionality of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School can also serve for the moral vernacular by arguing that the presence of the new building represents the bloodshed and pain that occurred and the political gridlock that refuses to mandate reform. The killing of twenty children becomes a crime against the public, therefore, the images articulate a moral discourse in which suffering does not end with their deaths. More importantly, this image's framing of the entirety of the school building reminds the viewer that "our memory of that time *should not* die out with them" (Brouwer & Horowitz, 2015, p. 543, emphasis in original). As long as this first image continues to circulate, official discourses will continue to be challenged by moral vernacular utterances that call for accountability and change.

Consequently, the image itself is political and partisan – ascribing a divide and clash between official and moral vernacular readings of public memory. These first two images are not printed or recirculated in other media/mediums. With the current case study, they exist solely through the digital sites. Unless in public at work or with friends, the viewing and subsequent commemoration of this text and series of events is done in isolation and in private. However, the place of memorializing produces challenges for vernacular discourses that wish to disrupt the official. Although this distancing between actual place and space of memorializing might assist in expanding the discursive possibilities for the vernacular, the lack of "being there" might pose problems on a material level. With this first image, there is no indication of what kind of building or activities occur within – there are no clear signifiers that this is a school building. In this instance, this image only has power when actively sought by a public member or is contextualized by an online article discussing the finalization of the new school. In this case, the lack of physical markers underscores the symbolic possibilities for those who might identify with the vernacular. Such concerns of online, pictorial memorials will be further developed in the conclusion. For now, the notion that online pictures provide unique and potentially empowering spaces for the vernacular to formulate arguments about the utilization and meaning of a place further guides the analysis specific to how the public is supposed to "read" the new school building.

Continuing the discursive and visual dialogue between the official and moral vernacular specific to arguments over place and space, the second image contains magnets on one teacher's fridge: the magnet on the upper right-hand corner is a copy of the old Sandy Hook Elementary School sign and the ribbon contains the only clear recognition of the shooting. Although small, these magnets render the vernacular by undermining the official discourses that continue to proclaim that the building is not to function as a place for remembering, but learning. This photograph challenges this either/or dichotomy by at the very least asking: Why can't the school do both? Even if the first image sets limits on vernacular ideologies attaching constructs of memorializing, this image grants a stronger case to affirm the vernacular.

By containing traditional markers of memory or remembrance, this second image evokes a clear frame of how the picture is to be read and seen by the viewer. Provided the composition of the image and the arrangement of the magnets several claims can be made that are particular to a moral vernacular reading of the photograph. First, if the image is to read like script, moving from left to right, the picture becomes more clear – the top and bottom right corners of the image are blurred. With the blurred signifier of the old building situated in the top-right corner, a stark contrast is created within the image given the clarity of the ribbon in which the words "We'll Always Remember" curve down towards the bottom of the frame. The less-clear magnet of what once stood exists as something less visible than the clearer possibility of remembering. Second, the presence of a remembrance ribbon poses a specific reading over the contested utilization of space. For example, such ribbons often elicit direct calls to challenges overcome (the pink breast cancer ribbon) and wars fought in and survived (the yellow-ribbon). Even in many elementary schools across the country, for an entire week students, teachers, and staff wear red ribbons during "Red Ribbon Week" as symbols against drug use. In other words, these ribbons function rhetorically to make claims about private lives and experiences while being publicly visible. Therefore, the existence of this

remembrance magnet and its circulation through online images produces these same meanings of private lives being symbolically spoken within the public.

Specific to arguments over function of the new elementary school, this image advances moral vernacular possibilities by containing a clear marker of remembrance. In effect, the continued private lives of family members who lost loved ones during the shooting are called into existence through commemoration while one gazes at this particular photograph. The rhetorical power of such ribbons expands the possibilities for the new Sandy Hook Elementary school to exist as something other than just a school building, but an architectural form that reminds the public of a horrific shooting and the role that catastrophe played in the ongoing discussion on gun legislation. Specific to the moral vernacular, discourses over the place and space of the building and memorializing function through thin morals by employing rhetorics of accountability that aim to remind official discourses of their service to keep the public safe. Ultimately, this political commemorative leaning understands the architecture of the building as a medium of social discourse which is circulated through online images.

Moral Vernacular: Affect

First image: http://www.newstimes.com/local/article/A-sneak-preview-of-the-new-Sandy-Hook-school-8617842.php#photo-10679927
Second image: http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/08/new-sandy-hook-elementary-still-evokes-tragedy.html

Affect as a communicative and rhetorical concept is understood as the capacity to impact. From this perspective, felt affections are actualized from embodied experience that can be recalled and recreated through the viewing of images (Jenkins, 2014). In this instance, a picture has "the capacity to affect viewers by cueing them to see photographs as documents of reality" (Jenkins, 2014, p. 449). The pictorial event surrounding the new Sandy Hook Elementary School enacts and deploys visualized documentary evidence. In this case, the parties involved (text and spectator) are related by their abilities to be affect and affected. From the work of Walter Benjamin (2006), distancing that occurs between an imaged event or space and the viewer gives spectators the capacity to judge a given picture and what it contains. Indicative of online memorializing, these vernacular affects are experienced through "remote sensing" (McCormack, 2010, p. 643). Since the building is a school and protected by state-of-the-art security measures, any affective sense making occurs outside and away from the actual existing place of the structure. However, as articulated in the previous section, this private place of memorializing holds possibility for moral vernacular affects to exist. This testing of images prioritizes the everyday as political because the latter is inseparable from the material – our politics have material consequences.

Given the symbolic possibilities of negation over utilization of place (the building) and space (arenas for memorializing), the photographs of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School also bring into question what emotive affects are deployed that help to secure adherence to vernacular memories surrounding the shooting and gun legislation. In this instance, since official discourses are political, the vernacular becomes political as well. As noted above, rhetorics of acquiescence encouraged by official discourses attempt to subdue political strife by encouraging the public to ignore politics and get back to their daily lives. Given that official discourses rely on rhetorical affects of acquiescence, the moral vernacular rely on other modes of affect in which other feelings are sensed to remind the viewer that the everyday is political (Deleuze, 1990).

This third image elicits a reading that is relevant to the contested memory and utilization of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School. The emptiness of the hallway engenders memories about the bodies that will not be walking and running through those hallways. The blankness of the image prioritizes a reading which allows the viewer to place whomever they want. In other words, the emptiness of the image gives vernacular discourses

authoring by filling in the hallway on their own terms. Here, the moral vernacular of accountability provides the possibility for viewers to recall what might have been lost since the shooting took place. As political roadblock creates frustration and perhaps apathy, the image works to remind the public of what has transpired since December 2012. This affect of loneliness reminds the viewer of the empty spaces that continue exist in the lives of those who lost loved ones. This picture supports the voices of loved ones who have publicly made pleas for the deaths of their loved ones to mean something: "common-sense" gun policy reform. Erica Lafferty, the daughter of slain Sandy Hook Principal Dawn Hochsprung, in 2013 urged the Senate to consider their bill by pleading,

> We're here to demand action, and demand that we receive a vote, and that we're allowed to have some peace of mind that our loved ones didn't die for no [sic] reason...They died protecting the children they love, and they deserve to have a vote and they deserve to have died for a reason. (quoted in, McAuliff, 2013, para. 5)

Ultimately, the emptiness of the image promotes a moral vernacular reading of accountability by reminding the public of what happens when legislators and governmental officials promote the constitutional precedent of the second amendment over calls for public safety and life. The hallway's emptiness provokes affects of loneliness which permit the viewer to directly challenge the discourses of officials who have stated that gun legislation has nothing to do with the families who lost loved ones. Instead, this image works in favor of people, like Erica Lafferty, whose voices, resonate with hurt and frustration, echo through the hallway to remind the public of loss by evoking feelings of loss. With this third image, this empty hallway that curves into the unseen provides an emptiness and uncertainty that any spectator may have experienced in their life-time. Ultimately, this third photograph contains rhetorics of affect because of its capacity to provide evidence of the past while arousing feelings of loneliness.

Coupled with affects of loneliness and emptiness, the pictorial event surrounding the opening of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School also presents other affective possibilities specific to senses of "otherness" and feelings of being trapped. With the fourth image, as a viewer, we are positioned as an outsider: We are not students looking out, we are strangers looking in. In this instance, the framing of the photograph situates us as an "other." Our displaced positioning as public viewers within our private spaces of our homes further inscribes this affect of otherness – we are excluded from sharing the physical place of the building. The clearly raised level of the building and bars over windows illustrate this even more so. Adam Lanza was an outsider who managed to get his way into the original Sandy Hook Elementary School building. By zooming in on the physical structure and make-up of the building, this fourth image makes known the strategic choices that were made to construct a safe school for students and workers. As noted in the background information, the town and architects wanted to make it difficult for outsiders (or people who do not belong inside) to get in. Positioning the viewer as this "other" works to remind the spectator of who literally should be included and excluded within the boundaries of the building's walls.

This form of "othering" is not entirely unique to this structure, rather this affective appeal of otherness constructs moral vernacular difference. In this sense, otherness "is understood not in terms of what is, but in relation to what 'we' are not or do not wish to be...othering is the action of making some group into a clear contrast to 'us'" (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 223). Here, our visual positioning as a viewer looking at the building from the outside offers a sense of what continues to keep us different: the value-based arguments over the defining and regulating of the second amendment. Since evoked through a moral vernacular, this otherness functions to transcend the boundaries of binary value systems to recall notions of accountability. This fourth image posits that this new Sandy Hook is a clear physical marker of what happens when the official is not held accountable. More specifically, this photograph highlights the extent the town of Newtown went through to construct a school that can keep their children safe – further integrating the documentary evidence of affective visuals. In effect, this image relies on affects of "otherness" to illustrate the stark reality of what happens when communities are forced to build expensive buildings to feel safer about sending their children to school. The vernacular is "other" to official due to a lack of accountability through which concerns of public safety continue to be defined and framed by official discourses as existing outside the reach of vernacular concern. Tied back to the conceptualization of thick moral vernaculars that permit performative vernacularism through embodied action, this photograph reminds the public that official discourses impact bodies both inside and outside of the school building. Such affective economies permit feelings

of "otherness" of the individual to align with a community that is oppositional to official subjectivities (Ahmed, 2004).

These affects of loneliness, emptiness, and bodies that cannot do service the vernaculars by allowing the viewer to make judgements about the building contained within the photograph. Entrenched with a moral vernacular, such affects discerned from the photographs expand vernacular interpretations of history. As the viewing public, we are capable of re-living and experiencing such senses as frequently as we wish given the accessibility of the online images. Bodnar (1992) once claimed that "public commemorations usually celebrate official concerns more than vernacular ones" (p. 16). As articulated through these two images, affective rhetorics permit the building to speak more from the concerns of the vernacular. More importantly, the moral vernacular has the symbolic capacity to completely claim the building as their own.

Although official discourses proclaim that affects of anesthetization are ideal for moving on, these four images promote a different reading that sees these images as the products of our governmental officials' lack of action. In result, it became the vernacular's task to take matters into their own hands by constructing a building to keep teachers, staff, and students safe – the very act of constructing a new building is disruptive. However, given the private act of memorializing through the viewing of mediated photographs produced by news sources that circulate official discourses, such symbolic possibilities become problematic provided a public memory that is contested through online spaces.

Making Sense of Online Vernaculars and Public Memories

Through a critical visual rhetorical reading of the pictorial event surrounding the opening of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School, I have attempted to purport how the building functions as a non-memorial that can't help being a memorial when its images are circulated through various online sources. Given this access to the building's symbolic power via the Internet, the public's ability to read the text on their own terms and in the private spaces of their homes opens the discursive possibility to assist in shaping our public memory. As explored through my analysis, the four images explored attempt to rupture official discourses by reclaiming the utilization of space, re-conceptualizing the place of memorializing, and permitting rhetorics of affect to remind the public to keep their governmental officials accountable for their safety. The power of the photograph specific to public memory is that they allow us to continuously re-live the past; we always have that accessibility to view the building in ways material existence might prohibit some from ever seeing it. Therefore, online mediums that permit any process of memorializing offers a blend of personal memories and public discourses. Ultimately, reflecting back on Hess' (2007) question of how private acts of memorializing change any process of memorializing leads me to consider implications in relation to communication technology and understanding online, mediated, and dispersed vernaculars.

First, the use of communication technology to view the photographs (smartphones, computers, and tablets) "paradoxically increases both connection and disconnection" (Hess & Herbig, 2013, p. 2209). Online pictures of the school building expand connection to the physical place while distancing and, therefore, potentially ignoring an adequate awareness of the physical environment. In light of this, an understanding of what presence means becomes an imperative implication when rhetoricians are constructing notions of "public" and "memory." Viewing of buildings that contains markers of memory rely on an augmented reality through which the public can alter the ambiguity and absences of the memorial itself in order to complete their own memory of the shooting (Hess & Herbig, 2013). This notion of an augmented reality creates challenges for public memories as it underscores a "co-presence" in which the viewer attempts to overcome distance by increasing connection (or access) to the images themselves (Hjorth, 2011). In essence, the ambiguity surrounding the circulation of the pictorial event "invite us *to* think, to pose questions, to interrogate our experiences and ourselves in relation to the memorial's discourse" (Blair & Michel, 1999, p. 37, emphasis in original). More to the point, although online forms of memorializing might push rhetorical critics to re-conceptualized modes of memory and commemorating, these forms of memorializing offer the necessary places for the vernacular public to reflect on past events to help make sense of or challenge present concerns.

Second, understanding the vernacular online can be complicated and messy. This is not to argue that such readings should not occur, but that rhetorical scholars must be reflexive of the language we use to make sense of

public discourse in relation to public memory. More specifically, my analysis exposes how moral vernaculars expressed through mediated spaces has the potential to both expand and dilute what we mean by vernacular. In this case, vernacular discourse becomes understood as: (1) The act of the average human being becoming engaged in the creation of rhetoric; (2) The expansion of social actors and therefore, opinions and arguments; (3) Increasingly fragmented, but still a part of the process of knowledge, ideology, and policy production. Such possibilities for this type of moral vernacular can expand discursive possibilities for arguments and judgements about gun violence.

For example, in early in December 2016, the Know the Signs campaign (formed by individuals who lost family members in the Sandy Hook shooting) released a public service announcement (Peled, 2016). In this two-and-a-half-minute video, the viewer is made aware of how easy it is to overlook or ignore at-risk behaviors that could lead to someone taking up a weapon and creating a catastrophe. This video bridges together direct commentary about gun violence by putting it into conversation with mental illness. Since their voices have been silenced and undermined within Congress, these family members have found other outlets to articulate their messages to a larger public. The existence of this video demonstrates how we can talk about both mental illness and gun legislation control. From a critical orientation to power, ideology, and moral vernacular, rhetorical critics need to expand their research into exploring arguments about the inherent harms or possible avenues for change that exists with such discourses and utterances that circulate in relation to mass shootings, gun legislation, and mental illness.

Ultimately, the images of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School continue to expand how rhetorical critics understand public memory and vernacular rhetorics. Given the authority and power of a rhetoric of acquiescence, as public viewers, we are discursively situated to read the building in a particular way. This move does situate the new Sandy Hook as a building with a functional purpose. This outcome still acknowledges the building's role as an unintended memorial. However, this "memorial" will likely stand as a reminder of Americans' ability to move on from tragedy by getting back to their everyday lives regardless of social or political change. Whether the fragmented, online vernacular nature will stand the test of time is difficult to predict. Rather, for now, what can be said is that this public building (and its subsequent images) exists as a "part of the texture of larger landscapes" which interpellates the spectator into particular subject positions and memories in relation to gun violence (Dickinson, Ott, & Aoki, 2006, p. 29). Therefore, current articulations from official positions continue to frame the linguistic and argumentative possibilities for the moral vernacular.

Postscript

Since originally writing this essay, the shooting at a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, and the shooting spree that brought a gunman to a school in Rancho Tehama, California, present two moments in which we witness a public official for the former case shifting focus from common-sense gun reform to mental health - which influences how vernacular discourses pick up similar logics in the later shooting. Speaking to the shooting in Sutherland Springs, President Donald Trump's demonstrates the strategic moves politicians specifically make to focus the public conversation on mental health rather than gun legislation: "Mental health is your problem here…This isn't a guns situation" (quoted in Diamond, 2017). Talking to reporters about her brother's actions, sister of Rancho Tehama gunman reflected: "There are certain people that do not need guns, and my brother was clearly one of them" (quoted in St. John, Shyong, Cosgrove, Serna, & Vives, 2017). Simply put, more recent politics continue to dictate that, following a mass shooting, the public must either focus on mental health or gun control. As illustrated by President Trump's statement, the former continues to be privileged by official discourses. Since thin moral vernaculars can co-opt official arguments and premises, it should come as no surprise that non-official positionalities echo the messages of officials. Rhetorical scholars need to continue mapping these arguments to search for new avenues for how both official and vernacular subjectivities can situate themselves and their arguments to account for both gun control and raising awareness on mental illness. In the end, both concerns have real consequences that demand rhetorical consideration and intervention.

References

Ahmed, S. (2004). Affective economies. *Social Text*, *79*, 117-139. doi:10.1215/016424722-22-2_79117

Bell, M. (2012, December 14). Newton school shooting: Sandy Hook Elementary. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/liveblog/wp/2012/12/14/newtown-school-shooting-sandy-hook-elementary/

Bendery, J. (2013). James Inhofe: Gun debate has nothing to do with families of Newtown victims. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/09/james-inhofe-guns-newtown_n_3046969.html

Benjamin, W. (1999). *The arcades project*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Benjamin, W. (2006). The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility: Second version. In H. Eiland & M. W. Jennings (Eds.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected writings, volume 3: 1935-1938* (pp. 111-128). Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Benson, T. W., & Frandsen, K. D. (1976/1982). *An orientation to nonverbal communication*. Palo Alto, CA: Science Research Associates.

Biesecker, B. (2002). Remembering World War II: The rhetoric and politics of national commemoration at the turn of the 21st century. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *88*, 393-409. doi:10.1080/00335630209384386

Blair, J. A. (2004). The rhetoric of visual arguments. In C. A. Hill & M. Helmers (Eds.), *Defining visual rhetorics* (pp. 41-61). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Blair, C., Dickinson, G., & Ott, B. L. (2010). Introduction: Rhetoric/memory/place. In G. Dickinson, C. Blair, & Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press.

Blair, C., Jeppeson, M. S., & Pucci, Jr., E. (1991). Public memorializing in postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans memorial as prototype. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *77*, 263-288. doi:10.1080/00335639109383960

Blair, C., & Michel, N. (1999). Commemorating in the theme park zone: Reading the Astronauts Memorial. In C. Rosteck (Ed.), *At the intersection: Cultural studies and rhetorical studies* (pp. 29–83). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Bodnar, J. (1992). *Remaking America: Public memory, commemoration, and patriotism in the twentieth century*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Browne, S. H. (1993). Reading public memory in Daniel Webster's 'Plymouth Rock Oration'. *Western Journal of Communication*, *57*, 237-265. doi:10.1080/10570319309374468

Brouwer, D. C., & Horwitz, L. D. (2015). The cultural politics of progenic Auschwitz tattoos: 157622, A-15510, 4559, …. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *101*, 534-558. doi:10.1080/00335630.2015.1056748

Bruce, S., & Yearley, S. (2006). *The sage dictionary of sociology*. London: Sage.

Chappell, B. (2013, October 6). The votes are in: Sandy Hook Elementary will be torn down. *NPR*. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2013/10/06/229797855/the-votes-are-in-sandy-hook-elementary-will-be-torn-down

Cooper, M. (2017, October 2). Congress has basically done nothing on gun control since Sandy Hook shooting. *Newsweek*. Retrieved from http://www.newsweek.com/congess-does-nothing-gun-control-675521

Deleuze, G. (1990). *Expressionism in philosophy: Spinoza*. Trans. M. Joughin. New York: Zone Books.

Diamond, J. (2017, November 6). Trump says Texas shooting result of mental health problem not US gun laws. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2017/11/05/politics/trump-texas-shooting-act-evil/index.html

Dickinson, G., Ott, B. L., & Aoki, E. (2006). Spaces of remembering and forgetting: The reverent eye/I at the Plains Indian Museum. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, *3*, 27-47. doi:10.1080/14791420500505619

Duerringer, C. M. (2016). Dis-honoring the dead: Negotiating decorum in the shadow of Sandy Hook. *Western Journal of Communication*, *80*, 79-99. doi:10.1080/10570314.2015.1116712

Duerringer, C. M., & Justus, Z. S. (2016). Tropes in the rhetoric of gun rights: A pragma-dialectic analysis. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, *52*, 181-198.

Eaton-Robb, P. (2016, July 29). New Sandy Hook school opens nearly 4 years after massacre. *Associated Press*. Retrieved from http://bigstory.ap.org/article/c8def31120c34b228741f661556ab8a4/sandy-hook-school-opening-public-4-years-after-massacre

Eckstein, J., & Partlow Lefevre, S. T. (2016). Since Sandy Hook: Strategic maneuvering in the gun control debate. *Western Journal of Communication*, *81*, 1-18. doi:10.1080/10570314.206.1244703

Ellis, R., Fantz, A., Karlml, F., & McLaughlin, E. C. (2016, June 13). Orlando shooting: 49 killed, shooter pledged ISIS allegiance. *CNN*. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/12/us/orlando-nightclub-shooting/

Engels, J., & Saas, W. O. (2013). On acquiescence and end-less war: An inquiry into the new way rhetoric. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *99*, 225-232. doi:10.1080/00335630.2013.775705

Everytown for Gun Safety. (2017. November 9). *253 school shootings in America since 2013*. Retrieved from https://everytownresearch.org/school-shootings/

Foote, K. E. (1997). *Shadowed ground: America's landscapes of violence and tragedy*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Frisby, D. (1985). *Fragments of modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Polity.

Furfaro, H. (2016, July 29). For Sandy Hook, a new start. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from http://www.wsj.com/articles/for-sandy-hook-a-new-start-1469839641

Halbwachs, M. (1980). *The collective memory*. London: Harper and Row.

Hauser, G. A. (1999). *Vernacular voices: The rhetoric of publics and public spheres*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.

Hauser, G. A. (2008). The moral vernacular of human rights discourse. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, *41*, 440-466. Retrieved from http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/article/256314

Herbig, A., & Hess, A. (2012). Convergent critical rhetoric at the "Rally to Restore Sanity": Exploring the intersection of rhetoric, ethnography, and documentary production. *Communication Studies*, *63*, 269-289. doi:10.1080/10510974.2012.674617

Hess, A. (2007). In digital remembrance: Vernacular memory and the rhetorical construction of web memorials. *Media, Culture, & Society*, *29*, 812-830. doi: 10.1177/0163443707080539

Hess, A., & Herbig, A. (2013). Recalling the ghosts of 9/11: Convergent memorializing at the opening of the national 9/11 memorial. *International Journal of Communication*, *7*, 2207-2230. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=99140345&site=ehost-live

Hjorth, L. (2011). Mobile@game cultures: The place of urban mobile gaming. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 17, 357-371. doi:10.1177/1354856511414342

Howard, R. G. (2008). The vernacular web of participatory media. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *25*, 490-513. doi:10.1080/15295030802468065

Hussey, K., & Foderaro, L. W. (2016, July 29). A new Sandy Hook school is ready nearly 4 years after massacre. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/30/nyregion/new-sandy-hook-school-is-ready-nearly-4-years-after-massacre.html?_r=1

Jenkins, E. S. (2014). The modes of visual rhetoric: Circulating memes as expressions. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *100*, 442-466. doi:10.1080/00335630.2014.989258

Katersky, A., & Kim, S. (2014, November 21). 5 disturbing things we learned today about Sandy Hook shooter Adam Lanza. *ABC News*. Retrieved from http://abcnews.go.com/US/disturbing-things-learned-today-sandy-hook-shooter-adam/story?id=27087140

Kellner, D. (1995). *Media culture*. New York: Routledge.

Kelly, D. (2013, May 11). Task force: Sandy Hook Elementary should be torn down and rebuilt. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from http://articles.latimes.com/2013/may/11/nation/la-na-nn-sandy-hook-elementary-newtown-rebuilt-20130511

Kumar, K. J. (2014). The "Bollywoodization" of popular Indian visual culture: A critical perspective. *tripleC*, *12*, 277-285. Retrieved from http://triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/511/679

Ludes, P., Nöth, W., & Fahlenbrach, K. (2014). Critical visual theory: Introduction. *tripleC*, *12*, 202-213. Retrieved from http://triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/559/654

Lyotard, J. F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Mass Shooting Tracker. (2017). *Mass shooting tracker: U.S. mass shootings, all years (2013-2017)*. Retrieved from https://www.massshootingtracker.org/data/all

McAuliff, M. (2013). Sandy Hook families push senate to hold gun bill vote. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/11/sandy-hook-gun-bill-senate_n_3060848.html

McCormack, D. P. (2010). Remotely sensing affective afterlives: The spectral geographies of material remains. *Annals of the Association of American Geographies*, *100*, 640-654. doi:10.1080/00045601003795004

McKerrow, R. (1989). Critical rhetoric: Theory and praxis. *Communication Monographs*, *56*, 91-111. doi:10.1080/03637758909390253

Miller, R., & Hutson, N. G. (2013, October 29). No trace of Sandy Hook Elementary School will be left. *Newstime*. Retrieved from http://www.newstimes.com/local/article/No-trace-of-Sandy-Hook-Elementary-School-will-be-4937150.php

Morris III, C. E. (2004). My old Kentucky homo: Lincoln and the politics of queer public memory. In K. Phillips (Ed.), *Framing public memory* (pp. 89-114). Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press.

Olson, L. C., Finnegan, C. A., & Hope, D. S. (2008). Visual rhetoric in communication: Continuing questions and contemporary issues. In L. C. Olson, C. A. Finnegan, & D. S. Hope (Eds.), *Visual rhetoric: A reader in communication and American culture* (pp. 1-14). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Peled, S. (2016, December 2). Sandy Hook PSA warns of subtle signs of gun violence. *CNN*. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2016/12/02/health/sandy-hook-gun-violence-psa-trnd/

Sanchez, R. (2017, October 25). Unsealed FBI docs paint disturbing portrait of Sandy Hook shooter Adam Lanza. *CNN*. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2017/10/24/us/sandy-hook-adam-lanza-unsealed-docs/index.html

School Safety Infrastructure Council. (2015, November). About us. *State of Connecticut*. Retrieved from http://das.ct.gov/cr1.aspx?page=421

Sedensky, S. T. (2013). Report of the State's Attorney for the judicial district of Danbury on the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School and 36 Yogananda Street, Newtown Connecticut on December 14, 2012. *Office of the State's Attorney Judicial District of Danbury*. Retrieved from http://www.ct.gov/csao/lib/csao/Sandy_Hook_Final_Report.pdf

Sloane, D. C. (1991). *The last great necessity: Cemeteries in American history*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

St. John, P., Shyong, F., Cosgrove, J., Serna, J., & Vives, R. (2017, November 15). Terror in Northern California town as gunman goes on rampage, kills 5. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-norcal-elementary-school-shooting-20171114-story.html

Tuz, S. (2013, October 5). Newtown voters approve $49M for new Sandy Hook Elementary School. *Newstimes*. Retrieved from http://www.newstimes.com/news/article/Newtown-voters-approve-49M-for-new-Sandy-Hook-4872742.php

Vogel, S., Horwitz, S., & Fahrenthold, D. A. (2012, December 14). Sandy Hook Elementary shooting leaves 28 dead, law enforcement sources say. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/sandy-hook-elementary-school-shooting-leaves-students-staff-dead/2012/12/14/24334570-461e-11e2-8e70-e1993528222d_story.html

Ohio Communication Journal
Volume 56 – March 2018, pp. 33-46

Social networks, social support, and mental health: Exploring responses to behavioral cues associated with depression in an online social network

Jessica Moore

Depression is one of the leading health disorders worldwide and research shows that social support plays an important role in mitigating the impact of this mental health issue. Accordingly, individuals' social networks play a significant role in their health and wellbeing. This study explores how users of social networks respond to symbolic behaviors commonly associated with depression (e.g., frequent posts, sharing stress, and communicating negative affect) in an online social network. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirty-two participants and inductive analytic procedures were used to process the data. Three themes emerged from the data as responses to online behavior commonly associated with depression: supportive communication, curtailed communication, and establishment of communication barriers. This research suggests that the process of receiving social support in an online social network may be challenging for people suffering from depression and that social network site users' awareness of behavioral cues that may signal depression among friends in their online social networks is low. Suggestions for future research are offered in response to these findings.

Keywords: social support, online social networks, mental health, depression

The positive impact of social support on health and wellbeing is widely noted among researchers and health practitioners alike. Social support, defined as the verbal and nonverbal behaviors that provide assistance to others, have been shown to moderate the effects of individual health and wellbeing (Albada & Moore, 2013; Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002; Goldsmith, 2004; Vangelisti, 2009). Indeed, it seems the architecture of, and exchange within, our social worlds affects our health and overall quality of life. Studies also indicate that social support, *or the lack thereof*, can impact individuals' physical and mental health (Albrecht & Goldsmith, 2003; Argyle & Martin, 1991; Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiertcolt-Glaser, 1996), and the essential nature of social support in sustaining health and wellbeing across the lifespan has been well documented (Levula, Wilson, & Harre, 2016).

Though social support is commonly viewed as a positive conduit for sustaining and/or improving health and wellbeing, researchers have noted the complexity of the means through which social support is sought and received (Vangelisti, 2009). Given the ubiquity of social interaction in online environments, the multitude of processes through which people seek and/or receive social support has never been more multifaceted. This provides researchers with an opportunity to better understand how online social support is *enacted* and/or *withheld* and the specific symbolic behaviors that sustain, enhance, or inhibit human health and wellbeing.

One area of increasing interest to communication researchers, mental healthcare providers, and technology professionals is the relationship between social media use and mental health. As the Internet has become progressively integrated into people's daily lives, there is more and more interest in understanding how human interaction in virtual environments contributes to psychological health. While there is a lack of robust evidence that social media use directly causes mental health problems such as depression (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014; Selfhout, Branje, Delsing, Bogt, & Meeus, 2009), researchers *have* noted that people who deal with depression often turn to social media for information, connection, and/or support (Moreno et al., 2011; Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). Given the propensity for people suffering from depression to turn to social network sites (SNSs) to meet various needs, scholars argue that ongoing research in this area is essential to enabling those suffering from depression to successfully manage their psychological health. This study answers that call by exploring how social network users respond to online behaviors commonly enacted by people with depression.

It is not rare to hear idiosyncratic reports of people having friends who consistently fill their social network feeds with "negativity." Such narratives often describe ostensibly self-focused friends who routinely engage in frequent posting or over-sharing, continually post about the stress in their lives, or often seem to be in a bad mood. It is not uncommon for this range of behaviors to unfold in online spaces, but how do people respond when they encounter such behaviors and what do they make of it? There are many possible reasons one might communicate

Jessica Moore (Ph.D., University of Texas at Austin) is a Assistant Professor at Butler University. Correspondence with the author can be made by mail at: Jessica Moore, Butler University College of Communication, 4600 Sunset Ave., Fairbanks Center 218, Indianapolis, IN 46208. Email: moore@butler.edu.

negative affect or share stressful events in online spaces, including simple information sharing or catharsis (Moore, 2017; Moore & Craig, 2009; Wright & Muhtaseb, 2011). But how many people consider that a constellation of these behaviors over time might be a sign that a social tie (e.g., friend, family member, acquaintance) is in need of social support or that they may be experiencing depression?

The purpose of this study is to explore how social support is enacted and/or inhibited when social network users are exposed to communication behaviors (e.g., frequent posts, sharing stressful life events, and negative affect) commonly exhibited by people suffering from depression. This study also examines whether social network users perceive such behaviors as potential signs of depression in people with whom they have social ties. Given the importance of social support in the lives of people suffering from depression, this study aims to help researchers and health practitioners better understand the role of online communication in support processes. What follows is an examination of research central to the current study, including literature on social support processes, the provision of online support, and the impact of social support on mental health. Specifically, the research presented focuses on the positive role of social support, including online support, in health and wellbeing. A description of a qualitative methodology utilizing in-depth interviews follows the literature review. Ultimately, findings of the study are presented and discussed, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are offered, and practical implications are discussed.

Social Support

Human survival depends on the ability to build mutually beneficial relationships. Humans have a deep-seated desire to feel connected and it is argued that feelings of connectedness play an essential role in sustaining physical and psychological health and wellbeing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Brewer, 2004). Researchers and theorists from a variety of disciplines have studied the ways in which social relationships can support human prosperity. Studies indicate that establishing and maintaining social connections can help people cope with a variety of unexpected life events, increase empathic responses, improve trust and cooperation, and decrease the risk of depression and other health disorders (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997; Glaeser, Laibson, Scheinkman, & Soutter, 2000; Hawkley, Masi, Berry, & Cacioppo, 2006). The quality of our social relationships, quite simply, contributes significantly and profoundly to human health and wellbeing.

While social connection in and of itself may perform an essential function in human wellbeing, researchers also agree that it is the interactions with people to whom we are connected that play an important role in allowing humans to function effectively and flourish (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Fletcher and Fitness (1990) contend that it is not merely the existence of social connectedness or social exchange, but the presence of *positive* thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that leads to psychological wellbeing. It is the positive valence of our social exchanges, researchers contend, that supports mental wellbeing, not simply the existence of social connection and/or interaction. Simply put, it matters whether our perceptions of our social connections and social exchanges are positive or negative. Thus, understanding the symbolic nature of our social worlds is paramount in comprehending the impact of social relationships on human health and wellbeing. This study attempts to make a contribution to that understanding.

According to Burleson and MacGeorge (2002), the specific symbolic behaviors (i.e., verbal and nonverbal) that provide assistance to others are defined as supportive communication. Researchers and theorists most often conceptualize enacted supportive communication as *social support*. As one might expect, the kinds of social support people seek, give, and/or receive is multifaceted. Studies indicate that a variety of supportive communication can promote human health and wellbeing by boosting self-esteem, providing health-relevant information, motivating healthy behavior, promoting self-care, and reducing emotional distress, to name a few (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002; Cohen & Wills, 1985; MacGeorge, Feng, & Burleson, 2011).

Communication researchers have documented several common types of social support, including: emotional support, esteem support, informational support, network support, instrumental support, tangible support, and appraisal support (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002; Goldsmith & Albrecht, 2003; Xu & Burleson, 2001). Emotional support, for example, includes expressions of empathy, care, or acceptance (e.g., acknowledging what a friend is going through or expressing your love for them) whereas esteem support affirms identities, enhances another person's self-worth, or expresses the value of another person (e.g., telling a family member how important

they are in your life). Information support involves such behaviors as offering information or providing advice (e.g., sharing the name of a reliable healthcare provider or advising a colleague to take time off at work to care for their health) while network support includes exchanges that provide new social connections or somehow expand a person's support resources (e.g., connecting friends going through similar situations or introducing someone to an online support group). Instrumental support includes behaviors such as assisting with tasks (e.g., helping a friend arrange childcare or driving their kids to school) and, somewhat similarly, tangible support is providing literal tangible aid (e.g., bringing a meal to a friend). And lastly, appraisal support involves communication that offers new ideas or perspectives in a given situation (e.g., helping a friend positively reframe a negative situation). Whether providing people with much needed emotional support, helping people complete meaningful tasks, or offering well-intended advice, scholars agree that the content of social exchanges shapes the ways our social connections impact our health and wellbeing.

Social Support & Social Network Sites

Social support commonly unfolds face-to-face, but it is also something that increasingly occurs in mediated environments such as social network sites. Due to the ubiquity of new technologies and the widespread acceptance of social interaction in online contexts, more and more people are turning to virtual communities to connect with others. Social network sites not only provide people with platforms to establish connections, but they also operate as conduits through which individuals can seek, provide, and/or receive social support (Moore & Craig, 2009). Studies show that computer-mediated social support commonly includes informational, emotional, appraisal, and instrumental support (Lieberman & Goldstein, 2005; Pull, 2006; Winefield, 2006; Wright & Muhtaseb, 2011). According to High and Solomon (2011), online interaction *coexists* with face-to-face interaction as modes for giving as well as receiving the support that is so important to human health and wellbeing.

Traditional conceptualizations of social support often include face-to-face exchanges with significant others such as spouses, family members, and close friends (i.e., strong tie networks). However, researchers have stressed the importance of understanding the role computer-mediated communication plays in social support processes. People commonly interact with significant others face-to-face, but people also increasingly interact with significant others in online spaces. What's more, social network sites expand users' social connections to people beyond those with whom they have close relationships to include a wider range of social relationships (i.e., weak tie networks). Studies show that weak tie networks can often be as effective as strong tie networks in providing social support. Wright and Bell (2003) note that weak ties can sometimes provide more effective social support than strong ties due to the fact that weak tie support can be sought and/or received without the risk of damaging close relationships. Additionally, weak tie networks could potentially offer more diverse points of view, feedback with greater objectivity, and information that is more multifaceted than strong tie networks. In sum, researchers agree that there are important empirical links between online supportive communication and health outcomes, but more research needs to be done in this area to discern the ever-evolving costs and benefits of seeking, giving, and/or receiving support online.

Social Support, Social Networks, & Depression

Mental illness is one of the most prevalent health issues worldwide, and depression impacts more people than any other kind of mental illness (Chouhury, Gamon, Counts, & Horvitz, 2013; Kessler et al., 2005). Mental illness accounts for nearly half of the disease burden for young adults in the U.S., and the presence of major depressive disorder (i.e., depression) is just over 10% in the general population of adults in the U.S. aged 18 to 25 (Center for Behavioral Statistics and Quality, 2016). Among college students, reports of students suffering from depression commonly range from one quarter to one half of the population, with growing numbers of students reporting symptoms related to depression (Furr, Westefeld, McConnell, & Jenkins, 2001; Pace & Trapp, 1995). Depression not only has negative health outcomes on individuals, but the impact of depression can affect partners, friends, family members, as well as others socially connected to those suffering from the disorder (i.e., both strong and weak tie networks). Beyond the psychological and social burden of depression, the economic impact in the U.S. is more than $210 billion per year (Greenberg, Fournier, Sisitsky, Pike, & Kessler, 2015).

Given the escalating prevalence of depression in the general population, researchers and practitioners alike are increasingly interested in discovering factors that might help assuage the impact that depression can have on

human health and wellbeing. One body of work that is getting a significant amount of attention is the relationship between the use of social network sites and mental health. Researchers have examined how social network sites impact self-esteem (Valkenburg et al., 2006), investigated the negative psychological health implications of social comparison on social network sites (Appel, Crusius, & Gerlach, 2015), and explored the effectiveness of social support in computer-mediated health support groups (Rains & Young, 2009). Researchers have even developed preliminary predictive tools in order to identify depression among social network users (Choudhury et al., 2013).

What seems evident to date is that online social outreach for people managing concerns about health and wellbeing is prolific, including those with mental health disorders such as depression (Wright, 2016). Additionally, studies indicate that there are several behavioral cues in online social networks that often characterize depression, including increases in: 1) frequency of social network posts, 2) communication about stressful life events, and 3) expressions of negative affect (Choudury et al., 2013; Moreno et al., 2011). Despite this growing body of work, much remains to be learned about the relationship between social media use and depression. Researchers note, for example, that it is not only important to understand behavioral cues that may help identify those at risk for or suffering from depression, but it is also *essential* to understand reactions and/or responses to those cues among social ties. That is, it is of importance to consider how social ties respond to behaviors often enacted by people with depression and whether those responses, or lack thereof, stand to enhance or inhibit mental health. Doing so may be useful for researchers and practitioners in developing and disseminating information and/or interventions that could assist people suffering from depression with mental health management processes.

Of significance to the current study is how people react to behaviors commonly associated with depression when exposed to them via a social network site (i.e., Facebook). Though studies have provided some compelling evidence about common online behaviors associated with people suffering from depression, information about how their social ties respond to such cues is lacking. As noted by Wright and Muhtaseb (2011), “research should continue to focus on computer-mediated support and health outcomes, and researchers should attempt to disseminate findings to potential users and healthcare professionals in an effort to increase education about these sources of social support” (p. 150). Thus, the following research questions guide this study:

RQ1: How do social network site users respond to online friends’ behaviors associated with depression such as frequent posts, sharing stressful life events, and negative affect?

RQ2: To what extent do social network users perceive behaviors such as frequent posts, sharing stressful life events, and negative affect as communicative indicators of depression?

Method

The current study collected data face-to-face in a human subjects laboratory. Semi-structured interviews were utilized along with a dual sampling process aimed at ensuring saturation of the data. Data analysis was performed using inductive methods informed by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000), and checks were performed to confirm internal and external validity of the data before reporting findings.

Participants

Thirty-two participants were recruited through criterion and snowball sampling via campus recruitment flyers and word of mouth. Participants included university students over 18 years of age who had a Facebook account for a minimum of one year and who self-identified as a "routine user" of social network sites. In the initial sample, 25 participants were interviewed. A second phase of interviews was conducted after data analysis from the initial sample was complete; this was done in order to ensure that the categories that emerged from the initial sample were saturated. Saturation occurs when new data no longer render new theoretical insights about established categories or relationships between or among categories (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Seven more interviews were conducted in order to reach saturation using the same recruitment and sampling method as the initial sample.

The majority of the participants ($N = 32$) were women ($n = 27$) and the average age of participants was 21 years old. Participants included African-American ($n = 4$), Latinx ($n = 2$), and Asian ($n = 1$) individuals, but the majority of participants were Caucasian ($n = 24$); one participant requested that the researcher not include their

ethnicity in the data. All of the participants reported routine use (i.e., daily login) of the social networking site Facebook, and all but one participant reported having at least three social networking accounts (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter). All participants reported that they engage in dyadic exchange (i.e., they send and receive symbolic messages such as posts, likes, and comments) on Facebook.

Procedure

The recruitment announcement directed those who were interested in participating in the study to a research laboratory where they would be able to sign up for specific date and time to be interviewed by a trained research assistant. Once participants arrived for their scheduled session, each reviewed and completed the appropriate informed consent forms approved by the institutional review board prior to the start of the interview. The face-to-face sessions began with a few basic demographic items and progressed as semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Interview protocols were semi-standardized such that predetermined questions were used for all interviews, but questions were most often open ended so that participants could describe their online experiences and share their perceptions of symbolic behaviors on social network sites (Kvale, 1996). Additionally, this open-ended interview procedure allowed for the development of follow-up questions in real time in reaction to participants' responses (Berg, 1995). Interviews were scheduled for 30-45 minutes. The average length of interviews was 33 minutes and they ranged from 27 to 49 minutes. As agreed, all reports of interview data are reported herein using pseudonyms in order to maintain confidentiality of participants.

Data Analysis

The data from the initial sample were analyzed by the author of this manuscript using inductive methods associated with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000). According to Boyatzis (1998), this type of approach is data-driven, which allows for themes to emerge from participants' responses rather than a priori conceptual categories. Open coding was performed for each of the participants' responses to interview questions in order to identify key concepts in the data. Open coding was then followed by axial procedures aimed at identifying themes and categories that exist in the data as well as relationships among the emergent categories (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Once the initial sample was analyzed, the remaining seven interviews were analyzed using a constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this process each point of datum was compared with the existing concepts and categories in order to establish similarities and differences, and to ultimately determine fit. In the end, a final set of categories and themes was established for the entire sample.

In order to establish internal validity of the data, a trained research assistant conducted an audit of the findings. After examining 20% of the data set selected at random, it was established that the conclusions drawn from the analytic process were accurate and reflected the themes and categories derived from the data. Additionally, ten percent of study participants were contacted post-analysis and asked to conduct member checks in order to establish external validity. Specifically, three participants were asked to review the themes and categories that emerged from the data analysis and confirm or disconfirm that the author's conclusions accurately represented their online experiences and perceptions of symbolic behaviors encountered on social network sites; the data was confirmed.

Findings

All participants in this study reported responding in multiple ways to online behaviors such as frequent posts, sharing stressful life events, and communication containing negative affect. Data analyses produced three themes that explicate social network site (i.e., Facebook) users' responses to behavioral cues common among people suffering from depression: *support, curtail communication,* and *establish barriers.* Participants reported an overt willingness to respond with support to social connections that communicated stressful life events, though their willingness to be responsive was qualified. However, participants described an overall reluctance to engage with social connections that engage in frequent posting or routinely sharing negative affect online. Additionally, participants' lacked a general awareness of online behavioral cues that might signal depression in online friends. The results presented herein rely primarily upon quoted excerpts from the interviews in order to bring life to participants' voices and lived experiences. The names of participants have been changed in order to protect their identities.

Support

Participants in this study reported a general willingness to respond with support to online social connections (i.e., Facebook friends) that communicate about a stressful life event. Importantly, however, their willingness to be responsive was often qualified by a friend's frequency of communication about stressful life events. All of the participants noted that they had at least one friend who had recently posted on Facebook about a stressful life event or stressful situation; most participants noted that several of their friends had posted about stressful events in the past. Likewise, all but two of the participants recalled a time when they had posted on Facebook about a stressful life event. A participant named Bailey noted that she posted about a stressful event, "finding out that my mom had cancer," the week prior to her interview.

Participants' responses to friends sharing stressful life events most often materialized as support via "likes" as well as comments intended to support the person who made the initial post due to an acute situation. Based on participants' verbal reports, the most common type of support response was brief emotional support messages such as "love you," "I'm sorry," "I know how that feels and it's awful," or "I got you." It was also common for participants to recall appraisal support messages such as "it sucks that your car is totaled, but the good news is this means you get to pick out a new car" or "sounds like today has been rough, but tomorrow will be here very soon and it will be better." Ashley explained, "If I see from someone's post that they are stressed out because they have gone through a situation that caused some kind of, like, trauma I will definitely offer them encouraging words or let them know that I am here for them by liking their post." Sarah commented:

> When someone is going through something specific [that is stressful] and they put it out there I think that takes courage and most times I'll say something about it like 'keep your head up' or…you know, let them know that I want to support them even though in reality there is nothing I can actually do.

Many participants were able to identify with the notion of experiencing an acute stressful life event and communicating about that event via Facebook post. This may have played a role in their willingness to be responsive to others who find themselves in similar stressful situations given the social norm of reciprocity. Though participants reported a general willingness to be responsive to "friends" experiencing *acute* stressful life events, 28 of the 32 participants in some way qualified their responses. That is, the vast majority of participants spontaneously reported having "friends" that *chronically* seemed to be in the midst of a stressful events, and expressed significant hesitation about their willingness to provide support for such friends on an ongoing basis. Elliott captured the essence of most participants' responses by explaining:

> I consider myself a good friend and am always willing to support my friends going through stressful situations, but I have a couple of friends who are *always* going through stressful situations [the participant used air quotes] and it's just not possible for me to be genuine in my comments to them when it's something every day or every week. There are only so many times you can tell someone you hope they feel better or support them when it's always something new. After a while it just loses all meaning and there is no point.

Thus, it seems that participants' responses to being confronted with friends' posts about stressful life events has limitations rooted in temporal aspects of the exposure such as frequency (i.e., acute versus chronic posts). Thus, people who routinely post about stressful situations or life events, it seems, may experience attrition in the responsiveness of their online social connections. Unfortunately, such findings raise potential concerns about people suffering from depression who may continually seek direct or indirect support via social networks. People sometimes develop depression as a byproduct of experiencing several consecutive stressful or traumatic life events. Thus, if they post about stressful events chronically and their social resources become exhausted before or during the onset of depression, they may be less likely to experience supportive communication online during a time when social support may be particularly valuable. Furthermore, people suffering from depression are more likely to experience everyday life as a stressful event. For some, getting out of bed or going to work or school may be a stressful act. If people suffering from depression routinely post about ongoing stressful events, the likelihood of enduring social support seems prone to diminish according to these interview data.

Curtail Communication

Participants in this study consistently described a reluctance to respond to online social connections that engage in frequent posting or habitually include negative affect in their communication regardless of whether that "friend" was a strong tie or weak tie. All of the participants expressed that they curtail communication with social connections on Facebook as a result of what they described as friends' "excessive posts" or "ongoing negativity." Participants routinely shared what they saw as abnormal levels of activity, which was most often qualified as more than one post per day. Reese commented, "If you're posting something every single day you might be on the edge, but if you are posting more than once a day something probably needs to change if you don't want to get judged." Participants often described daily activity such as browsing Facebook and "liking" other people's posts as being less significant in determining whether they curtailed their communication with a friend, but excessive message posting was articulated as a clear motive to curb interaction. Avery explained:

> When someone gets excessive with posts you sort of start to wonder if they have a life. I mean, no one needs to see what you are doing every minute of every day or read the diary of your life on social media. It's comes off as like…arrogant or maybe self-absorbed. And so I just respond to those people less often than my other friends because it's just too much to respond to all the time.

Participants also universally describe friends' negative affect as the dominant reason why they curtail communication with friends on social network sites. Specifically, participants articulated that ongoing negative posts show a "lack of awareness" as well as a "kind of self-focus" that is not desirable even among close friends (i.e., strong ties). Sydney said:

> Everyone has problems and we all expect to hear about our people's feelings from time to time. You know, someone has a bad day or just needs to blow off some steam after reading something crappy on the Internet. But there are just some people who always have something negative to say and is just like a negative person who blows up your feed every day with some asinine thing. So I am careful about it and sometimes just stay quiet until I see them post something positive and then I'm all "like, like, like, smiley face."

A few participants described having close friends or relatives who routinely engaged in sharing negative thoughts, feelings, or information. What's more, they described a similar process through which they curtailed their communication and ultimately their exposure to them on Facebook altogether. Jaden explained, "At first I would comment or reply to his negativity. You know, trying to be nice. But it fed the lion and I had to stop." Ryan added, "I love my brother, but it got to the point where I had to be like…bro, nomotions [no emotions] in public...and I just pretended I didn't see his post because I knew he expected a reply and I couldn't go there."

Additionally, two participants noted that friends who engage in excessive "commenting" also compel them to inhibit communication. For example, participants described refusing to "like" comments or reply to comments made by serial commenters. Taylor notes, "I like it when people comment on my posts, but if someone comments on *all* of my post and they are commenting on every post out there then it seems like it's not genuine and I don't reply or 'like' it." And Kristin noted, "I once had this friend who always had something negative to say. I could be like 'what a beautiful day' and she would be like 'it's supposed to rain tomorrow.' She brought me down all the time and so, over time, I just stopped responding to her."

Curtailing communication in online social networks, particularly in response to a friend's frequent posts or ongoing negative communication, may have multiple origins. It may be a self-protective mechanism used to avoid information or affective overload. Alternatively, it could serve as an avoidance strategy used to strategically circumvent negative thoughts and feelings about one's social connections. It could also be a simple result of compassion fatigue, which is common among those who are continually exposed to those who are suffering or in distress. Regardless of the underlying mechanism, these data present a predicament for people suffering from depression given their propinquity to make frequent posts in social networks and, as a result of illness, are prone to view as well as communicate about the world through a negative lens.

Establish Barriers

A final theme that emerged from interviews was the tendency for participants to establish barriers in response to exposure to friends' frequent or excessive posts in online social networks and/or exposure to communication that frequently contains negative affect. Participants noted that sometimes curtailing communication was insufficient to manage online social connections and that establishing barriers was necessary. Carson commented:

> There have been times when I realized that stepping back and not engaging them is not enough. When that happens I usually hide their feed so that I'm not exposed to [certain] people's negativity. If they somehow still show up in my feed because they tag me or something I go to settings and lock it down.…that sounds extreme, doesn't it? But there have been times when it was necessary for my own sanity, you know?

Another participant, Shawn, described a situation wherein they used Facebook settings to establish a barrier between themselves and a close relative.

> I had this aunt who was always doing this 'poor me' thing on Facebook. It seemed to always get her attention from some people, but it got really old for me and I had to adjust my feed because of it. I felt bad at first, but I ultimately unfriended her because it was everything negative all the time. I think my sister unfriended her, too.

The situation Shawn described is somewhat unique because a recurring sentiment that emerged from the data was a hesitance of individuals to create *absolute* barriers (e.g., completely hiding a feed, unfriending someone) between themselves and social connections with whom they have close relationships (i.e., strong ties). Participants did not report establishing such barriers with partners or close friends, but one quarter *(n* = 8) of the sample mentioned establishing barriers with a family member and approximately two-thirds of participants (*n* = 21) mentioned doing so with someone with whom they were socially connected online such as a coworker, classmate, or friend. Thus, 25% of the sample engaged in establishing barriers that would not only prevent them from seeing specific chronically "negative" friends posts, which would also result in creating a barrier for the provision of social support for those individuals.

Though establishing barriers may be characterized as negative response to frequent posts or exposure to friends' negative thoughts, feelings, or behaviors, it is possible that establishing barriers may allow some kinds of relationships to endure that might otherwise deteriorate or end altogether. In this way it is possible that establishing virtual barriers, particularly among one's weak-tie connections, may paradoxically serve as a conduit through which such relationships can be sustained in the face of undesirable social behavior. However, it is significant for researchers and mental health practitioners to consider the implications of social barriers being raised; such barriers have the potential to exacerbate feelings of isolation or loneliness among those suffering from depression. Further research could benefit from exploring such issues.

Beyond exploring how people respond when confronted with specific behaviors online, this study also explores the extent to which social network users perceive common behaviors such as frequent posts, sharing stressful life events, and negative affect as communicative indicators of depression. Though engaging in such behaviors does *not* mean that someone is depressed, research indicates that such online behaviors are common among people suffering from depression (Chouhury et al., 2013). Thus, it may be helpful for researchers and mental health practitioners to understand how people respond to potential support seeking behaviors in online environments. The current interview data do not suggest participants' awareness that the aforementioned behaviors have a robust relationship with depression, though four participants raised concern about the social adjustment or wellbeing of people who engage in these behaviors. Marian commented, "Something is not right if someone is constantly posting on Facebook." And Charlie said:

> I don't understand people who are always putting the negative parts of their life out there. It's okay to talk about stressful events every now and then, but when someone talks about it all the time I think it creates this negative world that no one wants to be a part of. No one. It just doesn't make sense [to me].

As a result of these data, it seems apparent that people are unfamiliar with behaviors that might signal a need for social support or be indicative of mental health concerns. Fortunately, research indicates that social support isn't always entirely positive; in fact, social support can sometimes undesirable because the process of receiving it can be stigmatizing (Vangelisti, 2009). Even still, it seems that education about the relationship between social networks and mental health could be beneficial to society at large.

Discussion

Previous research has explained what constitutes supportive messages (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002), how social support is commonly communicated (Goldsmith, 2004), and the benefits of seeking support via online social support groups (Wright & Bell, 2003). The general purpose of this study, however, is to extend what is known about online social support processes. We live in a world where an increasing number of people turn to online social networks to meet fundamental social needs and concomitantly the prevalence of depression among the general population continues to grow. Due to the stigma often associated with depression, however, many people who suffer from mental illness are reluctant to disclose their illness and/or directly seek support from people in their social worlds. Nonetheless, research indicates that people who suffer from depression commonly turn to virtual spaces for social connection and that is often pronounced for those who find it difficult to communicate about their lived experiences or socialize or face-to-face. But how do people in virtual spaces such as social networks respond to "friends" who exhibit behaviors (i.e., symptoms) associated with depression? And do social networks users have a sense of behavioral cues that might signal depression in a friend?

This study examines the ways people respond to behaviors commonly enacted by people suffering from depression such as high frequency of posts, sharing information about stressful life events, and communication that often contains negative affect. This study also explores people's awareness of online behavioral cues that could signal depression among their friends and how cognizance of such cues might affect social support processes. In doing so, this research primarily aims to present practitioners with data that will improve the lives of people suffering from depression and/or aid in depression prevention by articulating online social practices that may enhance and inhibit mental health. Additionally, this study hopes to extend what is known about conditions that stand to enhance and/or inhibit the provision of social support.

This study found that social network users respond to high frequency posting, sharing stressful life events, and negative affective communication by enacting support, curtailing communication, and establishing barriers between themselves and their online "friends." This study also found that social network users are not cognizant that people suffering from depression commonly enact the aforementioned behaviors. There are several practical implications and theoretical considerations that can be drawn from these findings.

First, the willingness of social network users to respond to friends' with social support was unambiguously qualified by frequency constraints. Like previous research, this study reveals a general willingness of individuals to provide support to others who are facing a stressful life event (Best et al., 2014; Cohen & Wills, 2005; High & Solomon, 2011; Wright & Bell, 2003). In the current study such support was most often reported as emotional and appraisal support, which have been reported as prevalent forms of support (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002). However, data from this study is novel in that it indicates a kind of "support threshold" that exists for providing support in online social networks. While participants in this study reported providing support to people in their social networks in the past, they were also clear that providing ongoing social support for individuals who chronically communicate about stressful events online was not only untenable, but also undesirable. Simply put, social networks users reported being unmotivated and unwilling to provide ongoing support for "friends" who ostensibly could have benefited from recurrent support.

Additionally, participants in this study reported an aversion to friends who engage in frequent posts or posts that routinely contain negative affect, regardless of whether those friends were strong or weak ties. Not only did participants report a reluctance to engage with strong and weak ties who routinely posted negative feelings, but they noted a general dissatisfaction for any social tie who engaged in excessive posting of any kind. Previous research suggests that weak ties are excellent for the provision of online support because weak ties can often offer diverse points of view, feedback with greater objectivity, and, importantly, provide support without the risk of damaging close relationships (Rains & Young, 2009; Wright & Bell, 2003). However, previous studies have focused on online

social support groups (e.g., online groups for people dealing with a specific disease). The current study focuses on a general social network site (i.e., Facebook) in which users are likely to communicate with an amalgamation of both strong and weak ties simultaneously. Thus, it may be that the ongoing provision of social support is subject to socio-cultural expectations that underlie specific network functions. It may be that sociocultural norms associated with "open" online communication may outweigh idiosyncratic relationship norms that might otherwise compel a strong social tie to provide enduring support in such environments. This data suggests for practitioners as well as researchers that individuals in need of social support (e.g., individuals suffering from depression) may expect to find ongoing support when part of an online support group, but anticipating enduring support from "friends" on Facebook may not prove reliable irrespective of one's social ties (i.e., strong or weak).

High and Solomon (2011) importantly note that online interaction *coexists* with face-to-face interaction as modes for giving as well as receiving support that is so significant to human health and wellbeing. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of this coexistence. As previously noted, due the ubiquity of new technologies and the widespread acceptance of online interaction, more and more people are turning to virtual communities to seek, provide, and/or receive social support (Moore & Craig, 2009). Accordingly, the results of this study accentuate the limitations of receiving social support via Facebook, particularly for people who may be prone to frequently posting about life stressors or negative feelings they may be experiencing. Participants in this study reported a willingness to offer social support to online social ties in sporadically or in acute situations. However, participants also noted that they engaged in strategic behaviors in order to curtail communication and, in some cases, establish barriers to communication altogether when confronted with "negative" friends. This not only emphasizes the importance of face-to-face social support for people suffering from mental illness, but also the significance of making strategic choices when seeking social support via social network sites. Practitioners might consider how the results of this study could be used to inform patient education and advise behavioral practices for the benefit of people suffering from depression or those simply in need of social support.

Limitations & Future Research

While this study answers the call for researchers to continue to focus on the relationship between social media and mental health outcomes, there are limitations to this study. Participants who took part in this study were routine users of social media, but the sample itself is rather homogenous in nature. The sampling procedure itself unnecessarily advantaged college students as participants due to the restriction of recruitment flyers to a university campus couple with secondary word-of mouth snowball sampling. Though college students are among the most prolific users of social media, studies show that adults of all ages establish and maintain social connections online and the current study could have done a better job of reflecting this population. Word of mouth was incorporated and encouraged in recruiting procedures; however, this ultimately did not elicit participants other than college students. Furthermore, the sample was predominantly female and Caucasian. Although demographics of this nature are common in research studies of this ilk, such homogeneity restricts the applicability of the results to larger populations. Given the likelihood of encountering someone with depression online across the adult lifespan and the prevalence of depression across various ethnic groups, future studies of this kind might better serve researchers and health practitioners by improving the diversity of participants such that results could be more effectively generalized.

The procedure of this study could have also been extended to include examination of participants' social network (i.e., Facebook) accounts. That is, the researcher could have attempted to capture data from the actual social network feeds of participants. Doing so may have confirmed the validity of the responses provided during the interviews themselves instead of relying solely upon cognitive and behavioral recall. That is, the researcher could have combined interview self-reports with online behavioral indicators in the data collection procedure. If a participant said that she "hid" a friend who routinely made posts containing negative affect, it would have been possible for the interviewer to confirm this fact had a more elaborate procedure been undertaken. It is possible that self-reports diverged (i.e., contained error) from actual behavior. However, the author of this study feels confident that interview responses were quite comprehensive given that answers to questions commonly included descriptions of behaviors that might frame participants in a negative light such as "ignoring" or "hiding" friends who appeared to be experiencing distress. Future studies might weigh the costs and benefits of combining interview data with

observed data in accordance with the goals of the study. In the current case interviews provided a rich source of data from which the posed research questions could be readily addressed.

Lastly, it should be noted that the goal in examining responses to common behavioral cues associated with depression in online social networks was to understand how social connections might ultimately enhance or inhibit mental health. That is, people often do not know whether people with whom they have social connections (i.e., relationships) are experiencing symptoms of depression or whether they have been formally diagnosed with depression. What's more, people often do not know how or whether their online action or inaction has a real impact on others. This "not knowing" was important to situating this study and these data. Given that mental health disorders are stigmatized and, as a result, often not communicated about openly and directly, the current study reflects a common state of "not knowing" that one might expect to encounter in a distal environment such as a social networking site. Quite simply, most people do not know the ever-changing health status of the majority of our social connections and this is particularly true when those health conditions carry social stigmas. Future studies might benefit from clinical contextualization such that researchers are able to examine symbolic exchange between actual persons suffering from depression and individuals in their online social networks.

Conclusion

It is evident that there is an amalgamation of factors that contribute to psychological health. From self-care to availability of information and access to healthcare to social support, the processes for successfully sustaining health and wellbeing are complex. As the number of people suffering from depression grows worldwide, researchers, theorists, and practitioners stand to make a significant impact in the lives of people struggling to manage their mental health. It is the hope of the current author that future studies will continue to explore these multifaceted processes until the risk of suffering or dying from depression or other mental health ailments is significantly diminished or eliminated.

References

Albada, K., & Moore, J. L. (2013). Moving from positive thinking to positive talk: Implications for relational wellbeing. In M.J. Pitts & T.J. Socha (Eds.), *Positive communication in health and wellness* (pp. 117-132). New York: Peter Lang Publishers.

Albrecht, T. L., & Goldsmith, D. J. (2003). Social support, social networks, and health. In T. L. Thompson, A. M. Dorsey, K. I. Miller, & R. Parrott (Eds.), *Handbook of health communication* (pp. 263-284). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Appel, H., Crusius, J., & Gerlach, A. L. (2015). Social comparison, envy, and depression on Facebook: A study looking at the effects of high comparison standards on depressed individuals. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 34*, 277-289.

Argyle, M., & Martin, M. (1991). The psychological causes of happiness. In F. Strack, M. Argyle, & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Subjective well-being. An interdisciplinary perspective* (pp. 77- 100). Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117,* 497-529.

Berg, B. L. (1995). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (2nd ed.). Boston , MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Best, P., Manktelow, R., & Taylor, B. (2014). Online communication, social media, and adolescent wellbeing: A systematic narrative review. *Children and Youth Services Review, 41*, 27-36.

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Brewer, M. B. (2004). Taking the origins of human nature seriously: Toward a more imperialist social psychology. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 8*, 107-113.

Burleson, B. R., & MacGeorge, R. L. (2002). Supportive communication. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (pp. 374-424). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (2016). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the Unites States: Results from the 2015 national survey on drug use and health. Retrieved from https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-FFR1-2015/NSDUH-FFR1-2015/NSDUH-FFR1-2015.htm

Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 509–535). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chouhury, M., Gamon, M., Counts, S., & Horvitz, E. (2013). Predicting depression via social media. Proceedings of the 7th International Association of the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence Conference on Weblogs and Social Media.

Cialdini, R. B., Brown, S. L., Lewis, B. P. Luce, C., & Neuberg, S. L. (1997). Reinterpreting the empathy-altruism relationship: When one into one equals oneness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73,* 481-494.

Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin, 98*(2), 310-357.

Fletcher, G. J., & Fitness, J. (1990). Occurrent social cognition in close relationship interaction: The role of proximal and distal variables. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59*, 464-474.

Furr, S. R., Westefield, J. S., McConnell, G.N., & Jenkins, J. M. (2001). Suicide and depression among college students. Suicide and depression among college students: A decade later. *Professional Psychology, Research and Practice, 32*, 97-100.

Glaeser, E. L., Laibson, D. I., Scheinkman, J. A., & Soutter, C. L. (2000). Measuring trust. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 115,* 811-846.

Goldsmith, D. J. (2004). *Communicating social support.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Goldsmith, D. J., & Albrecht, T. L. (2003). Social support, social networks, and health: A guiding framework. In T. L. Thompson, R. Parrot, & J. F. Nusbaum (Eds). *Handbook of health communication* (1st ed., pp. 335-348). Mahwah, NJ: Routledge.

Greenberg, P. E., Fournier, A. A., Sisitsky, T., Pike, C. T., & Kessler, R. C. (2015). The economic burden of adults with major depressive disorder in the United States (2005 and 2010). *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 76*, 155-162.

Hawkley, L. C., Masi, C. M., Berry, J. D., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2006). Loneliness is a unique predictor of age-related differences in systolic blood pressure. *Psychology & Aging, 21*,152-164.

Hefner, J., & Eisenberg, D. (2009). Social support and mental health among college students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 79,* 491-499.

High, A. C., & Solomon, D. H. (2011). Locating computer-mediated social support within online communication environments. In K. B. Wright & L. M. Webb (Eds.), *Computer-mediated communication in personal relationships.* New York, Peter Lang.

Kessler, R. C., Bergland, P., Demler, O., Jin, R., Merikangas, K. R., & Walters, E. E. (2005). Lifetime prevalence of age-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 62*, 593-602.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing.* London, UK: Sage.

Levula, A., Wilson, A., & Harre, M. (2016). The association between social network factors and mental health at different life stages. *Quality of Life Research, 25*, 1725-1733.

Lieberman, M. A., & Goldstein, B. A. (2005). Self-help online: An outcome evaluation of breast cancer bulletin boards. *Journal of Health Psychology, 10*, 855-862.

MacGeorge, E. L., Feng, B., & Burleson, B. (2011). Supportive communication. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.) *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (4th ed., pp. 317-354). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Moore., J. L. (2017). Exploring healthy connection: Communication, social networks, and wellbeing. In C. el Morr (Ed.) *Novel applications of virtual communities in healthcare settings.* Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Moore, J. L., & Craig, E. A. (2009). Relationship development and maintenance in a wired world. In J. Park & E. Abels (Eds.), *Interpersonal relations and social patterns in communication technologies: Discourse norms, language structures and cultural variables.* Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Moreno, M. A., Jelenchick, L. A., Egan, K. G., Cox, E., Young, H., Gannon, K., & Becker, T. (2011). Feeling bad on Facebook: Depression disclosures by college students on a social networking site. *Depression and Anxiety, 28,* 447-455.

Pace, T. M., & Trapp, M. D. (1995). A psychometric comparison of the Beck Depression Inventory and the Inventory for Diagnostic Depression in a college population. *Assessment, 2,* 167-172.

Pull, C. (2006). Self-help Internet interventions for mental disorders. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry, 19*, 50-53.

Rains, S. A., & Young, V. (2009). A meta-analysis of research on formal computer-mediated support groups: Examining group characteristics and health outcomes. *Human Communication Research, 35*, 309-336.

Selfhout, M., Branje, S., Delsing, M., Bogt, T., & Meeus, W. (2009). Different types of internet use, depression, and social anxiety: The role of perceived friendship quality. *Journal of Adolescence, 32,* 819-833.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques.* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Uchino, B. N., Cacioppo, J. T., & Kiercolt-Glaser, J. K. (1996). The relationship between social support and physiological processes: A review with emphasis on underlying mechanisms and implications for health. *Psychological Bulletin, 119*, 488-531.

Valkenburg, P. M., Peter, J. P., & Schouten, A. P. (2006). Friend networking sites and their relationship to adolescents' wellbeing and social self-esteem. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior, 9*, 584-590.

Vangelisti, A. (2009). Challenges in conceptualizing social support. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 26,* 39-51.

Winefield, H. R. (2006). Support provision and emotional work in an Internet support group for cancer patients. *Patient Education and Counseling, 62*, 193-197.

Wright, K. B., & Bell, S. B. (2003). Health-related support groups on the Internet: Linking empirical findings to social support and computer-mediated communication theory. *Journal of Health Psychology, 8*, 37-52.

Wright, K. B. (2016). Social networks, interpersonal social support, and health outcomes: A health communication perspective. *Frontiers in Communication, 1:10*. Retrieved from http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fcomm.2016.00010/full

Wright, K. B., & Muhtaseb, A. (2011). Personal relationships and computer mediated support groups. In K.B. Wright & L.M. Webb (Eds.), *Computer-mediated communication in personal relationships.* New York, Peter Lang.

Xu, Y., & Burleson, B. R. (2001). Effects of sex, culture, and support type on perceptions of spousal social support: An assessment of the "support gap" hypothesis in early marriage. *Human Communication Research, 24*, 535-566.

Ohio Communication Journal
Volume 56 – March 2018, pp. 47-58

"It's So Wrong, It's Right!": Analyzing Feminist Humor in Sitcoms

Nancy Bressler

Examining humorous media texts is essential because humor is a cultural entity that can depict social and cultural norms. Humorous representations are vital for analysis to understand the social underlying ideologies in media texts. In particular, this paper investigates the difference between women's humor and feminist humor in media representation. This analysis traces the rhetorical possibilities within humor and the discourse that results from it. Utilizing the CBS sitcom Two Broke Girls and using the theoretical framework of superiority theory and functions of humor, this paper examines how women's humor differs from feminist humor in media representations. While humor is just one possible avenue for revealing social inequality in media representation, it is one that warrants further discussion. How can the distinctions between women's humor and feminist humor differentiate between media (re)presentations that highlight marginalized voices in American society and those which continue to suppress them? Humor might be the best genre where depictions of cultural values can be discussed, explored, and scrutinized. Humor is a powerful rhetorical tool and if any genre can begin the discussion about social inequalities in America, humor is the cultural entity that can start those deliberations.

Keywords: Women's Humor, Feminist Humor, Superiority Theory, Sitcoms

Introduction

Humorous media creates a relationship between that media text and its audience; as a result, it is essential to analyze what humor represents to better recognize the social and cultural underlying ideologies in media representation. Yet, women have often faced a difficult path in being humorous within society. Women also faced the harsh criticism that they simply "weren't funny." However, as Merrill (1988) suggests, it may instead be that women fail to conform to the "premise of the joke" (p. 273). Therefore, a clearer interpretation between women's humor – not to be confused with feminist humor – is warranted. Women's humor features female comedians, who often conform to traditional jokes targeting men or self-deprecatory jokes that marginalize women. In contrast, previous communication scholars (see, for instance, Bing, 2004; Carlson, 1988; Lee, 1992; Merrill, 1988) hoped that feminist humor would use humor to critique social inequalities. Feminist humor would embody the criticism of systematic sources of oppression, rather than specific individuals as the source of the humor (Bing, 2004; Merrill, 1988).

Previous research differentiated between women's humor and feminist humor in a variety of contexts (Bing, 2004; Merrill, 1988). Women's humor embodies traditional, even hegemonic stereotypes, while feminist humor "empowers women to examine how we have been objectified and fetishized and to what extent we have been led to perpetuate this objectification" (Merrill, 1988, p. 279). Feminist humor, therefore, celebrates and includes the common beliefs and values of women. Defamatory jokes that use humor to belittle any member of society, no matter the gender, class, or race of those individuals, only reinforce hierarchies of oppression. This hegemonic type of humor – humor that marginalizes and differentiates between individuals – helps to reinforce the status quo and is hardly subversive. It evokes a sense of superiority for the audience that they are socially superior to the comedian.

This paper traces the rhetorical possibilities within humor and the discourse that results from it. Through the theoretical frameworks on why individuals use humor and the rhetorical possibilities within humor, as well as a contextualization using the CBS comedy, *Two Broke Girls,* this paper will also encourage future research in the connections between humor and the rhetorical influence of addressing the target of humorous discourse. While humor is just one possible avenue for revealing social inequality in media representation, it is one that warrants further discussion. Through an analysis of the CBS sitcom *Two Broke Girls,* I will argue the distinctions between women's humor and feminist humor to differentiate between media (re)presentations that highlight marginalized voices in American society and those which continue to suppress them.

Nancy Bressler (Ph.D., Bowling Green State University) is an Assistant Professor at Wheeling Jesuit University. She can be contacted at nbressler@wju.edu.

Influence of Sitcom Representation

Within communication and media representation, humor is a constant entity. Jokes and laughter have become a part of our cultural fabric and their impact warrants future research. Humor is representative of the dominant ideologies within a culture. The type of humor that Americans interpret as funny is particularly effective, specifically because it is situated within cultural norms and expectations.

Specifically this analysis examines humor within sitcom representation. Mills (2005) categorizes a sitcom as a half-hour series that includes recurring characters and a plot that can often be resolved within a single episode. Thus, a sitcom presents familiar character types and narratives that usually have simplistic resolutions. While this might be the typical structure of traditional sitcoms, some sitcoms have historically utilized a more serial format. For example, *Friends* used both an episodic, or self-contained storyline, for the central plots of each episode, but also employed a serial format for romantic storylines, such as Ross and Rachel's on-again/off-again relationship and Monica and Chandler's concealment and later revelation of their romantic relationship (Mills, 2005). As a result, the structure of sitcoms can be fluid depending on the narrative being conveyed.

Even though the overall goal of a sitcom is to provide humor, the genre has also been able to express or even sometimes to challenge traditional cultural values. As Mills (2005) observed, the sitcom has often been viewed as less factual than other television genres; however, sitcoms also provide a unique opportunity to reveal social attitudes and norms within a given culture. Therefore, this paper can investigate a television sitcom not to judge the particular characters or the narrative, but to better understand what cultural values are normalized within the text. "In these ways, [the] sitcom becomes not only representative of a culture's identity and ideology, it also becomes one of the ways in which that culture defines and understands itself" (Mills, 2005, p. 9). Using comedy, media content can influence who or what can be laughed at and who or what should be excluded. Landay (2005) observed that comedy, particularly American sitcoms, could be an excellent genre for displaying and even influencing cultural standards. Since it has been labeled as a genre that provides more entertaining than serious narratives, the sitcom then provides one of the best avenues for experimenting with social issues and possible solutions (Morreale, 2003).

Because the sitcom is often viewed as a more amusing genre, it can also provide more subversive representation. Comedy can function as both entertaining and thought-provoking. As a result of its flexible interpretations, humorous media content can depict subversive possibilities that can encourage conversations about inequality. Because the study of television sitcoms is imperative to our knowledge of social norms and the dominant ideologies they portray, it becomes the perfect media text to analyze women's humor and feminist humor.

Humor Theory

Humor theory aims to understand the circumstances and reasons why people laugh in specific situations (Mills, 2005). Within humor theory, there are three reasons why individuals use humor: superiority, relief, and incongruity (Lynch, 2002; Mills, 2005). Because superiority humor comes from a socially based viewpoint (DiCioccio, 2012), it will be the focus of this paper. The source of its humor is typically the inadequacies of someone else. One person finds humor at the detriment of another (Perks, 2012). Plato and Aristotle identified superiority theory in situations in which the joke teller identified the weaknesses of others and utilized humor to emphasize those limitations (DiCioccio, 2012). Humor theorists argue that superiority encourages individualism and competitiveness (Morreall, 2009). Consequently, superiority humor can be a destructive part of human nature (Merrill, 1988).

Humor's meaning also often stems from the ridiculousness of its target (Berger, 2010). The source of the humor comes from the criticism of someone other than the joke teller (DiCioccio, 2012). In essence, with this type of humor, there is always a winner and a loser because superiority humor raises the person over the source of the humor. If the audience perceives themselves to be better than the character, they are more likely to laugh (Morreall, 2009). Consequently, the humor may revolve around social criterion and the perceived violation of those standards; the humor results from the inadequacy of the person to measure up to those models (Lynch,

2002). Therefore, superiority theory would conclude that humor is a binary construction between an “in-group,” that creates the humor, and an “out-group,” that is the source of the humor (Lynch, 2002).

This paper focuses specifically on superiority theory because of its strong rhetorical influences. Superiority theory utilizes humor as a “social corrective” (Meyer, 2000, p. 314). Unwise or foolish behavior is displayed as the source of the humor as an example of unacceptable actions in civilized society. Superiority theory has been viewed throughout history through foolish performances; people would laugh at the town fool who was a symbol of undesirable behavior. Therefore, superiority theory is considered rhetorical in nature because it encourages the laughter toward a “lower” person, behavior, or idea within society (Meyer, 2000). The source of the humor stems from how inferior and wrong a person appears when he or she differs from the social status quo (Meyer, 2000). Therefore, utilizing the framework of superiority theory is essential to this project because this research seeks to explore the dominant cultural values in humor, specifically those of female characters. What “social correctives” are demonstrated within women’s humor and feminist humor and how do those differences contribute to our own perceptions of society?

Functions of Humor

Rhetorical research in humor investigates what is said in the message and how that message creates a persuasive meaning. Therefore, it is best to look at the functions of humor to analyze its rhetorical possibilities. Within humor research, there are also four functions of humor: identification, clarification, enforcement, and differentiation. Analyzing the functional approach to humor considers if the end result will be unification or division (Meyer, 2000). Identification and clarification focus on unity and shared expectations, while enforcement and differentiation highlight the diversities of social experience (DiCioccio, 2012).

Through identification, humor can emphasize the collective meaning and experiences within a culture (DiCioccio, 2012). Communicators reinforce shared values and collective insight, which leads to perceived cohesiveness and group identity (Lynch, 2002). Within identification, humor can also be educational as it reinforces the societal status quo (Meyer, 2000). Once again, there is an “in-group” and an “out-group” that people in society can recognize; anyone who violates the perceived social order becomes part of the “out-group (Carlson, 1988). Any variations from the social order can be ridiculed using laughter as the response to those who do not abide by the social rules (Meyer, 2000). Moreover, audiences who laugh together share an understanding of the cultural values that are inherent in the humor (DiCioccio, 2012). This type of humor ultimately “validates commonly held perceptions” and cultural norms (Lynch, 2002, p. 234).

Clarification, the second function of humor, emphasizes the anticipated social norm instead of defiance of that custom. Moreover this function of humor focuses on accentuating the cultural norms or beliefs within that society (DiCioccio, 2012). The difference with this function lies in its audience member’s ability to remember the remark. These powerful jokes can entertain and persuade at the same time. This function is particularly persuasive when the audience members may not readily agree with the person telling the joke (Meyer, 2000). Similar to identification, clarification emphasizes that the status quo is preferable, reassurance is provided, and compliancy to societal norms is encouraged (Meyer, 2000).

In contrast to the unifying nature of identification and clarification, a person who uses humor as enforcement typically hopes to reinforce customs by criticizing someone or that person’s beliefs, while still maintaining identification with his or her audience (Meyer, 2000). The humor playfully criticizes a violation of a social expectation and underscores that the defiance must be amended (DiCioccio, 2012). Enforcement humor can also demonstrate a concept that someone has yet to learn. When perspectives diverge, particularly those focused on social norms, humor can be the result. Humor may stem from a person not understanding the “correct sociocultural perspective” (Meyer, 2000, p. 321). Rhetorically, the enforcement function hopes that whoever violated or needed to learn the social norm will correct it by conforming in the future.

Finally, differentiation presents a binary opposition within humor. Differentiation is similar to enforcement, but with a harsher undertone. Communicators position two groups opposite each other, one that likely matches their beliefs and one that challenges them. By contrasting the two groups against each other, the communicator demonstrates the superiority of the one. Therefore differentiating is the “most divisive function of humor” (DiCioccio, 2012, p. 28); differentiation presents binary oppositions about the source of the humor

(Meyer, 2000, p. 321). Thus, differentiation humor can continue and expand on pre-existing inequalities of social groups (Lynch, 2002). The opposing group does not get a voice and may even ultimately identify with the joke teller's point of view. As Meyer (2000) noted, this is the most unsympathetic form of rhetoric, since the opposing group does not get a say. With this type of humor, there is a clear divide between two beliefs or values.

Women and Humor

Women's humor has historically focused on two main trends: men as the target of differential humor or self-deprecating humor toward the woman telling the joke. As Bunkers (1997) observed, "Those who hold the power in a culture develop a preference for humor that victimizes the powerless, while the powerless develop a preference for self-victimizing humor" (p. 162). When women utilize humor, they are temporarily taking control of the discourse. Therefore, by focusing the conversation back onto men, they are missing the opportunity to concentrate on their own experiences. As Kotthoff (2006) observed when a person of lower status performs humor, that person is at least temporarily taking control of the conversation from those in a higher status; ultimately this can be a perilous act since the higher status may not want to relinquish control. To minimize any negative effects, the humor is often aimed at a "socially legitimate target" so that it is more likely to be accepted by all (Kotthoff, 2006, p. 10).

Consequently, when humor is directed toward men, particularly individual men, there is still a detrimental undertone. Bing (2004) remarked that humor that targets men ignores women and particularly conceals their lived experiences. By focusing on men, they are still at the forefront of the argument. Therefore, when women use men as the source of their humor, they are conforming to societal norms. Implicitly, men are still superior. This source of humor reinforces social stereotypes that imply what is acceptable and "normal" male and female behavior. Men remain the center of attention if they are the source of the humor (Bing, 2004). Furthermore, it reinforces the "natural" idea that men exist to dominate women. In contrast, women can use "inclusive humor" to stress perceived social problems without inevitably ridiculing men (Bing, 2004, p. 28). Carlson (1988) argued that joke tellers may accent the weaknesses that they actually view inside themselves. This derision ultimately goes beyond differentiation into a harsh binary opposition of "us" versus "the other." As Bing (2004) argued, "The most empowering feminist jokes are not those that frame males as oppressors and females as victims, but those that celebrate the values and perspectives of feminist women" (Bing, 2004, p. 22). This previous research frames the discussion of the difference between women's humor, jokes told by women, and feminist humor that expresses and critiques social and cultural norms.

Moreover, when women use men as the source of their humor, they are deriding individuals, rather than "struggling to negotiate their circumstances" (Merrill, 1988, p. 279). Women can still use humor to criticize and condemn social issues, but their targets don't need to be men (Bing, 2004). Traditional roles and dominant cultural values that serve to marginalize women could be the target of their humor. Social aspects that oppress a particular culture could be the focus of the humor instead of individually focusing on the characters who might be fighting against those limitations (Merrill, 1988). Identifying commonalities among women, rather than positioning them as an "other" to men would allow for greater discourse surrounding female experiences. Yet, when men are the target of the humor, the source of the humor remains directed at individuals, instead of broader systematic sources of oppression.

In addition, women may also choose self-deprecatory humor and use themselves and other women as the source of their jokes. Self-deprecation is conceptualized as "a form of self-censorship" (Russell, 2002, p. 3). Once again, this is hardly a subversive choice, since the binary codes of gender are still in place. Women are just as marginalized when they are the source of their own deprecatory humor. If female comedians perform powerless positions, they undermine their own social status (Gilbert, 1997). Because women have historically been associated with powerlessness, and humor is a powerful tool, women needed a way to "excuse" their aggressiveness and assertiveness in humor (Barreca, 1991). Thus, women who use humor as a source of marginality are still conforming to oppressive tendencies and reinforcing patriarchal ideas. "When the 'other' is culturally represented not only as different but as foreign – a 'thing' to be despised and feared, the result is a systematic objectification, devaluation and dehumanization of the 'other'" (Gilbert, 1997, p. 323). Thus, self-deprecating humor becomes socially acceptable because the joke teller is making fun of herself/himself (Barreca,

1991). Self-deprecation appears less harmful because it doesn't insult the audience, only the joke teller; however it can still endorse conventional values (Gilbert, 1997). Rather than directing humor at others, women deflect the source of their humor onto themselves (Barreca, 1991). This approach only serves to further oppress women instead of embodying feminist, conscious-raising perspectives.

Two Broke Girls

Two Broke Girls was applauded as the highest-testing pilot in CBS history – drama or comedy – even before its premiere (Sepinwall, 2011). The show premiered in September 2011 to the largest rating for a fall comedy premiere since September 2001; the show appeared in a special timeslot and 19.37 million viewers watched the premiere (Seidman, 2011). The second season premiered in a different timeslot from the first season and attracted 10.14 million viewers and a 3.7 ratings share with adults 18-49 (Kondolojy, 2012). The show was created by Whitney Cummings, a stand-up comedian, and Michael Patrick King, writer of *Sex and the City.*

Max and Caroline are the two main female characters of the CBS sitcom *Two Broke Girls.* The show presents these two characters as a mixed-match, female "odd-couple" for the twenty-first century. Max is garish, vulgar, and has always been working-class. Caroline is formerly wealthy, but since her father was sent to jail, she is broke; she has a sense of style, no street smarts, and a business degree. Together, the two women strive to start a business of their own to avoid continuing to waitress at a New York diner. The show mainly focuses on the girls' attempts to become successful business women and have their own cupcake shop. While male characters play a supporting role as co-workers and boyfriends, the series primarily focuses on these two women's triumphs and failures as they try to move beyond their working-class status.

Superficially, one might argue that Max and Caroline are the embodiment of Third Wave Feminism. As Rockler (2006) noted, "Third Wave feminism is better known for its focus on women's postmodern negotiation of individual subjectivities than it is on collective political action" (p. 249). Max and Caroline continue to work hard to achieve their business dreams and imply that their hard work will eventually lead to success. Therefore, their individual successes and failures will be a result of themselves and not any broader, systematic oppression to two females attempting to start a business. With this implied even playing field, Max and Caroline ignore broader concerns and emphasize individual achievement. This exemplifies the individualistic nature of Third Wave empowerment that emphasizes individualistic, rather than collectivistic ideals (Rockler, 2006).

Yet, it would be a simplistic conclusion to interpret that these two characters are strong endorsements of female empowerment when the humor that surrounds these women is extremely problematic. Most jokes are insulting and contain racial and classist stereotypes to the characters around them. Rather than presenting women to emulate and characters who demonstrate female empowerment, the show disparages the characters that surround the two women in an effort to make Max and Caroline seem superior. Their individual empowerment comes from the denigration of those around them.

While Max and Caroline strive to enhance their lives through the ownership of their own business, they work in a diner in the meantime. Their boss, Han, is a short Korean man, whose lack of American social customs and broken English are often the source of humor. The girls' co-worker, Oleg, is a Ukrainian cook at the diner. While physically unattractive, Oleg crassly attempts to seduce every woman he meets. Finally, there is Earl, the elderly African-American former jazz musician; he is the cashier at the diner and usually has one-line jokes. While there are various boyfriends throughout both seasons and Sophie, an upstairs neighbor who moves into Max and Caroline's building later in the first season, this analysis will focus on how the main characters contrast with these three supporting male characters on *Two Broke Girls* to examine the distinctions between women's humor and feminist humor.

This paper utilizes qualitative textual analysis as its method of examination because textual analysis delves beyond the surface level content of media examples to deliberate the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions (Fürsich, 2009). Using textual analysis allows this analysis to identify *Two Broke Girls* as a cultural artifact that contributes to the ways in which people construct their perceptions of feminist humor. As Brennen (2012) wrote, "researchers do not study texts to predict or control how individuals will react to messages but instead to understand how people use texts to make sense of their lives" (p. 194). Additionally, this paper utilizes purposive sampling, which includes strategically selecting episodes that exemplify humor theory and the

functions of humor; since casual observers of the show will not watch every single episode, this sampling method is more comparable to the average television viewer. Moreover, through thematic analysis several themes emerged during the research, most notably the practice of utilizing “the fool” stereotype as well as self-deprecatory humor to marginalize characters. Through this qualitative textual analysis that examines episodes from the first season and several episodes at the start of the second season, this paper questions the distinctions between women’s humor and feminist humor utilizing *Two Broke Girls* as an example.

“The Fool” as a Source of Humor

Sitcom history is full of foolish characters and it isn’t innovative to the genre. Butsch (2005) observed how the character of the fool has been used throughout the history of comedy from ancient Greece to the Renaissance to vaudeville and through current sitcoms. However, Butsch (2005) highlighted that foolishness in sitcoms is typically correlated with a person’s inferior status. Consequently, while the character of the fool is not common to the genre of comedy, television sitcoms are unique in their perpetuation of the fool as a tool for indicating a person’s substandard role in society. Butsch (2005) wrote:

> Inferior statuses are represented using negative stereotypes of women, blacks and other minorities, the old and the young, and other low statuses. Already embedded in the larger culture, these stereotypes are useful for their familiarity…The foolishness in sitcoms is almost always attached to a character’s lower status, by representing well-known stereotypes of this status group (p. 112).

Two Broke Girls demonstrates the connection between character stereotypes and "the fool" persona through its supporting male characters. Han conforms to several cultural stereotypes. For instance, Han cannot speak English properly and often misinterprets the meaning of words. For example, in the episode “And the Pearl Necklace”, Han attempts to add additional electrical wiring in the diner. He holds up an electrical outlet and comments, "This thing has been plugged more than the Kardashian sisters.” Han's opinions and perspectives on situations are also relegated by Max and Caroline. As soon as Han uses broken English, the girls are quick to mock him. Perhaps the most frequent source of humor surrounding Han is his height. Han is the shortest character on the show and both Max and Caroline are significantly taller than him. In the episode "And the Rich People Problems”, Max remarks “There’s nothing big about him. He looks like I won him in a bear claw machine.” After the girls make several jokes about Han's flaws in the episode "And the Cupcake War”, Han runs away. Max remarks, “Great…now he’ll run under the stove.” The jokes about Han's height further relegate his character by highlighting his physical shortcomings. By emphasizing Han's flaws in speaking English and his height, the show underscores Max and Caroline's authority over Han. Even though Han is technically their boss, Max and Caroline use humor to relegate his status as inferior.

Similarly, Oleg, a Ukrainian cook at the diner, also conforms to sexist stereotypes that foreign men are only interested in sex. Despite his less than traditionally desirable physical appearance, Oleg attempts to seduce every woman that he meets with cheap one-liners. For instance, in “And the Pearl Necklace”, a diner customer asks, “Is there anything special tonight?” Oleg responds, “Yes, here I am.” When Caroline needs money to go to the dentist in the episode “And the Cupcake War”, Oleg agrees to loan her the money for a "sexual favor" to be determined later. In “And the ‘90s Horse”, Oleg invites Max and Caroline back to his place, where he claims there are already several girls waiting to have a sexual encounter with him and they could join them. In “And the Pretty Problem,” Oleg tells the girls, “Once you go Ukraine, you will scream with sex pain!” When Oleg finally meets a girl he wants to date, he expresses that his idea of exclusivity is to stop showing his penis to Max and Caroline (“And the Pearl Necklace”). In addition, Oleg can turn any word, phrase, or overall conversation into a sex-riddled pun. He uses sausage, salami, and celery to express his sexual desires in common conversation. Therefore, Oleg's entire characterization revolves around his overtly hegemonic sexist tendencies. Through this stereotypical characterization, Oleg embodies the fool persona.

Finally, Earl, the elderly African-American former jazz musician, is the cashier at the diner. Yet rather than focus on his musical talent, the show chooses instead to emphasize other African-American stereotypes, such as that Earl is a thief and is an absentee father to many children. For example, Han wants to improve the diner by

adding a new state-of-the-art ordering system ("And the Pearl Necklace"). After Han walks away, Earl comments: "Ah, girls. We got big trouble. If he starts using a new system, I won't be able to use my old system where I skim something off the top!" Earl further explains that he gives the "extra" tips to Max and Caroline but the example still perpetuates the stereotype that African-American men are thieves. This stereotype is further continued in the next episode, "And the Hold-Up", when a robber enters the diner and holds the employees hostage at gunpoint. Earl advises Max: "I've been on both sides of this situation…and the best thing to do is play along." Once again, the source of the humor stems from the African-American stereotype that black men are criminals. Moreover, Earl is excited that his son is coming to visit in "And the Pre-Approved Credit Card." He is especially thrilled that *this* son is coming to visit if "it's the one he's thinking of." This joke implies that Earl has multiple children, another common African-American stereotype. When his son, Darius, arrives at the diner, he reinforces the stereotype by commenting to his Dad that he doesn't: "know how far you threw your seed." As a result, Earl embodies two common African-American stereotypes: a thief and a neglectful father to many children, some he might not even know exist. Rather than focusing on Earl's positive attributes, the show emphasizes negative stereotypes to reduce Earl's status on the show.

Through these examples of Han, Oleg, and Earl, it is revealed that the source of the humor of the show focuses on the male characters as "fools." Even though Max and Caroline act and say foolish things occasionally, their characters are more complex and move beyond these common stereotypes. They are afforded the majority of screen time, given the most plot development, and the narrative concludes in a way that genuinely reflects positively on them. Max and Caroline are afforded more character development by the show, whereas the male characters are relegated to stereotypical attributes. When Max, Caroline, and the jokes presented on the show target the male characters, there is very little for anyone to feel empowered about. Rather a similar pattern develops in which the character of the fool is used to convey the message of inferiority. In the case of *Two Broke Girls,* the main characters are two strong, determined, hard-working female characters. This seems to suggest that female empowerment is achievable. However, the women are also surrounded by inadequate men, who have adopted the identity of the comedy fool. Han, Oleg, and Earl are stereotyped as sexist, uneducated, ignorant of social and cultural ideas, delinquent fathers, and even thieves. These qualities clearly label these men as poor role models, and thus inferior. Therefore, Max and Caroline, despite their occasional flaws, are the only two characters worthy of any emulation. Mills (2005) wrote:

> While each gender can only exist within the context of the other, the patriarchal nature of society means that, while masculinity may be seen as a problem, it is so primarily because of how that impacts upon women. The main way this takes place is through the normalization of masculinity and masculine concerns (p. 111).

By depicting the supporting male characters on the show as consistently inferior, the show actually endorses conventional masculinity. These two women are only given supremacy because these men are not "real men" who embrace hegemonic masculine qualities, such as physical strength, intelligence, occupational success, and upper middle-class status.

Butsch (1992) wrote of similar observance in family sitcoms. He noted that in television families, if there was a foolish spouse, it was typically the husband. *The Honeymooners* started this tradition where the husband or father does not have enough intelligence to act as the leader of the family. Consequently, the wife or mother must fill this role and make the important decisions for the family. While one might argue that this insinuates a gender role reversal in which women are receiving an equal amount of power in the family, it is actually the opposite. Since the woman is portrayed as smarter than the foolish man, she must take over his role. "What we end up with is a reversal of traditional gender roles where these guys are essentially incapable of taking their place at the head of the household" (Leistyna, 2009, p. 345). Therefore, the woman is the head of the household merely by default.

This is the result with Max and Caroline. A considerable amount of the humor of the show focuses on the incompetence and ineptitude of the male characters. They exist only to enhance the status of Max and Caroline. The women have no choice but to be perceived as superior and the characters with which the audience likely identifies with and supports. Who wouldn't encourage these women to succeed in their business endeavors to escape a diner where a chauvinist cook, a socially inept foreigner, and a thieving, delinquent African-American

were your co-workers? Thus, in order to have two strong, independent women as the female leads, the show adapts the sitcom tradition of the fool to their male counterparts; they assume the principal role because the male characters' lack of hegemonic masculine conformity necessitates it.

Consequently, the narrative of *Two Broke Girls* relies significantly on the superiority theory. Because the male characters are portrayed in such an inferior manner, the female characters are not necessarily breaking any social barriers. They seem content to find their own success, specifically in business; given the characters surrounding them, the show establishes a narrative in which the audience cheers for these two women to escape the male "fools" that surround them. The show embodies traditional women's humor by emphasizing the men as the target of the show's jokes. Max and Caroline gain more powerful roles simply because the men on the show are one dimensional stereotypes, incapable of pursuing or obtaining any meaningful contributions.

Yet there is no discussion or consideration for the broader systemic issues that these women face. Because they have each other, Max and Caroline will succeed. This raises the debate between Second Wave and Third Wave feminism, or the deliberation between personal, individual achievement and broader systemic change (Rockler, 2006). Here, the show does not address these concerns because the female characters will succeed through their own actions; the male characters represent negative examples of what could happen if they don't. However, the female characters will improve their own lives and only have themselves to blame if they do not. Systemic marginalization is not discussed or even acknowledged in *Two Broke Girls.* Max and Caroline are self-absorbed in their own lives, without a thought to other women who might also be facing similar social barriers. Not only do Max and Caroline show that there are no obstacles in their way, they also demonstrate a complete disregard for the social barriers that others may confront.

Self-deprecatory Humor

The second main theme to emerge from this analysis focuses on the function of humor, differentiation that is portrayed on *Two Broke Girls.* In his article, "Self-deprecatory Humour and the Female Comic", Russell (2002) argued that if female comedians want to be successful, they need to be self-deprecating. He highlights the path that Phyllis Diller and Joan Rivers blazed for female comedians today. "McGhee concluded that the female use of self-deprecatory humour may reflect an internalization of social values, but held out hope that 'changes in socialization' stemming from the 'women's liberation movement should modify . . . humour preferences among women'" (Russell, 2002, p. 2). However, through his analysis, Russell found most female comics to be self-deprecating, rather than empowering. He argued "The threat of a woman comic is multi-layered: she displays aggression, gains dominance (if successful) and, through her words and actions, challenges conventional definitions and power structures" (p. 4).

Yet, Mills (2005) observed:

> Studies show that men commonly use humour to mock others, thus reasserting their dominant role within communication, whereas women are only allowed by social convention to joke if they use the opportunity to mock themselves, contributing to their subordinate position (p. 111-112).

Self-deprecatory jokes abound on the show, but are most frequently observed coming from Max. When Max isn't providing self-deprecatory jokes, she is reinforcing others' offensive jokes. For example, the title for this paper comes from her mouth during the episode entitled "And the Pre-Approved Credit Card." Earl's son, Darius, has quit his job to pursue a career as a stand-up comedian. He believes his jokes are funny and Max agrees. However, the source of Darius's material is to reduce everyone he sees to a traditional stereotype. For example, when he first meets Caroline, he enacts the blonde stereotype that they are airheads that always end with the word "whatever." When Caroline doesn't bring him his soup immediately, Darius remarks "Look at blondie here: she's like, oh, my god, do black people even eat soup? It's like, whatever!" He also insults Han's height and broken English and Oleg's lack of hygiene. After each belittling joke, he remarks "You gotta laugh!" to which the target of his jokes responds, "Do you?" This set-up becomes a running joke throughout the episode. However, while the other characters on the show question the target of Darius's humor, it is Max who identifies

with and reinforces it. When Caroline challenges Darius's jokes, Max replies, "Caroline, come on. It's so wrong, it's right." Max's words have undertones of self-deprecation because Darius's jokes frequently target her as well.

The self-deprecatory humor exhibited within Max's and Darius's jokes also demonstrate identification humor. The joke teller assumes the point of view of what is humorous and relies on social inequalities and cultural stereotypes as the source of the humor. Max and Darius reaffirm traditional stereotypes through the jokes. If one of the other characters attempts to speak up, their voice is diminished with yet another joke from Max or Darius. Once again, the humor of the show misses an opportunity to utilize feminist humor. In these examples, there is a shared meaning between the characters that exhibits their group identity, a key aspect of the functions of humor (Lynch, 2002); however, that shared meaning relies on the negative aspects of cultural stereotypes. These characters could utilize identification and acknowledge the social barriers that they collectively face. They ultimately share many cultural values, but use that identification to find humor in other individuals instead of identifying cultural norms that could and should be challenged. As Gilbert (1997) observed, "self-deprecation is safe entertainment because it does not abuse or offend the audience—in fact, it *appears to* reaffirm hegemonic values" (p. 327). Unfortunately, that it is the type of humor emphasized in the show.

Ultimately, Max and Caroline are two women who are clearly designed as the champions of their own destiny and there is little doubt that the show, while providing them some obstacles along the way, will conclude with their triumphs in the end. However, it is not enough to examine only the women's behavior, dialogue, and plot points. Rather the context that these women are presented in warranted this examination. Max and Caroline are presented in a context that is problematic at best. The girls are surrounded by male characters who are reduced to inferior stereotypes that only serve to enhance Max and Caroline; the girls are superior and should be championed only because those around them are substandard.

Conclusions and Future Avenues of Research

At the beginning of this paper, I noted how women's humor embodies traditional, even hegemonic stereotypes, while feminist humor "empowers women to examine how we have been objectified and fetishized and to what extent we have been led to perpetuate this objectification" (Merrill, 1988, p. 279). Even though there are two female lead characters and the narrative of the episodes focuses on them, women's humor is the type of humor observed on *Two Broke Girls.* Moreover, I interpret that the themes of the stereotypical fool and self-deprecation among the characters emphasizes differentiation, in a negative manner. As opposed to emphasizing feminist humor as "rebellious and self-affirming" (Bing, 2004), the differentiation observed now is one of marginalization. This ultimately disregards an excellent opportunity to engage in feminist humor that would encourage identification, or even clarification forms of humor, to emphasize marginalized individuals. Humor can subvert hierarchies and challenge the societal status quo, only when uniting functions of humor, such as identification and clarification, are utilized.

Moreover, superiority humor can still be a vital tool for revolutionary forms of humor; the solution lies in the source of the humor. Bing (2004) observed "humor can be a double-edged weapon, providing a legitimate means of subverting authority" (p. 23). While studying female comedians in the nineteenth century, Carlson (1988) discovered that a few women could use comedy as a form of consciousness-raising. However, their humor was based on the realization that "the social order was askew" and only a new system would solve that problem (Carlson, 1988, p. 314). Merrill (1988) hoped that in the future:

> A feminist comic sensibility would be one in which the details of women's lives were presented in such a manner as to allow the female audience to mock our traditional roles, to "question their sanctity their quality of inevitability" (88). Oppressive contexts and restrictive values would be ridiculed, rather than the characters who are struggling against such restrictions (p. 275).

Thereby, subversive humor would challenge the power relations and hierarchies in society as opposed to finding humor in individual sources. Humor would need to evolve from a source of individualistic differentiation to one of identification and clarification of collectivistic desires. Superiority could still be a useful tool for humor as long as the target of the humor is inequality in society, rather than specific individuals. As Lee (1992) argued, feminist

humor ought to illuminate the social structures that trivialize women. Thus far, that is something that appears to be lacking either in media representation or in communication research.

In addition, sarcasm warrants future research on its collectivistic and feminist possibilities. Bunkers (1997) wrote that sarcastic humor must identify the preposterousness of female stereotypes so that society can move beyond them. Several authors have discussed the way in which the sitcom *Roseanne* attempted this (Karlyn, 2003; Lee, 1992; Senzani, 2010). Multiple authors further noted that while *Roseanne* contradicted stereotypes regarding class and gender, the show failed to display any broader systematic consequences (Lee, 1992; Morreale, 2003). Therefore, *Roseanne* likely did not have identification as a function for humor. Instead, Lee (1992) concluded *Roseanne* used "a strategy of resistance that subverts gender identities defining women as trivial, subordinate and marginalised, through the use of mockery, parody and feminist representation" (p. 96). I believe that future research could contribute to this continuing discussion of the differences of self-deprecatory and sarcastic humors. More research is needed that analyzes the functions of sarcastic humor and its feminist possibilities. As Bunkers (1997) wrote:

> Social criticism is the cornerstone of sarcastic humor, which provides an outlet for anger that has been repressed for too long. The function of sarcastic humor, as used by women, is to turn the laughter outward rather than inward, to expose the sex role stereotyping in our culture and to reject, either implicitly or explicitly, these rigidly prescribed images of women (p. 163).

Media texts that use sarcastic humor, rather than self-deprecatory, provide an opportunity to begin a dialogue about shared oppression and the collectivistic action that one could take.

Despite the overall conclusion that *Two Broke Girls* rarely demonstrates feminist humor, I remain convinced that media texts can present subversive feminist representations that rise above maintaining the status quo. As previous authors argued, there are ways to express feminist humor, including changing the target of the humor and utilizing the functions of humor to enlighten the audience about social justice concerns. When conscious-raising becomes the focus of the narrative, depicting feminist humor can be possible. Moreover, I interpret humor to be the preeminent genre where interpretations of cultural values can be examined and challenged. Just as superiority theory proposes that there is a winner and a loser within the humor, it is my hope that future research will highlight the collectivistic subversive possibilities in popular media texts, rather than solely emphasizing the inequalities. Humor is a powerful rhetorical tool and if any genre can begin the debate about social inequalities in America, I remain convinced that humor is the cultural entity that can start those discussions.

References

Barreca, R. (1991). *They used to call me Snow White: Women's strategic use of humor.* New York, NY: Viking Press.

Berger, A. (2010). What's so funny about that? *Society, 47*(1), 6-10. doi:10.1007/s12115-009-9281-y.

Bing, J. (2004). Is feminist humor an oxymoron? *Women & Language, 27*(1), 22-33.

Brennen, B. (2012). *Qualitative research methods for media studies*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Bunkers, S. L. (1997). Why are these women laughing? The power and politics of women's humor. In J. Boskin *The humor prism in 20th century America* (159-171). Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.

Butsch, R. (1992). Class and gender in four decades of television situation comedy: Plus ça change. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 9*(4), 387-399.

Butsch, R. (2005). Five decades and three hundred sitcoms about class and gender. In G. R. Edgerton & B. C. Rose (Eds.), *Thinking outside the box: A contemporary television genre reader* (pp. 111-135). Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky.

Carlson, A. C. (1988). Limitations on the comic frame: Some witty American women. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 74*, 310-322.

DiCioccio, R.L. (2012). *Humor communication: Theory, impact, and outcomes.* Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing.

Fürsich, E. (2009). In defense of textual analysis: Restoring a challenged method for journalism and media studies. *Journalism Studies, 10*(2), 238-252.

Gilbert, J. R. (1997). Performing marginality: Comedy, identity, and cultural critique. *Text and Performance Quarterly, 17*(4), 317-330.

Karlyn, K. R. (2003). Roseanne: Unruly woman as domestic goddess. In J. Morreale (Ed.), *Critiquing the sitcom: A reader* (251-261). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Kondolojy, A. (2012, September 25). *Monday final review: 'How I Met Your Mother', 'Mike and Molly', 'Voice', 'Bones' adjusted up; 'DTWS', 'Revolution', 'Castle' 'Hawaii Five-0' & 'LA Complex' adjusted down.* Retrieved from http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2012/09/25/monday-final-ratings-tt/150036/

Kotthoff, H. (2006). Gender and humor: The state of the art. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *38*(1), 4-25.

Landay, L. (2005). I Love Lucy: Television and gender in postwar domestic ideology. In M. M. Dalton & L. R. Linder (Eds.), *The sitcom reader: America viewed and screwed* (pp. 87-98). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Lee, J. (1992). Subversive sitcoms: Roseanne as inspiration for feminist resistance. *Women's Studies, 21*(1), 87-101.

Leistyna, P. (2009). Social class and entertainment television: What's so real and new about reality TV? In R. Hammer & D. Kellner (Eds.), *Media/cultural studies: Critical approaches* (pp. 339-359). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Lynch, O. H. (2002). Humorous communication: Finding a place for humor in communication research. *Communication Theory, 12*(4), 423-445.

Merrill, L. (1988). Feminist humor: Rebellious and self-affirming. *Women's Studies, 15*(1-3), 271-280.

Meyer, J. C. (2000). Humor as a double-edged sword: Four functions of humor in communication. *Communication Theory, 10*(3), 310-331.

Mills, B. (2005). *Television sitcom.* London: British Film Institute.

Morreale, J. (2003). *Critiquing the sitcom*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Morreall, J. (2009). *Comic relief: A comprehensive philosophy of humor.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Perks, L. G. (2012). The ancient roots of humor theory. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research,* 25(2), 119-132. doi:10.1515/humor-2012-0007

Rockler, N. R. (2006). "Be your own windkeeper": "Friends," feminism, and rhetorical strategies of depoliticization. *Women's Studies in Communication, 29*(2), 244-262.

Russell, D. (2002). Self-deprecatory humour and the female comic: Self-destruction or comedic construction? *Thirdspace: A journal of feminist theory & culture, 2*(1), 1-22.

Seidman, R. (2011, September 20). *Monday broadcast final ratings: 'Two and a Half Men,' '2 Broke Girls,' DTWS adjusted up; 'Castle' adjusted down.* Retrieved from http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2011/09/20/monday-broadcast-final-ratings-two-and-a-half-men-2-broke-girls-dwts-adjusted-up-castle-adjusted-down/104333/

Senzani, A. (2010). Class and gender as a laughing matter?: The case of "Roseanne." *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research, 23*(2), 229-253. doi:10.1515/HUMR.2010.011

Sepinwall, A. (2011, September 19). *Review: CBS' 2 Broke Girls' & NBC's 'Whitney.'* Retrieved from http://www.hitfix.com/blogs/whats-alan-watching/posts/review-cbs-2-broke-girls-nbcs-whitney

Ohio Communication Journal
Volume 56 – March 2018, pp. 59-68

Rhetorical Re-Framing and Counter Narratives: An Ideological Critique of the Christian Hip-Hop Artist Lecrae Moore

Robert Razzante
jw Smith

This essay explores the burgeoning popularity of Christian hip-hop artists. We examine how one particular artist (Lecrae Moore) manages to achieve narrative fidelity, cultural integrity, and ideological transformation through both his music and rhetorical presence. Utilizing an ideological methodological approach, the relationship between rap music, hip-hop culture and the black church is contextually addressed in this analysis. We conclude that a song with a secular aesthetic and an implicit sacred message may be more persuasive in challenging the dominant narratives of violence, drugs, and the objectification of women.

Keywords: Hip-hop, religion, ideology, counter-narrative, cultural-aesthetics

Fisher (1984) suggests one develops an epistemology through the use of narratives and storytelling. The degree to which a story resonates with an audience depends on the source's credibility. A source may increase their credibility through what Fisher (1985) calls, *narrative fidelity*. Narrative fidelity is, "the 'truth qualities' of the story, the degree to which it accords with the logic of good reasons: the soundness of its reasoning and the value of its values (p. 349)." Hip-hop scholars posit rap music as a specific mode of storytelling that shares insight into the experience of black U.S. Americans (Miller, Hodge, Coleman, & Chaney, 2014; White Hodge, 2010).

In a content analysis of the top-rated rap music videos for 2008, more than half of the songs referenced sexual misogyny, violence, and sexual desire whereas a third referred to religious symbols (Morgan et al., 2012). As a result, a religious hip-hop artist may lack credibility due to their message not maintaining narrative fidelity to the dominant narrative of what rap music videos portray. However, Lecrae Moore, has been able to maintain credibility to both hip-hop culture as well as his Christian faith, all while producing rap music.

Lecrae released his first recording, *Real Talk*, in 2004. However, Lecrae turned from an underground rap artist to a mainstream sensation in 2013 when his recording, *Gravity,* was recognized as a finalist for the "Best Gospel Album" at the fifty-fifth Annual Grammy Award ceremony (Moore, 2013a). As of 2016, Lecrae published an autobiography articulating the role of his faith during his life struggles through adversity. Lecrae's story and music is worth analyzing as a case study of how a hip-hop artist can simultaneously practice their faith through all while producing rap music. As such, an ideological critique allows for us to examine how Lecrae is able to maintain narrative fidelity to both ideologies while constructing his own hybrid musical identity

In this essay we primarily analyze an interview done by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) with the Christian hip-hop artist, Lecrae (Moore, 2013c). This critique will include several citations from the interview, along with quotations from specific lyrics that illustrate Lecrae's message. Lecrae's interview and lyrics provide a foundation from which we examine his ability to simultaneously maintain cultural integrity to both hip-hop culture and Christianity. In particular, we attempt to examine the rhetorical strategies of the gospel singer, Lecrae, and how he is able to reframe the image of hip-hop culture while incorporating a sacred message.

Robert J. Razzante (M.Ed., Ohio University). Robert J. Razzante is a second year doctoral student in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University. Rob is interested in how people come to communicate through prejudice toward mutual understanding.

jw Smith (Ph.D., Wayne State University). jw is an associate professor of communication in the School of Communication Studies at Ohio University. His research specializations include communication and disability as well as African American Rhetoric.

Lecrae Interview

In 2004, Ben Washer and Lecrae Moore founded Reach Records, a Christian hip-hop record label. In a joint statement on their website, Washer and Moore (2017) note that Reach Records serves as a place for creating music from artists who are, "unashamed to be themselves and remain true to their convictions." Furthermore, the goal of Reach Records is to, "change the way people see the world." As such, Washer and Moore set out to challenge the status quo that hip-hop culture and religion are incommensurable. The interview with Lecrae serves two main purposes. First, the interview offers a record of Lecrae's vision. Second, the interview provides specific examples of how Lecrae finds commensurability to both Christianity and hip-hop culture. It is within this commensurability that we argue Lecrae finds narrative fidelity to both ideologies through a hybrid musical identity.

Lecrae's interview with PBS's Religion & Ethics Newsweekly Series aired on February 8, 2013. The Religion & Ethics Newsweekly Series is known for, "providing distinctive, cutting-edge news coverage and analysis of national and international events in the ever-changing religious world" ("About the series," 2013). The title of PBS's interview with the Christian hip-hop artist is, "Lecrae extended interview: Can you be Christian and rap at the same time?" In the eight minutes and twenty-six seconds video, Lecrae speaks on the following topics of his: past, lyrical style, strategies in connecting to his audience, and personal goals through his music.

Three of Lecrae's songs and music videos are interwoven into the PBS interview as segment dividers: "Tell the World" (2012a) at the beginning, "Just Like You" (2010) at one minute and fifty seconds, and "Mayday" (2012b) at four minutes and thirty-seven seconds. All three music videos demonstrate Lecrae's lyrical style in conjunction with sights and sounds of hip-hop culture.

Defining a Christian Hip-Hop Artist

Research on Lecrae is limited, but scholars and journalists across a wide variety of disciplines have researched themes that appear in Lecrae's music. For example, scholars in the field of African American Studies, Communication Studies, and Hip-Hop Studies have explored the themes of: African American rhetoric, the social implications of hip-hop culture and rap music, the black church, and identity. In this review of literature, we will focus on a few sources that highlight the four categories.

African American Rhetoric

According to Cummings & Moore (2003), there are six principles that create the African American cosmology: "the centrality of Jesus; the symbolic importance of the word *freedom* as a communal worshiper; intense enthusiasm; belief in personal conversion of the individual worshiper; recognition of the African heritage; and commitment to racial parity, justice, and equality" (p. 62). Cosmology is the way one sees the world in which they live. Lecrae's cosmology heavily influences his lyrics, and by understanding Lecrae's cosmology, it is then possible to get an understanding of Lecrae's message. Carroll (1966) contends that "a change in language can transform our appreciation of the cosmos" (p. 365).

Rap music has become a source of communal identification for its black audience (Rose, 1994). Parmar (2005) posits that through the use of personal experience, rappers become critical educators that use their lyrics as a way to encourage transformative dialogue. More specifically, rap music can be used as an art form to interpret different representations of African Americans in the media. Subsequently, messages in rap music expose how culture, knowledge and power play a role in that representation. Finally, African American rhetoric through rap music influences the cosmology of artists and listeners. In order to better understand how Lecrae is able to use African American rhetoric and Christianity as tools for change, norms of the black church must next be considered.

The Black Church

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) identify the three main pillars of "priestly and prophetic functions" as: relationships, liberation, and community (p. 320). Relationships, liberation, and community within the black community serve as an historical foundation from which Lecrae bases his lyrical messages. We place extra focus on the three main pillars of priestly and prophetic functions in order to examine Lecrae's lyrical content. Because Lecrae is a hip-hop artist who sings about his faith, he may be considered an evangelist or preacher of the Christian faith.

According to Alkebulan (2003), "the effective African preacher or lecturer understands the transformative power of the word" (p 30). In contrasting written history and oral history, Lecrae is able to use the power of spoken word to transform his static audience into aware and active consumers of his sacred and secular message. African philosophy incorporates sacred and secular synergistically, rather than separating the two (Kirk-Duggan & Hall, 2011). Lecrae's lyrical content serves as a medium through which he binds the sacred with the secular to reach his audience. In building on the concept of oral communication role in the Black Church, we turn now to the theme of rap music.

Rap Music

Hip-hop as a co-culture was formed by the African American community in the 1970s. According to Parmar (2009), hip-hop culture consists of four specific practices: turntablism (DJing), b-bopping, graffiti art, and rap music. According to Miller et al. (2014),

> "Hip Hop culture has seemingly transcended its initial 'fad' trope and developed into more than just a musical genre; it is a voice; it is an identity; it is a movement; it is a force; it is a community of people seeking justice and higher learning; it is an environment for those seeking spiritual solace and cathartic release; it is performance art; it is, as KRS-One has argued, a place where both marginal and mainstream voices can be heard and flourish." (p. 6)

Essentially, rap is an art form where artists express a marginalized, counter-narrative, through the medium of music.

As previously stated, rap music may be conceptualized as African American rhetoric that unites its audience. Biggs (2012) analyzed how rap music and spoken poetry stem from indigenous epistemology as a mode for understanding marginalized experiences. In the African community, knowledge is passed from one generation to another through oral history. Based on similar principles as West African griots, hip-hop artists articulate lived experiences through spoken word. Rap music as a counter-narrative particularly exposes knowledge from a marginalized point of view with efforts to claim self-authorship of racial, political, and economic issues.

Barnes (2008) explores the history and creation of a genre of music called Contemporary Christian Music (CCM). Under the umbrella term of CCM, hip-hop artists who sing about their faith may fit in the smaller labels of Holy Hip-Hop, Christian Hip-Hop, Christian Rap, and Gospel Rap (Harris, 2014). Whatever the label may be, Belcher and Haridakis (2013) suggest five reasons why people listen to music: to pass time, to manage moods, for the content, for the aesthetics, and self-expression. An audience may conceptualize Lecrae as a Holy Hip-Hop artist, Christian Hip-Hop, Christian Rapper, or Gospel Rapper, but audience members might just see Lecrae as a hip-hop artist first.

Identity

Clay (2003) postulates how the identity of black youth can be conceptualized through the lens of hip-hop culture as a form of cultural capital. Clay asserts that the cultural capital of hip-hop validates a black identity that has been historically marginalized. Black youth who embrace the cultural capital of hip-hop culture do so as a means to understand inclusion and exclusion and how it relates to racial and economic identity. However, juxtaposed to religious identity, hip-hop culture may seem trivial.

Religious southern Calvinists see rap as "the ugly realities of urban communities under assault by poverty, violence, and racial injustice. At its worst, it seems to celebrate the horrors of gang violence, rape and misogyny, hostility toward gays and immigrants, and an anarchic gun culture" (Moore, 2013c, p. 26). The disapproval of certain factions of Christianity toward rap music is essential in understanding the dominant narrative of hip-hop culture when paired with religion. Moore's description of the Calvinist perspective provides a foundation from which to examine the tension between the dogmatic ideology of religion and the counter-narrative perspective from hip-hop culture. Through his rap music, Lecrae reframes the identity of rap music enthusiasts who happen to be spiritual beings too.

In addition to analyzing the audience's identity, it is important to examine the identity of Lecrae himself. Brown-White (2003) emphasizes how "harmony and balance should be attained without the speaker losing integrity, meaning without divesting the person's cultural orientation" (p. 266). Brown-White introduces a paradox that

expresses the balance of cultural integrity a Christian hip-hop artist may need to endure. The idea of cultural integrity is crucial in observing how Lecrae is able to balance a secular and sacred image simultaneously.

Method

Performing a written rhetorical criticism of traditionally oral cultures can create a paradox. However, it is through writing that one can deeply explore the contents of a text. More specifically, Ong (2013) notes that, "literacy can be used to reconstruct for ourselves the pristine human consciousness which was not literate at all…Such reconstruction can bring a better understanding of what literacy itself has meant in shaping man's [sic] consciousness toward and in high-technology cultures (pp. 14-15). As such, our ideological critique serves as a means to explore how Lecrae constructs an identity as a hip-hop artist who happens to sing about his faith. We perform our critique though analyzing an orally recorded interview alongside the lyrical content of his music. Such a combination allows for us to maintain integrity to both the orality of Lecrae's music and self-concept as seen through his lyrical content.

We analyze Lecrae's interview with PBS through the lens of an ideological critique. We use the ideological method because it allows critics to "look beyond the surface structure of an artifact to discover the beliefs, values, and assumptions it suggests" (Foss, 2009, p. 209). More specifically, this method enables us to examine the dominant ideology of hip-hop, and how the dominant ideology is demystified and reframed by the Christian hip-hop artist, Lecrae. After uncovering the dominant ideology of hip-hop, we compare and contrast the dominant narrative of hip-hop culture with Lecrae's counter-narrative of what constitutes hip-hop culture. We finally analyze how the dominant ideology of hip-hop is reinforced through social forces, and how Lecrae is able to challenge the dominant ideology through his music.

In this ideological critique, we are specifically interested in the themes of Christianity and hip-hop culture in relation to Lecrae as a Christian rap artist. In the scope of this essay, we critique the dominant ideology for hip-hop culture which "sees structural and social evil as a given, to be endured and raged against rather than appealed to" (Moore, 2013c). The dominant ideology for Christianity used in this essay is "characterized by an emphasis on humanity's depravity, God's sovereignty, and divine election" (p. 24). This study examines the rhetorical strategies employed by Lecrae, and how he is able to re-conceptualize the image of rap music. Through his music, Lecrae demonstrates how one can bring two distinct cultures together to form a new culture that embraces both Christianity and hip-hop culture. We argue that, through navigating ideological tensions, Lecrae is able to maintain narrative fidelity to both while creating a hybrid musical identity.

We organize our critique into four different sections: need for a role model, cultural connotations, relating with the audience, and transformation, redemption, and liberation. In each section we attempt to examine how Lecrae's ideology co-exists with the separate ideologies of Christianity and hip-hop culture. Each section begins with a quote from Lecrae's interview with PBS, followed by quotations from four of Lecrae's songs. We begin by taking a look at how Lecrae addresses the issue of finding a role model in hip-hop music.

Need for a Role Model

"I didn't grow up with, you know, just like these positive male influences who said, 'hey son,' you know, 'this is how you do this, this is how you do this,' you know. The men that I had in my life, did the best that they knew how, and um, they didn't grow up with positive male influences, so it was really kind of just a trial and error deal. And I really began to look to, um, obviously to hip-hop for wisdom and guidance" (Moore, 2013b, 0:58).

Belcher and Haridakis (2013) posits that one of the main reasons why people listen to music is for self-expression, and finding one's identity in music. In his song "Just Like You" (Moore, 2010), Lecrae tells a story of how he grew up desperate for a positive male influence and how his drug-dealing uncles failed to fulfill that role:

> I got this emptiness inside that got me fighting for approval 'cause I missed out on my daddy saying,
> way to go,
> And get that verbal affirmation on know how to treat a woman,
> Know how to fix an engine,
> That keep the car running.

> So now I'm looking at the media and I'm following what they feed me,
> Rap stars, trap stars,
> Whoever wants to lead me
> Even though they lie they still tell me that they love me,
> They say I'm good at bad things at least they proud of me.

As the song progresses, Lecrae tells the audience how his faith helped him find his positive male influence in Jesus. More specifically, Lecrae redirects his message from being just like his uncles, to being just like Jesus. Lecrae begins to follow his uncles because they were the only ones that showed him affection. However, the affection his uncles showed him was not the type of love he was pursuing. Lecrae combines the ideologies of Christianity and hip-hop by showing how one can fight against oppression by escaping through one's faith.

In contrast to the Calvinist ideological perceptions of rap music, Lecrae chooses to sing about his faith rather glorifying misogyny, drugs, or crime. Lecrae's counter-narrative illuminates the hardships youth may have when they lack a positive role model. Rather than falling in line with the dominant ideology that young black males turn toward drugs and crime, Lecrae offers an alternative perspective. Lecrae's faith guided him through the uncertainty of not having positive male role models. In the next section, we further explore Lecrae's motive in demystifying the negative connotations associated with hip-hop culture and rap music.

Cultural Connotations

"Culturally, it [rap] has been used as something that's negative and bad, but I think you can take it and use it for redemptive purposes and helpful purposes as well" (Moore, 2013b, 5:53).

Hip-hop tends to portray an image of "hypermasculinity, violence, and sexuality" (Chang, 2006, p. 24). The dominant narrative reveals a connotation of hip-hop that is tied to the "consumption of commodities-cars, jewelry, and women in particular" (Watts, 2004, p. 24). Even though hypermasculinity, violence, and sexuality may be a dominant ideology of hip-hop culture, Lecrae reclaims hip-hop culture as a culture that rectifies the image of women in rap music. In his song, "I Love You" (Moore, 2010), Lecrae expresses his love for a particular woman rather than objectifying her:

> If your lady love God and you gotta good girl
> Stay with her, pray with her, take her on a date
> Tell her you appreciate...
> How she love me, how she cares
> And how she's every woman everywhere,
> And baby I'm sorry for all the days I let you down
> But I got something to say, I love you girl.

Even though the aesthetic sound of the song can be categorized as rap, the lyrics may not jibe with what one defines as the dominant ideology of hip-hop culture. Instead of degrading women, Lecrae sings his appreciation for what this particular woman does for him. Lecrae combines the ideologies of Christianity and hip-hop by showing that through the love of a significant other, one can find salvation.

Morgan et al.'s (2012) content analysis of rap music suggests that rap artists sing about hypermasculinity, violence, and sexuality more so than one's faith. Because a majority of rap songs portray this image, the dominant ideology of rap music is reified through misogynistic lyrics and videos. However, it takes artists like Lecrae to share an alternative ideology in order to reconstruct an ideology of rap music that can raise awareness for social justice and religious appreciation. In order for the counter-narrative to dissemble the hypermasculine, violent, and sexual image of hip-hop culture, audience members need more exposure to these alternative messages.

Relating with the Audience

"Over the years I've been learning to one, make good music, but two, resonate and relate with people and not be so into trying to give a theological discourse in four minutes in a song. But maybe there's a song that needs to be written about my past or maybe there's a song that needs to be written about a relationship between me and my

father who I don't have a good relationship with. Those are the types of things I think people resonate and relate to" (Moore, 2013b, 6:33).

The toughest job for any Christian hip-hop artist is the ability to, "bridge the divide between pop culture and the old, old story" (Moore, 2013b). In order for Lecrae to appeal to both Christianity and hip-hop, he must come up with music that has a hip-hop aesthetic and an either implicit or explicit lyrical connection to Christianity. In his song "Confessions" (2012c), Lecrae rearticulates the meaning of being wealthy:

> Look, I ain't gonna pretend that car and my crib
> Give me worth and meaning 'cuz I know they never did
> Them numbers in my bank account are no reason for livin'
> And sleepin' with bad women really doesn't keep me driven
> I'm sure this man sittin' beside me is beside himself
> Tryna' find himself
> Yeah, he flyin' first class thinkin' everyone behind him is a peon
> Goin' home to a model chick he prolly gon' cheat on
> He'll be empty for eons; you know what I be on
> Money don't solve it all, man, look what happen to Dion
> I bought my dream house, but only made me wake up
> It all falls down even if you got ya' cake up

Hamlet (2012) posits how successful preachers are those that can, "communicate within the cultural milieu of the people" (p. 94). Lecrae is successful because he realizes that too many biblical verses may turn a portion of his audience away. However, the way he manages to subtly hint toward his faith in his lyrics while also producing rap music enables Lecrae to appeal to diverse audiences. His implicit themes please those who listen for the hip-hop aesthetic as well as those who actively listen for the Christian message. In negotiating his identity through music, Lecrae is able to balance both ideologies of Christianity and hip-hop at the same time without sacrificing either one.

In Lecrae's interview with PBS, he mentioned how he wanted to stay away from preaching to his audience. Later in the interview he mentioned how critics call him a Christian hip-hop artist, but he would rather be conceptualized as a rapper who happens to sing about his faith. In stating this, Lecrae strategically reframes his identity away from a Christian artist to that of a hip-hop artist first. Labeling himself primarily a hip-hop artist appeals to those who listen to rap music for the aesthetic sound. In addition to the hip-hop aesthetic, Lecrae's music happens to contain the Christian message some audience members seek.

Transformation, Redemption, and Liberation

"As you move through my song, and my soundscape, you're going to hear: a fall, a pain, and problems of life. You're going to hear, um, you know, the redeeming portions of life and how things can be redeemed and there's hope, and you're gonna hear that all weaved in. And I'd be crazy, you know, not to talk about the thing that's most passionate to me, and it is my faith. You know, how can I leave that out? It's all that I am, and it defines me so you gonna get that in my music as well" (Moore, 2013b, 7:55).

Barnes (2008) demonstrates the three divisions in Contemporary Christian Music (CCM): separational, integrational, and transformational. Each division offers a distinct purpose portrayed by different lyrical styles. A separational lyrical style includes direct theological discourse, whereas an integrational style chooses to leave theological discourse out of the lyrics. However, a transformational style uses both the aesthetic and lyrical elements to move its audience. In his song "Fuego" (Moore, 2012d), Lecrae uses a combination of metaphors and slight hints toward his faith as a way to provide vivid imagery:

> Light the sky up change your bio
> Live for something more than things you buy up
> Serve and save learn and change
> Trust in the king who can turn this thang
> Yeah they ain't every seen a shine like this

Look up they never see the sky like this
I'm on and this little light I got
Imma let it shine til the day I drop
Heart quit pumping only way I stop
Til then I'm a light post on your block.

Former Kansas City mayor, Emanuel Cleaver II, proposed that the way to achieve liberation is through, "community, relational ethics, and human relationships with the supernatural, others, and oneself" (Brown-White, 2003, p. 266). Lecrae pushes for liberation in a political world, but he also pushes for salvation in a religious world simultaneously. Lecrae's transformative message in this music was similar to Cleaver II's motives as a mayor. Lecrae's most popular songs are those that rely on the aesthetics of hip-hop music as a means to persuade his audience to engage with his lyrics. In attracting audience members through a hip-hop aesthetic, he then creates an opportunity to share the transformational message of his faith.

In an interview with CNN (Almasy, 2010), Lecrae states that, "every rapper is a preaching something. They are either preaching that you can find satisfaction in a million dollars or fifty women, or that you are not a real man unless you are a killer" (p. 2). In essence, Lecrae's motivation for his music lies in providing an alternative narrative of rap music and Christianity. Rather than singing along with the dominant ideology of violence, drugs, and the objectification of women, Lecrae uses his rap music for transformation, redemption, and liberation for himself and his audience.

We conceptualize Lecrae as a hip-hop artist who either implicitly or explicitly preaches a sacred message in a secular world. Lecrae is able to spread his faith and not have to rely on the church for help in disseminating his message. More specifically, Lecrae strategically utilizes rap music as a medium to spread his message to those who might not necessarily hear his message otherwise. Lecrae answers the question that there *can* be a Christian hip-hop artist, and a successful one too.

Discussion

In this essay we analyzed how the Christian hip-hop artist, Lecrae, was able to share the message of his faith through the medium of rap music. Even though he is recognized as a gospel artist, Lecrae categorizes himself as a hip-hop artist who happens to sing about his faith (Moore, 2013b). Though his music, Lecrae his able to navigate the tension between Christianity and hip-hop culture. Through such tension, we argue that Lecrae is able to maintain narrative fidelity to both. It is also important to point out that Lecrae is not the only artist that attempts to re-articulate the dominant ideology of Christianity and hip-hop culture.

Lecrae is a cofounder of a record label titled, Reach Records, which "aims to serve through art, to bring healing and show others a different way to view their world" (Reach Records, 2011). Lecrae's goal for the record label manifests through his lyrics in Fuego when he says, "Live for something more than things you buy up/ Serve and save learn and change." More specifically, he uses a rap aesthetic as a means to share a sacred message of service and change. Furthermore, through the art of rap music, Reach Records attempts to show that Christianity should not confine itself to the church, and that hip-hop culture should not confine itself to the misleading dominant ideology of misogyny, violence, and drugs. Lecrae and other artists of Reach Records are cultural diplomats that bring both Christianity and hip-hop together to create a new fashion of listening to music and to live one's faith.

What Lecrae and company are doing with Reach Records, is reminiscent of what artists have done in the past. For example, in the early 60s, Sam Cooke created his own record label, SAR, as a way to expose young gospel artists to a more secular audience. Around the same time, The Staple Singers of the 50s, 60s, and 70s, dedicated their music to preaching Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s message. Once Dr. King passed away, the Staple Singers turned toward social activism while still maintaining their gospel roots. Other artists such as, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Curtis Mayfield, and Aretha Franklin also balanced their gospel and secular identities while maintaining cultural integrity to their respective genres of music. What we see with Lecrae and Reach Records is not new, but rather a revival of previous generations' pioneers.

Finally, Slater and Rouner (2002) contend entertainment-education is a persuasive means to affecting one's attitudes, thoughts, and behavior. The more an audience member connects with the narrative, the more persuasive

the message becomes. For Lecrae, and other artists who balance a sacred and secular message, music becomes a persuasive means to sharing a counter-narrative. More specifically, a song with a secular aesthetic and an implicit sacred message may be more persuasive in challenging the dominant narratives of violence, drugs, and the objectification of women. It is within this liminal position that Lecrae maintains narrative fidelity to both audiences. That is, a listener may ascribe to the secular sound of rap music, the sacred message of his lyrical content, or a combination of both. Such narrative fidelity provides grand implications for the black church in the 21st century.

As the black church continues to grapple with the issues of remaining relevant in the 21st century, artists like Lecrae Moore will probably become more significant in this quest. We contend that a redefining of hip-hop culture will be essential in attracting younger audiences to the more traditional religious institutions in the black community. For far too long, the dominant rap music negative narratives have been allowed to dominate both the genre and the rationale for existence and success in the black community. Christian artists like Lecrae Moore who can "keep it real" but also keep it "religiously relevant" will only grow in popularity and persuasive appeal. We further postulate that these kind of artists will probably be the future "reachers and preachers" in the community. Future studies may employ a generic criticism as a means to further explore gospel rap music. That is, a generic criticism may enable one to explore how Lecrae's counter-narrative creates narrative resonance among many artists in gospel rap. Our current ideological criticism serves as a particular case study with Lecrae himself. However, rich insight might come from exploring the tension among many artists within gospel rap as a particular genre of music. Future studies might particularly examine how other artists within Lecrae's music label, 116, navigate the ideological tension between religion and hip-hop culture.

Conclusion

An ideological critique of Lecrae Moore offers readers insight an artists' identity negotiation between two seemingly disparate narratives. Rather than considering himself a Christian hip-hop artist, Lecrae identifies as a hip-hop artist who sings about his faith. As such, through his work, audiences are able to witness how Lecrae is able to successfully navigate the narratives of both hip-hop culture and Christianity as a means toward developing his hybrid-identity. Furthermore, audiences members may identify with Lecrae's narrative through transferability (Tracy, 2013). That is, through observing Lecrae's negotiation of identity, we advocate that audience members can learn how to negotiate disparate dominant narratives in their own identity construction.

References

About the series: religion & ethics newsweekly delivers one-of-a-kind news coverage from around the nation and the world. (2013). Available: http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/about-the-series/

Alkebulan, A. (2003). The spiritual essence of African American rhetoric. In R. Jackson II & E. Richardson (Eds.), *Understanding African American rhetoric: Classical origins to contemporary innovations* (pp. 23-40). New York, NY: Routledge.

Almasy, S. (2010, November 10). For the rapper, a new life, a new message. Retrieved from http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2010/11/10/for-the-rapper-a-new-life-a-new-message/

Barnes, S. (2008). Religion and rap music: An analysis of black church usage. *Review of Religious Research*, *49*(3), 319-338.

Belcher, J., & Haridakis, P. (2013). The role of background characteristics, music-listening motives, and music selection on music discussion. *Communication Quarterly*, *61*(4), 357-396.

Biggs, C. (2012). Spreading the indigenous gospel of rap music and spoken word poetry: Critical pedagogy in the public sphere as a stratagem of empowerment and critique. *The Western Journal of Black Studies, 36*(2), 161-168.

Brown-White, S. (2003). Afrocentric rhetoric transcending audiences and contexts: A case study of preacher and politician Emanuel Cleaver II. In R. Jackson II & E. Richardson (Eds.), *Understanding African American rhetoric: Classical origins to contemporary innovations* (pp. 263-282). New York, NY: Routledge.

Carroll, J. (1966). Language, thought, and reality: Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf. In Cummings, M., & Daniel, J. (2000). *The rhetoric of western thought*. (7th ed., pp. 360-375). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing.

Chang, J. (2006). Can't stop won't stop: A history of the hip-hop generation. In Balaji, M. (2009). Owning black masculinity: The intersection of cultural commodification and self-construction in rap music videos. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 21-38. doi:10.1111/j.1753-9137.2008.01027.x

Clay, A. (2003). Keepin' it real: Black youth, hip-hop culture, and black identity. *American Behavioral Scientist, 46*(10), 1346-1358.

Cummings, M., & Moore, J. (2003). "Jesus is a rock": Spirituals as lived experiences. In R. Jackson II & E. Richardson (Eds.), *Understanding African American rhetoric: Classical origins to contemporary innovations* (pp. 57-67). New York, NY: Routledge.

Fisher, W. (1984). Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument. *Communication Monographs*, *51(1),* 1-22.

Fisher, W. (1985). The narrative paradigm: An elaboration. *Communication Monographs*, *52(4),* 347-367.

Foss, S. (2009). *Rhetorical criticism: Exploration and practice*. (4th ed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc.

Hamlet, J. (2012). The reason why we sing: Understanding traditional African American worship. In A. Gonzales, M. Houston & V. Chen (Eds.), *Our voices: Essays in culture, ethnicity, and communication* (5th ed., pp. 92-97). New York: Oxford University Press.

Harris, T. (2014). Refocusing and redefining hip hop: An analysis of Lecrae's contribution to hip hop. *The Journal of Hip Hop Studies*, *1*(1), 14.

Kirk-Duggan, C. A., & Hall, M. (2011). *Wake up!: Hip-hop Christianity and the black church*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.

Lincoln, C., & Mamiya, L. (1990). The black church in the African American experience. In Barnes, S. (2008). Religion and rap music: An analysis of black church usage. *Review of Religious Research*, *49*(3), 319-338.

Miller, M., Hodge, D. W., Coleman, J., & Chaney, C. D. (2014). The hip in hip hop: Toward a discipline of hip hop studies. *The Journal of Hip Hop Studies*, *1*(1), 6-12.

Moore, L. (2010). Just like you. [Recorded by Lecrae Moore]. On *Rehab* [MP3 file]. Atlanta, GA: Reach Records.

Moore, L. (2012a). Tell the world. [Recorded by Lecrae Moore]. On *Gravity* [MP3 file]. Atlanta, GA: Reach Records.

Moore, L. (2012b). Mayday. [Recorded by Lecrae Moore]. On *Gravity* [MP3 file]. Atlanta, GA: Reach Records.

Moore, L. (2012c). Confe$$ions. [Recorded by Lecrae Moore]. On *Gravity* [MP3 file]. Atlanta, GA: Reach Records.

Moore, L. (2012d). Fuego. [Recorded by Lecrae Moore]. On *Gravity* [MP3 file]. Atlanta, GA: Reach Records.

Moore, L. (2013a, July 1). *Biography in context: Contemporary black biography*, *108*.

Moore, L. (2013b, February 8). Lecrae extended interview: "can you be Christian and rap at the same time?" Retrieved from http://video.pbs.org/video/2332849392/

Moore, R. (2013c, May). W.w.jay-z: How Christian hip-hop could call the American church back to the gospel- and hip-hop back to its roots. *Christianity Today*. Retrieved from http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/may/ww-jay-z.html

Morgan, T. N., Hampton, C. A., Davenport, S., Young, E., Badzinski, D. M., Richardson, K. B., & Woods, R. H. (2012). Sacred symbols with a secular beat?: A content analysis of religious and sexual imagery in modern rock, hip hop, Christian, and country music videos. *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, *24*(3), 432-448.

Ong, W. J. (2013). *Orality and literacy*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Parmar, P. (2005). Cultural studies and rap: The poetry of an urban lyricist. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education, 9,* 5-15.

Parmar, P. (2009). An historic analysis of hip hop. In *Knowledge reigns supreme: The critical pedagogy of hip-hop artist KRS-ONE*. Rotterdam, New York: Sense.

Reach Records. (2011). *The music of a movement*. Retrieved from http://reachrecords.com/about

Rose, T. (1994). Voices from the margins: Rap music and contemporary black cultural production. In *Black noise: Rap music and black culture in contemporary America* (pp. 1-20). Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

Slater, M. D., & Rouner, D. (2002). Entertainment – education and elaboration likelihood: Understanding the processing of narrative persuasion. *Communication Theory*, *12*(2), 173-191.

Tracy, S. (2013). Qualitative research methods. UK: Wiley-Blackwell Publications.

Washer, B. & Moore, L. (2017). About. Retrieved November, 28, 2017, from http://reachrecords.com/about/

Watts, E. K. (2004). An exploration of spectacular consumption: Gangsta rap as cultural commodity. In M. Forman & M. A. Neal (Eds.), That's the joint: The hip-hop studies reader (pp. 593–610). New York, NY: Routledge.

White Hodge, D. (2010). *The soul of hip hop: Rims, timbs and a cultural theology*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books.

Ohio Communication Journal
Volume 56 – March 2018, pp. 69-78

Waxing the Storyboard: Writing and Performing Stories of Family Loss

Alex J. Patti

This essay attempts to, narratively and autoethnographically, perform the stories of three individuals' experiences with the death of a loved one. These individuals' written stories were collected and performed to spark inquiry into the philosophy and praxis of expressive written narrative as a form of meditation. Building upon research on expressive writing, expressive written storytelling was used to aid these individuals in opening up to a richer, more clear present moment for remembering and storying. The performance of these three stories studies the power of restorative storytelling and enhances the connection between story and restoring to necromancy (Friedlander, 1979). Moreover, they speak to the power of love and story in families, and the creation of complex possibilities for healing, living, and loving.

Story: The Tie the Binds

> When a life ends it's as if it bursts, leaving wet weights all over the landscape. The living live in a state of dispersal.
>
> – Kathleen Stewart (2013, p. 661)

> "Do not pity the dead…Pity the living, and, above all, those who live without love."
>
> – Albus Dumbledore (Rowling, 2007, p. 722)

I dreamt about you last night, Grandpa. Strange… I do believe it was the first dream of you in many seasons. I've thought about you so much lately. This dream feels a long time coming.

It's been over five years and I still have not fully come to terms with or wholly expressed my grandpa's death. I don't know if I'll be much closer in a full forty years. But that's how it goes after you lose your first loved one, right? There is a wound—a burn, laceration, contusion, concussion. We are marked by unrest.

In the years since, I've peeled back the wound. My silence on his death has receded like a low tide. Each time I tell, I learn something new about my experience. I better understand my grandpa and me. The wound doesn't fester as viciously—the gash isn't quite as deep, the pus doesn't reek of decay, the blood clots much more quickly.

My grandpa and I are separated in life yet tied together by story. And in storying him, I have been able to explore the relationship between us, in life and after his death. When evoking my grandpa, I am reminded of John Kabat-Zinn's (1994) recollection of the poster of a yogi surfing Hawaiian waters, with the caption: *You can't stop the waves but you can learn to surf*.

Life and death, water and wave. Wounded and healing, suffering and surfing.

I have restor(i)ed my grandpa in/from a messy memory, a fractured story that longs to be whole. Because of my efforts, I wash and bandage my wound regularly. I pick at it every now and then with stories written or told. These stories are quite like a surfboard—a *story*board, rather—for surfing the waves of my suffering.

But these things are not enough. The partiality of stories makes it quite impossible.

Alex J. Patti (Department of Communication Studies, University of North Carolina at Greensboro). Correspondence concerning this article should be address to Alex Patti, 102 Ferguson Building, PO Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402. E-mail: alexjpatti@gmail.com

Big thanks to a pair of my graduate school mentors, Drs. Loreen Olson and Chris Poulos, as well as the two anonymous reviewers of this piece for their guidance and feedback throughout the process of drafting this essay, this *attempt to story*. I thank my first scholarly sherpa who inspires me to reach compassionately into the shadowy places of life, in search of the promise that is hidden there. It would not feel right without dedicating this essay to my good friends the Postmaster and Tobias, and their loved ones lost: this is a sheet of music and the beautiful notes are yours. Grandpa, I am sorry to have lost you here on earth, but I thank you so for what I've been able to do with your memory, story, and legacy.

Still, memory and story are all I (we) have…

Looking Inward, Telling Outward

Direct your eye right inward, and you'll find
A thousand regions in your mind
Yet undiscovered. Travel them and be
Expert in home-cosmography.

– Henry David Thoreau (1854/1997)

We are inseparable from, awash with, and stitched together with threads of stories (Freeman, 1997, 1998a, 1998b). In Poulos' (2008) words, "we arise in—and out—of our stories" (p. 127). We use stories to help make sense of our experiences (Bochner, Ellis, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997; Clark, 1993; Weber, Harvey, & Stanley, 1987). And yet our suffering creates a need for stories: they are an integral part of the healing process (Frank, 1995). This is no different for families either. Stories and experiences with death are no less intricate, and as with all suffering, Death's visits are unique and intimate. However, collective stories weave together a less fractured, maybe more resonant understanding of it. Our public and private stories about death illuminate its captivating, elusive, mysterious, and often heartbreaking nature. O'Brien (1990/2010) elucidates when he writes,

> What stories can do, I guess, is make things present. I can look at things I never looked at. I can attach faces to grief and love and pity and God. I can be brave. I can make myself feel again. (p. 180)

Motivated by the story tie that binds us—the living—to the dead is my hopeful response to Pennebaker and Smyth's (2016), Patti's (2012), and Poulos' (2006, 2008, 2009, 2010) calls to tell stories that move us toward personal and familial healing, to open the "story-door" to *possibilities*, to write our way through life, and to use those *possibilities* with practical utility that may help move in and out of suffering as a type of meditation.[1]

The three stories featured here are an attempt of this meditation. I did not simply ask myself and two others (collectively referred to as "the Authors") to write for the sake of it. I asked us to take up the heavy task of writing about our lived experiences with the death of a loved one, inspired by some of the most current expressive writing techniques set forth by Pennebaker and Smyth (2016). What might we discover when the eye is turned right inward, when the undiscovered is discovered; when the untraveled regions are traveled, each step an act of peacemaking with inner fears, pains, sufferings, demons; and when the strong are made weak (Kabat-Zinn, 1994)?

Because expressive writing can help us process the ties of suffering and stress, it is a unique tool for individuals to open up their own possibilities (Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016). In a paper journal, the Authors were requested to do just that: spend 20 to 30 minutes responding to four prompts in as many days, completing one prompt per day in succession. Their journals were returned to me upon completion. I asked us to write about the death of a loved one in order to make present our experiences, to (re)look at things, and to give a face to our suffering and our pity and love. What began as an open-ended response to loss, turned into three separate pieces about family

---

[1] In Eastern philosophies, mindfulness meditation (de)centers suffering as it pervades our everyday existence, the goal of peacefully moving through it for a more clear appreciation for the present moment. Thich Nhat Hanh (2013) writes,

> With mindful awareness, we can look into the nature of our suffering and find out what kind of food we have been supplying to keep it alive. When we find the source of nourishment for our suffering, we can cut off that supply, and our suffering will fade. (p. 7)

To Thich Nhat Hanh and many others, meditation may take the form of breathing, drinking tea in mindfulness, writing a "love letter," and hugging. To John Kabat-Zinn (1994), "Meditation is neither shutting things out nor off. It is seeing things clearly, and deliberately positioning yourself differently in relationship to them" (p. 30). To Christophe Andre (2011), "Meditation means withdrawing a little, stepping back from the world… To meditate is often to move through a land without paths" (p. 4).

members that speak to family communication and loss. The use of specific prompts[2] helped me piece together these stories with the ultimate aim of performing each, descriptively and interpretively, through my own eye as the researcher-performer. I must also note that I made diligent efforts to present each story in each Author's own unique style, with format, syntax, diction, emphases, and errors verbatim from our journals.

What follows are the three accounts of the Postmaster, Tobias, and myself. Each of us took noticeably different approaches to the journaling process. The Postmaster opens with a story about his wife of "49 years and one day": their life history, her illness, and her death. Harkening back to when he was 11 years old, Tobias follows with a story about his grandfather's unexpected death, the heroism of a "father figure," and moving on from loss as a child. I round us out with a story about my grandpa's death, the first death in my large extended family, which occurred when I was 20 years old.

Inspired by Martel (2001), it feels natural that each story is told in first person, and like Martel, "any inaccuracies or mistakes are mine" (p. xii). I hope the stories performed here are insightful and generative and suggestive. While these are stories of three particular experiences, "they are stories about all of us" because "all families feel pain and loss and trauma" (Poulos, 2008). Hopefully they cultivate a greater awareness of the present moment, of memory, and of story.

Storied: Three Accounts of Loved Ones Lost and Discovered

"Chiseled In Stone"

Look, I was one of the first mail carriers to ever wear shorts! That's how long I've been around. I dressed like a pickle in Vietnam (you know, standard U.S. Military olive drab camouflage), was a letter carrier, and then a postmaster until I retired. We moved several times, to four different towns—Karen never complained. She was my whole life—we worried, cried, laughed, had fights, and loved!! We had two children. They gave us four grandchildren!! I was 68 when she passed. We were married for forty-nine years and one day...

August 1961—Freshman year in high school

I had turned 15 in March—I was a real 15-year old. Smart alec. I was the Fonz before the Fonz was ever seen on TV. 14-year old Karin started the same year. We were both in homeroom and civics together. I heard from other students she thought I was "cute"! She and I became good friends and started thinking we were in "love" before we even knew what love meant!

June 27th, 1965—Wedding day

May 1965 we graduated high school and got married 3 ½ weeks later. (She went to nursing school and I joined the Marine Corps! What a way to start!)

2001

Karin retires on disability because of deteriorating arthritis. She was a nurse.

2009

Karin broke her hip

2013

Karin had a stroke and survived, but developed a seizure disorder!

August 2013 - June 2014

Karin is in and out of hospital and rehab on many occasions. She had a living will: ~~not to be res~~ artificial life machines not to be used.

June 2014

We started using home hospice care

June 22rd, 2014

I could not get her to respond to me—called EMTs and had her taken to hospital. E.R.

---

[2] The prompts used by each Author are as follows: Day 1: *Write about the death of a loved one*; Day 2: *Write about what your loved one meant/means to you*; Day 3: *Write about your support system in the midst and aftermath of a loved one's death*; and Day 4: *What would you like to share about your experience in dealing with the death of a loved one?*

Dr. had her admitted and had me call our children in. They each live a few hours away.

Day of June 23rd, 2014

Was told she had kidney failure and must go under hospice care—we got a hospice bed 20 miles south. Drs. told my kids and I she would probably not make it there. (She told me what arrangements she wanted.)

Evening of June 23rd, 2014

Ambulance took her to hospice. She was now sleeping and unresponsive!

June 24 - 26, 2014

Unresponsive, shallow breathing but still alive. Not talking just looking around

June 26th, 2014

My children sent me to a motel to clean up and get some rest. Our anniversary was tomorrow. (If she made it to midnight we would be married 49 years)

11:00 PM

I returned to the hospital. Told my children I had to be there at midnight and why!

12:05 AM on June 27th, 2014

I kissed her on forehead. Told her Happy 49th anniversary and that "I still love you very much"

She has not spoken for 3 days. She opened her eyes wide, looked at me and said, I love you too, big boy"

She never spoke again!

She passed June 28th, 7:30 AM—

I wish I were much better with words! I love hospice staff for what they do and I hate what they do!! I know it was for the best that we went there and she requested to go there so I would not have to watch her die at home. The staff at hospice are the most caring people in the world, but you go there to die! My children, my brother-in-law, and my father-in-law were there with me, and did a good job holding me up, but I guess you could say she was my biggest support and she was dying!!

I do thank all those who tried to help—but when a person whom was 80% of my whole life!! the grief is the most painful thing I have ever had to deal with. I am still in grief!!! Almost 3 yrs. now!!! I love to read and have read many books over the years, but I have never read a book I enjoyed more than my life!! She was and still is everything to me!!!

I have had many relatives pass over the years, plus many more friends and even comrades-in-arms.

None of those had the impact of Karin's passing!!

No pain I have ever had in my life—physical or mental—is as bad as the mental grief I felt and still feel over her passing—yes I am still dealing with it after almost 3 years!

I guess the best way to tell you I deal with it is to say, "I just suck it up and go on living!!"

But I will tell you—and I truly mean this

I would rather have this terrible grief than to never have had her love for all those years!!!

If the love is real
So is the grief!

The Better To See You With

My name is Tobias. *These* are my grandfather's glasses. There's a story behind them, but first I have to tell you about him. I was 11 years old when he passed away. I'm an adult now, 22 years old. My grandfather, *my hero*, filled the role my father voided when he and my mother split. I was two. He loved me very much and I loved him. He was my hero, a male role model for nine years. My grandfather was a family man. He loved my grandmother, my mother, my family, and me very much. He and my grandmother were the PB&J of love.

He was a tall, dark-skinned man. He was awfully quiet. A Marine, too, for many years. They called him Topp—based on his rank. He could lift anything, fix whatever. He taught me how to tie my shoes when I was younger. He taught me how to fish, yo-yo, and cook. He meant strength, wisdom (HE KNEW IT ALL), love, being a man, spirituality, goodness, and everything. He wasn't religious. He barely went to church. But he inspires me to pray. I ask about him in prayer, ask him to watch over me. He wasn't perfect… but he was pretty damn close.

In his 50s he had a stroke. My hero was hurt. I don't remember going to the hospital to see him. I do remember him coming back. He was all good and things were ok… for about a week. Then we found out he had cancer. I remember my grandpa going through chemo. I remember him becoming skin and bones. I remember his

smile never fading. I remember all this and then one day I remember my mom calling me and my brother into a room. She told us that my grandfather had passed away. I remember my room spinning: my bunk bed behind me and my glass mirror next to me. I just cried... I remember being in a sort of awe... I remember the funeral home. I remember they cremated the body... I remember a lot of crying.

My older brother did what he could. My big support came from my mom. She has given me so many hugs and so much support over the years. She helps me think about what he would say. I did JROTC in high school and would always wonder what my grandpa would say. *Would he be proud? Would he like this?* My mother would answer any question. She comforts me.

Now, my grandmother, I could write about her all day. My grandma knows how much I loved my grandpa. She knows that so well, that last summer she did something crazy. She gave me a box of his stuff. Mind you, my grandma is remarried, but to this day she still mentions him. The box had his glasses in it. This is one of my most prized possessions. I can see through them. We apparently had similar vision. This was so deep. My grandma wanted me to be happy and know that it's ok to still reminisce.

My experience with dealing with death is that it never goes away. It is going to take time. It is going to be a process. However, the pain might not be there anymore. I think it is weird, in the moment it is the worst thing to ever happen. However, one day at a time it hurts less and less. You start to get your bearings back. You can function again. It all happens in due time. You should talk it out with someone. Trying to tackle the complexities of death alone is too much. Having a confidence to put your feelings out too is useful.

I think that, in my experience, you have to do something to remind yourself about the gone-but-not-forgotten. It could be a tattoo, a picture, an event, or naming a baby after them. When you do these things, it helps you to disconnect from the negative and refocus on the positives. The positives are what keeps us smiling and moving toward our goals.

I think it does, however, differ for each person. I think that there are very good ways to deal with grief, as well as bad ways. When you can identify those good ways then it turns out a lot better. I think that if this happened recently I would not be able to handle it as well as I did in my youth. I realize that growing up and being able to deal with it at my own pace was a big factor.

I also think another thing is to not be afraid to say their name. Talk about them if you need to. Most importantly love yourself. Love yourself for being able to make it through. Love yourself for loving them. Love yourself because your loved one loved you.

A Bear Hug from Immobile Paws

There are endless miles of frosted-white mountain roads between us… I am blind to it all.

I am visiting a friend for the weekend, when my mom calls me up: "Your grandpa had a stroke… he's in the hospital… they don't know how it's looking…. We're on our way there."

"Well… I can be there as soon as I—"

"No, I don't want you driving that far this late at night, especially if you're upset. Just come when you can."

They don't know how it's looking? still ringing heavily in my ears. What she said punctures my gut like the smallest needle. The pinprick grows and quickly I feel as if a mountain could pass through my torso.

"Okay. I'll come straight there tomorrow morning," my voice breaks, "It'll take a while, but I'll hurry." I hang up the phone, deceiving my mom: if I leave tonight, throwing caution to the wind, I might get to say goodbye. If I leave tomorrow I might miss him.

But I cave to caution. I'll leave here as early as possible for my place in the mountains of western North Carolina (halfway between where I am and where he is) so that I can repack my bags and make the drive through the Appalachians to where he lay dying in a bland, cream-colored hospital in eastern Tennessee. I've never made this trip before; the GPS says it's seven-hours in total, and the weather prediction is a blanketing snowstorm.

I speed the whole way toward my apartment. 60, 70 miles per hour and faster and faster. There wasn't much warning about him dying. I'm told, "He has some days left," but I hear that as, "He'll be dead any minute." I glance at the clock on the dash as numbers morph into letters: *HA:HA*.

With every sideways glance into the cold gray distance I see fear and uncertainty sharpen in my view. *My grandpa is* dying*?* I can hear each fat flake of this convenient late-October snowstorm whisper doubts in my ear. With stings of moist, cold breath that penetrates the windows, they taunt me: "You won't make it." The voices grow

louder and more frequent. This maddening rush overwhelms me. I am slipping farther and further into worry and despair. I cannot think of food or drink or breath for I am too busy dueling my grandpa's death.

Three hours and three inches of snowfall in and I reach my apartment. I throw together a few nights of clothes. "My grandpa's in the hospital. I'll be back soon," I tell my roommate with an effort of laziness. The snow dusts the roads while blanketing me in a cold doubt. I want to wrap myself up in actual blankets and sleep. *Why can't I just do that?* At 20 years old I am young and ignorant, still a child in my mind's eye.

This is taking too long… *Is too much snow sticking to the roads now?* I am going to miss my grandfather's death because of this snow, and I wouldn't have said goodbye. The dusting proves to be gracious. Mother Nature lets me out of the mountains as I finish the drive safely.

I can't tell what comes next: the easy part… or the hard part…

The next few days are a carnival. We have a castle of a corner room in the hospital that still too small for our family. We laugh, pray, tell streams of stories, and, maybe most important to grandpa, we watch his (our) beloved Buckeyes on the TV. We celebrate life in the only way we know how. My grandma tells us, "This is how Dad would want it." *I* don't want this for him: I'm selfish. The last time seeing my grandpa alive, in a peaceful state of comatose, is an intravenous drip of ice. I want to know him better. He's been a wise old man my whole life, and now that I'm an adult I am beginning to dig into the meaning of it all: life, death, love…

The mysterious lump on his chest and sullen frame and sallow skin burn a lasting image in my mind. The sight burns a hole in my memory of him as a perfect, invincible person, stout, six-foot tall, as rugged as a mountaineer, and as strong as an ox. It burns to hug him goodbye, but I must get back to school. *Must I?* It burns at the threshold of the door. It burns all over.

"It'll be okay, mom," I tell her wishfully.

"No it won't."

It must be some cruel trick because he dies a week later on Halloween night. I hunch over the kitchen sink in my apartment, looking out the window at the precipice of a parking lot-turned-tundra. My clammy hands find no grip on the countertop. I fold over onto my elbows and I am plunged over that edge beyond the lot. I am clothed, but feel so naked and cold as I slide through the snow and out onto the street fifty feet below. There are headlights, so bright and so hypnotic, growing larger so quickly.

Paralysis sets in. And it feels *right*.

I flick my welling eyes toward the heavens. The headlights are so bright and so large. For a split second I can see the steam made by evaporating snowflakes against the hot lights. There is so much light around me. All at once I feel the full force of metal on my bones. Blackness forces itself around me. It forces itself down to the bone marrow, floods my cells, coats my throat and lungs like soot. A terror jolts through me, leaving a void invaded by immense despair.

My eyes are cascading now. Pressing my hands into the counter, I straighten up. My heavy eyes are still fixed on the horizon of that precipice, but it is time for class and I must go. *Must I?*

He is a pale grey dust in a tissue box-sized urn the next time I see him. We scatter him down the mountainside of my grandma and his home. His ashes, the bag that holds him, and the spectators' audible gasps all make a harmonious hiss. I will never forget how small a great person can be.

An Ending, A Beginning

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

– F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925/2004)

The three stories performed here are great personal tragedies. And through them, I hope I have been able to respond to Pennebaker and Smyth's (2016), Patti's (2012), and Poulos' (2006, 2008, 2009, 2010) calls to tell stories in ways that move us toward healing, to open the "story-door," to write our way through, and to open up *possibilities*. Whether the Authors' storytelling will have a lasting impact on their well-being remains to be seen; however, they have taken the risk of opening up and writing down their experiences with the death of a loved one. I do not claim that this method of expressive writing and performance is appropriate for everyone, nor should engaging with such activity be taken lightly. Expressive writing is not a substitute for other forms of treatment.

Reaching into the shadows, into the most painful caverns of our memory, requires considerable emotional risk. I do not suggest everyone adopt the practices used here, but I do believe the stories performed here resonate for those ready and willing and needing to cope. In the seemingly mundane task of journaling, these Authors have helped contribute to a collective understanding of death, but have also demonstrated a resiliency to suffer, live, and love after their loved ones have passed.

Further plunged into uncertainty and despair, there is a burning, the kindling is a feeling of inadequacy that I haven't done the Postmaster and Tobias justice in my performance of their stories. The words unwritten/unsaid keep me up at night. I worry that I haven't done *them* justice. As they are good friends, I face a conundrum best explained by Ellis (2007) when she writes, "The problem comes not from being friends with participants but from acting as a friend yet not living up to the obligations of friendship" (p. 10). Out of respect for the Authors and their stories, I, in Coles' (1989, p. 27) words, "err on the side of each person's particularity" by leaving some errors in grammar and some "loose ends" intentionally untied so the audience can harvest from the rawness of their stories. Moreover, I include most of their journals here in their own voice and style, but even that isn't the enough of the story. Even supplemental conversations don't capture the grief, pain, suffering, and love. But so it goes with experiences and emotions. In performing the Authors' stories, I work to heed Freeman's (2004) call to practice telling the *reality* of the Authors' experiences. Moreover, I work to appeal to a narrative performance that "support[s] the aim of increasing compassion and sympathy, and a sense of connection to others" (Freeman, p. 79). The aim is to capture what *really* happened, combining their journal response, our friendship, and my interpretations in a performance that explores each story and the love and suffering therein.

Yet my shortcomings and feelings of uncertainty and inadequacy—that which is expressed by many ethnographic storytellers—bring to light the ongoing process of suffering and the need for compassionate relationships in our lives. These Authors, much like everyone else who has lost a loved one, have more to remember and tell. "The rhizomes of memory. One story recalls ten" (Patti, 2012, p. 154). *Everyone's got to face down the demons* (Jenkins, 1997). These demons live in all places of our memory, and facing them may be as solitary and private as a journal, but also may require an audience and a support system. Living with and for another should call us to listen compassionately to our sufferings and those of others.

Kabat-Zinn (1994) hits the mark when he teaches: "Stress is part of life… [b]ut that does not mean that we have to be victims in the face of large forces in our lives" (p. 30). Capping the waves of life or succumbing to the undertow is not the intention (for more on this surfing metaphor see Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Instead, we could consider what paths we might clear in our consciousness that help us better navigate the forest towering with the trees of our sufferings and celebrations. In what ways can we look inward to focus on our most visible and unseen pains so that we can tell outward and live a sweeter life nearer to the bone[3], opening us up to richer, fuller, and more balanced senses of self and relationships?

However, I arrive at the question: What does processing and expressing a loved one's death have to do with mindfulness? In 2016, I wrote a blog unpacking this very concept (see Patti, 2016). I write,

> I once wrote my wife a letter with a section titled "Sunflowers and Bear Hugs". In it, I expressed to her how I come to terms with my grandpa's passing… [Symbols of loved ones] help us cope. They bring the spirit of those passed into the present moment… They bring us into a present state of mind that presents us the opportunity to reflect, discover, and move through the suffering of loss and death.

"I would say the compassion is in you, right. For you, you had a chance to see, kinda empathize. Say, 'Hey, this is how this person felt in this moment,' " Tobias tells me. Compassion is in me, the researcher-performer—but more importantly it is in *us*, the listeners. Compassion is in all of us, we just have to drop in and compassionately listen. I hope that others can find direction and healing by writing their own stories and listening compassionately to others.

---

[3] This line is in reference to a quote from Henry David Thoreau's (1854/1997) book *Walden*. The entire quote reads: "Moreover, if you are restricted in your range by poverty, if you cannot buy books and newspapers, for instance, you are but confined to the most significant and vital experiences; you are compelled to deal with the material which yields the most sugar and the most starch. It is life near the bone where it is sweetest."

A Beginning

June 2016: “Whenever your wife is mad at you, and I mean MAD at you, you play her ‘Chiseled In Stone’ by Vern Gosdin and tell her that you love her.” A popular 1980s country music song, Gosdin’s chorus ends with the lines: *You don't know about sadness / ‘Til you've faced life alone / You don't know about lonely / ‘Til it's chiseled in stone* (Gosdin & Barnes, 1988). In the months after my wedding, I think it’s no coincidence that the Postmaster gave me this one piece of advice among the 49 years and one day’s worth of marital wisdom. I think embedded deep within this advice is some longing that the Postmaster feels. For him, *it is* chiseled in stone. Reading his book of life is how the Postmaster recaptures the ups and downs of his memory. Reading his story is how he lives on.

By sharing Gosdin with me, there is little doubt my friend-mentor-grandfatherly figure was urging me to live and to love before *it* too is chiseled in stone.

In a smear of colors and haze of light, the scene changes…

March 2017: A blue-grey sky mixes outside the window. A spring rain has feed the flowers. I am warm and dry behind the glass where I write this. Lazy beads of water drip heavily off the fingertips of the crepe myrtle opposite the glass. I feel so insignificant and miniscule looking up at the widening storm. The sky becomes heavy once more, and I feel myself plunged into a puddle outside. Like an innocent, ignorant animal, I shiver before taking shelter. Swallowed by all this fluid, I am again reminded of my grandfather and the way he died of dehydration after the experimental medication failed to capture him from his state of comatose. All his lazy dandelion-yellow fluids dripping into a collection bag tied at the foot of the bed. His life dripped away into that bag. His corporeal body is cremated, a dry gray and black dust, but I wish we would’ve kept that bag of dandelion-yellow and spread his fluids down the mountainside. I romanticize his death story, but I like to think it’s what he would have wanted. Like the Postmaster and Tobias, I tell of my passed loved one in the best way I know how, possibly in the way they think their loved ones would have wanted, too.

The scene changes again…

April 2017: Tobias and I sit in an “interview” session. Truth be told, it is a conversation between friends. “I think with the journal in particular, it was something that was very near and dear to me so I kinda wanted to do it… justice and I had to think really deeply.” Tobias’ stream of consciousness style shows, too. The physical words are undisturbed: there is no apparent evidence of erasing and no words are crossed out.

“Being able to write it out was really good. If I had tears it was in the pen. If I had laughs it was in the pen,” he tells me. Each word is charged with emotion. “The emotions didn’t have to come out and they didn’t have to deter me in real life. I wasn’t scared of how it was perceived.” He emphatically informs me that because he has gotten past the pain of his grandfather’s death, he would not have done journaling like this if I hadn’t asked him. He would only journal unless there’s no way to verbalize his feelings. A well-spoken conversationalist, I see why Tobias might feel this way. Yet time and again in our conversation he describes the journaling process as “cathartic and cleansing.”

“It felt good to get it out,” he says. “I felt a sense of unified thoughts. I deserved to explain to myself my own emotions,” and, without hesitation, he adds, “I enjoyed it.”

He deserves to explain. He deserves to explore. He deserves to write *possibilities*.

The scene changes once more to a hot, windy day in June 2017…

A stroke constrains another family member to a hospital bed—this time it’s my partner’s grandmother. On a hot summer day, I feel a cold wind tickle my skin. The scene is too familiar. All her fluids drip lazily into a collection bag tied at the foot of the bed. I cannot bring myself to fully enter the room, to see this again. I find the courage though. Borrowing from the Authors, I have some loving words to share: “Talk about them if you need to.” “If the love is real so is the grief,” I tell some others. I have opened my heart even wider in effort to compassionately and deeply listen.

At the burial, there is a figure off in the distance. The figure and I feel intimate, as if I know its face, yet cannot place it. I request, “Come, dear friend, please… come,” but it disappears as the chatter yields to the pastor’s opening remarks.

Some remarks are shared and the figure shows up again. It sits playfully on the grass. The funeral reminds me of my grandpa. So I think about him in this moment. On the grass I can see one blurred face and… then another?… The chatter slows again, and they both disappear.

We begin to tell stories at the memorial in the church up the road. I can feel the figure breathing beside me on the pew. The stories have evoked, revived, restored my wife's grandmother. I can hear her voice, see her movements just as they are told in the story. For the first time since my grandpa died, I am lucid to the presence of loved ones lost. They are not so far away anymore.

Here in this church, I am reminded of my grandpa's memorial, and the second figure appears again. Story has summoned them—conjured, perhaps. The stories stop and they both disappear… until the next story comes.

* * *

Perhaps our experiences, the opening of our own "story-doors," may shed light on the shadows in others' (your) lives. Perhaps our experiences teach us something about death and life, shadow and light, loss and love. Perhaps the recording and performance of our experiences responds to Freeman (2004) by building compassion, sympathy, and connection between teller and audience, between the Authors and you.

Perhaps we teach about suffering and surfing.

Perhaps we have waxed the storyboard.

Dear, Grandpa

It has been over four years now. Time sure does fly. I hope you are proud of me. I hope I have used your legacy with generative intentions that help others (re)story their loved ones. I hope our connection does good and right by others. I hope I have inspired others to pick up boards, when ready, to then go surfing. You live on in my memory and in my stories. You live on in the *this and that*s of my life: your plumbing license in my wallet, a firm bear hug, and a phone call with my grandma, your dearest wife, filled with funny yarns that unravel ever so playfully. You live on in the places still unseen, waiting to step out of the shadows. You live on here in this essay, this *attempt* to story, this attempt to shine a light toward where you may be hiding. You live on deep in my soul, held so close to my heart.

I miss you still, felt all over, deep down into my cells. I will tell your stories to heal. I will tell your stories to love. And so I write, with feeling, like we sang at your wake:

Ain't no grave can hold your body down.

Amen, Johnny. [4]

[4] Johnny Cash was Grandpa's favorite musician. A pair of my cousins and I covered Cash's rendition of "Ain't No Grave" on guitar and vocals at his wake.

References

Andre, C. (2011). *Looking at mindfulness: 25 ways to live in the moment through art.* New York, NY: Blue Rider Press.

Bochner, A. P., Ellis, C., & Tillmann-Healy, L. M. (1997). Relationships as stories. In S. W. Duck (Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships: Theory, research, and interventions* (2nd ed., pp. 107–124). Chichester, England: Wiley.

Clark, L. F. (1993). Stress and the cognitive-conversational benefits of social interaction. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 12*(1), 25–55.

Coles, R. (1989). *The call of stories: Teaching and the moral imagination*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Ellis, C. (2007). Telling secrets, revealing lives: Relational ethics in research with intimate others. *Qualitative Inquiry, 13*(1), 3-29.

Fitzgerald, F. S. (2004). *The great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner. (original work published 1925)

Frank, A. W. (1995). *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness, and ethics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Freeman, M. (1997). Death, narrative integrity, and the radical challenge of self-understanding: A reading of Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilych. Ageing and Society, 17*(4), 373–398.

Freeman, M. (1998a). Mythical time, historical time, and the narrative fabric of the self. *Narrative Inquiry, 8*(1), 27–50.

Freeman, M. (1998b). Experience, narrative, and the relationship between them. *Narrative Inquiry, 8*(2), 455–466.

Freeman, M. (2004). Data are everywhere: Narrative criticism in the literature of experience. In C. Daiute & C. Lightfoot (Eds.), *Narrative analysis: Studying the development of individuals in society* (pp. 63-81). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Gosdin, V. & Barnes, M. D. (1988) Chiseled in stone [Recorded by Vern Gosdin]. On *Chiseled in stone* [CD]. Nashville, TN: Columbia.

Jenkins, S. (1997) Jumper [Recorded by Third Eye Blind]. On *Third eye blind* [CD]. San Francisco, CA: Elektra.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are*. New York, NY: MJF Books.

Martel, Y. (2001). *Life of Pi: A novel*. New York, NY: Harcourt.

Nhat Hanh, T. (2013). *The art of communicating.* New York, NY: HarperCollins.

O'Brien, T. (2010). *The things they carried*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin. (Original work published 1990)

Patti, A. J. (2016, January 12). August 9th, 1980: Remembering a loved one [Web blog]. Retrieved from http://pohsessions.blogspot.com/2016/01/august-9th-1980-remembering-loved-one.html

Patti, C. J. (2012) Split shadows: Myths of a lost father and son. *Qualitative Inquiry, 18*(2), 153-161.

Pennebaker, J. W & Smyth, J. M. (2016). *Opening up by writing it down: How expressive writing improves health and eases emotional pain* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Poulos, C. (2006). The ties that bind us, the shadows that separate us: Life and death, shadow and (dream)story. *Qualitative Inquiry, 12*(1), 96-117.

Poulos, C. (2008). Narrative conscience and the autoethnographic adventure: Probing memories, secrets, shadows, and possibilities. *Qualitative Inquiry, 14*(1), 46-66.

Poulos, C. (2009). *Accidental ethnography: An inquiry into family secrets*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Poulos, C. (2010). Spirited accidents: An autoethnography of possibility. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*(1), 49-56.

Rowling, J. K. (2007). *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. New York, NY: Arthur A. Levine Books.

Stewart, K. (2013). An autoethnography of what happens. In S. Holman Jones, T. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of autoethnography* (659-668). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Thoreau, H. D. (1997). *Walden*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1854)

Weber, A. L., Harvey, J. H., & Stanley, M. A. (1987). The nature and motivations of accounts for failed relationships. In R. Burnett, P. McGhee, & D. D. Clarke (Eds.), *Accounting for relationships: Explanation, representation, and knowledge* (pp. 114–133). London, England: Methuen.

Ohio Communication Journal
Volume 56 – March 2018, pp. 79-92

Broadcasting the Backstage: Essena O'Neill's Facework as an Instagram Model

Julia Elizabeth Schuller
Valerie Lynn Schrader

This rhetorical analysis examines Essena O'Neill's career as an Instagram model in order to illustrate how Goffman's theoretical construct of facework can be used to study social media and other internet texts. The phenomenon of Instagram modeling emerged as a new forum for aspiring models and marketers in the 21st century. As a public figure, Essena O'Neill's decision to quit the industry of Instagram modeling received a generous amount of media attention. Her newly edited Instagram photograph captions provided viewers with a unique look into what O'Neill portrayed as her backstage persona. In this essay, facework is used to examine O'Neill's comments regarding the "realities" behind her front stage region which was depicted through social media. Although traditionally studied in a face-to-face setting, facework can be applied to an online setting given the internet's ability to allow users to broadcast a front online. Online features such as editing software, a lack of time constraint, and the physical barrier of a computer screen can give users the ability and courage to greatly extend the gap between their front stage and backstage regions, blurring the lines between what can be deemed authentic on social media and creating an entirely new level of front stage.

Introduction

A 19-year old's decision to quit social media made headlines in November of 2015. With over half a million followers on Instagram, 200,000 followers on Youtube and Tumblr, and 60,000 followers on Snapchat, some would classify the Australian teen as a social media star (Rodulfo, 2015). After maintaining a career in the social media industry for a number of years, however, Essena O'Neill came to a new realization about her work. Once posting daily photos on Instagram of everything from her fashion choices to her toned body, O'Neill asserted in 2015 that "social media is not real life" (McCluskey, 2015). In conjunction with this statement, O'Neill deleted more than 2,000 photos from her Instagram account and edited the captions on existing photos to portray the "realities" of the industry, including anecdotes about her sponsors and the hours of work that went into each photograph (Rodulfo, 2015). Her newfound opposition to social media captured instant media attention with coverage from *The New York Times*, *Time* magazine, *The Guardian*, and other popular news publications. McCluskey (2015) of *Time* magazine noted that O'Neill's announcement made global headlines, while Bromwich (2015) of *The New York Times* compared her announcement to statements made by record-breaking pop star, Beyoncé, who "admit[ted] that she did not, in fact, wake up like this."

According to Kristina Rodulfo (2015) of *Elle* magazine, the concept of the "Instagram model" has emerged as a new form of fame in the 21st century. The recent inclusion of social media in marketing tactics goes hand in hand with this new phenomenon. Organizations in the private and public sector in countries all over the world use social media as a platform to reach out to existing and potential customers. An active and successful social media presence has been cited to guarantee a company's "fame and glory" globally (Javer, n.d.). Public figures, celebrities, and models have also begun to take advantage of this new marketing strategy. According to Lou Stoppard of *The Financial Times*, today's modeling world requires more than "lithe limbs and sharp cheekbones…A stellar career requires not only a good face, but also followers — preferably hundreds of thousands across various social media channels" (Stoppard, 2015). Globally recognized models are extremely active on social media and are often recognized by their followers. For example, the current face of Estée Lauder and Calvin Klein Jeans, Kendall Jenner, has 27 million followers on Instagram (Stoppard, 2015).

Social media, however, was not solely created for marketing. It was also created, in part, to communicate and share snippets of one's life with friends and family. However, social media's availability to anyone with a computer or smartphone has increased its popularity and lucrative potential. Social media's popularity and

Julia Elizabeth Schuller (B.A., Corporate Communication, Penn State University) is an Internal Marketing, Video Production & Social Media Manager at Invoq Marketing Company.

Valerie Lynn Schrader (Ph.D., Communication Studies, Ohio University) is the Associate Professor of Communication Arts & Sciences, the Interim Director of Academic Affairs, and a Co-Coordinator of the Honors Program at the Schuylkill Campus of Penn State University.

availability has also made it the “perfect forum to scout for talent” in the modeling industry, where “wannabe models…can seek stardom from the comfort of home” (Stoppard, 2015). Fashion companies like Marc by Marc Jacobs take advantage of this by casting campaigns on social media in search of models. Aspiring stars can easily submit photographs of themselves by simply posting on their social media account and using the hashtag #CastMeMarc (Stoppard, 2015). Deriving fame by simply participating in campaigns such as these and by creating a notable following on social media is what is commonly referred to as social media modeling or ‘Instagram-modeling’ (Stoppard, 2015).

This new phenomenon of ‘Instagram-modeling’ has not only been known to acquire fame but also funds for aspiring models. Essena O'Neill, the Australian Instagram model who quit the industry, said she was able to make an income from marketing products on her social media accounts to followers, quoting her income to be “$2,000AUD a post EASY” (Hunt, 2015). O'Neill derived a majority of her fame and income through posting on social media sites, notably Instagram; however, after quitting the industry, she posted videos of herself talking about the dangers of social media on *Vimeo* and on her website. Along with her video blogs and website, O'Neill edited the captions on 96 of her Instagram photos to reveal the “realities” behind the industry of Instagram modeling, including personal anecdotes about her disillusionment towards the industry (Hunt, 2015).

The new era of ‘Instagram modeling’ provides scholars with an opportunity to take a fresh look at the modeling industry and its effect on women. For years, scholars have studied the mass media and its effect on body image for women, however, social media has only recently began to play a large role in the modeling industry (Perloff, 2014). According to Perloff (2014), “there has been relatively little theoretically-driven research on processes and effects of social media on young women’s body image and self perceptions” (p. 363). The new phenomenon of Instagram modeling takes this notion of social media and body image one step further. Essena O'Neill’s decision to leave the world of Instagram modeling and her statements of disproval towards the industry as a public figure draw attention to the potentially deceptive qualities of social media and the modeling industry. Through this rhetorical analysis, we apply Goffman’s theory of facework to Essena O'Neill’s Instagram modeling career as well as to O'Neill’s statements about the misleading attributes of social media. Goffman (1967) defines face as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during particular contact” (p. 5). For the purposes of this article, we define facework as the technique of how one’s face is created, reinforced, maintained, or diminished through interactions with others. Using Essena O’Neill’s career and decision to leave the world of Instagram modeling as a case study, we contend that the launch of the Instagram model into the social media world helps to create a new layer of the front stage while simultaneously giving users the opportunity to broadcast their backstage online. We also note that because of social media’s ability to blur the lines between what is front stage and backstage, the authenticity of what is portrayed as one’s backstage may be questionable.

Shortly after she posted her video blogs speaking about the dangers of social media, O'Neill received an influx of backlash, and has since removed herself from the online world completely, deleting all of her social media accounts, including Instagram, Youtube, Tumblr, and Twitter, as well as a majority of the content on her website. By 2017, she had deleted her website entirely. For this rhetorical analysis, we have selected six images, along with their original and updated captions, that illustrate Essena O’Neill’s use of facework. These six images were selected because they all contained original and updated captions. Many of O’Neill’s posts were deleted entirely before we began this project. While the original web address of O'Neill’s Instagram account from which we obtained these images and captions is no longer available, much of the content lives on through fan accounts as well as magazine and newspaper articles. The Instagram photographs that we studied for this analysis are documented in the appendix of this work. We also use a fan account under the pseudonym of Essena O’Neill on Youtube to reference the video blogs that O'Neill posted following her decision to quit social media and Instagram modeling. The videos are still the same in nature and content, however, they are no longer posted from the original source.

Goffman’s Facework

Erving Goffman discusses his concept of facework in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior.* In *Interaction Ritual*, Goffman (1967) defines facework as “the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face” (p. 12). He goes on to describe

face as "present[ing] an image" or a "good showing" (pp. 5-6). Other scholars have pragmatically defined face as "the public self-image of individuals" (Suryawanshi & Ronge, 2012, p. 2).

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1967) makes the assertion that "universal human nature is not a very human thing" (p. 45). Instead, he poses that people are "a kind of construct, built up not from inner psychic propensities but from moral rules that are impressed upon him from without" (Goffman, 1967, p. 45). Goffman (1959) further contends that "we come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons" (p. 20). Suryawanshi and Ronge (2012) describe this act of learning and adapting face as "ceaseless human enterprise to build public opinion and the opinion of self" (p. 2). They suggest that "every individual tries to be projected as a better human being with the help of various individual qualities and abstract entities such as self-esteem, respect, honor, reputation, recognition, approbation, etc." (Suryawanshi & Ronge , 2012, p. 2). According to Goffman (1967), this is done by face-saving, a process of working to maintain one's own face or the face of others (p. 6).

Facework has been used by numerous communication and sociology scholars in their studies of various phenomena. Communication scholars Valerie Manusov, Jody Koenig Kellas, and April R. Trees (2004) examined accounts, defined as "public explanations of untoward events" (p. 515), between friends through Goffman's theory of facework, noting how account sequences were perceived as either attentive or inattentive to the self and others' negative face (p. 514). In his article in *Poetics*, sociologist Roscoe C. Scarborough (2012) discusses how musicians use four facework strategies – underscoring, substituting, reflecting, and neutralizing – to save or maintain face during performances. Facework has also been used to examine comments from instructors' written feedback to students (Gardner, Anderson, & Wolvin, 2017), cell phone usage in the presence of friends (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2017), argumentative discourse between smoker and non-smoker friend groups (Durham & Friedman, 2016), and even interactions between fictional characters in musicals (Schrader, 2014).

Though facework has been used to study a variety of communication contexts, few researchers have studied the use of facework in online environments. In their article in the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, Lim, Vadrevu, Chan, and Basnyat (2012) examined how juvenile delinquents and at-risk youths used facework in their social media interactions on Facebook, noting how they used posts, comments, photographs, and tagging for "posturing, power aggrandizement, and reputation management" (p. 346). Romo, Thompson, and Donovan (2017) also examined how facework is used on social media. Studying how college students engage in privacy management on social media in regards to their alcohol-related posts, Romo et al. (2017) note "how facework is involved in remediating privacy breaches and the co-opting of privacy" (p. 173). We hope that this article will add to the growing body of literature in this area of study.

Essena O'Neill's Use of Facework as an Instagram Model

Essena O'Neill's persona as an Instagram model provides a case study for examining how facework is used in the online realm of social media. In *Interaction Ritual,* Goffman (1967) states "every person lives in a world of social encounters, involving him either in face-to-face or mediated contact with other participants" (p. 5). In the case of social media, Instagram models communicate through what Goffman refers to as mediated contact. In contrast to face-to-face contact, mediated contact on social media allows a person to maintain his/her face easier than in a direct confrontation. Because the encounters were online rather than face-to-face, O'Neill was able to prepare her face in a time frame over which she had much control. In one of her re-edited Instagram photograph captions, O'Neill (2015a) noted that "while this image might just look like a girl having fun, this was like two, three hours worth of shooting on a beach." In multiple video blogs, O'Neill (2015a) pointed out that many of her photographs on Instagram looked "effortless," although a lot of time and effort went into her photographs. In her *Behind the Image: Effortless* video blog, she noted "[her] life of [what appeared as] effortless beauty was not effortless" (O'Neill, 2015a). In this video, she used one of her modeling photographs to demonstrate that although the photograph made her look very relaxed and natural, "her makeup was quite heavy actually…and the lighting made [her] look quite tan when [she] actually wasn't… There [were] probably a hundred pictures and this was [her] favorite and they edited it so that it looked effortless" (O'Neill, 2015a). She went on to note that while many of her photographs appear to be candid, they were actually staged, and this staging took a lot of time and effort.

Through her video blogs and re-edited photo captions, O'Neill revealed how easy it was to maintain her face on Instagram as a model. Goffman (1967) defines maintaining or saving face as "when the line [a person] effectively takes presents an image of him that is internally consistent, that is supported by judgments and evidence conveyed by other participants, and that is confirmed by evidence conveyed through impersonal agencies in the situation" (p. 6). O'Neill maintained face by posting daily photographs of herself that aligned with the Instagram model persona that she wished to maintain. In one of her later blogs following her removal from social media, O'Neill (2015b) described her presence on social media as "a skinny, tan, blonde girl wearing the latest clothes." Her initial facework included wearing popular clothing and makeup, and upholding what she describes as an "edited, beautiful and perfect [life] for the rest of the world" (O'Neill, 2015c). She further described her social media presence as "contrived perfection made to get attention" (O'Neill, n.d.) in one of her re-edited Instagram photo captions (See Image 1). This photograph of her tanning and studying in a bikini that was once captioned "Things are getting pretty wild at my house. Maths B and English in the sun,[1]" was then edited to read, "see how relatable my captions were – stomach sucked in, strategic pose, pushed up boobs. I just want younger girls to know this isn't candid life, or cool or inspirational. It's contrived perfection made to get attention" (O'Neill, n.d.).

Coinciding with the act of face saving is front. Goffman (1959) describes front as the equipment with which one projects face, including setting, appearance, and manner. During her time as an Instagram model, O'Neill maintained her face through setting, appearance, and manner. The controlled online environment in which O'Neill projected face represents her primary setting for her facework. Goffman (1959) defines setting as the "furniture, decor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it" (p. 22). O'Neill also crafted a secondary setting in her photographs by choosing the right location for her photographs. For example, many of her photographs were taken on a beach to portray her relaxing on the beach, although O'Neill was actually participating in extensive photoshoots at the time. This secondary setting is then projected onto the primary setting of the online environment.

Goffman (1959) also notes that "those who would use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their performance when they leave it" (p. 22). Goffman (1959) goes on to note that facework is performed in bounded regions, commonly referred to as the front and back regions. He defines front region as "the place where the performance is given" (p. 107) and back region, or backstage, as "a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course" (p. 112). He notes that front regions embody certain standards, including moral and instrumental requirements (Goffman, 1959, pp. 107-108). The back region, however, is a region where the performer can "drop his front" or "step out of character" (Goffman, 1959, p. 112). O'Neill's comments regarding her career as an Instagram model often align with this concept of facework being conducted in a specific region or setting. She was frequently quoted as saying that the persona she portrayed in an online setting, or front region, was not true to her actual personality, or back region. She notes that, "Online it looked like I had the perfect life… yet I was so completely lonely and miserable inside. I hid it from everyone. I smiled and laughed in pictures and vlogs. No one knew I had what now is described as social anxiety disorder, depression, [and] body dimorphic" (O'Neill, 2016). O'Neill also avoided threats to face through the online setting of social media. For example, on Instagram, one can delete undesirable comments posted on photographs. In this way, O'Neill was able to tailor her front stage image through crafting the setting in her photographs and removing any criticism from her posts.

This online setting also allowed for hours of preparation time regarding O'Neill's appearance. Goffman (1959) defines appearance as "stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer's social status" (p. 24). In this case, the stimuli of O'Neill's performance was a post on social media where she upheld the physically attractive and happy image that she wished to maintain online. Through O'Neill's online front, she was able to spend time choosing the appropriate clothing and makeup to uphold her appearance. Often, the clothing and makeup that O'Neill chose for her photographs were those that she was getting paid to promote by various companies, which was not always apparent to her followers on social media. Furthermore, the online setting allowed for more time to be spent on photoshoots, which were then followed by choosing the most flattering and candid-looking photograph. In an email newsletter, O'Neill stated that she "would spend eight hours a day photographing, styling, editing,

[1] "Maths B and English" refers to the school subjects for which O'Neill appeared to be studying in her Instagram photo.

filming, [and] scrolling" (O'Neill, 2016). O'Neill also notes that all of her photographs were edited through various editing software, and this editing also contributed to her online appearance or front stage (O'Neill, 2016). In one of her video blogs, she pointed out the overuse of editing software on social media by asking her viewers, "Why even compare your edited self with someone else's edited self?" (O'Neill, 2015b). Comments like these hint at the disparity between O'Neill's front stage and backstage.

O'Neill's manner on social media was also very important to maintain her face. Goffman (1959) defines manner as "those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation" (p. 24). O'Neill's manner online can be analyzed through her photograph captions. O'Neill's interaction role with her viewers typically was of an average girl looking "effortless" and sharing her photographs with the world (O'Neill, 2016). However, what seemed like candid photographs were actually paid promotional photographs for different companies (O'Neill, 2016). In the email newsletter that she posted a few months following her removal from social media, O'Neill described the details of her social media fame by noting how she "felt exhausted trying to keep up this bubbly, funny, happy facade" (O'Neill, 2016). Goffman (1959) notes that, "Often it seems that whatever enthusiasm and lively interest we have at our disposal we reserve for those before whom we are putting on a show [the front region] and that the surest sign of backstage solidarity is to feel that it is safe to lapse into an asociable mood of sullen, silent irritability" (p. 132). As expressed by O'Neill's comments, the manner she portrayed in her online "front region" as a happy and outgoing model was very far from her true feelings, which were only represented backstage.

Another aspect of O'Neill's social media persona was that her lifestyle focused around healthy eating and fitness. Many of her posts focused on her toned body or the vegan meals that she was eating that day. On Instagram, her healthy lifestyle was presented very positively; however, O'Neill later revealed that she was engaging in very unhealthy eating habits to look thin in photographs. In her email newsletter, O'Neill (2016) talked about how she "became so caught up [in] becoming thinner" and used the idea of becoming "fitter" as her excuse to engage in unhealthy eating practices. She supported this statement with one of her re-edited Instagram photograph captions. O'Neill re-captioned a photograph of herself pictured in a bikini on the beach (See Image 2) as "NOT REAL LIFE - Took over 100 [photographs] in similar poses trying to make my stomach look good. Would have hardly eaten that day" (O'Neill, n.d.). In another edited caption to one of her Instagram photographs (See Image 3), she described herself as "a 15 year old girl that calorie restricts and excessively exercises" (O'Neill, n. d.).

O'Neill talked about the pressure she felt to portray a physically fit and attractive type of face on social media throughout her video blogs, re-edited Instagram photo captions, and email newsletter. She traced her beginnings in social media to age twelve, when "[she] saw [herself] as this huge, solid, too tall, nerdy, awkward majorly unpopular girl. [She] thought to be social media famous would be the best job ever and if all these people 'liked' [her, she] would be happy" (O'Neill, 2016). According to Goffman (1959), "a given social front tends to become institutionalized in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectations to which it gives rise, and tends to take on a meaning and stability apart from the specific task which happen at the time to be performed in its name. The front becomes a 'collective representation' and a fact in its own right" (p. 26). For O'Neill, her front was developed through her perceived notions of what society expected of her; she felt pressure to be viewed as outgoing, sexually attractive, and happy. O'Neill's setting, appearance, and manner each coincided with one of these societal expectations. For example, the setting of her photographs allowed to her give the appearance that her lifestyle was active and fun. Rather than posting photographs of her sitting on a couch at home, O'Neill posted photographs that suggested that she made frequent trips to the beach. Furthermore, her appearance upheld societal expectations to be physically fit and sexually attractive; O'Neill maintained this appearance through unhealthy dieting practices, editing software, makeup, and revealing clothing. Finally, she portrayed her manner as relaxed and happy through her captions and facial expressions in her photos. This collective representation united O'Neill's front with her perceived expectations of the industry of Instagram modeling.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* Goffman (1959) notes that performances of face are "socialized, molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented" (p. 35). Goffman (1959) terms this concept the idealization of face, which he defines as "an idealized view of the situation" (p. 35). He observes that, "when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole" (Goffman, 1959, p. 35). O'Neill talked about the societal beauty standards as the idealization

that she felt pressured to uphold through her re-edited photo captions and video blogs regarding the dangers of social media. In one of her edited Instagram photograph captions (See Image 4), she noted that the "only reason [she] went to the beach [that] morning was to shoot these bikinis because the company paid [her] and also [she] looked good [in comparison] to society's current standards" (O'Neill, n.d.). O'Neill stated that during her time as a social media star, she also felt increasing pressure to obtain more likes and followers on Instagram (O'Neill, 2015c). Eventually, her reasoning for leaving her career as an Instagram model was because she did not agree with social media's "basis on views, likes and followers" (O'Neill, 2015c), which relates to Goffman's concept of idealization of face. O'Neill felt pressured to obtain "views, likes and followers" by aligning herself with societal versions of beauty. In her video blogs, O'Neill talked about how much emphasis people put on the number of likes and views they get on social media posts, asserting that "we're more than a fucking number" and furthermore, "we're more than how good we look in that photo" (O'Neill, 2015a).

O'Neill also pointed out the pressure she felt to portray herself as sexually attractive on social media from a very young age. In her *Behind the Image: What to Wear* video blog, she stated, "If you want to be successful on social media, number one, show flesh. I mean, especially if you are female and in the age bracket I was in of health, fitness, inspiration, fashion, beauty. You need to look sexually appealing to get followers, to get attention and that's everything we see in the mass media, in magazines, in TV" (O'Neill, 2015b). In the same video blog, she noted "Your sex appeal… gets you attention. It gets you a career on social media" (O'Neill, 2015b). This pressure that O'Neill felt to portray herself as attractive and sexually appealing online aligns with Goffman's concept of idealization. In order to gain followers and likes, or obtain the idealization of the face that O'Neill was aiming to portray, O'Neill aligned herself with the standards that she believed society upheld, including sexual appeal.

Goffman (1959) asserts that when an individual engages in facework, he/she typically conceals something in an attempt to achieve idealization (p. 43). He notes that "if an individual is to give expression to ideal standards during his performance, then he will have to forego or conceal action which is inconsistent with these standards" (p. 41). Goffman (1959) points out that the individual engaging facework may be concealing a variety of matters, including a profitable form of activity (p. 43). In the case of Instagram modeling, many followers of Instagram models do not realize that the Instagram stars who they are following on social media are actually promoting certain brands and products in exchange for money. As noted previously, O'Neill pointed out that she would make roughly 2,000AUD per Instagram post. In one of her re-edited photo captions (See Image 5), she wrote,

> EDIT REAL CAPTION: paid for this photo. If you find yourself looking at 'Instagram girls' and wishing your life was [theirs]… Reali[z]e you only see what they want. If they tag a company, 99% of the time it's paid. Nothing is wrong with supporting brands you love (for example, I proudly promote Eco sheets or a vegan meal in exchange for money as its business for a purpose to me). BUT this ^^^ this has no purpose. No purpose in a forced smile, tiny clothes and being paid to look pretty. We are a generation told to consume and consume, with no thought of where it all comes from and where it all goes" (O'Neill, n.d.).

In one of her video blogs, she stated that, "I wasted four years of my life getting paid to wear these clothes" (O'Neill, 2015b). Prior to her statements regarding the dangers of social media and realities of the Instagram modeling industry, O'Neill engaged in facework by concealing the paid aspect of her social media persona.

Goffman (1959) also notes that "errors and mistakes are often corrected before the performance takes place" (p. 43). O'Neill illustrated this type of concealment by discussing her backstage work where she edited photographs. Goffman (1959) notes that in the backstage region, "costumes and other parts of personal front may be adjusted and scrutinized for flaws" (p. 112). As mentioned before, O'Neill carefully crafted the setting and appearance of her photographs and then used multiple editing software applications to perfect her photographs before posting them online. In a photograph that she posted of herself smiling (Image 6), she re-edited the caption to read, "I had acne here, this is a lot of makeup. I was smiling because I thought I looked good" (O'Neill, n.d.). Goffman also notes that performers of facework may conceal certain things by only showing the end product to their audience. In these cases, Goffman (1959) observes that the audience "will be led into judging [the performer] on the basis of something that has been finished, polished, and packaged" (p. 44). This type of concealment is illustrated through O'Neill's use of editing software and a carefully crafted front to create her face in her Instagram photos. Her promotional activities, errors, mistakes, and preparation time were also concealed from the public.

Furthermore, O'Neill concealed the sacrifice of her personal beliefs throughout her Instagram modeling career. Her message now is clear — that social media is not real and she does not support it. However, during her Instagram modeling career, the public was not aware of her opinions about her career. Goffman (1959) indicates that, "If the activity of an individual is to embody several ideal standards, and if a good showing is to be made, it is likely then that some of these standards will be sustained in public by the private sacrifice of some of the others" (p. 44). Goffman (1959) also observes that "often…the performer will sacrifice those standards whose loss can be concealed and will make this sacrifice in order to maintain standards whose inadequate application cannot be concealed" (p. 44). For O'Neill, her true opinions of the modeling industry on social media had to be concealed in order for her to maintain her career as an Instagram model.

In October of 2015, O'Neill decided to quit her career as an Instagram model and reveal a completely new persona to her audience. Her decision to quit the industry caused her to lose face. Losing face or being in what Goffman (1967) refers to "wrong face," is "when information is brought forth in some way about [a person's] social worth which cannot be integrated, even with effort, into the line that is being sustained for him" (p. 8). O'Neill's loss of face included a completely new front which could not be reconciled with her previous front on social media. The content she posted on Instagram after her decision to quit the industry had a very different setting, appearance and manner than her preceding photographs. Images that once pictured O'Neill tanning on the beach now had the new setting of her bedroom. Instead of posting photographs of her heavily made-up appearance, O'Neill posted photographs of herself sporting a ponytail and wearing no makeup. While her Instagram captions originally portrayed her manner as happy and perky, her newly-posted videos showed her crying and discussing her battles with depression and body dysmorphic disorder. O'Neill argued that this persona was the "true" version of herself, or what Goffman would refer to as her backstage persona.

When loss of face occurs, facework is often performed in an attempt to save face. Here, the term facework is used to describe the process of "counteract[ing] 'incidents'—that is, events whose effective symbolic implications threaten face" (Goffman, 1967, p. 12). A variety of facework strategies may be used to combat the loss of face. For example, a person may partake in the avoidance process in which he/she avoids contact in situations where threats to face are likely to occur (Suryawanshi & Ronge, 2012, p. 4). Another type of facework is the corrective process, or corrective interchange, which takes place when threat to face has already occurred (Suryawanshi & Ronge, 2012, p. 5). In addition to the corrective process, one may avoid threat to face by participating in a post-threat type of facework referred to as poise (Suryawanshi & Ronge, 2012, p. 6). Noted by Goffman (1967) as an important type of facework, poise allows a person to control and lessen the impact of the loss of face after a threat by minimizing one's embarrassment (p. 13).

O'Neill's revelation of her backstage to the public threatened her overall face, thus presenting the need for corrective facework. Her actions following her decision to quit Instagram modeling illustrated two of the four stages of the corrective process: challenge, offering, acceptance, and thanks. In the first stage of the corrective process, one must engage in the challenge of calling attention to the misconduct or loss of face (Goffman, 1967). O'Neill called attention to her loss of face by editing the captions of her photographs to show what she claims is her "true," or backstage, persona. Goffman (1967) suggests that in the challenge stage of the corrective process, the person "suggest[s] that the threatened claims are to stand firm and that the threatening event itself will have to be brought back into line" (p. 20). O'Neill's case is unique, however, because she did not attempt to return to the line of her prior Instagram model persona. Instead, she created a new persona for herself via social media, which she argued was a more authentic version of herself.

In the offering stage of the corrective process, the person is given a chance to "correct the offense and reestablish expressive order" (Goffman, 1967, p. 20). As previously mentioned, O'Neill did not attempt to return to her previous front stage persona, however, she did attempt to reestablish some type of order on Instagram by revealing her backstage persona. She did this by creating a website and video blogs with the sole purpose of discussing the dangers of social media. She also attempted to reposition the responsibility in this stage by blaming social media and societal beauty standards, rather than herself. In her first video blog following her decision to quit Instagram modeling, she stated, "I don't agree with social media as it currently is… I think that culture creates validation and insecurity in likes and views. I think it's so detrimental to human health and human ability. When you put work out there, or a part of yourself out there, and a number on a screen dictates that success or that value, it's ridiculous." She also implied that she was not wrong in her career as an Instagram model, but rather that she

was “a product of a much bigger system [or] culture that we’re all in” (O'Neill, 2015b). By broadcasting what she claimed is her backstage personality, O’Neill attempted to rectify the situation by shifting blame to the industry of Instagram modeling and by rebranding herself as a social advocate.

In the next stage of the corrective process, the person who has lost face may receive acceptance for their apology and loss of face. Because Essena O'Neill is a public figure, there is a multitude of mixed feedback on her decision to quit Instagram modeling. In November of 2015, Sally Holmes of *Elle* magazine published an article on what she refers to as “inevitable backlash.” Holmes (2015) documented some of the negative feedback that O'Neill received after speaking out about the deceptive qualities of social media. In response to Holmes’ (2015) article, one reader commented, “I can't believe this IDIOT has become ‘news.’ This is the downfall of human society people. Don't give this story any traction and let this dumb bobble head blonde who has nothing to offer the world just disappear into obscurity.” Another reader replied, “So much hostility against someone I highly doubt you know personally. Regardless of her motives, she makes a valid point. I fail to see how ‘her message—that living your life for validation from others via likes on social media is harmful and isolating’ is the downfall of human society” (Holmes, 2015).

Although many of her followers did support her, an overwhelming majority criticized O'Neill for her decision to quit the industry. Eventually, this criticism caused O'Neill to almost completely remove herself from the Internet. As mentioned previously, O'Neill deleted all of her social media accounts including Instagram. She also removed the videos she posted speaking out about the dangers of social media. Her past videos and social media posts now only live on through fan websites. Goffman (1967) notes that acceptance “establish[es] the expressive order and the faces supported by this order” (p. 22). Because O'Neill has not reinstated a presence online, she has not yet completed the stages of acceptance or thanks in the corrective process.

Discussion

When applied to Essena O'Neill’s career as an Instagram model, Goffman’s theoretical construct of facework illustrates how aspiring models can craft their image online, specifically through the new phenomenon of Instagram modeling. Goffman’s concept of front is illustrated through an Instagram model’s use of his/her appearance, setting, and manner on social media. These three aspects of front can be highly manipulated because of the lack of a time constraint in an online setting. This online setting also gives Instagram models the ability to conceal certain aspects of their “back regions” when their front regions are presented online. Goffman’s concept of idealization is also exemplified through O’Neill’s efforts to maintain societal beauty standards, including sexual appeal and physique. Following her decision to quit the industry of Instagram modeling, O’Neill also engaged in corrective facework by attempting to reestablish order for herself through broadcasting what she claims is her backstage persona online and rebranding herself as a social advocate.

It is interesting to note that the online setting of O'Neill's corrective facework provided the opportunity for her to continue to engage in the corrective process regarding her loss of face online. In a face-to-face setting, the four stages of the corrective process can be completed in a matter of minutes. However, there is no time limit for any type of facework in an online environment. One can engage in facework at different times and have the facework still be effective. For example, O'Neill’s four stages of the corrective process occurred over a period of roughly three months, spanning the months of November 2015 to January 2016. Her corrective facework may still continue, as she may return to the online world and continue to develop a new front for herself.

The asynchronous nature of online facework also allows the performers of facework to manipulate their fronts to a greater degree than in a personal setting. For example, in a face-to-face situation, one is not able to alter his/her physical appearance through editing software. One is also not able to manipulate his/her manner as drastically in a personal setting as he/she is able to online. For example, captions to posts on social media can be edited at any time. This can include altering an existing post, adding a caption prior to posting, and adding a new caption after an initial post has already been captured. One may also simply delete a post online, as Essena O’Neill did to nearly 2,000 of her photographs on Instagram. This ability to drastically manipulate one’s presence online differentiates front from what Goffman had originally envisioned in the 20th century.

Although Goffman’s original theories regarding facework do not directly include concepts of facework in an online setting, his concepts can be used to study social media texts. Because one may alter his/her face online in

different ways, social media can be used as a new layer of one's front stage. However, in the case study examined in this article, it is difficult to know whether or not the backstage persona that O'Neill projected online was truly an authentic one. In studying one's presence on social media as a new layer of the front stage, scholars may focus on social media's lack of a time constraint, the further gap that social media presents between one's front stage and backstage, and the authenticity (or lack thereof) in regards to the backstage persona that is projected online. Future research may also study the effect of photograph editing software on one's ability to manipulate their appearance online. Furthermore, scholars may analyze Goffman's concepts of idealization on social media versus in a personal setting to determine if there is a stronger influence towards idealization in a social media setting due to social media's basis around likes and followers.

Although social media has the ability to extend the gap between one's front stage and backstage and to create an new layer front stage, certain users like Essena O'Neill still choose to broadcast their "backstage" online. After finding dissatisfaction through maintaining a front online, O'Neill broadcasted her "backstage" online by editing the captions of her photographs. Captions that once portrayed a front stage version of O'Neill tanning by the pool were adjusted to detail the actions O'Neill took to maintain her online front— extreme dieting, strategic posing, good lighting, sexual appeal and undisclosed advertising. A little over one year after O'Neill's decision to reveal the inner workings of her Instagram posts, the Federal Trade Commission took a strong stance against undisclosed advertising on social media. An advocacy group called Public Citizen argued that "Instagram has become a Wild West of disguised advertising, targeting young people and especially young women" ("Celebrities Warned over Instagram Ads," 2017, April 20). As a result of their investigation and other similar cases, the Federal Trade Commission began to take action against celebrities and other popular social media personas who have endorsed products online without disclosure. According to the *Business Insider*, the Federal Trade Commission sent letters to 90 celebrities and other social media stars in April 2017 that warned users to "clearly show when an Instagram post was sponsored by a brand" (Rath, 2017). In the following months, popular users of Instagram used #ad and #ambassador to identify their Instagram posts as paid advertisements.

Among the recent backlash against undisclosed advertising on social media, societal trends towards being "real" online have also gained traction. Campaigns like "Aerie Real" by American Eagle and the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty have recently emerged in effort to portray "more realistic images rather than relying on carefully polished portrayals of models who don't reflect the general population of customers" and to "celebrate diverse and healthy body shapes" (Lindeman, 2014; Nielson, 2013) In Dove's "Evolution of Beauty" video, Dove brings attention to the realities of the modeling industry through the portrayal of a model who is transformed through professional hair, makeup, lighting, photographs shot at good angles, and editing software that digitally enhances the image of the model (Nielson, 2013). However, Dove's campaign is still an advertisement, which may lead to questions of its authenticity and purpose. Essena O'Neill manipulated her photographs in a similar fashion to Dove's campaign. New technologies like Snapchat filters and Airbrush, a free smartphone application that allows anyone to do everything from removing blemishes to reshaping the size of physical features with a few simple swipes, allow anyone to easily alter his/her social media front. Technologies like these contribute to social media's position as a new layer of front stage, although social media also allows its users the option to broadcast a backstage online. However, social media's forum of mediated contact blurs the lines between a backstage persona and front stage persona, leaving scholars with much to explore between the traditional and contemporary versions of facework. As consumers, it is difficult to know what can be deemed truly authentic and what may be a manipulation of one's front stage for personal or profitable gain.

After quitting the industry of Instagram modeling, Essena O'Neill encouraged her fans to seek validation through whatever makes them happy on a personal level rather than through likes and followers online. O'Neill also encouraged her fans to stop comparing their peers' perfected "front regions" on social media with their own polished "front regions." This desire for one's "front region" to lie favorably in the eyes of one's peers is an ambition that Goffman identified decades ago. Participation in facework and consequently the need for validation or acceptance by society is an everlasting one. By applying Goffman's theoretical construct of facework to the online realm, we can recognize social media for what it truly is — the front stage in a new medium.

References

Bromwich, J. (2015, November 3). Essena O'Neill, Instagram Star, Recaptions Her Life. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/04/fashion/essena-O'Neill-instagram-star-recaptions-her-life.html?_r=0

Celebrities Warned over Instagram Ads. (2017, April 20). *BBC.* Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/news/business-39650580

Durham, W. T. & Friedman, R. B. (2016). Friendship and argumentative Discourse: A qualitative study of facework in smoker and non-smoker friend groups. *Florida Communication Journal, 44(1),* 61-76.

Gardner, E. E., Anderson, L. B. & Wolvin, A. D. (2017). Understanding instructor immediacy, credibility, and facework strategies through a qualitative analysis of written instructor feedback. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication, 18(1),* 27-35.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.

Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior.* Chicago: Aldine.

Holmes, S. (2015, November 4). The Inevitable Take Down of 18-Year-Old Viral Instagram Star Essena O'Neill Begins. *Elle.* Retrieved from http://www.elle.com/culture/news/a31683/backlash-essena-O'Neill/

Hunt, E. (2015, November 3). Essena O'Neill Quits Instagram Claiming Social Media 'is not real life.' *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/nov/03/instagram-star-essena-O'Neill-quits-2d-life-to-reveal-true-story-behind-images

Javer, Z. (n.d.) How to smart tweet your way to fame and glory. Retrieved from https://www.thesocialmediahat.com/blog/how-smart-tweet-your-way-fame-and-glory-07022014

Lim, S. S., Vadrevu, S., Chan, Y. H. & Basnyat, I. (2012). Facework on Facebook: The online publicness of juvenile delinquents and youths-at-risk. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 56(3),* 346-361.

Lindeman, T. F. (2014). Aerie Campaign Takes Embracing Beauty a Step Further. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Retrieved from http://www.post-gazette.com/business/2014/01/18/Embodying-variety-STOCKS-OF-LOCAL-INTEREST/stories/201401180045

Manusov, V., Kellas, J. K. & Trees, A. R. (2004). Do unto others? Conversational moves and perceptions of attentiveness toward other face in accounting sequences between friends. *Human Communication Research, 30(4),* 514-539.

McCluskey, M. (2016, January 6). Instagram Star Essena O'Neill Breaks Her Silence On Quitting Social Media. *Time.* Retrieved from http://time.com/4167856/essena-O'Neill-breaks-silence-on-quitting-social-media/

Miller-Ott, A. E. & Kelly, L. (2017). A politeness theory analysis of cell-phone usage in the presence of friends. *Communication Studies, 68(2),* 190-207.

Nielson, H. E. (2013). Dove campaign for real beauty. In J. J. Reel (ed.), *Eating Disorders* (pp. 147-149). Santa Barbara: Greenwood.

O'Neill, E. [Essena O'Neill]. (2015a, November 5). *Behind the Image: Effortless.* [Video file] Retrieved from https://youtu.be/PkeZr86_gUw

O'Neill, E. [Essena O'Neill]. (2015b, December 15). *Behind the Image:What to Wear.* [Video file] Retrieved from https://youtu.be/s89KkU9-CCk

O'Neill, E. [Essena O'Neill]. (2015c, November 5). *Why I think Social Media Sucks.* [Video file] Retrieved from https://youtu.be/Imk6a_4uAPw

O'Neill, E. (2016, January). *Subject: Here it goes…*[Tumblr Page]. Retrieved from http://agirlnamedally.tumblr.com/post/136577427665/hello-can-anyone-please-make-this-email-from

O'Neill, E. [essenaO'Neill]. (n.d.). Posts. [Instagram page]. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/MuxTZ9tDcO/?taken-by=essenaO'Neill

Perloff, R. M. (2014). Social media effects on young women's body image concerns: Theoretical perspectives and an agenda for research. *Sex Roles, 71*, 363-377.

Rath, J. (2017, April 20). The FTC wants social media stars to stop sneaking in ads on Instagram. *Business Insider.* Retrieved from http://www.businessinsider.com/the-ftc-wants-social-media-stars-to-stop-sneaking-in-ads-on-instagram-2017-4

Rodulfo, K. (2015, November 2). 100 Shots, One Day of Not Eating: What Happens When You Say What Really Goes Into the Perfect Bikini Selfie. *Elle*. Retrieved from http://www.elle.com/culture/news/a31635/essena-O'Neill-instagram-social-media-is-not-real-life/

Romo, L. K., Thompson, C. M. & Donovan, E. E. (2017). College drinkers' privacy management of alcohol content on social-networking sites. *Communication Studies, 68(2),* 173-189.

Scarborough, R. C. (2012). Managing challenges on the front stage: The face-work strategies of musicians. *Poetics, 40(6),* 542–564.

Schrader, V. L. (2014). Face-work, social movement leadership, and "Glinda the Good:" A textual analysis of the character G(a)linda in the musical *Wicked*. *Studies in Musical Theatre, 8(1),* 43-55.

Stoppard, L. (2015). Instagram and the new model statistic. *Financial Times,* Retrieved from https://next.ft.com/content/4a955b12-f7e8-11e4-8bd5-00144feab7de

Suryawanshi, D., & Ronge, P. (2012). Looking into face: A pragmatic appraisal of public self-image. *Language In India*, *12(6),* 387-397.

Appendix

Image 1

Image 2

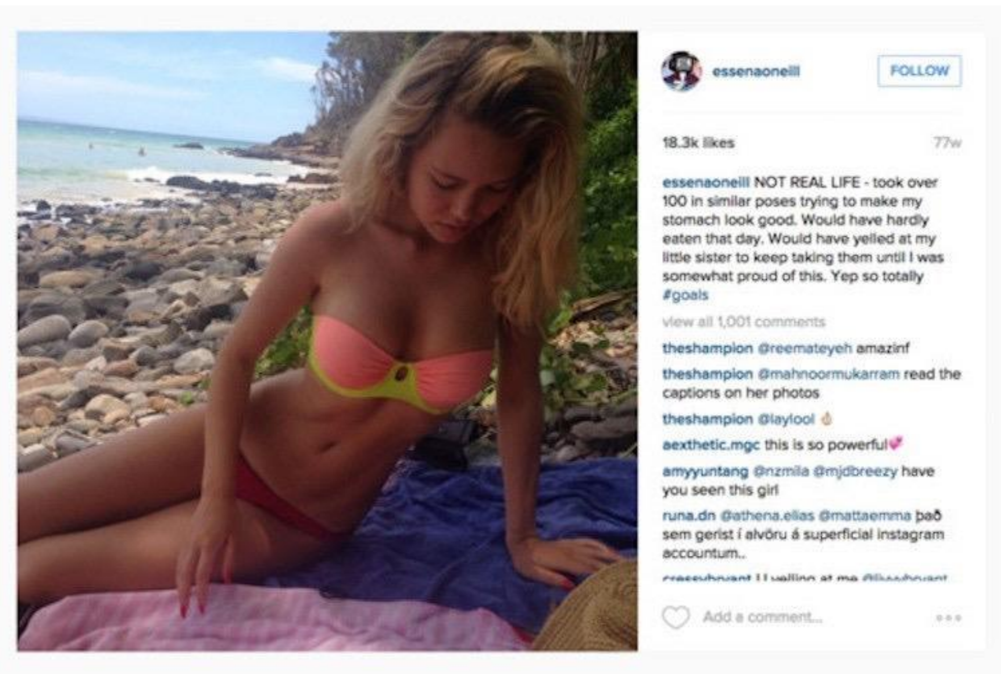

Image 3

Image 4

Image 5

14.5k likes 99w

essenaoneill Not real life. Only reason we went to the beach this morning was to shoot these bikinis because the company paid me and also I looked good to society's current standards. I was born and won the genetic lottery. Why else would I have uploaded this photo? Read between the lines, or ask yourself "why does someone post a photo... What is the outcome for them? To make a change? Look hot? Sell something? I thought I was helping young girls get fit and healthy. But I only realised at 19 that placing any amount of self worth on your physical form is so limiting! I could have been writing, exploring, playing, anything beautiful and real... Not trying to validate my worth through a bikini shot with no substance #celebrityconstruct

view all 837 comments

Image 6

essenaoneill FOLLOW

29.1k likes 73w

essenaoneill I had acne here, this is a lot of makeup. I was smiling because I thought I looked good. Happiness based on aesthetics will suffocate your potential here on earth.

view all 1,121 comments

loquil @thedistillerymarket this is awesome!!

ellahastingss @sylvielovegrove not even she could cover up my spot

skylarguercia @isabellagossweiler look at this Girls page

cherrychild_0403 @honeymoonprinzessin ich muss dir gleich was erzöhlen

iwascrazydrunkwheni After a rigorously brief overview of your profile, I wanted to let you know I have already married and divorced you in my mind. Thanks for all the wonderful imaginary memories... you will always have a special place in my heart.

Add a comment...

Ohio Communication Journal
Volume 56 – March 2018, pp. 93-105

#YoSoy132's use of Social Media: Public Screens in a Mexican Youth Movement

Caroline Waldbuesser

This essay explores the use of artwork and slogans by #YoSoy132, a Mexican youth movement during the 2012 presidential election in Mexico. The movement used art and slogans to communicate a new ideology to get into an alternative public screen. This essay demonstrates how social media and artwork can be used in movements where the protestors have limited access to mainstream media. In addition, it adds to rhetorical knowledge because it builds on the understanding of how modern movements utilize different strategies to gain an audience. Further, it contributes to the understanding of the internet as an alternative public screen, which is becoming increasingly prevalent in modern youth movements. Additionally, the essay questions the assumption of what it means for a movement to be successful. Lastly, this article discusses the constraints of movements using social media to make a rapid change in a political system.

Keywords: social movements, social media, youth movements, alternative public screens, #YoSoy132

> "If the ground is shaking, it's #YoSoy132 that's marching!"
>
> – Animalpolitico, #YoSoy132 twitter supporters ("Cracks form in," n.d.).

The past few years have brought an increase in youth-led social movements across the world. #YoSoy132 is an example of a youth movement that arose in Mexico in 2012 (Llana, 2012). The 2012 presidential election created a rhetorical situation, which the youth responded to, resulting in the creation of #YoSoy132. The conditions in Mexico restricted the movement from using the traditional means of gaining the public eye through the media (Llana, 2012; Oikonomakis, 2012), which forced the movement to engage in alternative methods to influence their audience. Other youth movements, including the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, have also demonstrated the importance of the use of social media to transmit information and gain supporters outside of the traditional media outlets (Greene & Kuswa, 2012; Jones, 2014). Through this analysis, I argue that the #YoSoy132 movement embraced the internet and social media as an alternative public screen in order to gain support from their audience. Further, to get onto this alternative public screen, the movement utilized slogans and artwork to carry an alternative ideology to protesters across the internet. The spread of this ideology helped to create identification across supporters online. To support this argument, I first discuss the rhetorical situation surrounding the creation of the movement. Next, I review past literature exploring the use of social media, public screens, and ideology in social movements. Lastly, through a rhetorical analysis of the movement, I posit that the movement used artwork and slogans to create an alternative ideology, which they disseminated through social media.

In the modern political climate, understanding how youth and leaderless movements operate is imperative (Greene & Kuswa, 2012; Jones, 2014). Through this essay, I explore how one modern youth movement in Mexico, #YoSoy132, used artwork and slogans to carry their message across an alternative public screen. By analyzing #YoSoy132, I add to previous research by showing how #YoSoy132 broke onto the internet as an alternative public screen. Additionally, I also discuss what prevented the movement from being successful in blocking the presidential candidate, Peña Nieto, from winning the election. Through looking at this movement, we can begin to understand what helps leaderless youth movements be more successful in their efforts for change. Since movements seem to be on the rise in many countries across the word, analyzing the contributions and rhetorical strategies of previous movements is essential.

The Mexican 2012 Presidential Election and the Rise of #YoSoy132

#YoSoy132 is a youth movement in Mexico that was created in response to the 2012 presidential election (Llana, 2012). One of the lead candidates in the election was former Mexico State governor Enrique Peña Nieto, the candidate for the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the Green Party ("Meet the candidates," 2012). The PRI was originally founded in 1929 and operated as the ruling party in Mexico until 2000 (de la Isla, 2012;

Caroline Waldbuesser (M.A., Texas State University) is a doctoral student at Ohio University.

Merrill & Miró, 1996). During their power reign, the PRI developed a reputation for violence and corruption, which continued into the 2012 presidential election ("Meet the candidates," 2012). In the past, the public viewed the PRI as an authoritarian regime known for blocking others from taking power; for example, in 1946 the PRI changed election rules so they could unregister candidates from opposing parties during elections (Hernandez, 2012; Klesner, 2001). Even though Peña Nieto was too young to be a part of the old PRI regime, some people still associated him with the past aggression of the PRI; despite this, he was still a favored candidate early in the 2012 election season in Mexico ("Meet the candidates," 2012).

#YoSoy132 began on May 11, 2012 when Peña Nieto gave a campaign speech at Iberoamericano University, a private institution in Mexico City (Llana, 2012). A protest was formed at the university by some of the students who felt that the media had been unfairly favoring Peña Nieto over the other candidates and decided to take action against the government (Llana, 2012; Oikonomakis, 2012). During the protest the students told Peña Nieto to get off their campus and reminded him of the events of a protest in 2006 in Atenco, Mexico (Gibler, 2006; Oikonomakis, 2012). In the previous protest in Atenco, Peña Nieto had ordered the police to step in during the demonstration, which resulted in violent searches of citizens' houses, assaults and beatings of innocent bystanders, and the deaths of two protestors (Gibler, 2006; Oikonomakis, 2012). When Peña Nieto attempted to leave the auditorium after his speech for the 2012 election, the students pinned him against a wall in order to rattle him and tell him he was not welcome on their campus (Garcia, 2012). Peña Nieto's campaign secretary and the media tried to frame the incident as a radical event staged by the other presidential candidate supporters, not as the action of the students (Garcia, 2012; Llana, 2012). In response to Peña Nieto's staff and the media, 131 students from the protest recorded themselves stating their names and showing their student identifications, proving that they actually were students and not radicals from the other parties. From this, the #YoSoy132 campaign was created; the 132 stood for anyone that wanted to join the students and stand against Enrique Peña Nieto and the PRI (Garcia, 2012; Hernandez, 2012). In English, "yo soy" means "I am"; therefore, the names translates to "I am 132." By using "YoSoy132," the movement was asking viewers to join the 131 students and become 132nd member of the movement. Additionally, The name was also partly borrowed from the movement "We Are All Khaled Said," which heavily relied on Facebook to share its messages (Cave, 2012).

After the creation of the movement, thousands of students began to protest Peña Nieto and his political party across Mexico as well through online sources including social media networks and YouTube channels (Cave, 2012; de la Isla, 2012). From here, the movement began to formulate its demands as the students fought to keep the PRI candidate from being elected as the next Mexican president in the July 1 election. One of the main structural components of the movement was that it sought to be leaderless; in a protest in Mexico City 74 students stood up to give their mandates for the protest, but remained nameless, only identifying themselves by the school that they attended. The demands the movement made were various, including a third nation-wide debate by the presidential candidates (de la Isla, 2012). Up to this point, two debates had been aired but by only one of the television networks; the other major networks broadcasted other events, including a soccer game, and ignored the debates. The students felt that this led to poor coverage and caused many viewers to focus on the soccer games instead of watching the presidential debates. Other issues that the movement stood for included "democratization of the country, transparency of the media, and free and fair elections" (Oikonomakis, 2012).

Along with being a leaderless movement, the #YoSoy132 movement had several other elements to their protests that caught the eye of the media and people in Mexico (Oikonomakis, 2012). The movement sought to be a peaceful movement and not interrupt those around them; at one protest of a PRI campaign in Mexico City, the protestors did not disrupt the PRI event but instead protested nearby the campaign. The movement also employed different art, posters, music, slogans, and other creative strategies (Oikonomakis, 2012; "Students invigorate Mexico's," 2012). The first official protest of the movement took place outside of Mexico's top television network, Televisa, when students chanted several slogans including: "Turn off the television, turn on your mind" and "Televisa turns you into an idiot" ("Students invigorate Mexico's," 2012). Around the time of this first protest it had been leaked that Peña Nieto had bought off Televisa in order to receive positive coverage from the television station where Mexican citizens got 90 percent of their election information, which further angered students and caused them to protest outside of the television network (Cave, 2012; "Students invigorate Mexico's," 2012).

To accompany the slogans, students often carried posters with slogans or pictures of Peña Nieto, fists, and other symbols that questioned the legitimacy of the PRI (Cave, 2012; Hernandez, 2012; Oikonomakis, 2012). The

students also painted their faces, covered their mouths with tape and the word "Televisa," poured red paint over themselves to signify blood, wrote #YoSoy132 and other slogans across their chests, and staged crime scenes in the middle of streets (Hernandez, 2012; Oikonomakis, 2012). These protests grew from approximately 10,000 students for a protest in Mexico City in the beginning of the movement, to more than 90,000 students gathering at events just two weeks later ("Students invigorate Mexico's," 2012). Protests were strongest around the capital, with significantly fewer students attending protests in cities farther from Mexico City. The movement declared they did not support one candidate over the other, but rather they solely worked against the PRI (Hernandez, 2012).

By the end of May, a little less than a month after #YoSoy132 had begun, Peña Nieto had already dropped 2.3 percent in the polls (Llana, 2012). Throughout the rest of the election, Peña Nieto continued to fight the negative light that was being cast on him by the movement (Hernandez, 2012; Oikonomakis, 2012). Despite the early success of the movement in dropping Peña Nieto's favorability in the polls, Peña Nieto still won the presidential election on July 1, 2012 ("Mexico election runner-up," 2012). Even though the movement did not succeed in preventing the PRI from gaining power again, the movement still planned to continue even after the election (Tuckman, 2012). Students had voiced their frustration with the system and wanted to keeping fighting for their voices to be heard, especially with the newly elected president and the PRI resuming some of its lost power in Mexico. Along with understanding the rhetorical situation behind the protests, the type of movement that #YoSoy132 represents needs to be explored as well.

Social movements seek to alter the current power status and change the structure of the establishment (Cathcart, 1978). #YoSoy132 represents a type of modern movement that is often driven by younger generations and utilizes technologies as well as other creative strategies to convey messages. Related to this movement are the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movements. These modern protests represent movements that are not bound by a specific place or time because they are able to transcend traditional protest limitations through technologies (Greene & Kuswa, 2012). This rhetorical strategy allows these movements to not only connect with people in their immediate area, but also people across the nation and even the world. Occupy Wall Street also utilized social media to reach an audience that it could not have reached otherwise, demonstrating the importance of technology to modern social movements (Jones, 2014). In order to understand the rhetorical strategies used by #YoSoy132, I next discuss the use of artwork, slogans, and students in other past social movements.

Artwork, Slogans, and Students in Past Movements

The #YoSoy132 campaign not only reflected a modern "youth" movement, but it also employed specific types of rhetorical strategies including the use of artwork and slogans. One of the main elements that the #YoSoy132 movement used was slogans, as even the name of the movement served as a slogan. Past movements have utilized these tactics in order to alter the current system as well as gain the attention of the public and encourage members of the movement (Romano, 2013). Romano (2013) examined the use of slogans in Madrid's 'Puerta del Sol' protests in 2011, which were part of a number of protests that happened throughout Spain in response to the national economic crisis that caused serious financial problems for the people ("Thousand of protestors," 2014). The slogans represented metaphors that the protestors employed in order to carry their messages to the government, current protestors, and the public watching the protests (Romano, 2013). Romano concluded that the metaphors were culturally, topically, and situationally triggered and worked to communicate these three ideals within the protests. Another strategy that social movements have adopted is the use of artwork (Deluca & Demo, 2000). Deluca and Demo analyzed how photographs were used in the early environmental movement in the United States to save Yosemite; these photos helped early environmentalists convince the U.S. Congress vote to preserve Yosemite and protect it against industrialization. Movements, therefore, have utilized photographs as artwork to communicate with the greater establishment (Deluca & Demo, 2000).

Much like these movements, #YoSoy132 used art forms including photographs, paintings, and music to carry the message of their protests to the Mexican government, members of the protests, and people outside of the movement (Red, 2013). In a critical analysis of the movement, Red (2013) looked at how music played an important role in the #YoSoy132 campaign. Specifically, she discussed how Músicos con YoSoy132 (or Musicians with I am 132), which represented a number of Mexican artists that banded together, carried the messages of #YoSoy132 protestors to the public. Based on her analysis, Red (2013) determined that this expression of music forced several

artists and publishers to coordinate to create music for the movement, allowing a diverse group of individuals to collaborate who would not have otherwise. In addition, she concluded that the music itself did not work to overthrow the establishment, but rather it depended on the actions of the listeners and users (Red, 2013). Additionally, an ethnography of #YoSoy132 found that by appropriating social media, the movement was able to revise the fabricated story told by the media about the protests and regain their agency, as well as create a collective identification and internal cohesion amongst the members (Treré, 2015).

In the past, movements have employed artwork and slogans to represent their own ideology that challenges the mainstream power system and works to establish a new view of power within the system. Therefore, the use of ideology through slogans and artwork can be utilized as a framework to view and analyze movements. For this essay, ideology is defined as the system of beliefs held by a group of people (McGee, 1980), which is often practiced and implemented through words (McGee, 1980; Porter, 2010). Porter (2010) argues clichés "stabilize, even freeze-frame, a world that has the potential to run away from via thoughts that fly all over the place" (p. 234). In essence, the larger dominant system uses clichés to keep people from deterring from the main ideology of the system. Slogans, however, can challenge the dominant ideology and even the clichés that function to control societies. Within social movements, protestors employ slogans displayed on posters and banners to communicate their ideology to a larger audience (Begum, 2015). For example, in a protest in Pakistan, a mob formed to speak against electricity outages. Through a discourse analysis, one researcher concluded that they used placards and slogans to communicate their ideology (Begum, 2015). Similar to the Pakistan protest, the current essay demonstrates how #YoSoy132 also used posters and slogans to represent their ideology.

Additionally, artwork has also been examined as a way to communicate ideology to a larger audience (Rodner & Preece, 2016; Palczewski, 2005). Governments and other authorities can use artwork to both frame and disperse their ideology to citizens, especially through museums and other displays of artwork (Rodner & Preece, 2016). Palczewski (2005) also demonstrated that other means of art, such as postcards, disseminate an ideological view. For instance, during the women's suffrage movement, postcards were utilized to reinforce the traditional ideals of the place of men and women in society. These postcards displayed images of women and men that violated the norms of the roles of gender in society, creating the <woman> and <man> ideographs (Palczewski, 2005). Therefore, past studies have demonstrated the ways that both slogans and art can be used to communicate an ideology to a larger audience. In the current study, I explore how the Mexican youth movement #YoSoy132 used slogans and artwork to both challenge the dominant ideology of the PRI as well as communicate their own ideology.

Along with opposing the current ideology, movements face the challenge of being noticed by individuals outside of the protests, as well as being recognized by the establishment. In order to be noticed, the movement needs to find a way to get onto the public screen, which is a modern form of the public sphere. Habermas, Lennox, and Lennox (1974) defined the public sphere as "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be found" (p. 49). Within in this realm, the citizens form a public body, are free to express their opinions, and can deliberate about general issues openly. Radio, television, magazines, and newspapers represent the media that the citizens in the public sphere use to communicate their ideas. Deluca and Peeples (2002) argued that the public sphere no longer represented today's society and technological advances; instead, they proposed the *public screen*, which took the modern use of media more seriously. This alternative new public sphere looks at the use of television, newspapers, magazines, and other media outlets to represent the organization of social issues; the speed and ease of communication through these screens has transformed the media into the main source of information for citizens.

Some societies and social movements, however, do not have access to the traditional public screens through news networks or other media outlets. For example, Occupy Wall Street had a difficult time getting onto the public screen during their protests in Zuccotti Park because the media often either ignored the movement altogether or misrepresented the movement as unorganized (Deluca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012). To overcome their lack of access to the dominant public screen and carry their message to the public, Occupy Wall Street supporters turned to alternative public screens through the internet. Instead of waiting for traditional outlets to pick up their story, the movement started to spread the story through online blogs as well as other social media websites including Twitter and Facebook. This alternative screen allowed the movement to combat the misrepresentations as well as communicate what the movement was doing and the ideals of the movement to supporters not at the occupation in New York (Deluca et al., 2012). Through this article, I investigate how slogans and artwork can be used to create identification

through the alternative public screen, letting movements communicate their ideology with a larger audience in a shorter time.

Additionally, social media outlets, including sites such as Twitter and Facebook, have allowed movements to function across platforms quickly (Frangonikolopoulos & Chapsos, 2012). Twitter and other social media websites let movements remain leaderless since they are not controlled by one network (Frangonikolopoulos & Chapsos, 2012). Traditionally certain networks or groups of people run news outlets; therefore, they can be biased toward certain candidates. Social media outlets, however, are not controlled by a particular network and disseminate messages across the world. Thus, this allows movements to remain leaderless because multiple activists can spread the message of the movement (Frangonikolopoulos & Chapsos, 2012). In this article, I look at how #YoSoy132 used Twitter, Facebook, and other social media sites to spread their messages without a leader.

With the rise of social movements throughout the world, as well as the increased activism of youth within the past decade, it is important to explore the rhetorical strategies of modern social movements (Greene & Kuswa, 2012; Jones, 2014). Understanding the use of slogans, artwork, and public screens in the #YoSoy132 campaign offers a new perspective on modern youth movements, by revealing the importance of social media in movements that do not have access to traditional public screens. Further, through an analysis of #YoSoy132, I discuss the importance of the use of slogans and artwork in social movements, especially when used with social media. Also, the current study demonstrates the importance of using social media to build a support base for a movement. In addition, understanding #YoSoy132 is imperative because of the unique dynamics between the Mexican government and the youth. Because the movement was able to create a large following across the world in a short time frame, examining the rhetorical strategies used in this movement to gain followers quickly can enlighten scholarship on how social media can be used to reach people in a small period of time. Additionally, exploring the rhetorical strategies used by this movement can help to understand how movements formed by marginalized groups or underrepresented youth in societies can peacefully protest their regimes. With the changing politics in the world today, the number of protests by marginalized and underrepresented groups is becoming increasingly common and needed. Therefore, exploring how recent movements use rhetorical strategies is paramount for understanding the current politic climate across the world.

Further, since #YoSoy132 formed its name partly from the movement “We Are All Khaled Said” (Cave, 2012), it seems that youth movements are starting to develop their methods based on previous movements. Therefore, exploring the current trends of modern youth movements can enlighten not only our current understanding of the movement, but it can also show us how other youth movements may form and the rhetorical strategies these movements could use as well. Overall, this study adds to our current body of research by exploring how one leaderless youth movement was able to gain access to an alternative public screen through artwork and slogans. A rhetorical analysis of this movement can help provide an understanding of the use of artwork, slogans, and social media in a modern social movement created by a younger generation of citizens.

Method

In order to explore the strategies used by this movement, I performed a rhetorical analysis of the slogans and artwork used by the movement. Specifically, I looked at the slogans and artwork used by #YoSoy132 to communicate their ideology to a larger audience. I examined how these artifacts were shared through social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and art sites such as Deviant Art. Through these websites, I was able to view and analyze the most popular slogans and pieces of artwork used by the movement. Generally, I looked for pictures and slogans that were shared across multiple platforms. To analyze these slogans, I used McGee’s (1980) understanding of ideology as well as Porter’s (2010) description of slogans. When analyzing the slogans, I both compared what the current ideology of the PRI party was as well as what the ideology the slogan or art piece represented for #YoSoy132 was. Therefore, I was able to compare and contrast the ideology of the main political party to that of the #YoSoy132 movement. Further, looking at the ideology of these slogans and art pieces allowed me to consider, based on Deluca and Peeple’s (2000) definition of a public screen, how the movement used these slogans and pieces of art to break on to the public screen. The next section discusses the findings of my rhetorical analysis.

The Slogans and Artwork of #YoSoy132 as Ideology

This analysis will review three ideals represented by several slogans and artwork that were created by the movement in the first few months of #YoSoy132's conception. These specific artifacts were chosen because of the time period in which they were created and the frequency with which they were shared by the movement supporters. All of these pieces communicated important messages about the Mexican youth movement. To begin, the analysis will examine how these artifacts influenced the ideology #YoSoy132 displayed to their audience.

Much like other youth movements at the time, #YoSoy132 was faced with an oppressive ideology from the establishment, which was enforced by the PRI (Llana, 2012). In the past, the ideology of the PRI was situated around control of the population and party officials having the main source of power in the country. Despite the fact that the Mexican government was now considered a democracy, Peña Nieto demonstrated the PRI's desire to regain power similar to the past regime when he was governor of the state of Mexico ("Meet the candidates," 2012). Within this ideology, freedom was limited and granted to the citizens by the government. The PRI controlled the news outlets and information that was dispersed to the citizens so that they could monitor what the citizens understood about politics and the government. The following sections will break down three main slogans as well as how they were represented through artwork, posters, and other methods during the protests to push back against the PRI's power and communicate a more peaceful ideology.

The use of the slogan "Televisa" as a representation of ideology.

To combat the PRI's dominant ideology, #YoSoy132 sought to create an alternative ideology by using slogans and artwork. One of the main slogans used in the movement included the word "Televisa," which is the name of the main television news source in the country. For the PRI, the slogan "Televisa" called upon the ideology of the government having control over the citizens; Peña Nieto utilized the television network as a way to control what the public learned about the presidential race. #YoSoy132 sought to realign the word "Televisa" so that it would represent the oppression of the PRI and illustrate a new ideology that granted freedom to the citizens of Mexico. The protestors utilized slogans and artwork to redefine the connotative meaning of the television network name for the people in Mexico.

The word "Televisa" was displayed as a slogan in strategic ways by the youth movement. It was both used as a one-word slogan and as the primary term in longer phrases. For example, protesters would often tape their mouths and write over the tape with the word "Televisa" (Oikonomakis, 2012). This gesture signified that the Mexican citizens were being silenced by Televisa and were not allowed to voice their opinions openly through news channels. Further, it demonstrated that the PRI were oppressing the youth by removing their voices and shutting them out of the public screen. This was further demonstrated in artwork created by the #YoSoy132 supporters. For example, one poster displayed the evolution of television in Mexico according to the youth protestors. The poster had three TV sets displayed, one from the 1970s, one from the 1980s, and one from 2010; each TV displayed a picture of excrement, but the excrement as well as the television changed as the years progressed. This was meant to represent the lies that had been told by the media since the 1970s, even though the TV sets had changed and the clarity of the images increased, the media still produced the same lies that it did in the past. This image too shows the oppression by the PRI, as well as highlights the dishonesty of the government. The slogan "Televisa" not only worked to reveal the oppression of the PRI, but also called upon a greater ideology that the movement sought to communicate. The ideology represented by this term was transparency and honesty from the government; the youth movement believed that the government should not hide information from the citizens or control their access to television networks. Rather, the citizens should be allowed to have a voice in the public realm. Further, what comes from the news media should not be corrupted by the establishment, but instead should reflect the truth about politics and what the government is doing.

Another striking slogan surrounding televisa was: "Turn off the television, turn on your mind" ("Students invigorate Mexico's," 2012). The slogan was mostly either displayed on signs or chanted by students during protests. The idea of turning off the television and turning on your mind represented an interesting change in the ideology of the youth movement. The slogan challenged the authority of the PRI and promoted equality, similar to the other slogans, but also rejected authority completely. It went beyond just saying that Mexico should promote equality, to actually telling the audience to take back power over their own lives. Rather than being controlled by

the government, the slogan told people to turn off the television and think for themselves. In other words, it encouraged people to liberate themselves from the authority of the PRI and to make decisions for themselves. Thus, making an ideological turn from just promoting equality, to actually telling their viewers to denounce authority and free themselves from the PRI.

The use of the slogan "#YoSoy132" as a representation of ideology.

Further, another slogan represented by the movement was "#YoSoy132." As part of the overarching ideology of control and power, the youth in Mexico had often been overlooked by the PRI. Power was reserved for the PRI officials and was not meant for the youth of Mexico. Instead, the youth were meant to listen to the older and wiser PRI officials and do what the officials instructed the youth to do, therefore, reinforcing the ideology of control over the Mexican youth. Peña Nieto staff's overall attitude towards the youth reflects this ideology. The campaign often overlooked college-aged students (18-23 years of age) (Garcia, 2012; Llana, 2012). When Peña Nieto did finally address the students on the college campus, he did not take their thoughts and opinions seriously, which resulted in the first official protest of #YoSoy132. Although the students stood their ground against the candidate, his staff members tried to frame the protest as being from supporters of the other presidential candidates. This showed how the government treated the youth; instead of believing they were taking a stand, the media tried to portray the incident as not involving the university students at all.

Contrary to the PRI's view of youth, through the "#YoSoy132" slogan, the protestors were utilizing an alternative ideology to represent themselves and other youth in the nation. Instead of following the ideology that the youth were to be controlled by the higher officials, the movement created an ideology where the protestors had equality and freedom. For instance, the freedom to express their opinions and not fear something similar to the protest in 2006 where citizens were abused and murdered for standing against the government (Gibler, 2006). Along with this, their ideology represented equality in the news; instead of being misrepresented and falsely framed, the movement desired to have the same amount and accurate news coverage from Televisa and other networks. "#YoSoy132" also allowed movement supporters to identify with the movement. The use of "YoSoy," or "I am" in English, made the members themselves realize that they personally could have this freedom if they worked with the movement; therefore, the ideology also created stronger connections between the movement and the members.

This slogan was presented and framed in several ways by #YoSoy132. First, the phrase "#YoSoy132" was used as a hash tag by the movement members. Whenever they posted about the protests or movement on a social media website they identified the status or update through this hash tag. Along with this, students displayed the slogan by writing it across their chests and mouths during protests. Additionally, it was represented in the art pieces created by the students. For example, one poster displayed the slogan "#YoSoy132" in black and white, underneath the photograph the words "Por progression no regression" (in English—"for progression, not regression") were displayed. This poster represented the slogan's ideology because it showed that the students wanted to move into a future were there opinions mattered and they were considered an important part of society, not move back into a world where the youth were manipulated by the government.

The images and use of fists in the protests as representation of ideology.

A third ideal that demonstrated the ideology of control for the PRI and #YoSoy132 was represented in images and illustrations of fists. This idea was represented mainly in pictures of fists and the slogans that went along with these images, which transmitted the beliefs of control within the PRI party as well as the Mexican youth movement. The PRI held an overall ideology where control rested with the government. For example, before they were voted out of office in 2000 the PRI supported an authoritarian style regime, where the government officials made all executive decisions for the country (Hernandez, 2012; Klesner, 2001). Further, these works of art reminded the public of the government's use of the military and police to control the people (Gibler, 2006; Oikonomakis, 2012). Although the government at the time was considered a democracy, Peña Nieto and his party supported a police state over the current system (Gibler, 2006; "Meet the candidates," 2012). This was demonstrated in the 2006 protest in Atenco when Peña Nieto ordered in the police rather than attempting to settle the matter more peacefully (Gibler, 2006).

#YoSoy132 sought to not only remind their supporters of the PRI's view of a strict regime of control, but also to communicate their own ideology with the fists in these images. The movement desired to take control from

the government and let the people, especially the Mexican youth, have power over the military and other important issues facing the country. By using fists as imagery, the youth movement communicated that the people could take control and break through the bonds of the government. Instead of letting the PRI turn the country back into a violent regime, the protestors wanted to illustrated that the people could keep control and have more power if they supported the movement and the ideology behind the movement. Previous movements also used fists to demonstrate power and bring the protestors together (Cushing, 2015). Movements, including the woman rights movement and the Arab Spring movement, have all used the fist to represent peace and unity among each. Therefore, this ideology draws upon an ideology created amongst movements throughout several nations.

These fists were displayed in several pieces of artwork created by the movement. One specific example comes from a deviant art blog posted in early June of 2012 (Roberto, 2014). This specific piece illustrated a fist that is displayed coming out of an outline of Mexico; in the picture, the fist is significantly larger than the country. Also, the outline of the country displays the Mexican flag. Surrounding the fist and Mexico outline is the name of the organization, #YoSoy132. The idea of the fist was not only represented in the images created by the movement, but also the actions of the protestors. During actual protests, the movement members would often pump their fists, shouting their name and other demands at people passing by, which demonstrated the ideology of control and power within the actual protests. Overall, these displays of fists represented an ideology that the protestors could unite together and have control over their own lives.

#YoSoy132 and the Public Sphere

Occupy Wall Street had to use an alternative public screen to spread the word about the movements since the media and mainstream news outlets ignored these movements (Jones, 2014). #YoSoy132 experienced similar obstacles since the PRI controlled the main news sources, including Televisa, and few other sources existed (Cave, 2012; "Students invigorate Mexico's," 2012). Often during the election, rather than airing the public debates, the news channels would air sports and other popular events happening in the world. The #YoSoy132 members felt this was extremely unfair and hindered the political knowledge of the citizens of Mexico. Therefore, the movement turned to alternative forms of the public screen through the internet. In 2012, when the movement originated, approximately 40.6 million Mexican citizens utilized the internet; therefore, the internet became an important outlet for #YoSoy132 to communicate with supporters ("Mexico Social Media," 2014). For instance, when the media and PRI campaign activists framed the original protest as action from opposing political forces rather than the students, the students reacted by sharing a video through YouTube and other websites (Garcia, 2012; Hernandez, 2012). This video displayed the students openly saying they did not support any opposing parties, but rather were standing in opposition to the PRI without the backing of any political parties. Therefore, the internet became the alternative public screen of the #YoSoy132 campaign.

#YoSoy132 also utilized social media as part of this alternative public screen (Hernandez, 2012). Social media represented an important outlet for internet users, with an estimated 65 percent of people on the internet having social media profiles and networks ("Mexico Social Media," 2014). #YoSoy132 turned to Facebook and Twitter instead of traditional media outlets including television news networks and newspapers. The protestors utilized Facebook and Twitter to organize protests, and share pictures of the movement and artwork created by the students. This use of the internet let supporters know what was happening and reframe incorrect perceptions of the movement formed by the PRI and traditional news networks.

Although the internet represents an alternative screen, it can be difficult to gain attention or stand out from other websites and movements. Therefore, #YoSoy132 needed to find a way to communicate their ideology on the internet that would catch the eye of others in Mexico as well as around the world. Without this, the youth movement could not gain the momentum and following that it needed to alter society and truly change the dominant ideology in Mexico. Therefore, the protestors used slogans and artwork to first gain an audience and then communicate their ideology to the protestors.

People and movements are constantly sharing information and photos on the internet, which can make it hard for movements to be noticed online. Therefore, #YoSoy132 needed a way to gain the attention of the viewers. To accomplish this, the movement turned to art and slogans that would stand out amongst other posts and photos. For example, the video that created the slogan #YoSoy132 was meant to quickly reframe what had happened at the first protest and capture the attention of a wide audience. The protesters also shared images of their protests that

displayed more extreme actions of the protesters, including lying on the ground as if they were dead. Each of these photos was strategically shared in order to either capture the eye of the media or to let supporters know that they were serious.

Further, one current popular area of the internet is artwork, with sites like Deviant Art created entirely to share different art pieces; this represented a way for the movement to distribute information to outside supporters (Roberto, 2014). To do this, the movement created vivid pieces that displayed the troubles that the youth faced and the oppression of the government. The art pieces also worked to unite the youth against the PRI, and give them hope. For example, one image displayed the photo of a young man with an "X" over his mouth to signify being silenced. The young man in the photo also had a blindfold covering just one eye, and a flame drawn around his head, meaning that he was ready to fight against the government. The background of this photo was all red, with "#Yo Soy" above the man's head and "132" below his head. Another photo displayed a PRI guard dressed in riot gear with a stick (meant to be a weapon) in one hand and the other hand holding a television that said the word "Televisa" accompanied by the Televisa logo. Further, the image said "TELEVISA NO ME QUITARÁ EL DERECHO A ELEGIR A MI PRESIDENTE," which translates to "Televisa will not take my right to choose my president." Below the television, toward the bottom of the photo, were the words "NO MÁS MANIPULACIÓN," which means "No more manipulation." One last photo from these websites displayed a television with a fist breaking through, surrounded by the chards of glass from the broken screen. Below the television were the words "TODO ES MEJOR ASI, yo soy 132," which translates to "Everything is better this way, I am 132." Behind the image was a light yellow background, while the television had a gray screen with a black and white frame around it.

These images allowed the movement to gain supporters from the alternative screen, however, the movement needed to do more than just attract followers. The students needed to change the perception that the government had created about them as well as form an alternative ideology that other students and Mexican citizens could identify more readily with. Through the slogans "Televisa" and "#YoSoy132," as well as the fists displayed in artwork and protests, the movement was able to communicate these ideologies across alternative screens, resulting in two impacts. First, the slogans helped the movement to restructure how the media had portrayed them; the slogan "#YoSoy132" let the students reframe what the media had said about them, showing that Peña Nieto's staff had misrepresented the movement. It demonstrated that the movement members were not radicals, but students standing up for their rights and values. Additionally, this slogan permitted the movement to expose the inequality of the media and therefore represent the ideology of equality. By pointing out the inequality, it produced the need for equality, and therefore reinforced the alternative ideology. Additionally, the "Televisa" slogan and the images of fists allowed the movement to reframe the PRI and the motives of Peña Nieto, therefore also changing how #YoSoy132 was represented. Instead of representing the Mexican youth as radicals, these ideas contended that the PRI was the radical party trying to take control of the country.

Secondly, the "Televisa," "#YoSoy132," and fists slogans and artwork helped the students to communicate an alternative ideology where students and all Mexican citizens had the freedom to express their opinions and to be heard by others. These slogans and art not only worked to establish the ideology of the movement, but also to create a new identity. Burke (1950) highlighted the importance of identification in persuasion. In order for someone to successfully be persuaded, they need to identify with the subject or cause. Therefore, the movement needed to create identification within the online audience in order to gain full support from them. By sharing the videos and artwork that represented the alternative ideology of the protesters through the public screen, the movement was able to unite members and achieve this identification. People outside of the movement could relate to the oppression created by the PRI through the media outlets; therefore, by using these slogans and images the movement showed the supporters a new ideology that could be obtained by supporting and joining the movement. It allowed the members to center around this new ideology of freedom and equality and created a community among new and old supporters. Further, the images of fists also represented unity among the members. The fists displayed in the art pieces not only represented the ideology of control, but also the ideals of unity. It demonstrated that the movement supporters could band together and unite around this want to take control back from the government. Overall, these slogans and artwork both helped the movement to reclaim its identity and to create identification amongst other members of the protest.

Implications and Conclusions

Understanding how #YoSoy132 utilized slogans and artwork across the internet as an alternative public screen to establish a group identity as well as reframe the portrayal of the youth movement adds to rhetorical research in several ways. First, it further shows how slogans and artwork can be used to represent alternative ideologies in social movements. Second, it extends the knowledge of current youth movements' turn to an alternative public screen. Lastly, this analysis demonstrates how slogans and artwork can be used in conjunction with a public screen to create identification with audience members. This is especially important in movements that seem "unsuccessful" to the outside world because they did not meet their original purpose. In sum, this analysis provides further understanding of how modern youth movements operate through social media and the importance of the internet to create identities for movements.

Overall, #YoSoy132 was able to communicate an alternative ideology through the use of slogans and artwork, which adds to rhetorical theory by demonstrating how these methods can be employed by social movements to gain the attention of the audience. The slogan "Televisa" combated the government control of the media, and represented an ideology of freedom of expression for all citizens. This idea was demonstrated through the protestors writing the word "Televisa" on posters, tape over their mouths, and images that displayed the bias of the main television networks to only share information related to the PRI. The second slogan discussed, "#YoSoy132," was meant to reframe how Peña Nieto's staff had portrayed the youth in Mexico, and therefore represented equality for #YoSoy132. This portion of the #YoSoy132 ideology sought to establish the importance of the youth in society. The young protestors desired to liberate the youth from being ignored and controlled by the government. Lastly, the images and use of fists signified the military control the PRI desired, but also symbolized the idea that the people could unite and take back power from the radical Peña Nieto. Therefore, these slogans demonstrate how social movements can use artwork and slogans rhetorically to both expose the problems with the dominant ideology and demonstrate how the movement's view of power is better for the citizens.

Since the PRI controlled the main public screen in Mexico, the movement had to be creative in defining an alternative public screen. Thus, the youth turned to social media and other internet resources (such as blogs and deviant art) to communicate their ideologies. The artwork and slogans utilized by the movement allowed #YoSoy132 to gain an audience amongst various other movements and people on the internet. The slogans and artwork helped the movement to restructure their framing by the main media sources, including Televisa, and unite youth in Mexico around a common ideology. This let the movement establish a prominent presence on the alternative public screen. This presence secured a following from not only youth and students in Mexico, but also students and people around the world. After seeing these slogans and artwork displayed, supporters held protests in cities outside of Mexico, including San Francisco, Rome, and Barcelona (Hernandez, 2012). From a theoretical standpoint, this adds to our knowledge about how social movements can use rhetorical strategies to gain a following through an alternative public screen. The use of alternative public screen warrants further rhetorical inquiry to see if the use of social media as an alternative public screen has replaced the original media as the main public screen to share information about societies.

People often seek to define movements and protests in terms of success, however, with certain movements it can be difficult to define this success. Based on this analysis, #YoSoy132 shows that a movement's success cannot necessarily be defined by its accomplishments. #YoSoy132's use of artwork and slogans to establish an ideology and following on social media did not work to prevent Peña Nieto from winning the 2012 presidential election, despite the strivings of the movement. Within the short time frame that the movement had, the slogans and art may not have been strong enough to accomplish the change that the movement needed. While words and ideas can work to change ideology, it is often a slow change that takes place over time (McGee, 1980). #YoSoy132 needed a more rapid change than the slogans and artwork represented. One reason that the movement was not as "successful" was that they decided to use these rhetorical strategies as methods of changing the opinions and ideologies of the public, rather than turning to violent measures or overthrowing the government through force.

Further, another argument for the movement not preventing Peña Nieto from becoming president was the medium used as the alternative public screen, i.e. social media. Although social media had been a successful vehicle in past movements for carrying messages to large audiences (Frangonikolopoulos & Chapsos, 2012), it may not have been enough in this instance. The PRI and Peña Nieto had a long history with Mexican residents and promised

to do a lot for the people during election campaigns. The posts the movement shared on Facebook, Twitter, and other sites might not have reached everyone that was planning to vote for Peña Nieto. Additionally, social media might have been as successful because of the type of audiences that seek out information online. For instance, since the movement was created by youth and mostly geared toward youth, the slogans and artwork may not have appealed to older audiences. Further, the people who gleaned their information from traditional mass media outlets may have preferred ideas that are more traditional. This could have led these same people to both consume messages on social media less often, and be less likely to want to change their ideology. Because they prefer traditional ideas, they may have not been open to changing their current ideology to equality over authoritarianism. Thus, the use of social media could have hindered the message of the movement because it only appealed to certain audiences, causing it not to be successful in preventing Peña Nieto from being elected president.

The use of the alternative public screen and an alternative ideology was not a complete loss for the movement, however. After Peña Nieto's win, the identity formation created by the use of slogans and artwork became especially important. Although #YoSoy132 did not succeed in preventing the PRI from taking control again, the movement needed to establish supporters that would carry the movement into the future. With Peña Nieto as president, the oppressive ideology created by the PRI could only get worse. Therefore, the movement needed to establish this strong sense of identity around a common ideology from the beginning. The use of the slogans and artwork to establish an identity among a strong support system proved to be especially important at this moment in time. This identity has allowed the movement to still be going on today, despite the fact that some might deem it 'unsuccessful' because of the election (#YoSoy132, 2017).

Additionally, #YoSoy132 begins to enlighten researchers on how modern youth movements are communicating with each other. #YoSoy132 based some of their strategies from the Arab Spring movement, "We Are all Khaled Said" (Cave, 2012). Specifically, #YoSoy132 used a similar strategy of sharing pictures on Facebook. Therefore, modern youth movements are beginning to mimic each other. Since the political tensions are currently high, more movements similar to the Arab Spring movement and #YoSoy132 may begin to emerge. Exploring how past movements used social media as an alternative screen gives rhetorical scholars a way to explore how current and future movements may also use social media.

In sum, understanding the artwork and slogans used by #YoSoy132 adds to our theoretical understandings of how social movements can use rhetorical strategies to reach a larger audience, specifically through an alternative public screen. Further, it adds to our knowledge of the expanding use of social media as the main outlet for social movements to communicate with their members. Additionally, it pushes back on the idea that social movements have to "win" in order to be successful, but slow change may have a better long-term effect. Research following social movements in the future, such as #YoSoy132, can help to answer this question of what it means for a social movement to be successful. Lastly, with the current political climate of the world, it is important to continue to understand how social movements form and break into the public screen or alternative public screens. It is likely that in the near future, we will continue to see the rise of social youth movements similar to #YoSoy132 in other countries as well. By examining the rhetorically strategies used by this movement, it is possible for researchers to understand these movements better and for members of the protests to know how to make their movement more successful.

References

Begum, G. (2015). Critical Discourse Analysis of the Protesters' Language. *Language In India*, *15*, 85-95.
Burke, K. (1950). *A rhetoric of motives*. Berkley: University of California Press.
Cathcart, R. S. (1978). Movements: Confrontation as a rhetorical form. *The Southern Speech Communication Journal, 43,* 233-247. doi:10.1080/10417947809372383
Cave, D. (2012, June 11). In protests and online, a youth movements seeks to sway Mexico's election. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/11/in-protests-and-online-theyosoy132-movement-seeks-to-sway-mexicos-election/?php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0
Cushing, L. (2015). A brief history of the "clenched fist" image. *Docs Populi.* Retrieved from http://www.docspopuli.org/articles/Fist.html
Cracks form in Mexico's student movement. (2012, June 15). *Aljazeera.* Retrieved from http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201206150030-0022246
de la Isla, J. (2012, June 10). Students, SNS shake up Mexico's politics. *Korea Times.* Retrieved from http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.txstate.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/
DeLuca, K. M., & Demo, A. T. (2000). Imaging nature: Watkins, Yosemite, and the birth of environmentalism. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *17*, 241-260. doi:10.1080/15295030009388395
DeLuca, K. M., Lawson, S., & Sun, Y. (2012). Occupy Wall Street on the public screens of social media: The many framings of the birth of a protest movement. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, *5*, 483-509. doi:10.1111/j.1753-9137.2012.01141.x
DeLuca, K. M., & Peeples, J. (2002). From public sphere to public screen: Democracy, activism, and the" violence" of Seattle. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *19*, 125-151. doi:10.1080/07393180216559
Frangonikolopoulos, C. A., & Chapsos, I. (2012). Explaining the role and the impact of the social media in the Arab Spring. *Global Media Journal: Mediterranean Edition*, *8*, 10-20.
Garcia, A. (2012, August 8). My name is… and #IAm132. *Huffington Post.* Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/fundacion-mepi/yosoy132_b_1578351.html
Gibler, J. (2006, May 7). Police brutality in Atenco, Mexico. *Upside Down World.* Retrieved from http://upsidedownworld.org/main/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=280&Itemid=0
Greene, R., & Kuswa, K. (2012). "From the Arab Spring to Athens, from Occupy Wall Street to Moscow": Regional accents and the rhetorical cartography of power. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, *42*, 271-288. doi:10.1080/02773945.2012.682846
Habermas, J., Lennox, S., & Lennox, F. (1974). The public sphere: An encyclopedia article (1964). *New German Critique*, *3*, 49-55.
Hernandez, D. (2012, June 19). Meet Mexico's new youth movement: The #YoSoy132. *Vice.* Retrieved from http://www.vice.com/read/meet-mexicos-new-youth-movement-yosoy132
Jones, J. (2014). Compensatory division in the Occupy Movement. *Rhetoric Review*, *33*, 148-164. doi:10.1080/07350198.2014.884416
Klesner, J. L. (2001). The end of Mexico's one party regime. *Political Science and Politics, 34*, 107-114. doi:10.1017/S1049096501000166
Llana, S. M. (2012, May 31). The 'Mexican Spring:' A new student movement stirs in Mexico; #YoSoy132, a burgeoning student movement in Mexico, is calling for citizens to demand more of their politicians and institutions. *The Christian Science Monitor.* Retrieved from http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.txstate.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/
McGee, M. C. (1980). The "ideograph": A link between rhetoric and ideology. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *66*, 1-16. doi:10.1080/00335638009383499
Meet the candidates. (2012, June 19). *The Economist Online*. Retrieved from http://www.economist.com/blogs/americasview/2012/06/mexican-presidential-election
Merrill, T. L., & Miró, R. (Eds.). (1996). Mexico: Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). *Library of Congress.* Washington, DC: GPO.

Mexico election runner-up demands recount. (2012, July 4). *The New Zealand Herald.* Retrieved from http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.txstate.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/

Mexico social media. (2014). *Translate Media.* Retrieved from http://www.translatemedia.com/translationservices/social-media/mexico-social-media/

Oikonomakis, L. (2012, June 25). #YoSoy132: Mexico's student movement for real democracy. *Roar Magazine.* Retrieved from http://roarmag.org/2012/06/yosoy132-mexicos-movement-for-real-democracy/

Palczewski, C. H. (2005). The male Madonna and the feminine Uncle Sam: Visual argument, icons, and ideographs in 1909 anti-woman suffrage postcards. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *91*, 365-394. doi:10.1080/00335630500488325

Porter, R. (2010). From clichés to slogans: Towards a Deleuze–Guattarian critique of ideology. *Social Semiotics*, *20*, 233-245. doi:10.1080/10350331003722588

Red, M. (2013). Rocking the vote in Mexico's 2012 presidential election: Mexico's popular music scene's use of social media in a post-Arab Spring context. *International Journal of Communication, 7,* 1205-1219.

Roberto, C. (2014). *DeviantArt.* Retrieved from http://party9999999.deviantart.com/art/Yo-Soy-132-305328252

Rodner, V. L., & Preece, C. (2016). Painting the nation. *Journal of Macromarketing*, *36*, 128-148. doi:10.1177/0276146715574775

Romano, M. (2013). Situated-'instant' metaphors: Creativity in Spanish 15M slogans. *Metaphor & The Social World*, *3*, 240-259. doi:10.1075/msw.3.2.07rom

Students invigorate Mexico's presidential polls. (2012, June 26). *Times of Oman.* Retrieved from http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.txstate.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/

Thousands of protestors occupy Puerta del Sol square in Madrid (2014). *The Telegraph.* Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/worldnews /8525938/Thousands-of-protesters-occupy-Puerta-del-Sol-square-in-Madrid.html

Treré, E. (2015). Reclaiming, proclaiming, and maintaining collective identity in the #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico: An examination of digital frontstage and backstage activism through social media and instant messaging platforms. *Information, Communication & Society*, *18*, 901-915. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2015.1043744

Tuckman, J. (2012, August 3). Student protestors challenge Mexican election result. *Guardian Weekly,* p. 7.

#YoSoy132. (2017). In *Facebook* [Group page]. Retrieved June 30, 2016, from https://www.facebook.com/yosoy132/

Ohio Communication Journal
Volume 56 – March 2018, pp. 106-119

Playing Like a Girl: Establishing a Virtual Female Social Position through Discourse Building Tasks

Steffi Shook

This paper analyzes the video game Secrets Can Kill Remastered (2010), a Nancy Drew Adventure game, through James Paul Gee's approach to discourse analysis. This game positions players within a virtual female social position. This position is constituted by the discourses of the other in-game characters. These characters attempt to place the avatar, Nancy, in various female social positions through Gee's discourse building tasks. Due to the non-visual nature of first-person avatars, Nancy and the player are gendered through these societal roles. Existing literature fails to explore how characters are gendered, and does not examine the unique features of first-person female avatars. Highlighting and examining unique portrayals of women in video games is important due to the hostility toward women found in the gaming industry and within mainstream video games. Nancy Drew's long-held position as America's favorite girl sleuth makes her a useful vehicle for exploring the complexities of gender in video games.

Keywords: female avatar, first-person, girl games, gender and sexuality, Nancy Drew

Recent developments, including 2014's Gamergate, have highlighted current video game culture's problematic relationship with female players, developers, and characters. Naturally, previous research has focused on the problem of gender in video games. Just as video games can promote gender differentiation through hypermasculine and hyperfeminine characters, they can also destabilize the gender binary and allow for gender play. To explore all the possibilities of gendered characterization in video games, games with unique gendered portrayals must be examined. *Secrets Can Kill Remastered* (Her Interactive, 2010), a Nancy Drew-themed PC point and click video game, utilizes a first-person female avatar. The avatar, Nancy, lacks the visual cues that often plague female video game characters (scantily-clad bodies, large breasts, small waists, long legs, etc.). Despite the absence of these cues, she is still consistently coded female throughout the game. This study analyzes *Secrets Can Kill Remastered* through James Paul Gee's approach to discourse analysis to establish how this game positions players within a virtual female social position despite the absence of visual gender cues.

While there exist hordes of studies examining sexism in video games, I believe it is also important to examine how gendering is accomplished in games without overt sexist characterization (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009; Cassell & Jenkins, 1998; Kafai, 2009; Kafai, Heeter, Denner, & Sun, 2008; Provenzo, 1991). Simply focusing on the problems of a medium offers no practical solutions. Looking at games existing on the periphery of the market, ones not specifically geared toward young adult males, reveals displays of gender that are less rigid and hypersexualized than the portrayals found in mainstream, hardcore games.

Nancy Drew Adventure video games feature a first-person female avatar. In these games players, through Nancy, solve puzzles, interrogate suspects, and search for clues. By having Nancy face sexism, challenges, and deception in the games, players navigate through a female social position. Players are consistently marked as female by other game characters and occupy a position of female agency often absent in the medium.

The current hostility toward women both in games and in the gaming community, which came to light during Gamergate in 2014, makes studies like this imperative. It is crucial to find and encourage diverse presentations of women in video games in order to diminish misogyny in the industry. The goal of this study is to examine a video game which places the player in a virtual female social position without the use of visual cues. By examining how this video game genders its first-person avatar, one can explore the possibilities of female portrayal in a medium with consistent problems of gender.

Steffi Shook (M.A., Ohio University) is a Ph.D. Candidate of Media Arts and Studies at Ohio University. Direct correspondence to sshook0711@gmail.com.

Literature Review

Nancy Drew: Girl Sleuth turned Video Game Heroine

Secrets Can Kill Remastered is part of the Nancy Drew Adventure video game series by Her Interactive. Examining any game within this series requires an investigation into the national phenomenon that is Nancy Drew. Nancy made her debut in the 1930 novel *The Secret of the Old Clock* by Carolyn Keene. Carolyn Keene is a pseudonym for a collective group of authors working under the guidance of the series' publisher Stratemeyer Syndicate (Parry, 1997).

Despite her lasting popularity, Still (2017) explains that Nancy was largely ignored by scholars until the 1990s, sixty years after her debut. Even with a renewed interest in the phenom, scholarly work has focused on a narrow set of inquiries. The majority of Nancy studies investigate her independence and sexuality or illuminate the racial stereotypes prevalent throughout the series (Still, 2017). While these subject areas are important and worthy of examination, Nancy's persistence and cultural influence warrants further and more diverse investigations. The Nancy Drew Adventure video game series provides a new lens to understand the amateur detective's complexity and significance.

Throughout her reign as America's favorite girl sleuth, Nancy, a sixteen then eighteen-year-old, has exhibited an impressive and extremely unbelievable set of skills. From providing psychiatric evaluations to repairing speedboats, Nancy's skill set inexplicitly increases with every new adventure. Her professionalism and autonomy cause many fans and scholars to label her a role model for girls and young women.

In addition to being respected by fans, inhabitants of Nancy's world also admire and fear her. Villains feel they have met their match in the attractive teenager while officers and officials repeatedly call on her for help. Nancy largely works independently and seems uninterested in familial duties or romantic pursuits. Parry (1997) explains that Nancy spends most of her time in the public sphere rather than the traditionally feminine private, domestic sphere. She labels traits, such as seeking recognition, masculine and feels Nancy is feminine while enjoying the benefits of masculinity (Parry, 1997).

Through an examination of the series' popularity, Chamberlain (1994) calls this double identity, "having their cake and eating it too (p.1)." The Nancy Drew series offers its, mostly female, readers the fantasy that they can be independent while retaining all the comfort and security that comes from dependence. This myth asserts, "…that they can help the disadvantaged and remain successful capitalists, that they can be both elitist and democratic, that they can be both child and adult, and that they can be both 'liberated' and 'Daddy's little girls (Chamberlain, 1994, p.3).'"

Just as Chamberlain (1994) labels Nancy's portrayal as fantasy, Mason (1995) critiques the character for her unrealistic character traits. Nancy embraces her femininity in a way that would likely dampen her social clout. However, the girl sleuth remains glamorous and gracious while breaking laws and outwitting criminals. While a perpetual teenager, Nancy acts closer to thirty. She exhibits exceptional maternal instincts despite being motherless, and rivals any pageant queen while maneuvering around a room (Mason, 1995).

Nancy has also been critiqued for her role in an ideological order that lauds wealth accumulation. Parry (1997) explains that Nancy's lawyer father connects her to a system privileging material possessions and ownership. Nancy is often returning lost or stolen goods to their rightful owners, calling out people who attempt to lie about their class status, and fighting on behalf of people with "good" families and upbringing. Parry (1997) views Nancy's capitalist ideals as a need to restore status quo gender and class roles.

One reason Nancy is able to restore social order with such efficiency is due to her desexed nature. Nancy has a steady boyfriend, Ned. However, while the couple has been dating close to ninety years, they have yet to progress beyond first base. Ned appears crazy for Nancy, but she rarely pays him the same amount of attention or care. Parry (1997) explains Ned's role as convenient. Nancy keeps Ned around when she needs doors busted in, but she would much rather search for clues than explore Ned's nether region. Marshall (2003) feels the original series actively denies the possibility of Nancy's adolescent female sexuality. Nancy never gets distracted by attraction to others nor has to stop pursuing a criminal due to menstrual cramps (Marshall, 2003)

In addition to being desexed, scholars criticize Nancy for her ahistorical nature. The original series, and its legion of offspring, function as escapism and naturally ignore, or skirt, serious social problems. Though she appeared at the height of The Great Depression, Nancy's pleasant suburb remained virtually untouched by financial

hardships. Nancy rights wrongs while completely unaware of the material realities shaping the lives of her readers (Siegel, 1997). Nancy upholds justice in a world where true injustice is never acknowledged.

Not all scholars feel Nancy is an empty, capitalist shell. Nancy has also been upheld as a feminist icon. She remains active and assured while thwarting criminals and facing sexism. While Chamberlain (1994) criticizes the unrealistic portrayal of Nancy's adolescence, Parry (1997) feels this suspended place between teen and adult gives the sleuth power. Nancy is fairly unrestrained by her father, and independent thanks to her disinterest in men. She is able to be strong and active due to her independence from familial and romantic ties (Parry, 1997).

While Nancy is active, she is also extremely resilient. She faces physical danger in every adventure. She has been bound, gagged, and locked up endless times over the past ninety years (Parry, 1997). Nancy is remarkably, and inexplicably, able to free herself from restraints, go days without food nor access to a restroom, and capable of tripping up and chasing down adults of various builds and ages. The mythic, unbelievable quality some chastise Nancy for is the very reason others laud her as a strong, feminist heroine. Parry (1997) notes that Nancy needs very little help in any situation.

Woolston (2010) goes further to label Ms. Drew a "subversively positive role model for young female readers (p. 173)." Nancy's body is not merely a beautiful object of desire, though she is strikingly attractive, it is also a vehicle that allows her to act on her desires. In a culture that places women and children in passive roles, the teenage Nancy promotes action and self-sufficiency (Woolston, 2010).

Whether a feminist icon or tool of the patriarchy, Nancy does not appear to be going anywhere. She has starred in multiple book series from the classic Nancy Drew Mysteries to the Supermystery series where she teams up with sleuthing duo The Hardy Boys (Parry, 1997). Nancy has spawned several movies and television series and even appears in an app based game which attempts to teach young girls how to code.

While Nancy's circumstances and cases have changed over the years, her characterization remains largely consistent. She fluctuates in age and location, but has always been composed, confident, and wise beyond her years. In the 1930s, she returned stolen goods in her midwestern hometown. In the 80s, she chased jewel thieves around the globe (Siegel, 1997). Now, she takes extended vacations to remote locations like Iceland, where she uncovered the mysteries surrounding an ancient Viking ship.

Nancy in video games. Since 1998, Nancy Drew has continued her never-ending work in a virtual space. Nancy Drew Adventure video games are produced by Her Interactive, an independent game studio based in Bellevue, Washington (Jong, 2000). The company has garnered consistent success through the Nancy Drew series, and boasts a dedicated and active community of fans. This community is comprised of primarily female gamers ranging from young girls to middle-aged women. The company has a lively Nancy-themed social media presence where they provide specialized and largely nerdy content to their equally enthusiastic followers. For example, their social media accounts and website often hold contests for fans including pumpkin carving, costume, and cookie decorating competitions. Fans are praised and rewarded for entries that exhibit an in-depth knowledge of, and dedication to, the series.

Nancy Drew Adventure games exist within the history of "girl games." The girl video game movement began in the 1990s. In an attempt to scoop up a new demographic, developers mirrored traditional girl toys. These games are often referred to as "pink games" because of their perpetuation of gender stereotypes and their traditional values of femininity (Sundén & Sveningsson, 2012; Kafai et al., 2008).

A second category of girl games became known as "purple" games. These games are differentiated from pink games because they deal with real life issues and are less ultra-feminized. However, these issues are often based in stereotypes. Purple games tend to focus on relationships, dating, and social status. This game genre has been criticized for continuing gender hierarchies by implying that girls prefer games that reflect social expectations tied to gender roles (Kafai et al., 2008). I would label Nancy Drew Adventure video games as post-purple. They exist within the trajectory of girl games and deal with real-life situations, but their content goes beyond stereotypical considerations of dating and relationships.

As of early 2018, there are 33 Nancy Drew Adventure titles. All games in the series contain similar ideals and gameplay. These games implement a first-person female avatar. The player navigates through the virtual worlds as Nancy Drew. To complete the game, the player must interview suspects, solve puzzles, and search for clues. While interviewing subjects, players decide what questions to ask and how to respond from a set of choices. Players read through their speech options and click on their desired responses.

Following Nancy's continued trajectory into the world of video games offers new insights into both the phenomenon of Nancy Drew and the status of female subjects in virtual spaces. Nancy has faced many challenges throughout her term as an amateur detective, maybe none as daunting as being a woman in the world of video games. By examining studies of gender and video games, I can investigate how *Secrets Can Kill Remastered* genders its first-person female avatar.

Video Games and Gender

Most existing literature on gender and video games focusses on negative portrayals of women. More recent studies have moved away from pointing out the flaws of mainstream games to examine how online games allow for gender play. Between these two areas of focus there exists a gap. The literature ignores the possibility of female character existing in single player offline games who are not hypersexed. While scholars are excited about the possibility of gender play online, they ignore that first-person female avatars in medium-circulation games can combat the sexist presentations in AAA (big budget, widely-circulated) video games.

Despite some dissenting opinions, gender still matters in video game studies. James Paul Gee recognizes that video games tend to contain sexualized female characters. Gee argues that as more girls and women play video games these problems will correct themselves (Gee, 2003). While examining a tween gaming club, Kafai (2008) notes this is not the case. Women now make up a significant portion of video game players (Kafai et al., 2008). However, little has changed in terms of game content and the game design industry is not easily accessible to women (Kafai, 2009; Consalvo, 2008).

Video games' presentation of gender has also not improved with the influx of female gamers. In a content analysis of video games in the early 1990's, Provenzo (1991) found that female video game characters are often presented as victims or prizes. Unfortunately, today's most popular, big budget video games encourage the brutalization, sexualization, and objectification of women. Video games also tend to display hyper-gendered characters (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009; Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce, 2008; Kennedy, 2007). The majority of female characters in mainstream video games are non-playable characters (NPC), meaning they cannot be played by the gamer but can often be interacted with socially and physically. Playable female characters are often overtly sexualized. They are typically provocatively dressed and presented as objects to be looked at and used (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009).

The portrayals of women in games marketed toward girls and women are also problematic. Most pink and purple games present women as hyper-feminine and preoccupied with consumerism. Some believe these games run the risk of naturalizing hyper-femininity and gender-polarized play (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998).

While these video games place players in rigid gender roles, others can allow for gender play (Jenkins, 1998; Kafai, 2008; Suden & Sveningsson, 2012; Turkle, 1995). Kafai suggests gender play in online video games as an alternative to these stereotypical portrayals without considering the possibility of a non-stereotypical gendered avatar (Kafai, 2009). I fully support the introduction of gender play into the realm of video games. I think the medium is perfectly suited to destabilize the gender binary and highlight the social construction of gender. However, I believe the field's sudden push for this type of game ignores the offline games that present gendered characters in unique ways.

Nancy Drew is very clearly gendered as feminine and she is perceived by others as a heterosexual woman. However, she is able to possess agency without being paralyzed by her femininity or stereotypical female preoccupations (like fashion or dating). I believe it is important to show that gendered women can exist in virtual worlds as people and not merely as sex objects or hyper-feminine consumer-bots.

***Secrets Can Kill Remastered* (2010)**

Nancy Drew Adventure video games are point-and-click PC games in which players navigate a 3D virtual space through a first-person avatar. These games feature several locations relevant to each game's narrative.

Secrets Can Kill Remastered is a 2010 remake of the series' original game *Secrets Can Kill* (1998). The 1998 version of the game features 3D animation and 2D character design. The remastered version updates the original animation with 3D characters, contains new puzzles, and alters the game's final events. The original game was discontinued on August 1, 2010 due to compatibility issues with sound cards in newer computers. On August

24th the same year, the remastered version was released to coincide with the 80th anniversary of Nancy Drew (Her Interactive, 2013).

In *Secrets Can Kill Remastered* Nancy goes undercover to investigate a murder at a California high school. Players can visit several locations including the high school, Nancy's Aunt's house, and a local diner. In these spaces, the player clicks the screen to advance forward, interact with objects, and interview subjects. Players have an inventory in which they gather objects for future use. The game also requires players to take physical notes while playing the game in order to keep track of important, puzzle-solving information. The game typically takes a couple hours to play, though game length varies widely depending on the style of gameplay (e.g. if one wants to explore the world of the game or simply complete all necessary tasks). Completing the game requires players to collect items, complete various types of puzzles, and interview subjects multiple times.

Methodology

In order to evaluate the use of a first-person female avatar in Nancy Drew Adventure video games, I conduct a discourse analysis on one of the games from the series. I analyze *Secrets Can Kill Remastered* (2010). This game is a remastered version of the very first game in the series: *Secrets Can Kill* (1998). Because this game is a reissue, it illustrates the brand's original design and values as well as its current ideals. This game is the most logical choice for analysis because it spans twelve years of the series' history.

Discourse Analysis

Much of the games' actions are based on speech and conversing with other characters, making discourse analysis the most appropriate way to analyze Nancy Drew Adventure video games. There are many different approaches to discourse analysis. These approaches contain different tools and ask different questions of the text. Discourse refers to groups of communication that structure one's thinking. It serves as a basis for our actions and shapes how the world is understood. Discourse also produces subjects; it differentiates people and establishes/maintains hierarchies (Rose, 2001).

Since I am specifically concerned with the presentation of a virtual female social position, I implement James Paul Gee's approach to discourse analysis. This approach examines the way language enacts activities, perspectives, and identities.

Gee's approach combines considerations of the mind, interactions, activities, society, and institutions to dissect different instances of communication. Gee does not present a step-by-step procedure for how to implement his approach. This approach changes and mutates as it is used by different theorists. Instead of providing a formula, it presents tools of inquiry, or thinking devices, and strategies for utilizing them (Gee, 1999).

Gee (1999) presents a D/discourse framework for analyzing language. This approach is interested in how language is used to enact activities and identities. Language-in-use is identified as discourse with a little "d". All the culturally-specific attributes that combine with discourse to communicate a message constitutes Discourse with a capital 'D'. Big 'D' Discourse involves ways of believing that establish the self as meaningful. Life is a series of discourses, or interactions, within larger Discourses.

D/discourse analysis illuminates why language works the way it does. This allows for the identification of problems in applied areas. Gee's theory states that language only has meaning through actions and practices. If these language practices are not called into question, we can unknowingly contribute to Discourses of harm and injustice (Gee, 1999).

Gee's method requires asking various questions of the text. The questions arise from many different fields of analysis. Together they offer a full-bodied and diversified analysis of the text. The questions are organized into six categories: semiotic building, world building, activity building, socioculturally-situated identity and relationship building, political building, and connection building.

Gee's approach allows me to recognize the institutions of power and control represented within *Secrets Can Kill Remastered*. Due to the game's first-person avatar, Nancy is gendered through the interactions she has with other, onscreen characters. Not only is she gendered through discourses of control, she also possesses agency and asserts her own identity throughout the game. Gee's method illustrates the Discourses at play in the virtual world and allows me to compare them to real-world Discourses.

Within *Secrets Can Kill Remastered* there are five characters that the avatar, Nancy Drew, can have multiple conversations with. I analyze the conversations with these characters separately. By looking at all of the conversations Nancy has with one particular character, I am able to recognize differences in discourse between the characters and code these interactions.

Immersion as Method

Since this discourse analysis takes place in a virtual environment, I must address my role and experience within this space. Discussing virtual engagements in MOOs, Gaijala and Altman (2006) explains the nature of a researcher's virtual presence. More than inhabit a space, the research also codes themselves into existence by interacting with objects and building spaces. This results in the production of a cyberself, a "real" identity that enacts change within a virtual space.

Analysis of virtual texts must involve a self-reflexive engagement that involves observing the Self within "technospaces," in addition to observing other in-game phenomena (Gaijala & Altman, 2006, p. 2). Virtual and "real world" identities do not exist in a one to one ratio. A distance exists between the game subject (avatar, player character) and the player (Sunden, 2003). This distance, both physical and cognitive, alters interactions, making self-reflexivity imperative to game analysis.

A neutral playthrough is impossible due to the nature of gameplay. Video games require users to enact the text, to set off algorithms, and to generate their recursive space. Therefore, one's socioeconomic, cultural, racial, gendered positions must be acknowledged and taken into consider during both data gathering and analysis.

While I may have never occupied the elevated socioeconomic status Nancy Drew inhabits as a young adult, both my female-identified and white markers afford me an affinity with the avatar. This affinity naturally inclines me to accept a dominant reading of the text. To assuage this bias, I exhaust all possibilities of the text, rather than simply playing through with my initial, personality-driven choices. Nancy Drew Adventure games provide players with multiple response choices during each character interaction. By examining the ramifications of every possible choice through multiple gameplays, I can determine the consistency of the text across multiple styles of gameplay.

Findings

In *Secrets Can Kill Remastered*, Nancy Drew can hold multiple conversations with five characters: Detective Beech, Daryl Gray, Connie Watson, Hector "Hulk" Sanchez, and Hal Tanaka. Using Gee's method to analyze D/discourses within the text, I found that the conversations associated with each specific character aligned with both a specific female social position and one of Gee's building tasks. My coding led me to examine Nancy's interactions with each character separately.

Gee identifies six building tasks. Through these tasks people use language to construct a situation network (Gee, 1999). While these building tasks all take place simultaneously, the discourses of the individual characters in *Secrets Can Kill Remastered* each serve as a clear example of one of these tasks and can be analyzed as such. The building tasks found in the game are: political building, socioculturally-situated identity, connection building, world building, and semiotic building. The female social positions observed are: woman as subordinate, woman as object of desire, woman as confidant, woman as physical non-threat, and woman as intellectual threat.

The game is structured largely around interviews. In these interviews the player, as Nancy, is able to choose how to respond during the conversations. Not every interaction prompts a choice. Some interactions involve a set script that moves the narrative along. In these instances, the player has no control over how Nancy responds to other characters. The structure creations many conversational possibilities within the game. I played through the game multiple times to exhaust its discursive possibilities.

Below I analyze the discourse of each game character separately based on how they interact with Nancy. The analysis considers all conversations Nancy has with each character throughout the game. Through this analysis, I assign a discursive mode that each character exhibits, and a female social position inscribed on Nancy through this mode.

Detective Beech - Political Building- Woman as Subordinate

Detective Beech is presented as Nancy's contact for her undercover sleuthing mission. Detective Beech consistently asserts his authority during his interactions with Nancy. He points out Nancy's position to him by stating that she is a girl, teenager, and amateur detective.

Nancy's interactions with Detective Beech follow Gee's political building task. Gee questions a text's political building function by asking what social goods (status, gender, class, race) are relevant within a situation and in what way these goods are made relevant. Gee's approach also examines how these social goods are related to big 'D' Discourses.

Detective Beech builds a political discourse and views Nancy as occupying a subordinate position in many of their interactions. Nancy's first interaction with Detective Beech takes place over the phone. In this interaction the detective struggles with gendered labels and makes his position of power clear. While the detective's superior attitude likely arises from his social position as Nancy's boss, his continual reference to Nancy's age and gender illustrate his attempt to place the sleuth in a subordinate role predicated on her gender identity:

DB: Nancy Drew? Detective Beech here. How are you?
ND: Good and yourself?
DB: Frustrated, Nancy. I need some leads and you're my man…er…woman, teen, student, whatever…I'll be at Maxine's Diner- come see me when you've found out anything. All contact should be through me.
ND: Can do- so what's our cover?
DB: Our what?
ND: Umm…our cover. Who should I say you are if anyone sees us and asks?
DB: Oh…right. I'll be your uncle. Uncle Steve. …I gotta go now- if you need anything else comes see me at Maxine's. I'm wearing glasses and a green striped shirt.

Detective Beech remains patronizing toward Nancy regardless of the actions chosen by the player. For example, one student asks Nancy why she is asking so many questions. The player has a choice of revealing she is working for the police or the player can choose from one of two "cover stories." When choosing a cover story, the interaction between Nancy and the detective is as follows:

DB: Good recovery on Daryl's question about Jake's locker.
ND: Thanks, Uncle Steve.
DB: But 'reporter for school newspaper'? It's not that great of a cover.
ND: I had to think on my feet.

If Nancy tells the student she is working for the police, Detective Beech becomes angry:

DB: Did I overhear you telling Daryl that you're an undercover detective?
ND: Yes…
DB: (angrily) What did I tell you about not revealing this information?
ND: I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that.
DB: Need I remind you that this is a serious murder investigation and we are counting on you to act responsibly? Is that clear?
ND: Yes. Very clear.

In both situations, Detective Beech instructs Nancy on correct behavior. Even when Nancy uses a 'cover story' the detective tells her it was a poor choice. Detective Beech also becomes angry with Nancy if she asks for his help:

ND: How can I get into the teacher's lounge?
DB: Look, Nancy. Maybe this assignment isn't for you. I can't be holding your hand all the time. Your job is to come to me with solutions, not problems.

ND: Could you tell me the combination to Jake's locker?
DB: Like I said, we already looked in his locker. There's nothing there.
ND: I know, but I'd like to see for myself.
DB: Then you'll need to figure it out by yourself.

Detective Beech views Nancy as occupying a subordinate social position through his implementation of political building discourse.

Daryl Gray - Socioculturally-Situated identity- Woman as Object of Desire

Daryl is one of the students at Paseo Del Mar High. Nancy interacts with him at Maxine's Diner where he works. Daryl views Nancy in a position of desire through Gee's socioculturally-situated identity building task. This task asks what relationships and identities are relevant in the situation and how these relationships are stabilized or transformed.

During their interactions, Daryl consistently flirts with Nancy even after she tells him multiple times she has a boyfriend. The player has an option of ignoring these advances or telling Daryl about Nancy's boyfriend Ned. Despite the responses chosen by the player, Daryl continues to make advances toward Nancy:

ND: Who did it?
DG: No one knows, and the police are keeping pretty clammed up about it. But my resources say that they're calling some special detective, maybe even the FBI.
ND: Wow- you must have some special contacts.
DG: Just special enough to see beautiful women like yourself.
ND: What do you mean?
DG: Get it? Contact? *points to eye* I'm wearing contacts that let me see pretty women?...I should get back to work. Nice meeting you, Nancy.

Daryl sometimes gets embarrassed and ends the conversations on his own. At other times he recognizes that Nancy has a boyfriend but continues to flirt with her regardless:

ND: Do you know Connie Watson?
DG: Not that well- she keeps to herself a lot. I've always thought there's something…mysterious about her. Kind of the same way I feel about you.
ND: Thanks for the compliment, but I'm already seeing someone.
DG: That's cool- I'm just saying, not playing.

Nancy, the player, can continually tell Daryl about her boyfriend but this does not stop the advances:

DG: Hey gorgeous. Glad you stopped by.
ND: Daryl- I appreciate the compliment but I'm seeing someone else.
DG: Hey I'm just saying what I'm seeing.

Dealing with persistent, unwanted sexual advances is a common challenge of those occupying a female social position. Through Gee's socioculturally-situated identity building task we can see that Daryl identifies Nancy as an object of desire and attempts to stabilize this identity by ignoring Nancy's wishes and continuing to flirt with her.

Connie Watson-Connection Building- Woman as Confidant

Connie Watson is the only female character Nancy can interact with in the game. Connie recognizes Nancy as female and attempts to build homosocial bonds based on this commonality between them. Connection building implies that there are ways of communicating typical in woman-to-woman conversations. Once Connie perceives

Nancy as a trustworthy confidant, she continues to gossip about other students. These interactions constitute "coherence" in that they perpetuate the assumptions surrounding female conversation.

During their first interaction Connie attempts to establish a homosocial bond:

> CW: Hi, I'm Connie. You're not from around here are you? Usually, Paseo Del Mar High is really quiet and boring. Lately it's been totally out of control.
> ND: Is it that obvious I'm not from around here?
> CW: I'm a school monitor, so I have to notice these things.
> ND: You're very observant.
> CW: We girls have to stick together. There are a lot of wolves walking around campus.
> ND: What do you mean?
> CW: You wouldn't want to waste your time with any of the guys at this school. Trust me. They're all a bunch of self-centered jerks.

Even after Nancy exposes some of Connie's secrets, Connie attempts to appeal to her and Nancy's shared experiences as females:

> ND: Didn't I hear you were dating Jake?
> CW: Hey, a girl can make a mistake, can't she?

In another interaction Connie opens up about her romantic interest in another character. Since she has just met Nancy, this revelation is prompted solely by the fact Nancy is female:

> ND: How well do you know Daryl Gray?
> CW: I wish I knew him better. He's the only guy I'd ever consider dating. He's student council president, holds a cool job at a diner called Maxine's and drives a C-Back x80.
> ND: Drives a sports car and works at a diner? That doesn't compute.
> CW: Yeah, I don't get it either. Daryl's family was rich and used to throw major parties all the time. But not anymore.

Connie views Nancy as occupying the social position of confidant. Her proclivity to reveal personal information to Nancy based on her sex can be understood through Gee's connection building task.

Hector "Hulk" Sanchez - World Building- Woman as Physical Non-Threat

Hulk Sanchez is a football player at Paseo Del Mar High who consistently performs hyper-masculinity. Hulk makes it clear that he is physically the strongest person in school. He views other students, as well as Nancy, as his admirers. Unlike the other students, Hulk does not see Nancy as suspicious or a threat because he is confident in his physicality. Hulk's discourse can be understood through the task of world building. Hulk creates his reality and establishes what is possible and impossible through his egocentric world view. In Hulk's world, Nancy could never be a threat because of her sex and physical stature.

During their first interaction, Hulk illustrates his egotistical nature:

> HS: Whoa, a new girl at school. Do you realize what destiny has brought you today? Yours truly, Hector Sanchez, but you can call me 'The Hulk.'
> ND: How did you know I was new here?
> HS: Hey, you're talking to 'The Man,' the number one football player in the state of Florida. I know all the beautiful girls at Paseo del Mar High, are you kidding?
> ND: How do you know all the other girls at school?
> HS: Isn't it obvious? I'm tall, dark, handsome, not to mention a superstar athlete. Everybody knows Hulk Sanchez and the Hulk knows everybody.
> ND: Did you know the guy who was killed?

HS: I knew Jake. But I didn't hang out with him. …Sorry can't talk now. I gotta go to practice. Later.

Hulk also refuses to admit any weakness to Nancy:

ND: I'm really sorry you got injured. Does that affect your chances of playing college ball?
HS: I had a little sprain, no big deal. Within a week I was better than before, and impressing the football scouts. I'm as strong as ever.

After Nancy has questioned Hulk several times, he becomes impatient and belittles her:

HS: I'm not into pushy girls. Do me a favor and bother someone else.

In this response, Hulk assumes that Nancy cares about his opinion of her and he frames this opinion in a way that establishes her as a female subject that can be dismissed. Hulk views Nancy as a non-threat due to her sex and enforces this view through world building.

Hal Tanaka- Semiotic Building- Woman as Intellectual Threat

Hal Tanaka is a Japanese foreign exchange student at Paseo Del Mar High. Like all the characters, Hal has secrets that he attempts to keep from Nancy. However, Hal, an intellectual himself, sees Nancy as an intellectual threat and recognizes that he cannot get away with lying to her. These interactions can be understood through semiotic building which examines systems of knowledge and ways of knowing. Hal identifies Nancy as privy to the system of knowledge that he had previously occupied alone. Hal is recognized as intellectually superior by the other students which allows him to hide information from them. He sees Nancy as an intellectual threat and does not feel like he can deceive her.

This dynamic between the two characters is most clearly illustrated when Nancy confronts Hal about his plagiarism:

ND: You plagiarized your senior essay on etiquette and Jake knew about it.
HT: Yes, Nancy. I'm very ashamed. My family will be extremely unhappy about this terrible mistake I have made. Somehow Jake found out I copied that old essay. Then he blackmailed me into doing his homework for him.
ND: Why did you copy the essay?
HT: I had no other choice. My family won't let me stay in the United States unless I get a scholarship next year. I had to take extra courses to earn the scholarship. Before I realized what I had done, I was buried in work. I copied the essay because I was desperate.
ND: What happened when Jake found out?
HT: Jake demanded I do all his homework for the rest of the semester or he would tell my family everything. What else could I do? My family was depending on me to succeed.
ND: Were you desperate enough to kill him?
HT: I was not happy about the situation, but I would never kill anyone. I value human life. Please don't tell anyone about this. I beg you. You will gain nothing if you do, and it would destroy my family if they knew what really happened. I regret what I have done. Please let me have this change to become a doctor. I promise to make up for this mistake, even if it takes the rest of my life.

Through semiotic building, Hal recognizes that Nancy has found out the truth and she cannot be duped into thinking otherwise. Unlike the other characters, Hal respects Nancy's intelligence and does not lie to her when she first confronts him with the truth. The other characters do admit things to Nancy but only after they first deny them. Hal recognizes Nancy as an intellectual threat and tries to appeal to her sense of reason to keep her from exposing him.

Discussion and Conclusions

Nancy Drew Adventure video games position the first-person avatar in a female social position through discourse building tasks. Other in-game characters gender Nancy with their language by viewing her through specific female social positions. Just as being viewed as inferior does not make one inferior, Nancy is not confined to any of the roles the in-game characters attempt to place her in. However, their attempts work together to gender her within the game due to the lack of visual cues associated with a first-person avatar. Each of these roles is tied to a specific character with which Nancy interacts and is implemented through a specific building task established by Gee (1999):

Table 1

Discourse Building Tasks in Secrets Can Kill Remastered (2010)

Character	Building Task	Social Position
Detective Beech	Political Building	Woman as Subordinate
Daryl Gray	Socioculturally-Situated Identity	Woman as Object of Desire
Connie Watson	Connection Building	Woman as Confidant
Hector “Hulk” Sanchez	World Building	Woman as Physical Non-Threat
Hal Tanaka	Semiotic Building	Woman as Intellectual Threat

The first-person avatar in *Secrets Can Kill Remastered* is gendered through social roles established by the discourse of other in-game characters: subordinate, object of desire, confidant, physical non-threat, and intellectual threat. These roles are established by the discourse building tasks: political, socioculturally-situated identity, connection, world, and semiotic.

Agency

While this discourse analysis sought to determine how the first-person female avatar is gendered despite the lack of visual cues, examining the interview sequences within *Secrets Can Kill Remastered* also offers interesting insights into various complexities of the text. One of these insights has to do with female agency, a component often missing in video game content. The player is able to make meaningful choices within the game. While the game’s outcome is unchangeable, character interactions can be altered by the decision a player makes during interview sequences. Since the player holds agency within the game, the female first-person avatar also possesses this agency. While other in-game characters attempt to place Nancy in various feminized roles through their discourse, Nancy remains an autonomous agent, capable of asserting her own identity.

Race

Nancy’s interactions with Hal Tanaka illuminate the tainted racial history of the original Nancy Drew series. Hal is clearly stereotyped within the text. He is an overachieving Asian student who worries about the expectations of his family. He spends all his time studying, and is presented next to an open book and notepad. He talks in a hurried, nervous manner, and his wordiness makes his responses less than conversational. This stereotypical presentation works to highlight Nancy’s white femaleness. Despite this characterization, Hal is given the same respect, importance, and attention as the other in-game characters. The same cannot be said about Nancy Drew’s past adventures.

In the 1950s, previous Nancy Drew novels were reworked, which removed much of the racially insensitive content. Unfortunately, the history of racism is forever ingrained in the girl sleuth’s legacy. In the series’ first books, “negro” characters are rarely given names. They are subservient to white characters and often involved in criminal activity (Still, 2017).

In addition to the unacceptable representation of African-Americans, early Nancy Drew novels contain other cultural stereotypes. Italian, Polish, Chinese, and Irish characters are all given unsavory characteristics, which the novels clearly associate with their heritages. Characters with Jewish sounding names can rarely be trusted, and

Irish policemen are dumb and ineffective. Marshall (2003) notes that villains are not hard to spot in classic Nancy Drew novels. One must only look for those with non-white markers.

Still (2017) notes that more recent iterations of Nancy Drew adventures are much more culturally sensitive. Portrayals of African Americans are more realistic beginning in the 1980s, and the video game version of Nancy encounters and validates people from diverse backgrounds. However, as seen in *Secrets Can Kill Remastered*, race is always salient when it comes to Nancy Drew. Her WASP-y status affords her many privileges minority characters do not possess.

Conclusion

Nancy Drew Adventure games gender its non-visual female video game character through the discourse of other in-game characters. This game shows how discourse building tasks can be used to establish a gendered social position without the aid of visual markers. Female video game characters have long had problems with stereotypical, hypersexed visual representations. Games like those in the Nancy Drew Adventure series show an alternative way of placing players in a virtual female social position. Additionally, Nancy Drew Adventure games provide examples of female agency, a component largely missing from video game content. These games also offer insights into the long and ugly history of racism in Nancy Drew texts, and provide an opportunity to either perpetuate or challenge this tarnished history. After close to a century of cultural influence, it is clear that Nancy Drew is here to stay. With her move into the virtual realm, she continues to evolve and influence females throughout the country.

References

Behm-Morawitz, E., & Mastro, D. (2009). The effects of the sexualization of female video game characters on gender stereotyping and female self-concept. *Sex Roles*, *61*, 808-823.

Cassell, J., & Jenkins, H. (1998). Chess for girls? Feminism and computer games. In J. Cassell, & H. Jenkins (Eds.), *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and computer games* (pp. 2-45). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Chamberlain, K. (1994). The secrets of Nancy Drew: Having their cake and eating it too. *The Lion and the Unicorn*, *18*(1) 1-12.

Consalvo, M. (2008). Crunched by passion: Women game developers and workplace challenges. In Y. B. Kafai, C. Heeter, J. Denner, & J. Y. Sun (Eds.), *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New perspectives on gender and gaming* (pp. 177-192). Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Fullerton, T., Morie, J., & Pearce, C. (2008). A game of one's own: Towards a new gendered poetics of digital space. *The Fibreculture Journal*, *11*, n.p.

Gajjala, R., & Altman, M. (2006). Producing cyberselves through technospatial praxis: Studying through doing. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Health research in cyberspace* (pp. 1-18). Hauppauge, NY: Nova Publishers.

Gee, J. P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. London: Routledge.

Gee, J.P. (2003). *What videogames have to teach us about leaning and literacy.* New York, NY: Palgrave.

Her Interactive. (2010). *Secrets Can Kill* Remastered [PC]. Bellevue, WA: Her Interactive.

Her Interactive. (2010, August 2). Her Interactive kicks off pre-sale for remastered Nancy Drew: Secrets Can KIll. Retrieved from Her Interactive: https://www.herinteractive.com/about-us/news/her-interactive-kicks-off-pre-sell-for-remastered-nancy-drew-secrets-can-kill-08022011/

Jenkins, H. (1998). "Complete freedom of movement": Video games as gendered play spaces. In J. Cassell, & H. Jenkins (Eds.), *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and computer games* (pp. 262-297). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Jong, P. (2000, June 12). *Megan Gaiser, Carolyn Bickford, Sheri Hargus Her Interactive*. Retrieved from Adventure Classic Gaming: http://www.adventureclassicgaming.com/index.php/site/interviews/156/

Kafai, Y. B. (2008). Gender play in a tween gaming club. In Y. B. Kafai, C. Heeter, J., Denner, & Y. Sun (Eds.), *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New perspectives on gender and gaming* (pp. 111-124). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Kafai, Y. B. (2009). Serious games for girls? Considering gender in learning with digital games. In U. Ritterfeld, M. Cody, P. Vorderer (Eds.), *Serious games: Mechanism and effects* (pp. 221-235). New York, NY: Routledge.

Kafai, Y. B., Heeter, C., Denner, J., & Sun, J. Y. (2008). Preface: Pink, purple casual or Mainstream games: Moving beyond the gender divide. In Y. B. Kafai, C. Heeter, J. Denner, & J. Y. Sun (Eds.), *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New perspectives on gender and gaming* (pp. xi-xxv). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Kennedy, H. W. (2007). Female Quake players and the politics of identity. In B. Atkins, & T. Krzywinska (Eds.), *Videogame, player, text* (pp. 120-138). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Marshall, E. (2003). Red, white, and Drew: The All-American girl and the case of gendered childhood. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 203-211.

Mason, B. A. (1995). *The girl sleuth: On the trail of Nancy Drew, Judy Bolton, and Cherry Ames.* Atlanta, GA: The University of Georgia Press.

Parry, S. E. (1997). The secret of the feminist heroine: The search for values in Nancy Drew and Judy Bolton. In S. A. Inness (Ed.), *Nancy Drew and company: Culture, gender, and girls' series* (pp. 145-158). Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.

Provenzo, E. F. (1991). *Vide kids: making sense of Nintendo*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rose, G. (2001). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to interpretation of visual materials*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Siegel, D. L. (1997). Nancy Drew as new girl wonder: Solving it all for the 1930s. In S. A. Inness (Ed.), *Nancy Drew and company: Culture, gender, and girls' series* (pp. 159-182). Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.

Still, J. (2017). Nancy Drew and the ivory tower: Early academic study of the girl detective. *A Journal of Detection*, *35*, 75 – 84.

Sundén, J., & Sveningsson, M. (2012). *Gender and sexuality in online game cultures: Passionate play*. New York; NY: Routledge.

Sundén, J. (2003). *Material virtualities.* New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on screen: Identity in the age of the internet*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Woolston, J. (2010). Nancy Drew's body: The case of the autonomous female sleuth. *Studies in the Novel*, *42*, 173-184.

Ohio Communication Journal
Volume 56 – March 2018, pp. 120-135

Civil Keystrokes: Examining Anonymity, Politeness, and Civility in Online Ohio Newspaper Forums

Kelly P. Dillon
Rachel L. Neo
Natalee Seely

Online news discussion forums have become popular virtual spaces for public discourse. Computer-mediated communication theories suggest the anonymity afforded by online platforms may deindividuate individuals, leading to less civility and politeness. The current study examines the role of anonymity within the setting of online news comment forums and whether anonymous comments contain more incivility and impoliteness than Facebook-identified users. Comments from two Associated Press articles were collected from four major newspapers' websites. Results suggest anonymous comments are less civil and less polite than those commenting through Facebook profiles. Future research is necessary to determine the implications of online discussion forums.

Keywords: civility, computer-mediated communication, newspaper, comments, politeness, SIDE model

Americans' online news consumption has surpassed radio and print media, becoming the second most popular news media outlet only to television, leading to about four in ten Americans getting their news online (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016). As the online presence of newspapers has grown, the avenues for the expression of public opinion have become more diverse. The present study aims to understand how the different affordances of these forums affect civility and politeness in comments. Historically, letters to the editor served as the primary feedback forums in the news industry. With more newspapers taking their publications to the internet, readers can now express their opinions in online news forums, characterized by fewer gatekeepers and more opportunity for participation across time and space.

These forums are digital spaces where readers can offer their voices, opinions and feedback on news content and issues, allowing them to interact with both the content and other readers (Hlavach & Freivogal, 2011). Many large U.S. newspapers including *The Los Angeles Times* enable readers to register anonymously to post comments. Users have the autonomy to be identified by usernames and handles that can be as vague or as descriptive as they choose. Other newspapers, like *USA Today*, or scholarly websites such as *Popular Science*, recently have taken steps to restrict anonymity by linking comments to Facebook profiles or disabling comments entirely. Some research has suggested online civility not only leads to polarization between commenters (Chen & Ng, 2017), but also influences readers' perceptions of the subject matter (Anderson, Brossard, Scheufele, Xenos, & Ladwig, 2013). Online comments may also affect journalists' approach to newswriting (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011) and experiments have suggested incivility and impoliteness can affect readers' judgment of journalistic quality (Prochazka, Weber, & Schweiger, 2018). Editors have expressed concerns about cyberbullying and the spread of misinformation within comment sections, especially when many news outlets do not have the time or staffing to monitor the content of forums (Brost, 2013).

Some scholars have suggested that anonymity enables users to express unconventional opinions without the fear of being judged by gender, race or disability (Papacharissi, 2004). Conversely, others have contended that higher levels of anonymity exacerbate hostile discourse (Rösner, Winter, & Krämer, 2016). In an initial content analysis of comments made in the *Washington Post*'s website followed by a comparison of comments made on the website to those made on the newspaper's Facebook page, Rowe (2013) found a clear difference in civility. Using a theory driven approach, we aim to examine whether social media profiles on source sites or the use of anonymity leads to uncivil and impolite behavior in online news forums.

Kelly P. Dillon (PhD, The Ohio State University) is an Assistant Professor of Communication at Wittenberg University.
Rachel L. Neo (PhD, The Ohio State University) is an Assistant Professor of Communications at the University of Hawaii, Manoa.
Natalee Seely (PhD, University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill) is an Assistant Professor of Journalism at Ball State University

Anonymity in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

Anonymity is a construct defined by the absence of identifiers (Marx, 1999); however, many scientists agree that anonymity is a social phenomenon. Marx (1999) argued that anonymity requires an audience of at least one other person. Rationales for anonymity include the facilitation of information, the protection and privacy of one's self, the avoidance of persecution and the encouragement of experimentation and risk-taking (Marx, 1999).

The different type of online platforms allows for varying degrees of concealment of physical appearance, location, name and other identifying characteristics. For instance, some types of news sites allow people to create a user account with the news site and post comments using pseudonyms and fake names. However, online platforms such as Facebook do not necessarily have 'visual anonymity,' as others can easily glean clues about a person's real identity from information displayed on his or her Facebook profile—people typically put their real names and display photos of themselves on their Facebook profiles (DeAndrea & Walther, 2011).

The Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (SIDE) model provides a salient theoretical framework to explain why online platforms facilitate impolite and uncivil discourse (Walther, 2011). Though originally constructed with organizational groups in mind, the SIDE model has been applied to a wide variety of CMC situations and environments (Tidwell & Walther, 2006). This model purports deindividuation in online group settings leads to a transfer of salience from self to the collective, causing group identification and adherence to group norms. The SIDE model identifies two factors that drive CMC behavior: visual anonymity that leads users into a state of deindividuation and the lack of verbal and nonverbal cues, known as the cues-filtered-out approach (Walther, 1992). When in a state of deindividuation, CMC users will "orient themselves to a salient social category or group" (Walther, 2011, p. 450) and relate with other users on the basis of group membership (Lea, Spears, & de Groot, 2001). This anonymity frees people from ordinary relationships and social conventions such as politeness, and transports the user into an environment where the self is less important than the collective (Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995). Users will act according to in-group norms and adopt a group identity.

Going by the tenets of SIDE, it is a logical inference that newspapers allowing anonymous users to comment will have statistically more comments after articles compared to those newspapers requiring a known profile login, such as through Facebook. Furthermore, based on the reduction of social presence afforded by CMC, we seek to examine the conditions under which commenters will be more likely to disclose their own personal political identities.

> H1a: Newspapers allowing anonymous comments will have more initial comments than newspapers requiring a social media profile.
>
> H1b: Newspapers allowing anonymous comments will have more responsive comments than newspapers requiring a social media profile.
>
> RQ: Under what conditions, topical and anonymity, would individuals disclose their own personal political identities?

Politeness

Extensive research has examined the effects of politeness in conversational exchanges; however, there is no fixed scholarly consensus as to what constitutes 'politeness.' According to Fraser (1990), there are four broad perspectives of 'politeness.' The 'social-norm' perspective views 'politeness' in terms of speech styles and contends that politeness is associated with higher levels of formality and adherence to social etiquette rules. Grice's (1989) "conversational maxim" describes how communication efficiency can be enhanced using principles such as conflict, minimizing strategies to maximize cooperation between parties. Goffman's (1971) 'face saving' view delineates between two types of 'faces': positive and negative face. 'Positive' face describes how people behave politely in order to maintain relationships with others, whereas 'negative' face describes how people assert their autonomy by expressing frank opinions that could potentially offend other parties. Lastly, the 'conversational-contract' view posits that conversation participants have certain preliminary normative expectations of one another that are applied to all discussion parties (Fraser & Nolen, 1981). Ultimately, politeness is defined as the extent to which a participant follows these conversational norms.

Although some commenters may make attempts at politeness, it is difficult to ascertain whether politeness is a driving force or motivator of behavior or communication choice in these forums. In sum, politeness can be described as the extent to which people adhere to conversation etiquette and norms, negotiate between sacrificing one's face and saving face, and attempt to minimize conflict by cooperating with other parties (Chen, 2015; Fraser, 1990). According to "cues filtered out" approaches, online communication platforms lack the visual markers of face-to face communication (Culnan & Markus, 1987). Applying conversational norms, which have been established using face-to-face communication, in the mediated environment is a challenge. Such visual anonymity makes it harder to trace peoples' real identities and reduces the social cost of being impolite. Consequently, scholars have contended that the anonymity afforded by online platforms emboldens people to be impolite when having political discussions with others (Ng & Detenber, 2005; Papacharissi, 2004). Given previous studies (for example Halpern & Gibbs, 2012) have shown that people tend to have more impolite political discussions on anonymous platforms than on known platforms, we hypothesize people who post comments with their news site user accounts will be more impolite than people who post comments using their Facebook accounts. Impoliteness, then, may be the norm in the mediated, deindividuated environment, rather than a violation of norms. When a user is individuated, or uses a social media account with a (presumed) authentic photograph, real name, and networked ties, like that of Facebook, an active attempt to adhere to conversational norms like politeness should be observed. Thus, we hypothesize

H2: People who post comments with their news site user accounts will be more impolite than people who post comments using their Facebook accounts.

Civility

Civility is regarded as a key hallmark of deliberative political discourse. The term 'civility' was derived from the term 'civil discourse.' Civil discourse is essential for the functioning of a democracy (for example, Dutton, 1996; Johnson & Johnson, 2000). Some scholars have lamented the decline of civil discourse in the public sphere (Bowman & Knox, 2008). Nevertheless, other scholars have cited the potential of online platforms to foster civil discourse (Pavlik, 1994). As such, it is imperative to examine the extent to which online platforms promote or stymie civil discourse.

The present study also aims to differentiate between civility and politeness in CMC research. Previous research tends to conflate incivility with impoliteness. For instance, in Ng and Detenber's (2005) study, their 'uncivil' experimental conditions consisted of people being impolite by flouting conversation norms, e.g., hurling personal attacks at one another. Some scholars have suggested that it is unrealistic to expect political discourse to always be carried out in a polite fashion (Garnham, 1992). Furthermore, political discourse that is carried out in a polite manner tends to be more restrained because people practice self-censorship and espouse the status quo so as to avoid offending people (Holtgraves, 1997). It would seem that such measured polite discourse impedes spirited debate that reflects democratic ideals, as Lyotard (1984) and Schudson (1997) have found. Rather, whimsical, heated, political debate that flouts conversation norms and etiquette might actually enhance democratic goals as such discussions tend to be more diverse than polite political discourse (Dillard, Wilson, Tusing, & Kinney, 1997).

Thus, it is important to delineate between impoliteness and incivility. According to Papacharissi (2004), uncivil discourse goes beyond what is typically regarded as 'impoliteness,' i.e., flouting etiquette or social norms, and being uncooperative. Rather, civil discourse is discourse that espouses democratic ideals and the common societal good (Shils, 1992). Papacharissi (2004) further argues that civility is a form of '*collective* politeness.' As such, when people denigrate *social categories* of people, they are deemed to be behaving in an uncivil manner. However, if people hurl aspersions at each other (for example, "You're an incompetent governor!"), they are simply being impolite, not uncivil.

Given civility is a hallmark of a democratic society in which each individual ideally has an equal opportunity to voice their frank opinions for the collective good, Papacharissi (2004) defined uncivil discourse as discourse that undermines democratic ideals, challenges the common good by depriving people of their personal freedoms and discriminating against social categories of people. Thus far, few studies have explicitly delineated between known (not anonymous) and anonymous online platforms when examining the extent to which people engage in uncivil political discourse online. Although other content analyses have shown people are generally civil

when expressing their views online, these have only focused on examining civility within the context of online message boards (Papacharissi, 2004). Such displays of incivility are more likely to occur in anonymous contexts because users are acting under a cloak of anonymity. (Papacharissi, 2002; Spears & Lea, 1994). Furthermore, according to the SIDE model (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998; Spears & Lea, 1992), the lack of nonverbal cues on the Internet causes people to interact with one another using cues (for example, textual cues) that give indications about group-level attributes of other discussants. Consequently, people are more likely to form stereotypes of other online discussants and make derogatory remarks based on perceptions of *social categories* that these discussants belong to (Spears & Lea, 1992). As such, we hypothesize:

H3: There will be more uncivil comments from anonymous news site user accounts than comments using Facebook accounts.

The struggle to civilly discuss politics in the news and interpersonal conversations is as historic as the American democracy (Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Herbst, 2010). Furthermore, online political news stories generally tend to receive more comments than non-political online news stories (Tsagkias, Weerkamp, & de Rijke, 2009). Scholars contend the online political sphere is highly polarized, with opposing parties having factious debates on political issues that are characterized by emotionally charged vitriol (Hargittai, Gallo, & Kane, 2008; Sunstein, 2001). Topics discussed online that have clear sides in opposition of each other, especially partisan leaning, have been found to have fewer civil comments (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014). As such, we predict online political news stories will receive more impolite and uncivil comments than non-political online news stories.

H4: Comments to political stories will be less civil than non-political stories.

H5: Comments to political stories will be less polite than non-political stories.

Methods

Sample

Four Ohio newspapers that allow online comments to AP articles were chosen for the current study. The state of Ohio was specifically chosen because of its importance in presidential elections as a swing state, the frequency of candidate and surrogate visits during the 2012 campaign, and for the comparisons of the cities and newspapers chosen. The newspapers used in this study were the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (Cuyahoga County), *Toledo Blade* (Lucas County), *Dayton Daily News* (Montgomery County), and the *Cincinnati Inquirer* (Hamilton County). The newspapers range in daily circulation from 95,000 to 300,000, and are each well established in their respective communities. Two of the newspapers require commenters to use their known Facebook profile in order to leave a comment. Two newspapers require commenters to create an account, creating any handle they would like. We recognize anonymity could be perceived as a spectrum than as a binary. The Facebook profiles necessary for leaving comments in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* and *Toledo Blade* could contain false or fake profiles, deidentified profile pictures, or creative names, obscuring the commenter's real identity. Additionally, the handles created by commentators in the *Plain* Dealer and *Dayton Daily News* could contain identifying information, depending on how much the commentator wants to reveal. Table 1 contains circulation and total comments drawn from each paper.

Table 1
Condition, Daily Circulation, and Total Number of Comments from Sample Newspapers

Newspaper	Condition	Circulation	*N* of Comments
Cleveland Plain Dealer	Anonymous	246,571	431
Cincinnati Enquirer	Facebook	144,154	88
Toledo Blade	Facebook	94,215	31
Dayton Daily News	Anonymous	94,425	32

Content

In order to determine if it is truly the platform affordances that lead to differences in comment content, it was important to use the same articles during the same time frames, keeping the content as standardized as possible. This also minimized possible effects of external events unrelated to the chosen topic (for example, global events on election related news). We also wanted to determine if type of content, political or non-political, would yield different types of comments in the different conditions. Thus, newspaper articles surrounding a non-political and political event approximately one week apart were used for the current study.

AP articles on a political topic and a non-political topic were chosen as the stimuli for collecting comments. The AP is a news agency that operates nearly 250 news bureaus throughout the world, and the agency's news content is published and circulated in more than 1,500 newspapers. The AP's articles are written in plain, non-inflammatory language and circulated widely across communities. The choice of AP articles helped in the standardization of article content, regardless of the partisan leanings of the editorial boards of the newspaper. The same AP article was available in all four newspapers in both topics and was examined for edits or updates during the 24-hour comment capture timeframe.

The political topic chosen for this study is the recap of the Presidential debate covering domestic policy held in Denver, CO on October 3, 2012. This was the first of three Presidential Candidate debates and covered domestic policy exclusively (where the remaining debates will either be a blend of foreign and domestic policy or a town hall meeting). The non-political topic chosen was a controversial ruling by replacement referees during the Seattle Seahawks-Pittsburgh Steelers NFL game on September 24, 2012. The referees' ruling, outcome of the game, and subsequent national outrage was a hot topic and the final straw in a media narrative about the ongoing NFL referee strike. This event was also chosen given neither of the NFL teams in Ohio (Cincinnati Bengals or the Cleveland Browns) were involved in the story. Prior to the choice of the NFL topic, two other non-political stories were considered: one reporting the Emmy awards and another regarding the response to super storm Sandy. The Emmy story yielded no comments in the first day. The discussion following the story covering responses to Sandy evolved into a political topic, making comparisons moot. Because we wanted to make sure the non-political story was within a week of the political topic, we settled on the NFL story, which was controversial at the time, and engaged readers to comment.

Procedures

Comments and articles were printed digitally every few hours for 24-hours after the articles' posting to the newspapers' websites. Articles were compared for substantial editing and none was found. Streams of comments were compared to determine if newspaper webmasters removed or flagged comments deemed offensive or in violation of the newspapers' policies and none were found. Comments were recorded in chronological order and coded for newspaper, topic, condition, and if they were initial or responsorial. Each commenter from each newspaper was given a unique subject identification code and all comments from the commenter were coded with this code. A total of 210 unique commenters were found across the four newspapers and two topics. One commenter appeared to comment on each newspaper's political article, using the same handle and nearly the same comment.

Civility and Impoliteness Coding. A total of 582 comments were organized according to paper, condition, topic, timing, and commenters' subject identification codes by the lead author. All subsequent data analysis was conducted using only subject identification codes in order to ensure handles, which can contain political or uncivil speech in and of themselves, would not affect analysis of comments. Each post was coded as either an initial post, where the author addressed the content of the news article in a new "thread," or as a reply, where the author addressed a comment from another author or another author directly. If available, the number of likes/dislikes a comment received and whether the newspaper designated the author as a "Top Commenter" was also recorded.

The remaining two authors adapted previous civility and politeness coding schemas to use to train on 25 comments, illustrated in Table 2 (Papacharissi, 2004). Civility codes focused on verbalization of threats to democracy, political identification, or stereotypes directed towards self, other commenters, or a non-present generalized 'other.' Comments containing threats to another commenter's rights (for example, "Keep talking like that and you'll see what I mean") or a non-present other (for example, "Seniors listen up…those death panels are for real.") were coded as uncivil. According to the tenets of SIDE theory, it would be uncivil for a commenter to deindividuate another discussant or non-present other, and ascribe assumed group characteristics (Postmes &

Spears, 1998). Included in these codes are comments containing political identification of self (for example, "As a democrat and as an Obama voter"), other commenter (for example, "Jim, if you were an actual conservative"), or general non-present other (for example, "As a liberal, Obama goes left"). Comments containing stereotypes such as "women are so desperate" or political stereotypes towards specific parties such as "You lefties just cant let Bush go!" or "what do we expect who was trained by Marxist professors?" were also coded for incivility.

Table 2

Civility, Politeness Codes and Actual Sample Examples

Category	Code (to OD or NPO)	Actual User Comments
Civility	Politically identify (self)	"As a democrat, and as a Obama voter,
	Political stereotype	"You lefties just cant let Bush go!"
	Non-political stereotype	"This is why people call you desperate!!"
	Threat to freedoms	"His efforts to increase socialism in the US won't work as it never has and never will…freedom remains the answer."
Politeness	Sarcasm	"Pete Carroll has been on the right end of both the Bush Push and now the Fail Mary."
	All caps	"YOU CAN raise revenue and lower taxes when you GROW the economy."
	Name calling	"Romney has been a clown since day one"
	Aspersions (excluding lying)	"You lose the argument about ACA everytime & yet you continue are you stupid as well as ignorant?"
	Accusations of lying	"love watching you liars get their butts handed to them. Face it doink, Obama was exposed last night for the liar he is!"
	Hyperbole	"certainly you are refering to The Amateur King."
	Non-cooperation	"Obama has no intention of ever working with Republicans."
	Vulgarities	"hell, he didn't even read his own bill!"

Note: OD = other discussant, NPO = non-present other

The coding schema for impoliteness contained more specific interpersonal communication codes (Jamison & Falk, 1999; Papacharissi, 2004). Each type of interpersonal communication was coded for either towards other discussant or non-present other. Use of sarcasm was coded as a measure of impoliteness, such as "'Romney is ducking the issues regarding his refusals to release his income tax return;" "It's filed away safe and sound with the President's birth certificate :);" or a non-present other such as "Pete Carroll has been on the right end of both the Bush Push and now the Fail Mary." Comments in all-caps were labeled as impolite as over-capitalization of text online is a known heuristic for yelling (Brusco, 2011). Aggressive communication such as name calling (for example, "Romney has been a clown since day one.") and aspersions (for example, "You lose the argument about ACA everytime and yet you continue are you stupid as well as ignorant?"), excluding lying, were considered impolite comments. Accusing of others of lying (for example, "love watching you liars get their butts handed to them"), non-cooperation (for example, "Obama has no intention of ever working with the Republicans"), and hyperbole (for example, "certaintly you are referring to The Amateur King") could be considered threats to democratic conversation and therefore impolite (Ng & Detenber, 2005; Papacharissi, 2004). Finally, any comments including vulgarities or swear words were coded as impolite per societal norms of public speech.

The codebook was developed over a series of meetings with the other authors on these 25 comments. Conversations determined if a single word, or the entire comment, would suffice for any given code. It was decided the entire comment would the unit of analysis, and the codebook reflected this agreement. After training, each coder coded the same random 10% sample, and Cohen κ was calculated for each variable (Hayes & Krippendorf, 2007). Intercoder reliability was found to be 0.91, indicating acceptable agreement on most of the training content. The categories with disagreements, specifically aspersions towards another commenter and aspersions towards a non-present other, were discussed and clarified in the codebook. Next, the two coders each coded half of the remaining sample to test hypotheses, and Cohen κ was calculated for each variable. The final coding analysis found all

categories met a threshold of Cohen κ > 0.80, which has been found to be a satisfactory discipline standard (Lacy & Riffe, 1996; Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2016).

Results

A comparison of total number of comments in each condition was conducted to test H1a and H1b. In the Facebook condition, readers left a total of 34 unique comments (18%), and in the anonymous condition, readers left a total of 152 unique comments (92%). A binomial test found this distribution is not due to chance, $p < .001$. H1a is therefore supported. Similarly, in the Facebook condition, readers left a total of 85 (21%) comments in response to others' comments, and readers in the anonymous condition left a total of 311 (79%) comments in response to others' comments. A binomial test found this distribution is not due to chance, $p < .001$, and thus H1b is supported.

In order to test H2, seven categories were summed creating a civility index of comments ($M = 0.12$, $SD = 0.32$, range = 0 - 1). A higher score on this index illustrated a more uncivil comment. A one-tailed independent groups *t*-test found anonymous comments ($M = 0.13$, $SD = 0.33$) were less civil than Facebook comments ($M = 0.08$, $SD = 0.27$), $t(579) = -1.732$, $p = .043$, supporting H2. Sub-scales of civility were calculated, summing the codes of comments made towards other discussants ($M = 0.02$, $SD = 0.12$, range = 0 - 1) and NPO; $M = 0.10$, $SD = 0.3$, range = 0 - 1). One-tailed independent groups t-tests suggest no difference in civility by condition in comments made towards non-present others or those comments made towards other discussants. Comparison of total number of comments across profile conditions revealed only one variable, assigning political stereotypes to generalized others not involved in the online discussion, was found in nearly 10% of all comments. The remaining six variables were equal to or less than 1% of comments coded in the affirmative for the incivility code (see Table 3).

Table 3
Comparison of Civility Indexes by Condition

	Facebook		Anonymous		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
Civility Index*	0.08	0.27	0.13	0.33	-1.73
Civility – NPO^{ns}	0.06	0.24	0.10	0.30	-1.97
Civility – OD^{ns}	0.02	0.13	0.02	0.12	0.13

Note: ns = not significant; * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .001$

Across conditions, negative stereotypes were rarely assigned to other discussants or non-present generalized others, and the differences in frequency were found to be statistically insignificant. Of the 50 comments coded as assigning political stereotypes to a non-present other, 43, or 86%, were in the anonymous profile condition and only seven, or 14%, were in the Facebook profile condition. A binomial test found this distribution to be due to condition, and not chance. Therefore, political stereotypes will be more likely to be assigned to non-present others in an anonymous profile.

To test H3, 16 coding categories were summed to create an impoliteness index based on comments towards other discussants or non-present others (see Table 4). A higher score on this index meant the comment was more impolite ($M = 1.1$, $SD = 1.18$, range= 0-8). A one-tailed independent groups *t*-test found anonymous comments ($M = 0.13$, $SD = 1.23$) were marginally less polite than Facebook comments ($M = 0.95$, $SD = 0.96$), and trending towards significance, $t(575) = -1.44$, $p = .08$. Sub-scales of politeness were calculated, summing the codes of comments made towards other discussants ($M = 0.18$, $SD = 0.51$, range = 0-4) and non-present others ($M = 0.89$, $SD = 1.04$, range = 0-5). One-tailed independent groups *t*-tests suggest anonymous comments ($M = 0.93$, $SD = 1.06$) were less polite in when made towards non-present others compared to Facebook comments ($M = 0.73$, $SD = 0.92$), $t(579) = -1.94$, $p = .05$. There was no difference found between anonymous ($M = 0.17$, $SD = 0.52$) or Facebook ($M = 0.23$, $SD = 0.46$) conditions in comments made towards other discussants, $t(579) = 1.03$, $p = .30$.

Table 4
Comparison of Politeness Indexes by Condition

	Facebook		Anonymous		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
Politeness Index*ns*	0.95	0.96	1.10	1.23	-1.44
Politeness – NPO*ns*	0.72	0.93	0.92	1.06	-1.94
Politeness - OD*ns*	0.23	0.17	0.46	0.52	1.03

Note: ns = not significant; OD = other discussant; NPO = non-present other

Table 5
Pearson Chi-Square and Binomial Tests of Politeness Variables by Condition

		Analysis of comments coded 'yes'	
	χ^2	Facebook (n, %)	Anonymous (n, %)
All-Caps NPO	2.42**	7, 12.5%	49, 87.5%
Name Call of NPO	9.24**	9, 9.2%	89, 90.8%
Aspersion OD	3.06*	16, 29.6%	38, 70.4%
Aspersion NPO	4.89**	36, 15.9%	191, 84.1%
Accuse Lying NPO	5.49**	23, 30.7%	52, 69.3%

Note: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .001$; OD = other discussant; NPO = non-present other

Table 6
Comparison of Civility Means of Comments on Non-Political & Political News Articles

	Non-Political Topic		Political Topic		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
Civility Index**	0	0	0.13	0.33	-8.74
Civility – NPO**	0	0	0.11	0.31	-8.06
Civility – OD*ns*	0	0	0.02	0.13	-0.88

Note: *ns* = not significant; * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .001$; OD = other discussant; NPO = non-present other

Binomial tests were calculated for five of the individual politeness items that were coded as 'present' (1) in at least 9% of the comments across conditions. Nearly 90% of the comments did not contain the remaining eleven variables. The impoliteness variables examined were typing in all caps, calling names, accusing of lies, and using aspersions towards other discussants or generalized others (see Table 5).

Using the same civility index used for testing H2, a one-tailed independent groups t-test comparing means in each topic condition were calculated and found comments left on political articles were less civil than comments left on non-political articles, $t(579) = -8.74$, $p < .001$. Sub-scales of civility were created to comparing comments directed towards other discussants and comments made about non-present others across topics (see Table 6). Comments made about non-present others in political topics were less civil than those made in reaction to the non-political news story. There was no statistical difference between topics on comments made towards other discussants, $t(579) = -0.88$, $p = .19$. Just as in the condition tests, only assignment of political stereotypes to non-present others was present in at least 10% of the total comments. The remaining six variables were coded in no more than 2% of the comments, and not analyzed.

A Pearson chi-square and follow-up binomial test found a significant difference between article topic and rate of political stereotypes being assigned to non-present others, $\chi^2(1) = 4.59$, $p = .03$. Of the 50 comments coded as assigning political stereotypes to non-present others, all were written in comments to the political article. Therefore, political stereotypes will be more likely to be assigned to non-present others in a political article.

Assignment of political stereotypes to other discussants and non-present others was not expected in comments made to non-political stories. Pearson chi-square and binomial tests examining frequencies of comments assigned to other discussants were not significant, but comments made to non-present others were. The only comments assigning political stereotypes to non-present others were found in response to a political article.

Additional chi-square tests compared the frequency of negative stereotypes (non-political) towards other discussants and non-present others in comments by topic. Once more, there were no statistical differences between the cells. Nearly 99% of comments did not contain a negative stereotype towards anyone and does not warrant further comparison of frequencies. Therefore, topic does not affect the probability of assignment of negative stereotypes being made by commenters to other discussants or non-present others.

The same politeness index was used to calculate one-tailed independent groups t-tests comparing means in each topic condition (see Table 7). Comments left on political articles were not found to be less polite than comments left on non-political articles. Political news stories had less polite comments directed at non-present others than non-political stories. Four of the same specific politeness variables were present in at least 10% of comments, leading to binomial tests to determine if distribution of codes was due to chance or the article's topic (Table 8). Individuals commenting on political stories are less civil directing their comments towards non-present others indexed by typing in all caps (95% of comments were from political stories, $p < .001$), name-calling (95% of comments were from political stories, $p < .001$), use of aspersions (93% of comments were from political stories, $p < .001$), and accusing non-present others of lying (100% of comments were from political stories, $p < .001$). Therefore, H5 is partially supported.

Table 7

Comparison of Politeness of Comments on Non-Political and Political News Articles

	Non-Political Topic		Political Topic		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
Polite Index^{ns}	0.82	0.83	1.09	1.21	-1.46
Politeness – NPO^{ns}	0.78	0.85	0.90	1.05	-0.73
Politeness – OD**	0.04	0.21	0.20	0.58	-3.92

Note: *ns* = not significant; * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .001$; OD = other discussant; NPO = non-present other

Table 8

Pearson Chi-Square and Binomial Tests of Politeness Variables by Condition

		Analysis of comments coded 'yes'	
	χ^2	Sports n, %	Politics n, %
All-Caps Non-Present Other	0.50**	3, 5%	53, 95%
Name Call of Non-Present Other	0.06**	7, 7%	93, 93%
Aspersion Non-Present Other	1.18**	7, 7%	91, 93%
Accuse Lying Non-Present Other	7.23*	0, 0%	75, 100%

Note: *ns* = not significant; * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .001$

In order to answer the proposed research question, each comment was coded for self-identification of party or fandom and ideology. Self-identification was coded as whether the commenter identifies with a specific political identity (0 = no, 1 = yes) such as "Amen brother, I'm a democrat;" "I'm a conservative…". Ideology was coded as pro-Obama/anti-Romney (for example, "I'm going to vote today, and I won't vote for Mitt;" "Obama has the better policies"), pro-Romney/anti-Obama ("Romney is for all of us;" "best policies! Romney/Ryan"), or unknown. Ninety-nine percent of all commenters did not self-identify specifically in any way, and four of the six commenters who had were found in the anonymous condition. Pearson chi-square tests were found to be not significant. A Pearson chi-square test did not show any statistical significance difference between topics and self-identification. Therefore, neither condition nor article topic affect rate of self-identification.

A series of binomial and crosstabs tests were conducted to determine under what conditions ideology would be disclosed. A binomial test first confirms there is a significant difference beyond chance between the number of

pro-Romney/anti-Obama comments (*N*=259) and pro-Obama/anti-Romney (*N*=70) comments, $p < .001$. A chi-square test suggests there is no difference in proportions of disclosure of ideology between anonymous or social media profile conditions, $\chi^2(1) = .001$, $p = .98$. A comparison of the number of ideological disclosures by paper, however, was significant, $\chi^2(3) = 11.88$, $p = .01$ (see Table 9). The clearest difference appeared between the proportion of pro-Romney/anti-Obama comments to pro-Obama/anti-Romney comments left in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and the proportion of comments in each ideological category in the *Dayton Daily News*. It is interesting to note these two papers were both in the anonymous condition. In particular, the number of pro-Romney/anti-Obama comments left on the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*'s article accounted for 62.3% of the 329 comments that disclosed some sort of ideology.

Table 9
Pearson Chi-Square of Ideological Disclosures by Paper

	Cleveland Plain Dealer	*Toledo Blade*	*Cincinnati Enquirer*	*Dayton Daily News*
Pro-Obama/Anti-Romney	48^{a}	$6^{a,b}$	$5^{a,b}$	11^{b}
Pro-Romney/Anti-Obama	205^{a}	$12^{a,b}$	$29^{a,b}$	13^{b}

$\chi^2(3) = 11.88$, $p = .01$. Each subscript letter denotes a subset of paper categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.

Discussion

Our current study found civility and politeness, and possibly rationality, are hard to come by when users are anonymous to others. In total, most of our hypotheses were either completely or partially supported. The anonymous nature of certain newspaper comment forums yielded more comments, and these comments were less civil and polite compared to comments left in forums requiring a Facebook login. Additionally, political news articles in general tend to lead to less civil and less polite comments than non-political news stories. Comments towards non-present others were especially less civil and less polite across condition and topic. These findings are consistent with the tenets of the SIDE theory (Spears & Lea, 1992) and previous findings indicating that people tend to be more impolite on anonymous online platforms than on online platforms requiring a known profile (for example, Halpern & Gibbs, 2012; Santana, 2014). We believe this is the first study to collect comments from the same newspaper article during the same period of time, standardizing the environments and content to which users were commenting. Furthermore, this study filled the gap in the literature using the SIDE theory to examine whether people were more uncivil in anonymous online conditions than in online conditions where a user's identity is known.

The finding of proportions of self-disclosure of political ideology are particularly interesting. In the *Dayton Daily News*, there were no differences between the number of pro-Obama/anti-Romney and pro-Romney/anti-Obama comments (see Table 9). In the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, however, there were four times as many pro-Romney/anti-Obama comments compared to the pro-Obama/anti-Romney self-disclosures. While these papers were both in the anonymous condition, their communities' political histories may offer insight (Richardson, 2017). Democrats have held the offices of city commissioners in Dayton since the early 1990s, but prior to then the offices were served by Republicans. In the same time period, the mayor of Dayton has been Democrat, Republican, and Independent, and all U.S. representatives have been Republican as well. Conversely, Cleveland's mayor, city council, and U.S. Representatives have all been Democrats since the mid-1980s. In fact, Cuyahoga County is a majority Democratic county (Exner, 2016), has carried Democratic candidates in Presidential elections since the 1990s, and is considered one of the most progressive, liberal cities in the state. From our data, it appears the anonymous environment provided those in the minority (Republicans) in the largest Democratic county (Cuyahoga). Research examining the spiral of silence in CMC contexts has shown people who perceive their opinions to be in the minority feel more emboldened expressing their honest views on anonymous CMC platforms (McDevitt, Kiousis, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2003). It is plausible that the Republicans living in that region knew that they were in the minority and thus felt more comfortable criticizing Obama online under the guise of anonymity.

More research is needed to examine the extent to which anonymity creates partisan echo chambers online among political groups whose opinions are in the minority.

Concerns of individuals becoming somehow "submerged in the machine" leading to social isolation and deindividuation effects lead more psychological, sociological, and communication research to focus on the interpersonal aspects and ramifications of CMC (Kielser, Siegel, & McGuire, 1986). This study aimed to explore the role of anonymity on incivility in CMC settings, but current research only scratches the surface of how anonymity affects the dynamics of online discussion. Future research can take a number of directions, including the experimental route to establish a more causal relationship between anonymity and incivility. An experimental design involving the creation of anonymous and identified conditions within the context of comment forums would have great explanatory power. Anonymity may give those who feel marginalized protection to speak out, but our findings suggest those doing the speaking are doing so in less civil and polite ways, which can lead to constant face saving in light of identity threats, culminating in a spiral of toxicity.

Further research is also needed to gauge the effects of incivility on readers' perception of bias in the news and their perception of the journalist and newspaper's credibility. Prochazka, Weber, and Schweiger (2018) found while "uncivil comments decreased the perceived formal quality of an article" civil comments themselves did nothing to improve such perceptions (p. 72). With online news consumption on the rise, comment forums are becoming increasingly common, and thus more visible to readers. Even if an online newsreader is not actively participating in the discussion, the comments from other readers are easily seen following most news articles. According to Jones, Ravid, & Rafaeli (2004), nearly half of online news readers may be comprised of individuals who do not participate in commenting behavior, but who still read posts from other users. Thus, the effects of incivility within online commentary may reach beyond just those who actively engage in online conversation. A more qualitative approach could explore the effect of negative and impolite comments on journalists themselves, especially those comments directed at the author or publisher of a story by examining whether uncivil comments affect a journalist's mental health, their ability to perform their job well, or their job satisfaction.

The results of this study also beg the question: What can, or should, be done about incivility in online news environments? Some media outlets, such as *NPR* and *Chicago Sun-Times*, have disabled their comment sections entirely. Scott Montgomery, managing editor of *NPR* digital news in 2016, stated the comment sections were not "providing a useful experience for the vast majority of users" (Montgomery, 2016, p. 1). Banning comment sections altogether may be the most practical solutions for news outlets that have neither the time nor the resources to monitor and take down offensive posts. Other scholars suggest that journalists might engage with commenters within the forum to steer the conversation back to quality discussion, such answering legitimate questions posed by users, providing more information on a story, or encouraging and being supportive of quality, civil comments (Straud, Curry, Scacco, & Muddiman, 2014).

Limitations

We have used a very narrow definition of anonymity in the present study, and thus our results may be limited in external validity. Anonymity in other CMC studies has been defined as simply visual anonymity, where "individuals communicate with each other without their physical appearances attached to their messages" (Morio & Buchholz, 2009, p. 298). A hierarchy of anonymity has been proposed (Azechi, 2005), and tested in a variety of contexts, including civility in online newspaper comments (Reader, 2012). Two of the source sites used in this study could be considered more pseudo-anonymous than truly anonymous, given the users had opportunities to choose their own handles, which could include identifying factors. There is also no true way to ensure those who commented on the articles in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* or *Toledo Blade* had accurate and honest Facebook profiles. These varying levels of anonymity – when the outlet permits it, pseudo-anonymous when the outlet requires an account and/or name be created, and identifiable when the outlet requires an existing social media profile be linked – should be tested experimentally in the future, or, conversations with the platform administrators to determine to what extent anonymity is accurate.

The entanglement of civility and politeness should not be understated. Civility can offer a means to enable deliberative, constructive conversations on topics, that elicit passion and mobilization. Deliberate debate is necessary for a "well-functioning democracy," without which can "lead to apathy and disaffection with political participation" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 104). Civility is often studied as a discursive activity (Santana, 2014) whereas

politeness is a communication strategy to save face of either speaker or receiver (Chen, 2015). Political issues have been found to be tied to some individuals' sense of self (Walsh, 2004), and thus face threat impoliteness can strike at the very core of a person. The content analyzed in the present study was discursive in nature, insofar as individuals were leaving commentary either to an article or in response to another's comments. From the content alone, however, it is difficult to determine if saving face from perceived threats were motivations behind comments made. Impoliteness in a comment that is responding to a negative face threat would be expected according to politeness theory (Brett et al., 2007). In fact, others have found resolution of impolite or uncivil communication online is unlikely if a user's sense of face is challenged (Brett et al., 2007).

We were faced with certain challenges when choosing our non-political AP story. Our original story regarding the Emmys, did not yield any comments. Our third choice of non-political story, Hurricane Sandy, yielded highly politicized conversations due to the involvement of key campaign surrogates and government entities. The choice of political topic may have had some influence in which civility and politeness indexes were significant: other discussant vs. non-present others. Had we chosen a political story less centered around the performance of a non-present others the comments may have been coded differently. Future research should attempt to validate the findings obtained in this study by examining the nature of comments posted in reference to online news stories on controversial political issues that do not necessarily have *specific* political scapegoats such as climate change, gun control laws, or equal rights for gay men and lesbians.

Although we drew upon coding categories that were used in previous studies on impoliteness and incivility in online comments (Papacharissi, 2004), we were unable to find the *specific* adjectives and nouns comprising each of these coding categories. Consequently, we had to use our discretion to decide on the most appropriate coding categories for words that appeared in the comments that we encountered. Also, we coded for the absence or presence of specific words, and did not code for the tone of the entire comment. For instance, one commenter wrote, "Well the FAILED ONE proved what he is all about and how is looking out for a special segment of the population. Now you should understand. Thank me for educating you." Using our coding schema, we coded that the commenter was simply calling others names (for example, "failed one"). However, we did not deem the commenter to be hurling aspersions because none of the *individual* words in those two sentences were derogatory. Future research should examine the comment holistically.

Conclusions

News writers and editors, whether in the 'traditional' or 'convergence' camp, have perceived online comments as a means of engaging and establishing a community (Meyer & Carey, 2014; Robinson, 2010). Scholars have expressed hope that the anonymity of online platforms would bridge divides between various social classes of people and enhance deliberative democracy (Barlow, 1996; Pavlik, 1994). The negative effects of allowing incivility and impoliteness to take over newspaper forums has been a concern of journalists, editors, and readers alike (Anderson et al., 2013; Coe et al., 2014). Some have found deliberative moderation and involvement by either the reporter or the content provider can lead to a decreased likelihood of incivility and impoliteness (Stroud, Scacco, Muddiman, & Curry, 2014), and offered plausible tips to decrease toxic communication without losing online commentary's deliberative properties (Stroud et al., 2014). However, the findings from this study seem to suggest otherwise. Although anonymous online platforms generate higher levels of discourse than social media identified platforms, such discourse also tends to be more impolite and uncivil than discourse on online platforms requiring a social media profile. Thus, there seems to be a tradeoff between anonymity and discourse that is both civil and polite. As such, newspaper websites that prize civil and polite discourse over the volume of discourse might want to consider making users post comments using social media profile accounts.

References

Anderson, A. A., Brossard, D., Scheufele, D. A., Xenos, M. A., & Ladwig, P. (2013). The "Nasty Effect:" Online incivility and risk perceptions of emerging technologies. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 19*(3), 373-387. doi:10.1111/jcc4.12009

Azechi S (2005) Information humidity model: explanation of dual modes of community for social intelligence design. *AI & Society, 19*(1), 110–122. doi:10.1007/s00146-004-0304-3

Barlow, J. P. (1996). "Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace," from http://wac.colostate.edu/rhetnet/barlow/barlow_declaration.html

Bowman, J. S., & Knox, C. C. (2008). Ethics in government: no matter how long and dark the night. *Public Administration Review, 68*, 625–637. doi:10.1111/j.1540-6210.2008.00903

Brett, J. M., Oleakalns, M., Friedman, R., Goates, N., Anderson, C., & Lisco, C. C. (2007). Sticks and stones: Language, face, and online dispute resolution. *Academy of Management Journal, 50*, 85-99. doi:10.5465/AMJ.2007.24161853

Brost, L. F. (2013). Editors have mixed feelings on user-generated content. *Newspaper Research Journal*, *34*(3), 101. doi:10.1177/073953291303400308

Brusco, J. M. (2011). Know your netiquette. *AORN, 94(3),* 279-286.

Cappella, J. N., & Jamieson, K. H. (1997). *Spiral of cynicism: The press and the public good*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Chen, G. M., & Ng, Y. M. M. (2017). Nasty online comments anger you more than me, but nice ones make me as happy as you. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *71*, 181-188. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2017.02.010

Chen, G. M. (2015). Losing face on social media: Threats to positive face lead to an indirect effect on retaliatory aggression through negative affect. *Communication Research, 42*(6), 819-838. doi:10.1177/0093650213510937

Coe, K., Kenski, K., & Rains, S. A. (2014). Online and uncivil? Patterns and determinants of incivility in newspaper website comments. *Journal of Communication, 64*(4), 658-679. doi:10.1111/JCOM.12104

Culnan, M. J., & Markus, M. L. (1987). Information technologies. In F. Jablin, L. L. Putnam, K. Roberts, & L. Porter (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational communication* (pp. 420-443). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

DeAndrea, D. C., & Walther, J. B. (2011). Attributions for inconsistencies between online and offline self-presentations. *Communication Research, 38*, 805-825. doi:10.1177/0093650210385340

Diakopoulos, N., & Naaman, M. (2011, March). Towards quality discourse in online news comments. In *Proceedings of the ACM 2011 conference on Computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 133-142). ACM.

Dillard, J. P., Wilson, S. R., Tusing, K. J., & Kinney, T. A. (1997). Politeness judgments in personal relationships. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 16*, 297–325. doi:10.1177/0261927X970163003

Dutton, W. H. (1996). Network rules of order: Regulating speech in public electronic fora. *Media, Culture & Society, 18*, 269-290. doi:10.1177/0261927X970163003

Exner, R. (2016, November 24). "Democratic presidential candidates do best in Cuyahoga County; Putnam leads for Republicans: Statistical Snapshot, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. Retrieved from www.cleveland.com.

Fraser, B. (1990). Perspective on politeness. *Journal of Pragmatics, 14*, 219–236. doi:10.1016/0378-2166(90)90081-N

Fraser, B., & Nolen, W. (1981). The association of deference with linguistic form. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 27*, 93–109. doi:10.1515/ijsl.1981.27.93

Garnham, N. (1992). The media and the public sphere. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the public sphere* (pp. 359-376). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Goffman, E. (1971). *Interaction ritual*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Grice, P. (1989). *Studies in the way of words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Halpern, D., & Gibbs, J. (2012). Social media as a catalyst for online deliberation? Exploring the affordances of Facebook and YouTube for political expression. *Computers in Human Behavior, 29*(3), 1159-1168. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2012.10.008

Hargittai, E., Gallo, J., & Kane, M. (2008). Cross-ideological discussions among conservative and liberal bloggers. *Public Choice, 134*, 67-86. doi:10.1007/s11127-007-9201-x

Hayes, A. F., & Krippendorf, K. (2007). Answering the call for a standard reliability measure for coding data. *Communication Methods and Measures, 1*, 77-89. doi:10.1080/19312450709336664

Herbst, S. (2010). *Rude democracy: Civility and incivility in American politics*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Hlavach, L., & Freivogel, W. H. (2011). Ethical implications of anonymous comments posted to online news stories. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 26,* 21-37. doi:10.1080/08900523.2011.525190

Holtgraves, T. (1997). Yes, but . . . positive politeness in conversation arguments. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 16*, 222–239. doi:10.1177/0261927X970162006

Jamieson, K. H., & Falk E. (1999). *Civility in the House of Representatives: The 105th Congress*. The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. Retrieved from http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/Downloads/Political_Communication/105thCongressCivil/REP26.pdf

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2000). Civil political discourse in a democracy: The contribution of psychology. *Journal of Peace Psychology, 6*, 291-317. doi:10.1207/S15327949PAC0604_01

Jones, Q., Ravid, G., & Rafaeli, S. (2004). Information overload and the message dynamics of online interaction spaces: A theoretical model and empirical exploration. *Information Systems Research, 15*(2), 194-210.

Lacy, S., & Riffe, D. (1996). Sampling error and selecting intercoder reliability samples for nominal content categories. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 73*(4), 963-973. doi:10.1177/107769909607300414

Lea, M., Spears, R., & de Groot, D. (2001). Knowing me, knowing you: Anonymity effects on social identity processes within groups. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*, 526-537. doi:10.1177/0146167201275002

Lyotard, J. F. (1984). *The postmodern condition*. Minneapolis, MN: UMN Press.

Marx, G. T. (1999). What's in a Name? Some Reflections on the Sociology of Anonymity. *Information Society*, *15*, 99-112. doi:10.1080/019722499128565

McDevitt, M., Kiousis, S., & Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2003). Spiral of moderation: Opinion expression in computer-mediated discussion. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *15*, 454-470. doi:10.1093/ijpor/15.4.454

Meyer, H. K., & Carey, M. C. (2014). In Moderation: Examining how journalists' attitudes toward online comments affect the creation of community. *Journalism Practice, 8(2)*, 213-228. doi:10.1080/17512786.2013.859838.

Mitchell, A., Gottfried, J., Barthel, M., & Shearer, E. (2016). The Modern News Consumer: News attitudes and practices in the digital era. From Pew Research Center's Journalism & Media. Retrieved from http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/the-modern-news-consumer/

Montgomery, Scott. (2016, August 17). Beyond Comments: Finding Better Ways to Connect with You. *National Public Radio.* Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/sections/npr-extra/2016/08/17/490208179/beyond-comments-finding-better-ways-to-connect-with-you

Morio, H., & Buchholz, C. (2009). How anonymous are you online? Examining online social behaviors from a cross-cultural perspective. *AI & Society, 23*(2), 297-307. doi:10.1007/s00146-007-0143-0

Mouffe, C. (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. London, UK: Verso.

Ng, E. W. J., & Detenber, B. H. (2005). The impact of synchronicity and civility in online political discussions on perceptions and intentions to participate. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 10*. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2005.tb00252.x

Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The virtual sphere: The internet as a public sphere. *New Media and Society, 4*, 9-27. doi:10.1177/14614440222226244

Papacharissi, Z. (2004). Democracy online: Civility, politeness, and the democratic potential of online political discussion groups. *New Media and Society, 6*, 259-283. doi:10.1177/1461444804041444

Papacharissi, Z. (2004). Democracy online: Civility, politeness, and the democratic potential of online political discussion groups. *New Media and Society, 6*, 259-284. doi: 10.1177/1461444804041444

Pavlik, J. V. (1994). Citizen access, involvement, and freedom of expression in an electronic environment. In F. Williams and J. V. Pavlik (Eds.), *The people's right to know: Media, democracy, & the information highway* (pp. 139–162). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Postmes, T., & Spears, R. (1998). Deinviduation and anti-normative behavior: A meta-analysis. *Psychology Bulletin, 123*, 238-259. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.123.3.238

Postmes, T., Spears, R., & Lea, M. (1998). Breeching or building social boundaries? SIDE-effects of computer-mediated communication. *Communication Research, 25*, 689-715. doi:10.1177/009365098025006006

Prochazka, F., Weber, P., & Schweiger, W. (2018). Effects of civility and reasoning in user comments on perceived journalistic quality. *Journalism Studies, 19*(1), 62-78. doi:10.1080/1461670X.2016.1161497

Reader, B. (2012). Free press vs. free speech? The rhetoric of "civility" in regard to anonymous online comments. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *89*(3), 495-513. doi:10.1177/1077699012447923

Reicher, S. D., Spears, R., & Postmes, T. (1995). A social identity model of deindividuation phenomena. *European Review of Social Psychology, 6*, 161-198. doi:10.1080/14792779443000049

Richardson, J. F. (2017). "Politics" in the online version of the *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*/*Dictionary of Cleveland Biography*. Retrieved from https://case.edu/ech/articles/p/politics/

Robinson, S. (2010) Traditionalists vs. convergers: Textual privilege, boundary work, and the journalist – Audience relationship in the commenting policies of online newsites, *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, *16*(1): 125–143. doi:10.1177/1354856509347719.

Rösner, L., Winter, S., & Krämer, N. C. (2016). Dangerous minds? Effects of uncivil online comments on aggressive cognitions, emotions, and behavior. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *58*, 461-470. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2016.01.022

Rowe, I. (2015). Civility 2.0: A comparative analysis of incivility in online political discussion. *Information*, *Communication & Society, 18*(2), 121-138. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2014.940365

Santana, A. D. (2014). Virtuous or vitriolic. *Journalism Practice*, *8*(1), 18-33. doi:10.1080/17512786.2013.813194

Schudson, M. (1997). Why conversation is not the soul of democracy. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, *14*, 1–13. doi:10.1080/15295039709367020

Shils, E. (1992). Civility and civil society. In E. C. Banfield (Ed.), *Civility and citizenship* (pp. 1–16). New York, NY: PWPA (Professors World Peace Academy).

Siegel, J., Dubrovsky, V., Kiesler, S., & McGuire, T. W. (1986). Group processes in computer-mediated communication. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 37*(2), 157-187. doi:10.1016/0749-5978(86)90050-6

Spears, R., & Lea, M. (1992). Social influence and the influence of the 'social' in computer-mediated communication. In M. Lea (Ed.), *Contexts of Computer-Mediated Communication* (pp. 30-65). New York, NY: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Spears, R., & Lea, M. (1994). Panacea or panopticon? The hidden power in computer-mediated communication. *Communication Research, 21*, 427-459. doi:10.1177/009365094021004001

Stroud, N., Curry, A., Scacco, J., & Muddiman, A. (2014). Journalist involvement in comment sections. *Engaging News Project*. Retrieved from: http://engagingnewsproject.org/research/journalist-involvement/

Stroud, N., Scacco, J., Muddiman, A., & Curry, A. (2014). Changing Deliberative Norms on News Organizations' Facebook Sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 20*(2), 188-203. doi:10.1111/jcc4.12104

Sunstein, C. R. (2001). *Republic.com*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Tidwell, L. C., & Walther, J. B. (2006). Computer-mediated communication effects on disclosure, impressions, and interpersonal evaluations: Getting to know one another a bit at a time. *Human Communication Research, 28*, 317-348. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2002.tb00811.x

Tsagkias, M., Weerkamp, W., & De Rijke, M. (2009, November). Predicting the volume of comments on online news stories. In *Proceedings of the 18th ACM conference on Information and knowledge management* (pp. 1765-1768). New York, NY: ACM Press.

Walsh, K. C. (2004). *Talking about politics: Informal groups and social identity in American life.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Walther, J. (1992). Interpersonal effects in computer-mediated interaction: A relational perspective. *Communication Research, 19*, 52-90. doi:10.1177/009365092019001003

Walther, J. B. (2011). Theories of computer-mediated communication and interpersonal relations. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *The handbook of interpersonal communication* (4th ed., pp. 443–479). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Wrench, J. S., Thomas-Maddox, C., Richmond, V. P., & McCroskey, J. (2013). *Quantitative research methods for communication: A hands-on approach* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Ohio Communication Journal
Volume 56 – March 2018, pp. 136-148

Uncertainty Reduction and Technologically Mediated Communication: Implications to Marital Communication during Wartime Deployment

Margaret C. Stewart

The experience of deployment is a common occurrence in contemporary American military culture, and these tours of duty are often trademarked by stress, anxiety, fear, and uncertainty for the service members and their loved ones. Coping with frequent geographic separations, coupled with the intensity and turbulence of these events, forces the constant readjustment in domestic roles and communicative norms in military marriages and families. Further, this era of war coincides with the implications of utilizing Internet-based technologies to maintain relationships. Social media platforms allow for more frequent communication and increase the flow of information, which raise questions about the role of technologically mediated communication in marriages during deployment. This study provides the findings of interviews with ten military wives to discuss their experiences with using select new media platforms to communicate with their husbands during wartime deployment. Uncertainty arises as a leading theme in the study, and is discussed in the context of uncertainty reduction theory. Next steps and future directions for continued research are discussed.

Introduction

The current study examines how military spouses maintain their relationships during deployment using select Internet platforms, namely Facebook and Skype, and attempts to learn more about their experiences. Interviews with ten military wives reveal uncertainty as a leading theme within the data. As such, the implications that using select new media platforms potentially have on military marriages regarding uncertainty are discussed, along with future directions for ongoing research in this area. This article attempts to balance the discussion between the summary of the previous research and plans for next steps of research on this subject.

Review of Literature

This review of literature spans several areas of communication studies research. By examining a range of studies about military culture, family communication, deployment, relationship maintenance, coping strategies, technologically mediated communication (TMC), long-distance relationships (LDRs), and more, several distinctions regarding communication processes for members of the military constituency arise. In addition, the critical role of new communication technologies and social media for technologically mediated communication is beginning to emerge. Current research shows its challenges in capturing the dynamic shifts in military life and culture with the progression of technology. For these reasons, it is important to view studies on these intersecting variables as a means to capture a point in time for how technology is used to better understand the ongoing implications under a variety of circumstances. These include changing conditions of deployment for the military, different communication needs by family of the deployed, and the continuing evolution of technology.

Background and Relevancy of the Study

Existing studies report negative effects of deployment on military couples and families and acknowledge the complexities and strains that are unique within military communication paradigm (Maguire, Heinemann-LaFave, & Sahlstein, 2013; Merolla, 2010). American military families cope with uncertainty, transiency, and geographic separation during deployments as a regular part of domestic life, and the contemporary military lifestyle is hallmarked by recurrent and lengthy deployments (Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2009). The norms and roles among the family adjust when a loved one deploys, and all members are forced to recalibrate for the duration of the time apart (Spera, 2009). There is an interest in the well-being and satisfaction of military spouses and

Margaret C. Stewart (Ph.D., Indiana University of Pennsylvania) is an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies in the Department of Communication at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville. Special thanks to Dr. Robyn Defelice and Maria Atilano for their assistance with editing. For correspondence please contact m.c.stewart@unf.edu.

families, as research shows that familial satisfaction towards life in the military can potentially impact retention of the enlisted (Van Epp, Futris, Van Epp, & Campbell, 2008; Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003).

As such, since September 11, 2001 there have been over 2 million American service members deployed to date, and an estimated 60% of these individuals are considered to have family obligations (Rossetto, 2015; Siegel, et al., 2013). According to the Profile of the Military Community Report published by the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (2014), "nearly one-half (49.6%) of Active Duty enlisted personnel are 25 years of age or younger, with the next largest age group being 26 to 30 years (22.1%), followed by 31 to 35 years (14.0%), 36 to 40 years (8.8%), and those 41 years or older (5.6%). Overall, the average age of the Active Duty force is 28.6 years. The average age for Active Duty officers is 34.8 years, and the average age for Active Duty enlisted personnel is 27.3 years" (p. iv).

Social networking sites have allowed military families to communicate and maintain their relationships online, which is found to have a positive impact on satisfaction in military families and marriages (Rea, Behnke, Huff & Allen, 2015; Matthews-Juarez, Juarez, & Faulkner, 2013). Two social media platforms that are popular among military for communicating with spouses and family are Skype and Facebook. Skype is a voiceover internet protocol (IP) telecommunications application specializing in video chat and voice calls from computers, tablets and mobile devices via the Internet (Skype, 2017; Rea et al., 2015). Skype's platform provides real-time, interactions for personal and professional exchanges. In comparison, Facebook creates user-defined interactions with individuals and groups through real-time and latent communications.

According to the Pew Research Center (2017), 88% of American adults between the ages of 18-29 and 79% of adults between the ages 30-49 are active on Facebook. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them" (Facebook, 2017). Facebook users create profiles and utilize them to establish a personal online presence, share posts, send messages, upload photos and video, and communicate with other uses who may range from intimate to impersonal connections (Facebook, 2017; Rea et al., 2015).

The intersection of popularity of social media use, the age of active duty military personnel, and the recent era of armed conflict involving American troops provides the background and rationale for the present study.

Relational Maintenance in Military Marriages

Deployed military, their spouses, and family inherently rely on communication technologies to interact while separated. Technologically mediated communication (TMC), which includes online, written, and electronic interaction, is an essential tool within the military family unit (Maguire et al., 2013; Rabby & Walther, 2003; Walther & Parks, 2002). Lange (2004) notes that encouraging ongoing development of intimacy and family unity is critical in military relationships. Rossetto (2013) describes several relational coping strategies that emerge for managing communication during deployment including, maintaining a mediated interpersonal connection and choosing open versus restricted communication.

Additionally, Rossetto (2015) observes that providing information and reassurance is an important influence over managing uncertainty during deployment. Uncertainty encompasses feelings of staying connected, intimacy, and well-being of the deployed. Participants attribute their mediated interpersonal connection to positive relationship maintenance and behaviors which contribute to satisfaction.

Theoretical Frameworks of Uncertainty

For these reasons, utilizing uncertainty frameworks to explore military family communication, and, in particular, its intersection with TMC, is clear. Uncertainty reduction theory (URT) states that uncertainty creates an uncomfortable feeling, which is alleviated when action is taken to reduce or manage it (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Although URT was initially utilized to study first-time interpersonal encounters, scholars have subsequently come to rely on the framework to examine uncertainty in relationships (Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985; Planalp, Rutherford, & Honeycutt, 1988). Dainton (2003) and Dainton and Aylor (2001) concluded that uncertainty predicts the use of maintenance behaviors in relationships, so for military spouses, these findings suggest that more frequent and distinctive maintenance behaviors are important in military-affiliated relationships (i.e. family, friends) because of the inherent characteristic of uncertainty.

By definition, relational uncertainty is an individual's confidence in his/her perceptions about the relationship's status (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Dainton (2003) determines that relational uncertainty and inequity can predict the level of relational satisfaction in romantic relationships. This research suggests that with uncertainty elevated by underlying stress and fear that their partner may potentially not return, perhaps military spouses will be less satisfied than civilian spouses within their marriage, due to the intensified and varying levels of uncertainty and inequity (Dainton, 2003). Due to the implications of familial satisfaction on reenlistment decisions of service members, concern for the effects of uncertainty is paramount.

Wheeler and Torres-Stone (2009) discovered that reliance on mediated communication was one of the ways the participants dealt with being apart, revealing that using technology to communicate as a means of feeling closer to their spouse during deployment. Merolla (2010) found that military partners acknowledged establishing communication routines during deployment, many of which involved using the Internet. For example, some couples set aside a specific time each day to interact online (Merolla, 2010). Some respondents recognized that with the presence of online technology and computer-mediated communication they were better able to stay emotionally connected (Wheeler & Torres Stone, 2009).

Convenience and Accessibility of Mediated Technology

In Merolla and Steinberg's (2007) study, many of the wives indicated that it was easier to communicate using Internet than telephone. These findings suggest that the Internet plays an increasingly important role in contemporary deployment experience when it comes to relationship maintenance and mediated communication experiences while separated. Common maintenance strategies that military spouses use on social networking sites include family, peer, and community support ("using one's network to reinforce bonds with one's partner"), family and peer updates ("talking to one's network about one's partner"), network integration/preoccupation ("socializing with one's network members"), and military-facilitated support ("getting advice or information from official military sources") (Maguire et al., 2013, p. 256).

Rae et al. (2015) reveal that "respondents reported a range of purposes for using social media and online communication as a military spouse, with the two primary uses being: staying in touch with the deployed service member (all ten participants) and a means to staying connected with family and friends (8 out of 10). Many spouses expressed the following sentiment, as captured by one participant: ''If social media didn't exist, I don't know how I would communicate with my spouse [during deployments]'' (p. 332).

Technology Maintenance Paradox

A maintenance paradox occurs when a relationship maintenance strategy is utilized out of necessity, when there is no way to foresee or control the outcomes. For instance, the way a couple uses technology to facilitate marital communication during deployment and the ways that social media may be helpful or harmful to their communication (Maguire et al., 2013; Maguire & Sahlstein, 2009). Interviews with 40 military wives with deployed husbands yielded six paradoxes regarding stressors and coping strategies. Among them, avoidance and perceived impending loss, release of emotions and communication issues, providing support and emotional contagion, and seeking support and social network issues (Maguire & Sahlstein Parcell, 2015).

More evidence towards paradoxes within the communication culture among this group include the findings of Knobloch, Basinger, Wehrman, Ebata, and McGlaughlin (2016) study on the changes, challenges, and benefits in communication of military couples during deployment among 236 spouses (118 couples). The findings yielded a curious result in that the sample ranged across positive neutral, and negative changes about how their marital communicated changed during deployment. According to the data, 44% of the couples reveal constructive communication and improved relational dynamics, while only 35% state that their communication was more destructive or benign (Knobloch et al., 2016). With a focus on marital and familial satisfaction's influence on military enrollment and retention, uncertainty during deployment is a subject of interest for military leaders, individuals in charge of military family programs, and to various community leaders who work with members of the military constituency. Examining relational maintenance during these times, through the use of social media platforms, may reveal effective TMC strategies to support families during time of great uncertainty.

Research Questions

This review and analysis of the collective findings presented in the existing literature invite two research questions for exploration:

RQ1: What are the effects of using Facebook and Skype on the communicative behavior and patterns between military spouses?

RQ2: How do military spouses perceive the availability of Facebook and Skype to enhance their communication during wartime deployment?

Methodology

Instrumentation and procedure

This study approaches the data gathering and analysis procedures using hermeneutic phenomenological interviews to achieve two specific outcomes. First, the goal is to explore the narrative of mediated communication experiences during deployment in context to the idea of relational uncertainty. Secondly, this study examines the interplay of social media platforms to those mediated communication experiences. The data gathering procedure used a series of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with a small group (n=10) of civilian spouses who are married to active or former members of the United States military. Participants had to meet the inclusion criteria of being active users of Facebook and Skype platforms and their spouse had to have been deployed at least once between the years of 2007-2012 to Afghanistan or Iraq to qualify for the study. This small sample is suitable for phenomenological methodology, according to Creswell (2009).

The instrument contained a three-part interview sequence, consisting of demographic and relational inquiries and information regarding the participants' use of social media and online platforms. Such as, a series of questions on how they use new media channels (i.e. Facebook, Skype, and other mediated tools) to communicate with their spouse during deployment, as well as the frequency, norms, and patterns of their interactions.

More specifically, the first phase of the interview included questions such as: (1) In what branch of the service does/did your spouse serve?, (2) How long has s/he been enlisted in the military?, (3)When and where (year(s) and general location) was your spouse deployed?, (4) What new media platforms do you use? Your spouse?, (5) During the deployment(s) and/or military separation(s), how did you contact your spouse?, and (6) During deployment and separation, do you notice any change in frequency or any patterns of communication with your spouse using these platforms.

The second phase of the interview was a line of inquiry about the perceived impact that Facebook and Skype potentially have on communicative behavior among the military partners. Sample questions from this portion of the interview include: (1) Describe how you use Facebook and Skype to communicate with your partner during deployment?, (2) How often are you communicating?, (3) Describe the level of consistency of your communication exchanges, (4) What norms exist within your relational communication with your spouse?, (5) During deployment(s) to war, do you experience topic avoidance around any particular discussion items? Are there any topics that are "off limits" for discussion?, (6) How do you feel about having the ability to communicate using these new media during deployment?, (7) How would your communication during deployment(s) differ without the availability Facebook and Skype?, and (8) Have you communicated during deployment(s) without those platforms? If so, how?

The third and final phase of the interview asked a series of questions about the differences in communication between wartime compared with other types of military separations (training operations, disaster relief, and peace-time deployments) and speculative questions about the potential absence of these platforms during wartime deployment. Example questions include: (1) What changes do you notice in your communication habits and behaviors between communicating during wartime deployment and other types of military separation? And (2) How do you feel your spousal communication as a military spouse would be different without the presence of Facebook and Skype?

The interviews took place over three months and were predominately conducted via telephone due to geographic constraints. Using the multi-stage thematic analysis procedure presented by Creswell (2009), this narrative data is analyzed for the derivation of themes based upon the experiences of these military spouses.

Participants

The participants are all women (n=10, 100%) between the ages of 21 and 37 years (mean = 27 years old). The average length of marriage is 3 ¾ years, with marriages ranging from 6 months to 6 years. Most of the spouses were dating for an average of just over 3 years before getting married. Out of the couples, six have children (60%), ranging in age between 10 months to 5 years; four of the couples (40%) do not have children.

The sample includes four spouses who served in the Army (40%), four in the Marine Corps (40%), one in the Army National Guard (10%), and one in the Marine Corps Reserves (10%); none were in the Navy or Air Force. The average length of time enlisted is 6 years and 4 months, ranging from 2 ½ years to 17 years. A total of 6 spouses are on active duty (60%) and 4 are honorably discharged (40%). Since 2007, these 10 wives have experienced a total of 14 deployments; 11 with their partners doing tours in Iraq and/or Afghanistan, 1 tour in Japan, 1 tour in Kuwait, and 1 tour in Norway. The tours ranged in length from 6 months to a year. The average tour lasted for 9 ½ months.

Findings

The spouses interviewed in this study provide rich narrative revealing insights in response to the questions contained in the interview protocol. This section summarizes the highlights of these conversations as related to the posited research questions.

Outcomes of Results

In response to the two research questions posed in this study, when it comes to the theme of uncertainty, three conclusions arise within this study: (1) the expediency and opportunity of the Internet and the communication platforms it affords are valued by the military spousal constituency, (2) military spouses appreciate ready-access to information that they can acquire with and without direct contact in attempts to reduce uncertainty, and (3) indeed, it is more socially-acceptable to monitor behavior and information online (than in-person), which is conducive to the military lifestyle and its reoccurrences of geographic separation. While these findings are relevant to the military-affiliated constituency, they ironically echo the findings of other social media and relational research that examines the civilian population which describe the complexities of mediated communication in romantic relationships and for relationship maintenance (Utz & Beukeboom, 2011; Stewart, Dainton, & Goodboy, 2014).

Findings in this present study echo the results of Rossetto (2013) wherein spouses describe the duality of social media and mediated communication deployment. It is apparent that military spouses recognize social media as a channel to both enact maintenance activities of communication to build trust and intimacy, while simultaneously facing the reality that their partner may not return from deployment and that regularity to their interactions is entirely unpredictable. These and other findings of the current study mirror those found by Rea et al. (2015) wherein "participants in this study had strong and varying opinions of the impacts of social media for each couple" (p. 333).

TMC Duality

"One spouse reported that 'social media can be a double-edged sword' that both helps and hinders communication among military couples" (Rea et al., 2015, p. 333). Utz and Beukeboom (2011) propose that displays of affection online between partners may contribute positively to relationship satisfaction; their findings show that the majority of romantic partners are happy about online displays of affection. Their results also reveal that online monitoring behavior in romantic relationships occurs more commonly and is more widely acceptable than traditional monitoring behavior (i.e. looking through their partner's phone or planner).

Most likely this is attributed to the ease of access to and publicity of information. The lack of privacy, coupled with the copious amounts of information and updates that are publicly available online, establish a complex venue for relational communication, proven to have both amazing benefits and potential costs to relationships.

Overall, romantic partners were more likely to be satisfied with Facebook use than threatened by its possibility of causing jealousy within their relationship (Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). The military-affiliated participants in this present study concurred with these results in acknowledging their frequent use and positive accolades regarding Facebook, while barely acknowledging the pitfalls.

Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais (2009) discovered that the use of Facebook might increase partner uncertainty, noting a significant relationship found between Facebook-related jealousy and frequency of Facebook use. This standpoint is supported by subsequent research by Craig and Wright (2012) and Stewart et al. (2014), who concluded that mediated communication and use of Facebook might simultaneously increase and decrease a partner's ability to understand the behaviors of others, thus having a complicated impact on satisfaction and uncertainty. The results of this current study align with these other recent investigations and support the notion that the Internet as a means for relational maintenance can simultaneously be the causes of uncertainty and the means for reduction.

Several of the wives in this present study testify that although they did not experience jealousy within their own marriages, they are aware of other military couples who had marital conflict resulting from Facebook activity. In some cases, the online interactions caused the couples to separate or even divorce, highlighting the serious consequences that platforms can incite. Their shared testimonies imply that jealousy may be a catalyst for uncertainty for military spouses, and perhaps within romantic relationships more generally. The spouses in this study clearly indicate awareness as to how Facebook activity could trigger jealousy. According to Afifi, Dillow, and Morse (2004), knowing too much information about a partner can promote jealousy and ignite negative relational consequences. Thomas (2010) stated that 25% of unfaithful partners used Facebook as a means to communicate with the partner of their infidelity, thus validating a cause for concern within military marriages. The presence of uncertainty among the spouses in the present study, and the paradoxical complexities identified in previous studies, warrant the need for ongoing research among military spouses and families. While the participants discussed some of the complexities with social media in the contexts of military marriages, they overwhelmingly valued mediated communication platforms to communicate with their partners during deployment.

Social Media Preferences

In addition to the collective sentiments about the varied patterns of communication, the spouses also indicated that a myriad of platforms are used to augment their mediated communication. Predominately from this research Skype and Facebook were discussed, but Yahoo Messenger, traditional e-mail, and texting/messaging also emerged as common TMC modalities. One couple manages to Skype roughly once a week in addition to talking on Facebook daily and texting via iPhone apps. According to the wife, her husband does not favor Skype, and she speculates that him seeing her through the video triggers his emotions about being apart from her. She predicts that other media they use (i.e., Facebook messaging and text messaging) are less visual and therefore do not cause the same effect.

On the other hand, another wife had a very positive experience with Skype and used it as the primary channel of communication when her husband did his tour in Japan. She shares, "During Afghanistan, we weren't allowed to Skype at all. The Japan deployment, Skype was our main way to communicate. It was every day, sometimes more than once a day. He had his laptop with him in Japan, so it was pretty easy to connect." A particularly compelling preference for Skype arose when a spouse shared an intimate life moment with her husband, as she virtually introduced him to their child for the first time online. An experience that was shared by two of the other couples as well.

Yet another couple preferred using Yahoo Messenger instead of Skype to facilitate their video chats. At times, presumably due to bandwidth, the signal would cut out, or the image quality was poor, which would compromise their ability to communicate effectively. Nonetheless, the pair appreciated having a platform like Yahoo Messenger to communicate and interact. This suggests that it was comforting and reassuring for the couple to see each other while communicating by video. A challenge with using Skype as described by another spouse had to do less with the platform itself and more to do with her daughter sitting still to "talk to daddy." Hence, her preference was to upload lots of videos and pictures of their daughter for him because it was her belief that it made him feel more connected to their growing daughter than Skype chatting.

Reflecting on a different new media platform, Facebook provides a way for spouses to reduce uncertainty. For example, a participant admits that she and her spouse would monitor each other's Facebook pages occasionally during deployment, but largely their primary communication channels were satellite phone and Yahoo Messenger. In addition to checking in on her husband on Facebook directly, she became Facebook friends with her husband's Battalion Commander. She and the Battalion Commander did not communicate directly with one another using Facebook (i.e. exchanging private messages or sharing wall posts); however, the platform served as a valuable resource to acquire information by following his posts of online status updates. This surveillance greatly helped to reduce her uncertainty.

Another wife acknowledges that her husband's unit was strongly discouraged from using Facebook to communicate information and had very strict about posting information online. For this reason, and because they had alternatives, the couple typically relied more on Yahoo and Yahoo Messenger to facilitate their mediated communication instead of Facebook, Skype, or other platforms. In another couple's case, they preferred sending traditional emails as their primary means of communication during deployment. Yet another wife admits that it was easy to monitor the Facebook profiles of her husband's comrades. She also became online friends with the spouses of her husband's comrades as observing the other married couples interactions were reassuring.

Although the wives report positive and significant experiences using Skype and Yahoo Messenger, Facebook emerges as the most commonly used communication channel during deployment. Facebook acts as an instrument for interacting with their husbands, sharing pictures, making connections with other military spouses and their husbands' comrades, and monitoring Facebook activity to reduce uncertainty. One wife reveals, "If he is able to talk, he typically will Facebook me all day long. Pretty much, if he can talk, we talk, and we will talk all day. And he will try and contact me all day… because you never know when the next time is going to be that he'll be able to talk like that again."

Yet another spouse explains, "When he's training and stuff, I'm less obsessed about speaking with him every day and stuff. I mean, of course I still miss him, it's not that--it's just that I don't want to speak to him every day anyway, but the amount of feeling of stress I feel to talk to him is different when he's deployed." One participant uses the word 'uncertain' in response to the question about how their communication would be different without the presence of these new media platforms. She feels as though it could potentially cause strain on the relationship and that her life as a military spouse would ultimately become fraught with even more anxiety about her husband's well-being without ready-access to communication.

Communication Inconsistency and Uncertainty

Variations in communication patterns emerged in the findings, not only from tour to tour, but within a single tour of duty as well. One of the spouses experienced a noticeable disparity between the first and second halves of her husband's Afghanistan deployment. During the first part of the tour, he was not on an established base so their communication was inconsistent and infrequent. When he went back for his extension after his "R&R" (his leave to travel home during his tour), he was stationed on a major base. There, the Marines were able to use the Internet and also had access to phones, so the pair communicated much more frequently at that point.

Another of the wives notes that the consistency of her and her spouse's communication also varied from tour to tour. She states that during the "Afghanistan deployment we never knew when we would talk. Sometimes it was every few days, other times it was every few weeks. Japan was pretty much daily, several times a day even, sometimes." The couple relied on Skype to facilitate their communication while her husband was in Japan. She reveals that once during her husband's Afghanistan deployment, the Family Readiness Officer (FRO) scheduled a "Skype-like" video-conferencing session for the family members where they got to chat on webcam with their spouses. Other than that, she states that they primarily relied upon Facebook messages or phone calls to communicate whenever her husband was available and had access during the Afghanistan tour.

A third participant regards the differences both among and during the individual tours as well. During the first deployment, the couple only communicated about once every 5 or 6 weeks. Then, during the second deployment, their communication patterns initially started out slowly. She reveals:

> At the beginning, (we spoke) hardly at all, but then after that, it just would always depend on if he was on base or if he had to go out for missions and what not, so I would say about, by the third or fourth month,

> we were Skype-ing almost daily when he was on base, for like 30 minutes to an hour each time…Just depending on what he was doing.

Value of Mediated Communication during Deployment

In all ten interviews uncertainty surfaced as a leading theme given their use of mediated communication on social media platforms. In the findings to follow, specific examples of the wives mediated communication experiences are detailed. To begin, the participants described various reasons for why they found the opportunity to engage in mediated communication valuable. For example, one of the wives deems the Internet as being a vital asset to coping with deployment because of the ability to keep communication open. She regards this as being important when a spouse is gone for a long period of time.

Another participant reflects on the importance of creating emotional intimacy through relational communication in sharing, "A relationship is based off of you being able to communicate and speak with a person and share things. And if you don't have that communication with them, then, what is your relationship? It would pretty much be you by yourself over here and them by themselves over there, and that wouldn't be good. So, it just makes it a lot easier to communicate with one another." These comments suggest that ready access to mediated communication channels online allows military couples and family members to build and maintain their relationships while apart, as well as in uncertain circumstances.

For instance, one participant praised the Internet, but is quick to also describe it as a "double-edged sword." While she credits Facebook with keeping her and her husband connected during the deployment, she reveals about uncertainty resulting from communication blackouts, when online communication activity would "go dark" because of an occurrence that transpired in the combat theatre. She acknowledges challenges brought on by the transparency and visibility of an online platform like Facebook. She goes on to speak about the sense of family and community that develops within the military culture and explains the perils of having such a tight sense of community among the spouses and comrades within the military lifestyle include the ability to monitor and exchange information online more frequently. The transmission of information becomes overwhelming at times, which adds to the stress of the situation, and she insists this is among the most unnerving aspects of life as military spouse.

Another perspective on the value of mediated communication came from a spouse sharing her appreciation for having modern day communication channel at her disposal, as she reflects on sentiments expressed through the generations in her family. She reveals:

> My aunt always tells me, because my uncle is a Vietnam vet, and she always tells me how blessed that I am to have this technology, because she said she rarely heard from him, maybe got a letter like once a month. She would always send out letters and wouldn't even know if he got them. She feels like there must be more pressure now, because we all know what's going on, but then, back in her day, they had no way of knowing anything, because it was kind of like 'out of sight, out of mind,' so but I wouldn't have liked it. Even during basic training, they can only call once a week, and you can send letters back and forth, but it stunk really because when he went to basic training the first time, I was pregnant with our first, so I had to go to ultrasounds, and even by the time I would get him the ultrasound images in the mail, it would almost be time for another one, so that was kind of annoying.

This final example draws together and highlights the potential benefit of mediated communication during a time of uncertainty, such as wartime deployment. The anecdote also helps to express that each deployment, each war, and each evolution of mediated communication platforms creates its own context of uncertainty.

Through these findings, mediated communication demonstrates a valuable benefit to relationship satisfaction of military spouses and families during times of deployment. While these findings capture a moment of time history, due to the transient nature of social media and the inconsistent shifts in military assignment, there is a need for ongoing research.

Discussion

As previously stated in the Methodology section, the research goals were two-fold. First, the goal is to explore the narrative of mediated communication during deployment in context to the idea of relational uncertainty. Secondly, this study examines the interplay of social media platforms to those mediated communication exchanges. Uncertainty emerges as a unanimous theme within the study. The spouses reveal how these mediated platforms both contributed towards and reduced uncertainty during deployment. An unpredictable situation, such as deployment, is prone to increasing uncertainty; in addition the diversity for mediated communication per social media platform also creates circumstances for clarity, assurances, and uncertainty and its features. These circumstances present challenges to developing a concrete understanding about the role and impact of mediated communication among the military constituency. These pre-existing assertions are upheld and reinforced by the findings within this current study.

Spouses of this study acknowledge Facebook, Skype, and Yahoo Messenger as their leading platforms for communication during the wartime separation. Most of the spouses praise the convenience of communication promoted by the Internet, while others noted the complexity and paradoxical nature of communicating using social media during deployment.

Uncertainty appears to be simultaneously created and reduced through the use of TMC during deployment. These findings of the present study indicate that the role and impact of social media is critical to the spouses and their marital maintenance within the military culture. Uncertainty and the use of social media as communicative agents in relationships represent a challenging and complicated paradox, one which researchers have struggled to completely understand (Muise et al., 2009; Stewart et al., 2014; Utz & Buekeboom, 2011).

A maintenance paradox may occur when military couples are forced to rely on their less-preferred technology platforms, or when they engage in challenging interactions online during the inherently stressful and uncertain experience of wartime deployment (Maguire et al., 2013; Maguire & Sahlstein, 2009). Knobloch et al. (2016) cite the need for further research on the changes, challenges, and benefits to the communication of military couples during deployment in acknowledging that "specificity is needed to formulate effective prevention and intervention programs [for military couples]. We nominate this issue as a vital direction for future research" (Knobloch et al., 2016, p. 172).

Constructively, the Internet is a potentially beneficial outlet to foster productive and meaningful relational communication. These results suggest mindful use of Internet platforms such as Facebook, Skype, and related social media may offer a viable means to reduce uncertainty and increase comfort, which is especially critical to this military constituency faced with their transient lifestyle. Popular maintenance strategies on social media for military spouses include family, peer, and community support, family and peer updates, network integration/preoccupation, and military-facilitated support (Maguire et al., 2013). Conversely, the findings suggest that the transparency of social media may incite or increase uncertainty, or even provoke jealousy.

Future Research Opportunities and Next Steps

There are plenty of academic and pragmatic reasons to continue this line of research. In 2011, the National Military Family Association promoted the need for more research on the best practices for families. Further, several of the existing studies in the area of military communication also cite the need for continued and ongoing research in this area. These studies also acknowledge the challenges to this research, in that there is such a vast amount to explore (i.e. coping, relationship maintenance, family communication, etc.) yet it is very difficult to gather any generalizable benchmarks due to the niche nature of this research population (military spouses and families), as well as the dynamic climate of TMC (Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Maguire & Sahlstein, 2009; Merolla, 2010; Parcell & Maguire, 2014; Rossetto, 2015). Several researchers comment that experiences alter given the nature of each individual deployment, thus supporting the ongoing need for evaluation as being critical towards greater knowledge and understanding (Maguire et al., 2013; Merolla, 2010).

This evidence provides rationale to further explore uncertainty in this niche of military marriages and families, particularly as technology continues to innovate and as each unique combat situation presents its own set of conditions. This current research study is not without limitations. For one, this study may have been enhanced by expanding the breadth and scope of participants. Namely, the study lacked perspective of male military spouses,

homosexual military couples, and spouses of members of the United States Navy and Air Force Branches. Although self-reported data is criticized in many cases, it is appropriate for this particular study because of the phenomenological approach to understand the lived experience of these participants, which also validates the small sample size. This study may benefit from advancing towards a more grounded theory approach, encompassing existing data while examining new trends of popular online platforms across a larger, more diverse sample. Moving forward, this researcher intends to develop a longitudinal investigation, examining the ongoing uses and evolution of the most recent social media and Internet platforms and their role in military-affiliated relationships, especially within the unpredictable circumstances of war.

Through this study, uncertainty emerges as a leading theme among contemporary military spouses and URT surfaces as a meaningful theoretical structure for the design of future studies. In addition, several conclusions are posited about the particular lived experience, communication behavior, and uncertainty faced by service members and their loved ones alike during deployment. Presumably in times of war and peace alike, members of the Unites States Armed Forces and their partners and families will indefinitely face the challenges presented by separation. These unpredictable circumstances create a unique climate to explore communication behavior. Combined with the techno-cultural phenomenon as a result of global adoption of social media, there appears to be a constant opportunity to examine the intersection of these highly-exclusive variables. Gathering this data in a longitudinal capacity may potentially yield constructive contributions towards a body of knowledge that can pragmatically influence the development and sustainment of education and family readiness programs to support the partners and families of military service personnel (aka family satisfaction).

While these findings captured a relevant outlook by which to examine the interconnecting phenomena of deployment, spousal communication and relational maintenance, and the use of technologically-mediated communication (TMC) via social media among this community, there is a need to go beyond this preliminary study to elaborate this foundational research. This advances the understanding of the communicative needs and behaviors of military families. This information is essential in order to develop and provide appropriately modernized, best-suited educational programs for military spouses and family members, both when facing the deployment experience and the everyday military lifestyle.

As such, the initial task, in the second phase of the study is to bring the review of literature to present, comprised of a summary of the most recent publications presenting emerging research across a variety of fields and sub-fields; including, but not limited to communication (namely, relational, interpersonal, and family studies), new media, information and communication technologies (ICTs), technologically-mediated communication, and sociological and psychological research related to present-day deployment experiences. New research questions will be formulated to reflect the most recent trends and technologies yet will align with the scope of the pre-existing questions (i.e. exploring uses, perceptions, and effects).

The protocol will be revised for both currency and to consolidate the number of questions in order to be less redundant and more direct. Lastly, participants will be recruited using a purposive, snowball sampling method, wherein this researcher will specifically target online community networks comprised of military spouses, many of which were identified by participants in the earlier study, and utilize these spaces as recruiting vehicles for the upcoming study. Viral word of mouth was apparent among the previous sample, thus, a snowball sampling from the initial recruiting efforts is likely. Future studies invite interviewing a larger group of participants, exceeding the limitation of the size of the previous sample.

Conclusion

In closing, with the theme of uncertainty developing throughout the testimonies of the wives regarding deployment experiences, the clear emerging framework for this study is uncertainty reduction theory (URT). The results of this study reveal three distinct takeaways including: (1) the expediency and opportunity of the Internet and the communication platforms it affords are cautiously valued by the military spousal constituency, (2) military spouses appreciate ready-access to information that they can acquire with and without direct contact in attempts to reduce uncertainty, and (3) indeed, it is more socially-acceptable to monitor behavior and information online (than in-person), which is conducive to the military lifestyle and its reoccurrences of geographic separation.

This study brings about opportunities for future research and provides a wealth of valuable information which serves two purposes: (1) to better understand the needs and behaviors of military spouses deployed here and

now, and (2) establishes the foundation on which to build an ongoing body of research dedicated to this highly-exclusive juxtaposition of variables. Undoubtedly social media and TMC platforms are only going to continue to evolve, and global conflict has been a constant, yet unpredictable, historical cornerstone, thus requiring a well-prepared military ready to deploy and serve their country at a moment's notice. Recognizing the potential impact of these intersecting factors, there is value in fostering this type of ongoing exploration. Not only to the field of communication and social media studies but to the many military- and community-related stakeholders who may also potentially benefit from having access to the most recent and ground-breaking information on this unique and important topic.

References

Afifi, W. A., Dillow, M., & Morse, C. (2004). Examining predictors and consequences of information seeking in close relationships. *Personal Relationships, 11*, 429–449.

Berger, C. R., & Calabrese, R. (1975). Some explorations in initial interaction and beyond: Toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication. *Human Communication Research, 1*, 99-112.

Craig, E., & Wright, K. B. (2012). Computer-mediated relational maintenance development and maintenance on Facebook. *Communication Research Reports, 29*, 119-129.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Dainton, M. (2003). Equity and uncertainty in relational maintenance. *Western Journal of Communication, 67,* 164-186.

Dainton, M., & Aylor, B. (2001). A relational uncertainty analysis of jealousy, trust, and maintenance in long-distance versus geographically close relationships. *Communication Quarterly, 49*(2), 172-188.

Drummet, A. R., Coleman, M., & Cable, S. (2003). Military families under stress: Implications for family life education. *Family Relations*, *52*(3), 279-287.

Facebook (2017). Company Info. Retrieved from https://newsroom.fb.com/news/

Joseph, A. L., & Afifi, T. D. (2010). Military wives' stressful disclosures to their deployed husbands: The role of protective buffering. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 38*, 412-434.

Knobloch, L. K., Basinger, E. D., Wehrman, E. C., Ebata, A. T., & McGlaughlin, P. C. (2016). Communication of military couples during deployment and reunion: Changes, challenges, benefits, and advice. *Journal of Family Communication, 16*(2), 160-179. doi:10.1080/15267431.2016.114672

Knobloch, L. K., & Solomon, D. H. (1999). Measuring the sources and content of relational uncertainty. *Communication Studies, 50*, 261-278.

Lange, J. (2004). *The treasure of staying connected for military couples*. Baltimore, MD: United Book Press, Inc.

Maguire, K. C., & Sahlstein, E. (2009). Pro-social, a-social, and anti-social coping in long distance romantic relationships. In T. Kinney & M. Porhola (Eds.), *Current advances in anti- and pro-social communication: An examination of theories, methods, and applications* (pp. 127-138). Switzerland: Peter Lang Publishing Group.

Maguire, K. C., & Sahlstein Parcell, E. (2015). Communication and the coping paradox: The case of Army spouses and wartime deployment. *Southern Communication Journal, 80*(5), 365-376.

Maguire, K. C., Heinemann-LaFave, D., & Sahlstein, E. (2013). "To be so connected, yet not at all": Relational presence, absence, and maintenance in the context of wartime deployment. *Western Journal of Communication, 77*(3), 249-271.

Matthews-Juarez, P., Juarez, P. D., & Faulkner, R. T. (2013). Social media and military families: A perspective. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 23*(6), 769–776.

Merolla, A. J. (2010). Relational maintenance during military deployment: Perspectives of wives of deployed US soldiers. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 38*(1), 4-26.

Merolla, A. J., & Steinberg, D. (2007, May). Relational maintenance during military deployment: A qualitative analysis of U.S. military-affiliated romantic relationships. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, San Francisco, CA .

Mmari, K., Roche, K., Sudhinaraset, M., & Blum, R. (2009). When a parent goes off to war: Exploring the issues faced by adolescents and their families. *Youth & Society*, *40*, 455- 475.

Muise, A., Christofides, E., & Desmarais, S. (2009). More information than you ever wanted: Does Facebook bring out the green-eyed monster of jealousy? *CyberPsychology and Behavior, 12*, 441-444.

Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (2014). 2014 demographics: Profile of the military community. Retrieved from http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2014-Demographics-Report.pdf

Parcell, E., & Maguire, K. C. (2014). Turning points and trajectories in military deployment. *Journal of Family Communication, 14*, 129-148.

Pew Research Center (2017). Who uses social media? Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/chart/who-uses-social-media/

Planalp, S., & Honeycutt, J. M. (1985). Events that increase uncertainty in personal relationships. *Human Communication Research, 11*, 593-604.

Planalp, S., Rutherford, D. K., & Honeycutt, J. M. (1988). Events that increase uncertainty in personal relationships II: Replication and extension. *Human Communication Research, 14*, 516-547.

Rabby, M. K. & Walther, J. B. (2003). Computer-mediated communication effects on relationship formation and maintenance. In D. Canary & M. Dainton (Eds.), *Maintaining relationships through communication: Relational, contextual, and cultural variations* (pp. 141-162). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Rea, J., Behnke, A., Huff, N., Allen, K. (2015). The role of online communication in the lives of military spouses. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal, 37*(3), 329-339.

Rossetto, K. R. (2013). Relational coping during deployment: Managing communication and connection in relationships. *Personal Relationships, 20*, 568-586.

Rossetto, K. R. (2015). Developing conceptual definitions and theoretical models of coping in military families during deployment. *Journal of Family Communication, 15,* 249-268.

Skype (2017). About Skype. Retrieved from https://www.skype.com/en/about/

Siegel, B. S., Davis, B. E., & the Committee on Psychological Aspects of Child and Family Health and Section on Uniformed Services (2013). Health and mental health needs of children in U.S. military families. *Pediatrics, 131,* 2002-2015.

Spera, C. (2009). Spouses' ability to cope with deployment and adjust to Air Force family demands: Identification of risk and protective factors. *Armed Forces & Society, 35*, 286-304.

Stewart, M. C., Dainton, M., & Goodboy, A. K. (2014). Maintaining relationships on Facebook: Associations with uncertainty, jealousy, and satisfaction. *Communication Reports, 27*(1), 13-26.

Thomas, L. (2010). *Finding love though Facebook – it happens!* Retrieved from http://www.mynorthwest.com/?nid=646&sid=283853

Utz, S., & Beukeboom, C. J. (2011). The role of social network sites in romantic relationships: Effects on jealousy and relationship happiness. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 16*, 511-527.

Van Epp, M., Futris, T., Van Epp, J., & Campbell, K. (2008). The impact of the PICK a partner relationship education program on single Army soldiers. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal, 36*, 328-349.

Walther, J. B., & Parks, M. R. (2002). Cues filtered out, cues filtered in: Computer-mediated communication and relationships. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.), Handbook of interpersonal communication (pp. 529-563). Thousand Oaks, CA; Sage.

Wheeler, A. R., & Torres Stone, R. A. (2009). Exploring stress and coping strategies among National Guard spouses during times of deployment. *Armed Forces & Society, 36*(3), 1-13.