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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

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"We're Out Here": Black Identity and Digital Resistance in Instagram Travelogues

Tori Omega Arthur

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Black individuals and communities have used the media available to them to articulate the phenomenon of Black travel. Following the path set when Victor Hugo Green's first edition of The Negro Motorist Green Book was first published in 1936, today's Black social media influencers and consumers continue to assert Black travel movements in the digital realm, creating arresting imagery that asserts their presence in a multi-million-dollar industry that largely ignores Black leisure travel. This article examines how two popular Black travel influencers, Jessica Nabongo and Oneika Raymond, use the social networking site Instagram to challenge erroneous beliefs about Black travel in a cultural paradigm where Black people are frequently disregarded in domestic and global travel markets. These influencers affirm and defend their place in the travel-sphere, exposing how racial politics inform the travel industry's continued ignoring of Black travelers. The article argues that these Black travel activists and their Instagram content, chiefly photographs, combat what I call the 'white travel imaginary', facilitates the survival of Black representation in the travel-sphere, and provide new means for exploring how Blackness signifies and is interpreted, and how racist erasure is contested in online spaces.

Introduction

On January 9, 2018, travel influencer Jessica Nabongo took to her Instagram account @thecatchmeifyoucan to inform her nearly 22,000 followers that Four Seasons Hotels had denied her request for a complimentary stay in their resort in St. Kitts and Nevis. Nabongo, a frequent traveler who operates the travel agency Global Jet Black, often partners with travel brands, especially hotels, resorts, and hotel chains, to provide advice and services to her clients and growing social media network. The reason she was denied the complimentary visited sparked social media conversations about racism in the travel industry. In a January 5th email to Nabongo, the Nevis hotel's management team stated that her "demographic was not in line with [their] brand" (Nabongo, 2018). A later email, also posted on Instagram, stated that while the management team believed her "photography is beautiful and may speak to the aspirational traveler" it was "not reaching a luxury brand clientele which is in line with our brand" (2018).

Nabongo, her Instagram followers, and others in her digital media orbit (including her nearly 1,300 Twitter followers at the time) responded with a swift #noseasons. They perceived the Four Seasons response to be the snub of a woman who, by December of 2017, had traveled to 106 countries[1]. By the time of the seeming slight, Nabongo had been featured in *Bloomberg* and *Conde Nast Traveler*, in addition to owning and operating a boutique travel firm focusing on encouraging African diaspora tourism. Not only did Nabongo's orbit consider the Four Seasons response as the marginalization of a woman who has been an outspoken critic of the lack of diversity in the travel industry, including travel media, it was also perceived to be a rebuff of Black travelers in general, a consumer group the hotel brand did not seem to associate with luxury. The conversation around Nabongo's experience resulted in nearly 500 Instagram comments within two days.

Nabongo's digital battle with the Four Seasons represents the travel industry's abject lack of recognition of Black global travel, as well as the view of some in the industry that Black people and luxury are not synonymous terms. Within days of Nabongo's Instagram posts about the Four Seasons, award winning blogger and Travel Channel digital host Oneika Raymond used her Instagram account to discuss her effort to highlight the phenomenon of Black travel. She powerfully stated (with well-placed emoti-cons), "Black □ people □ do □ travel! Contrary to popular belief (and mainstream travel media,

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which rarely features us)" (Oneikatraveller, 2018a). This post is one of many that tackles the inherent whiteness of the travel industry and travel media. Though she does not reveal instances of brand discrimination, Raymond frequently reveals her brushes with racism, especially while traveling with her white German husband. Both Raymond and Nabongo seek to change and expose the largely white face of "mainstream travel", thereby illuminating the efforts of Black travelers taking planes, trains, and automobiles every year to explore the globe.

This study examines how Nabongo and Raymond use the social networking site Instagram to challenge erroneous beliefs about Black travel in a cultural paradigm where Black people are routinely dismissed in domestic and global travel markets. These influencers use Instagram to affirm and defend their place in the travel-sphere, exposing the quotidian nature of racial politics that inform the travel industry's refusal to notice or acknowledge Black travelers. Studying Black digital travelogues presents, especially in the relatively new realm of Instagram research, an opportunity to explore Instagram consumers and consumption practices and its place within the contemporary socio-cultural and socio-political environment. Through photograph posts – their primary type of content – on the Instagram platform, Nabongo and Raymond reveal the ways racial assumptions affect life for Black people, even the seemingly innocuous processes of vacationing. They tackle what I call the 'white travel imaginary', a physical, ontological, and epistemological spreadable media fantasy that routinely erases Black travel and continuously reinforces the erroneous notion that the world-wide travel industry, including travel media, is an inherently white enterprise. Employing critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) as a methodological tool to explore how cultural and racial ideologies circulate within digital spaces, this study ultimately argues that these Black travelers and photo posts within Instagram provide new means for exploring Black digital resistance, articulating how Blackness signifies and is interpreted in the digi-sphere, and examining how racial stereotypes are contested in online spaces, particularly social networking sites (SNSs).

The White Travel Imaginary, Place Myths, and Invisible Blackness

Racial assumptions about Black immobility that lack socio-historical, cultural, and political nuance is largely to blame for the avoidance of Black travelers. Whiteness is the standard within the travel industry, including travel media. Ben Groundwater (2017) poignantly notes in a blog post, "All those smiley, happy bloggers and influencers...they're incredibly privileged. They're selling a dream, but the ability to live that dream has nothing to do with their hard work or brave decision-making. It's the good fortune of the incredibly privileged". Groundwater's primary question "Is the travel community 'too white'?" is a non-question for many Black travelers. Farai Chideya (2014) notes that racial stereotypes contribute to travel brands steering "clear of targeting African-American travelers". A late 2017 DigitasLBi and Harris Poll survey found that there are nearly five million Black travelers in the United States; 94-percent of them had taken a trip in the last two years and 76-percent had traveled in the six months prior to the study (Haddad, 2017). Additionally, 72-percent of respondents noted that they are more likely to book with brands that acknowledge their racial/ethnic identity (Haddad, 2017). Thus, Black travel influencers are educating the industry about Black travelers. Not only are these influencers and companies offering advice for potential and seasoned travelers and in many cases organizing affordable opportunities to visit different locations for those with limited budgets, these travel companies are among an expanding cadre of individuals and organizations creating online and offline networks of Black travelers using SNSs to document global migration.

The founder of *Nomadness Travel Tribe* Evita Robinson contends that "...the same travel industry that this community loves, that it has built businesses and relationships within, and kicked down doors for, has in many respects ignored us. This is the living truth for travelers of color" (2018). This ignoring of travelers of color fosters what I call the 'white travel imaginary'. The Instagram accounts they establish and their content are designed to oppose racism against Black travelers and combat the erasure of Black people who regularly travel. Thus, theorizing the white travel imaginary affords the scaffolding upon which scholars interested in studying how systems of (bio)power and representation manipulate an

industry not immediately associated with sustained racial and sociocultural critique. Though the white travel imaginary is an abject racist illusion, members of the travel industry and travel media actively maintain it, transforming it into a magic eraser working hard to keep the desktop, laptop, tablet, mobile phone, and even the television and film screens devoted to travel narratives as white as possible. To explicate the rhetorical machinations of the white travel imaginary and its role in proliferating neocolonialism one visual at a time, I first apply basic concepts from George Lipsitz's (2011) theory of the "white spatial imaginary". The white spatial imaginary consists of physical spaces grounded in exclusivity and emerges from both the embodied identities of white people "inscribed in the physical contours of places where [they] live, work, and play" (2011, p. 28). According to Lipsitz, the white spatial imaginary structures feelings as well as social institutions...idealizes "pure" and homogenous spaces, controlled environments, and predictable patterns of design and behavior. It seeks to hide social problems rather than solve them. The white spatial imaginary promotes the quest for individual escape rather than encouraging democratic deliberations about the social problems and contradictory social relations that affect us all (2011). While this theory centers mainly on the racialization or whitewashing of urban and suburban spaces, it suitably enables tools for exposing how the travel industry is situated in whiteness.

Travel is considered a means by which white actors play, often in spaces where they are mostly surrounded by other white travelers. The white travel imaginary "promotes the quest for individual escape" (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 29) rather than challenging the sociocultural and racial problems inherent within the travel industry. It works to define travel, especially global travel, as a homogenous and even pure space of whiteness. It is physical; it consists of nations, cities, and tourist sites in Africa, Europe, Asia, Latin and South America, the Middle East, as well as other spaces where travel media glossily positions images of happy and cultured white sojourners. It is ontological; it focuses on the travel identities and experiences of white travelers to the relegation or outright exclusion of others. It is epistemological; it centers the expertise of white jetsetters who do not recognize their own or the industry's inherent bias and perpetuates the belief that traveling the world is mainly, if not solely, for white bodies with the cultural, economic, and social capital to do so.

Additionally, the white travel imaginary is technological; in fact, it can be considered a technology in two distinct ways, as a practice and as artifacts which enable the practice. As a practice, the white travel imaginary consists of systems, schemas, and processes used in the production of goods, services, ideas, etc., to accomplish specific sets of objectives, typically the promotion of locations, activities, and people engaging in travel. As artifacts, the white travel imaginary is a collection of devices, machines, and digital and/or physical objects, such as television, print media, the Internet, SNSs, and photography used to promote locations, activities, and people engaging in travel.

The physical, ontological, epistemological, and technological constructs of the white travel imaginary allow for assessment of the hegemonic "place images" or "place myths" often attached to a variety of locations and people in the white travel imaginary. As Rob Shields (1991) notes, place images are the "varied discrete meanings associated with real places or regions regardless of their character in reality" (p. 60). Shields asserts that place images are the result of stereotyping or the over-simplification of a place or group of places within a region. Consequently, a collection of place images forms a place myth. While "opposed groups may succeed in generating antithetical place myths" related to class and cultural expression, the antithetical sets of place images within a place myth are often:

...taken up in hegemonic discourses and re-worked by commercial advertising and propaganda...which reinforces certain images just by repeating them and assimilating them to what is considered desirable while discouraging others. While some elements of spatiality – such as gesture, or attitudes about the appropriateness of sites to particular uses – might be correlated with ethnicity, age, gender, and socio-economic classes, spatialization must, to some extent, cross class, ethnic and even 'cultural' lines in the form of basic perceptions and orientations to the world if there is to be a maintenance of a basic sociability between these groups (1991, p. 61-62).

In other words, resistance to certain place myths is frequently a futile undertaking because social progression and sociability are dependent upon the role place myths perform in a society's understanding of different spaces *and the people who travel to those spaces*. While various marginalized groups and

individuals – like the travel influencers studied here – may actively oppose the hegemonic obfuscation of their travel identities, pervasive messaging routinely renders their resistance moot and props up the proverbial narratives of the place images and place myths, and the discourses of those who routinely travel to these places as was the case in Nabongo's incident with the Four Seasons in St. Kitts and Nevis. As such, the white travel imaginary is what Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2003) would call spreadable media, a phenomenon which exists within a participatory culture where users are not passive consumers of media, including themselves. Jenkins et al. note that consumers and the media they use symbiotically interact "within larger communities and networks, which allow [users] to spread content well beyond their immediate geographic proximity" (p. 2). Ultimately, the white travel imaginary consists of global locations, travel brands, various companies, and people working with artifacts – namely photographs – inside travel media ecosystems that ideologically fuse travel with whiteness.

Travel writer Elizabeth Aldrich (2017) has likened travel media whiteness to colonization, stating, "...why are white people and people from the Global North the loudest voice and most prominent authority on brown countries and cultures from the Global South?...We need to decolonize travel writing and travel culture, and we need to do it now". Strikingly, Aldrich and Groundwater are white travel writers probing their privilege to ask poignant questions of fellow white travelers. Groundwater says, "...most Instagrammers and bloggers – the faces that travel brands like to attach themselves to – are white and privileged. There's little chance of this changing" (2017). The Black influencers studied here would disagree. As Raymond has stated, "I want to literally and figuratively help change the face of 'mainstream travel', so that black people know that they, too, can go out and travel the world for leisure, education, and to 'find themselves'...Diversity and representation matter and I'm intent on showing that WE'RE OUT HERE" (Oneikatraveller, 2018a). Ultimately, SNSs like Instagram offer space in the digi-sphere where the visual narratives within Black travelogues contradict the white travel imaginary. Resistance within Nabongo and Raymond's Instagram travelogues is unambiguous; their accounts become active spreadable media designed to defy the whiteness of the media within the white travel imaginary.

Instagram and Black Travel Networks

In a post dated December 30, 2018, Raymond stands before the African Renaissance Monument in Dakar, Senegal; her red dress is in stark contrast to the earthy brown and green colors in the statues of a woman, child, and man. The caption states, "How many African nations can you name that *aren't* Egypt, Morocco, South Africa, Kenya, or Tanzania? Such a rich continent of 54 countries and yet we tend to visit/talk about the same ones over and over" (Oneikatraveller, 2018f). Raymond's post and caption are a subtle indictment of two phenomenon: the travel industry's intentional disregard of the African continent and travelers' continued ignoring of the African continent. She goes on to state, "Africa is not the problem our perception of it is. The only way to change the single story of the African continent is by seeing it and experiencing it differently" (2018f). This post is a prime example of how the travel influencers studied here employ the Instagram interface to defy ideologies and spark conversations about a place that has been consistently overlooked in the travel-sphere. Thus, Instagram and the visual narratives it supports become apparatuses of resistance and re-education, a digital space for contesting images, ideas, and myths about a place.

Currently boasting over one billion plus monthly active posts, over 500 million daily active posts, and over 400 million daily Stories activities (Instagram, 2019), Instagram is one of the most popular social networking platforms in the world. Despite its popularity, the quantity of research on Instagram is limited when compared to studies of other social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook (Laestadius, 2017). Research exploring racial representation on Instagram is in its nascent stage, though some has analyzed self-representation (Curtis, 2015; Tanksley, 2016); hip hop identity (Mosley, Abreu, Ruderman, & Crowell, 2017); and, Black and Latinx athletes and representation (Chawanksy, 2016; Hull, Kim, & Stilwell, 2018). Scholars, like Nakamura (2002, 2007), Dinerstein (2006), and Everett (2009) have asserted that access to and the utilization of technology, particularly the Internet, has long been associated with whiteness, power, and privilege. Dinerstein argues:

> Technological progress has long structured Euro-American identity...Here is the techno-cultural matrix: progress, religion, whiteness, modernity, masculinity, the future. This matrix reproduces an assumed superiority over societies perceived as static, primitive, passive, Communist, terrorist, or fundamentalist (p. 571).

Black travelers' identity assertions within the digital realm are evolving processes of self-formation and meaning-making, designed to topple the matrix often associated with technological progress and prowess. Thus, attention should be paid to the visual manifestations of race and Blackness on Instagram. Visual narratives are told with each Instagram post and are potentially layered and loaded with multiple meanings. Instagram allows for critical discourse *and* visual analysis within a platform that also permits a cultural-technocultural study of race and racial ideologies.

It is for this reason that the relatively new mode of digital media analysis critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) is an apt methodological tool for studying the intersection of Blackness and Instagram. CTDA allows for the examination of "the interactions between technology, cultural ideology, and technology practice" inside a critical cultural framework that looks not only at the signs and symbols in the information and communication technology, but also examines those within the socio-cultural discourse of the examined group (Brock, 2018, p. 1014). Uniquely, CTDA provides researchers the tools to combine qualitative methodology with the cultural theory best suited for studying the represented group and technology. Visual analysis, technocultural analysis, and critical race theory along with theories of racialized space and representation are combined here to analyze the phenomenon of Black travel influencers' Instagram use. The Instagram interface allows users to signify their identities and interests in several ways, from the user's profile photo or logo to their profile bio and the photos, videos, memes, gifs, captions, and hashtags posted in their main account feed, geotagging, live broadcasting, the Stories feature (which allows users to post content that disappears within 24 hours), and the recently released IGTV feature (designed to act and feel like YouTube). Therefore, a CTDA approach to studying Black travel influencers' Instagram efforts to oppose effacement in the digital realm include analysis of: 1) the Instagram interface, its design and features, and how subscribers use the technology within the platform to craft, distribute, and/or reproduce unique narratives; 2) digital practices of users, or how Instagram subscribers employ the platform to articulate their identities; and, 3) the ideologies the technology personifies, reifies, and/or negates through user participation and interaction.

For example, analysis of the December 30, 2018 @oneikatraveller post mentioned above using CTDA would include: 1) how Raymond used the Instagram interface to posit a message; 2) how she used Instagram to craft her identity as a traveler (and travel influencer) and communicate with other travelers in the platform; and, 3) the ideologies she negates and the responses to that negation from other Instagram users. Therefore, a CTDA approach to studying the phenomenon that Nabongo and Raymond represent, would articulate that the photograph of Raymond before the African Renaissance Museum wearing a color associated in pan-Africanism as the blood that unites all people of African descent and the redemption and liberation that comes with shedding blood for a cause (McGuire, Harvey, & Universal Negro Improvement Association, 1921) is her way of connecting herself (a Canadian of Jamaican origin who currently lives in the United States) to her African heritage. The photo and the message within the caption serve to separate Raymond from travelers who have not or do not explore the richness of the African continent and its nations beyond those that are visited or talked about "over and over." Intrinsically, the photo, caption, 4,211 likes, and 316 comments question and dismiss the logic (ideology) that the African continent has nothing to offer beyond the five nations mentioned in the post. CTDA's multilayered methodological approach suitably captures technology, performance, and understandings within a kinetic data set that refuses simplistic explications of digital interfaces and their connection to the dogmas within various modes of marginalization and oppression.

Thus, for this CTDA focused study, I concentrated on content from @thecatchmeifyoucan and @oneikatraveller with two interrelated questions: How do Nabongo and Raymond use Instagram to combat the lack of Black travelers in the travel industry/travel media, thereby challenging the white travel imaginary and its place myths? How does the Instagram platform enable Black travelers' resistance

narratives to emerge? Overall, @oneikatraveller has 81,800 followers and 2,029 posts included in the account while @thecatchmeifyoucan possesses 123,000 followers with 2,421 posts (as of August 31, 2019). To study how the above accounts/influencers use Instagram platform features to assert Black travel, I examined 1) types of media posted – photographs, videos, memes, other images (N=4,450); 2) captions and hashtags included with the media; and, 3) user participation through likes, comments, and sharing posts with other users. These three spheres of analysis explicate CTDA's primary modes of unpacking techno-cultural routines and praxes: interface = media posted; practice = captions and hashtags; and, ideology = participation.

Cursory analysis of the accounts revealed that the influencers primarily post photographs. Therefore, I chose to focus the analysis on photos; captions and hashtags; and, likes and comments for the photos. This led to a total of 4,199 photo posts with 2,261 included in @thecatchmeifyoucan and 1,938 in @oneikatraveller. I randomly selected 100 photo posts, 50 from each account, posted between January 2017 and December 2018, a period when the influencers began receiving increased mainstream press attention. This attention included Raymond's hiring as a *Travel Channel* digital host and Nabongo's announcement that she is endeavoring to become the first Black woman to visit all 195 United Nations recognized nations. CTDA's three spheres of analysis enabled twelve distinct categories for coding to emerge. Interface analysis rendered five categories: selfies, portraits of the influencer, landscape images, cityscape photos, and food and drink photos. User practice analysis engendered four categories: captions about racism and travel, captions encouraging Black travel, hashtags signifying race and travel, and inspirational travel hashtags. Analysis of how ideologies are decoded in posts rendered three categories: number of likes, number of comments, and comments content. Posts were analyzed to determine how the photos, captions, hashtags, and comments within the posts signified race, Black mobility, and resistance. Primarily, the goal of the analysis was to determine how these Black traveler accounts/influencers manipulate Instagram's platform to self-define their travel experiences.

Land/Cityscape Shots and Portraits: The Power of the Interface

Of the elements examined within @thecatchmeifyoucan and @oneikatraveller, the photographs the influencers consistently use work hardest to combat the white travel imaginary and its incumbent place myths. Three prominent types of photos emerge upon close inspection of 100 sample posts: portraits of the influencer, landscapes, and cityscapes. Here, portraits of the influencer (N=62) are considered photographs of the influencer posing in various global locations. Landscape and cityscape photos are images of natural areas, city streets, people, architecture, and monuments that do not feature the influencer. They are combined here (N=28) because their epistemological and ontological function within the accounts are essentially the same, to show a location, its culture, and its people from the influencers' unique points of view, thereby rebelling against place myths about who actively spends time in a place.

Table 1. Portraits and Landscapes/Cityscapes Across Accounts

Account (as of 8/31/19)	**Total Number of Posts**	**Total Number of Portraits**	**Total Number of Land & Cityscape Posts**	**Portraits in Random Sample**	**Land & Cityscape Posts in Random Sample**
@oneikatraveller	1,938	833	563	30	16
@thecatchmeifyoucan	2,154	1,167	244	32	12

It would be simple to assert that these photographs are little more than Instagram humble brags or pretentions; however, recent research on Instagram, self-presentation, and narcissism (Matley, 2018; Sheldon and Bryant, 2016) notes that SNSs can be "sites of self-presentation and identity negotiation" (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 304) with interfaces that enable the crafting and promotion of identity, including (but not limited to) boastful and arrogant behavior. However, Matley argues that positive self-disclosure

is "presented as mere information-sharing, but which is positively connoted in a particular community" (p. 31). Thus, a more nuanced interpretation of Nabongo's and Raymond's online activities must consider how the influencer's Instagram epistemology emphasizes the combative nature of their movements and desire to breakdown myths associated with places and who travels to those places. By posting portraits in different global locations, Nabongo and Raymond offer a positive visual proclamation about inclusion and visibility. Their posts highlight that travel, both global and domestic, can be acts of self-love and self-expression within an industry that does not often acknowledge Black presence, thereby challenging the white travel imaginary and its place myths. Their photos of themselves in specific travel moments offer stories of exposure, exchange, and gaining lived experience their followers can also receive. The photos' social capital supports digital bonding (Putnam, 2000) between these influencers, their content, and their consumers, essentially providing "emotional kinship, trust, and social support" (Phua, Jin, and Kim, 2017, p. 116) rooted in the desire to strategically convey the cultural muscle of Black global movements. The vital messages the photos send is "We're out here and you can be or are out here too."

Land/cityscape photographs and influencer portraits convey these ideas through active opposition to place myths. With this content, the accounts/influencers tackle the stereotypes or falsehoods within place myths, share their own ideas about a place, and offer information based on what they have learned during their travel experiences. For example, Raymond stated in a June 2018 post about Mexico City, "Personally, I think the idea that Mexico is dangerous is very overexaggerated and overblown, especially when you live in the US, where gun violence is a near-daily occurrence □" (Oneikatraveller, 2018d). Nabongo noted in 2018 about Uzbekistan, a Central Asian travel site firmly rooted in the white travel imaginary not consistently associated with desired travel destinations, "The patterns and textures of Uzbekistan are sublime. Whether it is the ceramics, fabrics, traditional clothing, or domes of some of the most beautiful mosques [I] have ever seen" (TheCatchMeIfYouCan, 2018b). The influencers do not utilize these photos as pretty pictures to gawk at and/or envy. Land/cityscape shots and portraits resist the fallacy of incorrect narratives about a place, provide new narratives through the influencers' points of view, and spurn ideas about Black travel immobility. Most importantly, the photos and the locations within them flout the white travel imaginary, asserting Black presence in various places to flip the abject racial ideology script. Landscape and cityscape photos, influencer portraits, and the captions that accompany the photographs and portraits are active defiance to pejorative and absent narratives about Black travelers. As such, they disrupt the place myths within the epistemological white travel imaginary and dislocate the physical white travel imaginary.

Captioning and Hashtagging Resistance: The Ontologies of Digital Practices

Captions and hashtags for the media posted in the accounts are another tool Nabongo and Raymond employ to resist the white travel imaginary. The social capital and positive self-disclosure within photos, captions, and hashtags increase the influencers' likability and even make them relatable to Instagram audiences. Specifically, captions and hashtags share information about the location, the influencers, and their experiences, ultimately revealing the ontologies of their traveling selves to those perusing the accounts. Notably, Nabongo and Raymond use the platform to discuss the politics of anti-Blackness and the ways of being those politics create around the world. In early 2018, the influencers openly discussed their experiences in Haiti, using their Instagram captions to denounce Donald Trump's racism and xenophobia rooted in place myths. Nabongo stated, "Just luxuriating in one of my favorite shithole countries" and included the hashtags #catchmeinhaiti and #catchmeinashithole (TheCatchMeIfYouCan, 2018a). Similarly, Raymond noted:

> Mention Haiti to most people and they'll likely conjure up images of strife and devastation. But while the island nation's had its troubles, it's so much more than the single story of suffering the media is quick to promote...read my five reasons you should make Haiti your next vacay destination (ignorant remarks from a certain world leader notwithstanding). (Oneikatraveller, 2018c)

Using their platforms to discuss immigration geopolitics, Nabongo and Raymond stress an issue not immediately associated with tourism. Not only do they defend their travel to Haiti, they assert why others should not buy place myths associated with the nation and ultimately eliminate it from their list of travel destinations. Consequently, these posts assert myriad ways of gazing upon and studying how cultural expressions manifest and proliferate in contemporary society. In this way, Nabongo and Raymond not only highlight racism in global geopolitics, but also the ways racist place myths can impact how travelers perceive certain global locales. Nabongo's hashtag, #catchmeinashithole, is another powerful signifier; her account name @thecatchmeifyoucan speaks to her frequent transnational movements and her desire for Instagram users to 'catch' or watch her visit different places. Catching Nabongo in Haiti means exploring all the ways the nation is not a shit hole and a way to contest what Raymond contends is the "single story of suffering the media is quick to promote" (Oneikatraveller, 2018c). The hashtag is "not simply a confluence of text, hypertext, symbols," (Conley, 2017, p. 23) and random meanings; it is a commanding statement about how racist dialogues about travel sites with majority Black populations flourish and prevent travelers from considering them as leisure destinations. As such, #catchmeinashithole in Nabongo's post about Trump's Haiti comments fiercely defies the ontological white travel imaginary, striking perceptions that keep it afloat.

The Command of the Like: Spreading Ideologies

Perception is also an important consideration for Nabongo and Raymond as their accounts can generate high user participation through likes, comments, or reposting. Nabongo's encounter with the Four Seasons in 2018 generated over 500 comments within two days. Comments facilitate discussions between different users and with the influencer. Despite researchers' claims that Instagram is not a platform that fosters reciprocal interpersonal relationships (Sheldon and Bryant, 2016; Jackson and Luchner, 2017), Nabongo and Raymond often ask questions in their captions to spark conversations about racial identity, racism, and travel. Users are not shy about responding to the influencers or to other users. Raymond's post about Haiti garnered 92 comments; 17 of which are part of conversations she had with followers. One follower thanked the influencer for featuring her parent's homeland, saying "I haven't been back since 2001. Can't wait to e-visit Haiti through your site" (Oneikatraveller, 2018c). As Raymond's caption suggests, a place like Haiti is not readily included within the white travel imaginary. However, Raymond and Nabongo reclaim and proclaim that the "shithole" country is a viable and desirable vacation destination. Their posts clouted pervasive ideologies about Haiti, disordering the white travel imaginary physically, ontologically, and epistemologically both with their content and the sheer number of likes and comments they received.

Connectivity and resistance through 'likes' are the most common forms of participation across the accounts. Raymond's Haiti post has received 2,908 likes. Nabongo's Haiti post has received 3,116 likes. On average, @thecatchmeifyoucan and @oneikatraveller posts can receive likes in the thousands (as the above posts attest). Just as it would be facile to assert that the posts 'show off' or 'humble brag,' it would be equally glib to assume that most of those who actively peruse the accounts passively click the heart within the platform based solely on the media content (photo, meme, video, etc.). Quite often, they are engaging with the total post (media, caption, comments) before liking the post. Clicking the heart to like a post within Instagram is a way of acknowledging, agreeing with, and appreciating users' content. Nabongo and Raymond's followers are Instagram users who are "shaping, sharing, reframing, and remixing" (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 2) their personal media product(ion)s on a platform that allows them to publicly speak about the issues that affect their movements.

Raymond often posts about traveling with her white German husband and how his privilege makes him ignorant of traveling while Black. One post poignantly articulates how she is perceived differently in airports, stores and restaurants, etc., compared with her husband. She laments, "He's treated with respect, and even reverence, in situations where I myself have elicited insolence, ignorance, and/or suspicion...I sometimes hold my tongue for fear of being stereotyped as 'the angry black woman'" (Oneikatraveller, 2018e). Since September 2018, this post has garnered 4,181 likes and 242 comments in which users either agree with Raymond's statements or thank her for sharing an experience like their

own. One follower noted, "I'm also extra polite in places where there are little to no black travellers for fear of being accused, but as we travel more, we'll normalise it around the that black people travel too" (2018e). In this context, liking and commenting on a post is a way of showing solidarity; digitally 'snapping,' clapping, or nodding to concur with the post; and, informing the influencer that their content has touched them. Liking and commenting can also be a means, especially within the Black travel communities these influencers have created all working toward toppling the white travel imaginary, to say "Your journey is my journey. We're definitely out here...with you!"

Conclusion

In January or February 2018, Nabongo removed the Instagram feud with Four Seasons hotel and resort chain from her @thecatchmeifyoucan account. No further mention of the incident is present on the platform. It is difficult to speculate as to why Nabongo deleted the exchange from Instagram, however a retelling of the incident can be found on *Medium.com*. What is clear from Nabongo's experience and her relaying of it in *Medium.com* and Instagram is that her response to the slight was *not* the knee jerk reaction of someone who did not get her way; it was a method for exposing conspicuous racism within the white travel imaginary. As Nabongo stated in a post that was taken down, "We have got to...tell these brands that we won't stand for them making us invisible," (2018). Nabongo's Instagram protest resulted in an apology from the Four Seasons corporate office. Though it states that the brand did not support the choice of words the Nevis employee used to describe Nabongo's followers and recognizes "that there is much more that we can do to ensure that we are better representing our diverse guest base," Nabongo made clear that the issue had not been resolved (2018). She responded, "...I am interested to know what your plans are for ensuring better representation of your diverse customer base, specifically on social channels" (2018). As mentioned, these posts had disappeared from Instagram by early March 2018, but the story of her Four Seasons experience on *Medium.com* has received 3,300 'claps' (likes).

Consequently, Jessica Nabongo and Oneika Raymond have dedicated their young careers to calling out Black traveler erasure. The privileging of white travelers contributes to maintaining the white travel imaginary in social networking sites. As Elizabeth Aldrich (2017) states, the "travel industry is sorely lacking dialogue, self-awareness, and critique. It is lacking in diversity, in inclusivity, and in fucks given". Essentially, Aldrich chastises those who are not self-reflexive and whose privilege affords them the multiple opportunities not to consider the sociocultural issues and history of racism that infect global leisure migration. She eventually began to boycott travel bloggers until there is more diversity within the industry. This travel influencers' stance was bold and draws attention to what Nabongo and Raymond are seeking to upend, a homogenous travel sphere that fails to recognize the presence of Black travelers. Raymond has stated "when travel media is flooded with more visible minorities from different walks of life, we normalize [people of color] in the travel space" (2017). She and Nabongo are marshalling in a new age of Black travel media and representation. Digital spaces, namely Instagram, have become sites of resisting racist assumptions about Black travel and a way to reach current and aspirational travelers who are consistently dismissed or ignored altogether.

Accordingly, Instagram is a powerful tool for Black travel influencers to change the largely white face of the travel world, especially Internet and SNS based travel media. Nabongo's SNS use to 'school' the Four Seasons about the presence of Black travelers seeking to explore different locations and (luxury or other) brands around the world was resistance within an industry that may not be immediately associated with sustained social remonstration. Ultimately, Nabongo and Raymond using Instagram to assert their presence within the global travel industry has enabled them to create and maintain precise methods of representation embedded in digi-cultural and socio-cultural structures that have routinely negated Black presence within an increasingly technocultural society. These influencers know the photo sharing platform is a means to inject a Black cultural frame into travel media that can upset the white travel imaginary. Thus, Instagram is a means for talking back and signifying Blackness to a white travel imaginary that has yet to recognize that "we're out here."

Notes

1. As of October 2019, Nabongo has visited all 195 United Nations recognized nations, making her the first Black woman to do so.

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Environmental Injustice: Examining How *The New York Times* Frames the Flint Water Crisis

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Perceived as one of the current environmental controversies in the United States, the Flint water crisis represents a case of environmental injustice and has attracted public attention and scrutiny. Among mainstream news media outlets, The New York Times is the newspaper that has intensively published news stories addressing the issue. Using qualitative frame analysis as the method, the researchers examined the way in which The New York Times framed the Flint water crisis from when a federal state of emergency was declared in 2016 to the one-year anniversary of this declaration. Examining how the Flint water crisis is framed in a mainstream United States national newspaper is valuable, especially during major national environmental disasters, with holding public officials and government(s) accountable. The researchers found that the newspaper employed four major frames in its coverage: causes and effects, responsibility, remedial efforts, and health crisis. The significance of this research expands and contributes to timely and germane scholarship on coverage and framing of environmental injustice in the print news media. However, a small sample size (N = 29) is one of the limitations of this study.

Introduction

The water crisis in Flint, Michigan, which had negative and detrimental effects on many of its residents in terms of life and health quality, prompted President Obama to declare a federal state of emergency on January 16, 2016 (Hanna-Attisha, 2019; Southall, 2016). The complexity and sensitivity of this environmental controversy, in which civilians' fundamental right of access to safe drinking water is jeopardized and violated, have penetrated public discourse. It has further sparked public debate about the dwindling of the quality of life around the affected community (CNN Library, 2019; Renwick, 2019). The incident has unequivocally created an uproar in American public. Several news media outlets have vocally condemned the state government to its neglect of doing its supposedly required and elected job: to protect the community from environmental hazards. In other words, the state government failed to control the lead level in the water and did not come up with effective solutions.

The Flint water crisis is among the most prominent environmental crisis scandals in the United States (U.S.) in recent years. The urgency and severity of the crisis have resulted in an emergent body of research that examines political actions, criticizes government's handling of the Flint water crisis, and addresses health problems related to drinking lead-contaminated water (Hanna-Attisha, 2019; Nickels & Clark, 2019; Renwick, 2019; Stephens, 2018). For instance, showing the ineffectiveness of governmental regulations in terms of protecting and controlling the quality of the water, Butler and her colleagues (2016) perceived the Flint water crisis as a case of environmental injustice. However, little is known about how the national press portrayed the Flint water crisis in its coverage.

Print media, in particular newspapers, can be considered as a major communication channel for the transmission of information, addressing and discussing issues affecting communities to the general public (Atanasova, 2019; Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007; Weathers & Kendall, 2016). Therefore, examining how mainstream and national newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, frame stories about

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environmental crises, can enhance public understanding on these issues, can hold individuals, governments, and/or industries accountable, and can encourage actions to help remedy them (Berlemann & Thomas, 2019; Mayeda, Boyd, Paveglio, & Flint, 2019; Nickels & Clark, 2019; Rebich-Hespanha et al., 2015). This study therefore aims to explore the way in which *The New York Times* frames the Flint water crisis after it gained such a monumental status in the U.S.

Given that *The New York Times* is an influential source of news in the American society, it is important to acknowledge its orientation toward the way in which its news stories are framed and reported. That is, *The New York Times* is among mainstream newspapers with a "left-leaning" political slant in its news coverage (AllSides, 2019; Stone, 2011). Many scholars have found public perception of *The New York Times* as politically left leaning to be generally accurate (Chiang & Knight, 2011; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010; Groseclose & Milyo, 2005; Puglisi, 2011). Nevertheless, others have argued that news reporting in *The New York Times* has minimal partisan bias and that its news coverage is politically neutral or balanced (Dalal, Adlim, & Lesk, 2019; Otero, 2019). To that end, acknowledging the orientation of *The New York Times* indicates how its journalists may adopt certain bias in constructing news stories. That is to say, journalists who write for other more "right-leaning" and/or "politically balanced" newspapers may employ different frames to cover the Flint water crisis.

This study, then, examines what frames *The New York Times* utilized to construct news stories surrounding this crisis, and therefore adds to the expanding scholarly work on coverage of environmental injustice in the news media. More specifically, this study hopes to add to the environmental communication literature by investigating how the print media may frame underlying concerns about marginalization and disenfranchisement related to environmental crises.

Literature Review

This study relies on several areas of scholarship within mass communication and environmental communication, specifically focusing on framing theory and environmentalism within news coverage. We first provide a review of literature on news coverage and environmental issues. Next, we elaborate on the Flint water crisis and environmental injustice in greater detail. Finally, we discuss framing theory, before stating the research question of this study.

News Coverage and Environmental Issues

In his discussion on environmental coverage in mainstream newspapers from 1970 to 1982, Howenstine (1987) argued that reporters dedicated more space and length to address environmental stories, which allowed them to mention economic/developmental aspects contributing to or resulting from these environmental issues. In addition, Anderson (1991) stated that the press paid less attention to environmental news stories, had a tendency to sensationalize stories to attract viewership, focused on green consumerism in news coverage of environmental affairs, and politicized reportages on this topic. According to Major and Atwood (2004), because "the press defines [environmental] problems primarily in terms of conflicts and losses instead of solutions" (p. 18), it apparently does not offer enough information for readers to form their viewpoints of how a possible solution can be reached. McCluskey (2008), who investigated journalists' utilization of news sources in reporting environmental issues, pointed out that journalists who predominantly covered or were assigned to cover environmental issues tended to develop and cultivate auspicious attitudes toward environmental groups in addition to providing in-depth information on the issue.

According to Deacon, Baxter and Buzzelli (2015), reporting environmental stories did not highlight problems pertinent to affected communities but instead focused lenses on their economic/developmental aspects that apparently justified the action to make use of natural resources. This tendency resulted in language choices "that minimized or silenced any potential environmental injustice issues" (p. 429). Heinz (2005) wrote that news media coverage of environmental issues neglected certain perspectives and viewpoints while placing emphases on others, leading to skewed representations of how racial minority groups are affected by the environmental injustice. Reporting environmental issues this

way promotes the idea that as long as the majority of the population benefits from environmental exploitation, spatial elements or characteristics of inflicted communities can be bypassed and erased.

Past research on reporting environmental stories have shown how news media has gradually adopted frames that prioritize the aspects of social justice and environmentalism to provide affected and marginalized communities with the opportunity to have their voices heard, and to ask for changes in public policies to demand justice (Hopke, 2012). For instance, Weathers and Kendall (2015) found an increase in news stories that focus attention on the public health dimension of environmental crises linked to climate change. They indicated how climate change is framed as a human health issue. Applying framing theory to examine news media representations of water issues as health risks, Mayeda, Boyd, Paveglio, and Flint (2019) concluded that journalists tend to frame water issues around pollution and contamination but not as a human health issue. However, missing from these studies is an attention to how health and water issues related to environmental crises come to impact what communities and groups of people.

Further, Taylor (2000) argued for environmental justice frame "as a master frame used to mobilize activists who want to link racism, injustice, and environmentalism in one frame" (p. 514). This frame underlines the importance of addressing the idea of intersectionality and, thereby, functions in a way that can facilitate aggrieved communities' participation in social movements to address and challenge environmental injustices. That is, an investigation into how mainstream and national newspapers cover environmental injustice and how they construct stories that draw connections between past policies and the perpetuation of the marginalization of communities is crucial. By examining the reportage of the Flint water crisis in *The New York Times* within this context, the study hopes to add to the environmental justice and environmental communication literature.

The Flint Water Crisis and Environmental Injustice

Located in Michigan, Flint is a city in financial distress as a result of the evaporation of the automobile industry that once built it and fostered its economic development. Most of its residents are perceived to belong to the working class with low incomes and are currently seen as being "among the poorest in the land and disproportionately African American" (Gostin, 2016, p. 2053). Against this background, emergency managers were appointed rather than elected by the people in order to develop strategies to bring the city out of its dire conditions. Therefore, the appointment process was considered as "the problem of a democracy deficit" (Washington & Pellow, 2016, p. 53). It appears that the emergency managers cared more about salvaging Flint financially and economically than protecting the well-being of its residents. In other words, this emphasis on finding a solution for the economic problem adds more problems to Flint—a city already in (economic) decay. Since the Flint water crisis can be considered to have both economic and racial backstories, it offers a valuable opportunity to investigate the news media reportage of environmental injustice.

Chronologically, the causes of the Flint water crisis can be traced back to the month of April in 2014 when city officials decided to switch the water supply. Instead of continuing to use the water provided by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, they chose the Flint River as a replacement and as the main source of water supply for the city—a decision made because government officials believed that it would help cut cost and save money for the already financially struggling city of Flint. Following this switch, residents began complaining about the deterioration of the quality of the water in terms of its taste, color, and odor. Residents simultaneously expressed concerns over its safeness (Gostin, 2016; Hanna-Attisha, 2019; Kennedy, 2016). To complicate the matter further, city officials initially ignored these complaints from the community and did not respond in a timely manner. Moreover, government officials manipulated the procedure of testing used to determine the safe lead level in the water, and even stated that the water was safe for daily consumption. In September 2015, nevertheless, a research team from Virginia Tech University conducted tests and published a report highlighting the alarmingly high level of lead in the water. As these events gradually unfolded, the state government finally apologized to the community of Flint for the mishandling of the water crisis whilst filing charges against individuals who were responsible for this catastrophe (CNN Library, 2019; Kennedy, 2016; Rothstein, 2016).

Mainstream news media has vocalized their criticisms of the state government's responses toward the Flint water crisis.

The environmental justice frame foregrounds the relationship between social justice and environmentalism. By adopting this master frame, journalists address *who is impacted by the issue*, *who is responsible for it*, and *what kind of social justice will entail*. Nickels and Clark (2019) drew upon framing theory to examine interviews, speeches, and newspaper op-eds of local grassroots associations and high-capacity nonprofits in their responses to the Flint water crisis. They found that these organizations come to frame the policy solutions to the crisis as an equal impact, which minimizes "the issue of race and class or the impact of racism—and instead focus on moving forward" (p. 215). Nickels and Clark's (2019) findings highlight this environmental injustice by recognizing the silencing of concerned residents of Flint and, at the same time, emphasize a natural cause of the crisis, which disregards issues of racism and classism in the crisis. Therefore, centering this study on the environmental justice frame is of significant importance and allows for the possibility of paying attention to marginalized positions and including other factors, such as race and class, in the reportage of the Flint water crisis in *The New York Times*.

Framing Theory

Framing theory is a productive theoretical framework that enables an investigation into newspapers coverage of environmental issues and crises (Atanasova, 2019; Berlemann & Thomas, 2019; Nisbet, 2009; Rebich-Hespanha et al., 2015). Researchers in the field of mass communication commonly use framing theory to understand media phenomena and journalistic practices within the context of culture (Bryant & Miron, 2004; Gorp, 2007). Gamson (1989) conceptualized "a frame" as "a central organization for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue" (p. 157). Goffman (1981) perceived frames as "a central part of a culture and are institutionalized in various ways" (p. 63), where culture is constituted by an "organized set of beliefs, codes, myths, stereotypes, values, norms, frames, and so forth that are shared in the collective memory of a group or society" (Gorp, 2007, p. 62). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) contended that "individuals make use of these cultural phenomena, precisely as media workers apply and magnify them in media content and present them to their audiences" (p. 60). Gorp (2007) underscored that framing is an important journalistic technique because the adoption of particular frames can influence the outcome of how a news story is constructed and received. In his own words, "the same events make different kinds of sense depending upon the frame applied" (Gorp, 2007, p. 63). Gorp (2007) further added that frame analysis is "useful to identify the frames that are dominantly applied in other social, political, or historical contexts and periods" (p. 63).

In his proposal of how frame was constructed, Entman (1993) pointed toward two essential components in framing: "selection" and "salience." Journalists create news stories through their ways of framing social life and events, and therefore have the power "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the items described" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). To frame, in this context, involves journalists' attempts to make an angle of an issue appear more prominent and dominant in a media text to provide the audiences with a version of a problem, to engage them in the conversation, to arouse their judgment, and to propose them with solutions or remedies. Wide arrays of issues that the public reads and receives on newspapers are constructed through frames. With the power to do the "selection" and to contribute to the "salience" of the news stories, journalists can push for problems and issues that they think the public needs to pay more attention to as well as take notice of. Clearly, frames are essential and unavoidable in the practice of journalism. Since it is nearly impossible for the media to capture the whole picture of the world, frames offer the reader with heuristic and oversimplified, albeit essential, lenses into viewing the world and its reality.

In this study, we investigate how a U.S. news media print outlet framed the coverage of the Flint water crisis. *The New York Times* dedicated several news stories to covering this environmental controversy. Understanding how this mainstream and national newspaper, with high readership and circulations, approaches this crisis and informs its readers of what transpired in Flint respecting the issue

of lead-contaminated drinking water can be beneficial, because it helps shine a spotlight on the kind of environmental injustice residents of Flint were exposed to. Specifically, we ask the following research question:

RQ: What frames does *The New York Times* utilize to portray the Flint water crisis?

Methodology

News stories about the Flint water crisis published in *The New York Times* were examined. Our decision to focus on *The New York Times* in this study was primarily based on this: Of mainstream and national print outlets, *The New York Times* was the one newspaper, with a prestigious status, that not only reported extensively but also included in-depth coverage on this subject. Framing analysis was used for this study (Gorp, 2007; Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Framing Analysis

Since the news media can influence how individuals perceive events, we conducted a qualitative frame analysis, using the approach proposed by Entman (1993), Gorp (2007) and Pan and Kosicki (1993) to understand frames that were utilized to cover the Flint water crisis in *The New York Times*. Pan and Kosciki (1993) explained that frame analysis requires researchers to view news stories "as a system of organized signifying elements that both indicate the advocacy of certain ideas and provide devices to encourage certain kinds of audience processing of the texts" (pp. 55-56). Framing analysis is different from other approaches, such as content analysis, to study news stories because this method does not focus on the psychological aspects with objectively identifying meanings (Livingston, 1998). Rather, framing analysis calls attention to how meanings are constructed out of the organized symbolic devices within news stories (Gorp, 2007; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Framing analysis additionally "does not assume the presence of frames in news texts independent of readers of the texts" (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 58). Taken together, framing analysis is subjective because it enables researchers to look at how meaning-making is organized within the news stories.

As such, we considered framing analysis as the most appropriate method for this study because it enabled the possibility of "analyzing news discourse mainly deals with how public discourse about public policy issues is constructed and negotiated" (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 70). A framing analysis of the news coverage of the Flint water crisis in *The New York Times* further helped uncover the influence of this news outlet on shaping "the importance individuals attach to particular beliefs" (Nelson & Oxley, 1999, p. 1041) regarding this issue. In this study, we carefully perused each news story to evaluate and identify frames and sub-frames that were used to construct the discourse around the water crisis in Flint, focusing on the selection and salience components of framing (Entman, 1993).

Sample

News articles from *The New York Times* were sampled from January 16, 2016 (when President Obama declared a state of emergency for this issue) to January 16, 2017 (the one-year anniversary of the Flint water crisis being declared a state of emergency). The Lexis-Nexis online database was used to locate news stories reporting on the Flint water crisis in *The New York Times*. In particular, headline and lead paragraph were searched using the keyword "Flint water crisis." Additionally, only articles written in English were considered. The option of "high similarity" was selected to remove duplicate articles from the search results. Furthermore, editorials and opinion columns were eliminated from the sampling pool, because we focused only on the factual aspects of news stories. Articles were then reviewed and discarded if they did not have a substantial focus on the Flint water crisis, were duplicates, were editorials or opinion pieces, or were non-articles. The decision-rule for inclusion was whether or not articles predominantly focused on the Flint water crisis.

When searching within these parameters, 49 results emerged. Of these 49 results, 20 were eliminated because they did not meet the criteria that we discussed above. The following articles that

appeared in the search results were eliminated: six articles focused on other issues besides the Flint water crisis (i.e. the 2016 Presidential Election, EPA Budget, and 2016 Michigan Election), four articles were duplicates that made it through to the search results, three articles were blogs, three articles were published in *The New York Times Magazine*, two articles were opinion pieces, and two articles focused on water pipes in the state of New Jersey. Therefore, with news story as the unit of analysis, 29 news stories were finally chosen for the purpose of this study (see Appendix A for list of the 29 articles).

Procedure. Adopting an approach to framing analysis proposed by Entman (1993), Gorp (2007), and Pan and Kosicki (1993), we first read the 29 news articles collectively to get a sense of what was reported in *The New York Times* (Entman, 1993; Gorp, 2007). To situate the selection component of framing, we re-read each article to analyze what was selected and how what was selected was organized (Entman, 1993). Here, we paid close attention to selected keywords and target phrases that would constitute larger structures of meaning (Entman, 1993; Gorp, 2007; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Finally, we read each article a third time to look for the salience component of framing (Entman, 1993), which includes "certain information" that is made "more significant so that the audience will notice it more easily" (Gorp, 2007, p. 67). Here, we sought for reasoning devices, which focus on the explicit and implicit statements that deal with justifications, causes, and/or consequences in a temporal order (Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1988; 1989; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gorp, 2007; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Based on the qualitative framing analysis of the 29 *New York Times* articles, the following four frames emerged: 1) the cause and effect frame; 2) the responsibility frame; 3) the remedial efforts frame; and 4) the health crisis frame.

Results and Analysis

The New York Times published most of its news stories of the Flint water crisis within the first five months after President Obama declared a federal state of emergency in the middle of the month of January in 2016 (22 articles reported from January 2016 to May 2016). One possible explanation is that when this environmental crisis first captured public and national attention, journalists might have had more materials and more sources to work with. During the months after the beginning of May 2016, the frequency of news stories reporting on the Flint water crisis, however, drastically decreased. The analysis of news stories from *The New York Times* produced four major frames: causes and effects, responsibility, remedial efforts, and health crisis. Also, journalists might combine frames to construct their news stories on the crisis. For instance, a story mainly about government's efforts to remedy the crisis might also employ other frames, such as responsibility or health crisis.

Frame 1: The Cause and Effect Frame

Reports in *The New York Times* identified causes leading to the presence of an astronomical level of lead in the water supply after the state decided to use the water of the Flint River. Several news stories highlighted the state's failure to employ anti-corrosion chemicals in the treatment of the water to make sure that it would be safe enough for public consumption. One story particularly noted, "The pipes began leaching lead into the water supply in 2014, when the Flint River became the primary source of water for the city and officials failed to add corrosion controls to prevent the pipes from eroding" (Bosman, 2016). Another cause of the problem stemmed from the decision to prioritize cost-cutting, and therefore, downplaying the well-being of the community.

News stories further addressed the effect of the crisis. Journalists expressed their concerns that the exposure to lead-contaminated water would put residents of Flint at risk in terms of health. They further asserted that the problem with lead in the water would cost the state government money and time to come up with a tangible solution (Bosman, 2016). Several news stories attributed the Flint water crisis to delayed responses to its handling even though civilians complained the quality of the water as well as vocalized concerns over their health. State officials were warned about the Flint River's water, yet they did not develop strategic plans and tactics to handle it. These delayed responses galvanized journalists to adopt a sub-frame: *socio-economic and racial factor*s.

In many news stories, journalists drew a connection between these two factors and government's mishandling of the issue. In these stories, they repeatedly discussed the failing economy of the city of Flint, which relegated its people into the condition of poverty. They underscored that the population is constituted by a high number of members of a racial minority group. One of the news stories stated the following:

> An independent panel has concluded that disregard for the concerns of poor and minority people contributed to the government's slow response to complaints from residents of Flint, Mich., about the foul and discolored water that was making them sick, determining that the crisis "is a story of government failure, intransigence, unpreparedness, delay, inaction and environmental injustice" (Bosman, 2016).

These conditions of Flint further prompted a journalist to particularly pose the question, "If Flint were rich and mostly white, would Michigan's state government have responded more quickly and aggressively to complaints about its lead-polluted water?" (Eligon, 2016). Within this frame, issues of poverty and race, which were linked to the government's delayed responses to the crisis, were also recognized as one cause of the crisis.

Frame 2: The Responsibility Frame

The frequency of Michigan Governor Rick Snyder being mentioned in many news stories as the main person responsible for delayed responses to handle this crisis underscored this frame. News stories repeatedly highlighted that the governor publicly expressed his contrition for the incident. For instance, one news story wrote:

> Gov. Rick Snyder of Michigan issued a sweeping apology on Tuesday to the residents of Flint for a contaminated water supply. He pledged to promptly release his emails about the issue and laid out more specifics than had previously been known about the state's handling of the matter. (Bosman & Smith, 2016)

Despite this, the governor was adamant that his aides misled him and told him that water was safe enough for daily consumption. In a sense, Snyder considered his staff members as the source of responsibility for causing the crisis when they did not provide him with accurate information on the issue.

Environmental Protection Agency (E.P.A.) was also blamed for the crisis. The reports noted that laws required by the agency in terms of determining the quality of the water were not effective. Indeed, E.P.A. did not develop strict regulations when it comes to testing the water supply. Also, E.P.A. did not handle the issue the way it should be handled. In one report, the journalist observed that:

> Members of a congressional oversight committee excoriated a former Environmental Protection Agency official on Tuesday for not responding more forcefully when she learned last year that Flint, Mich., was not adding a chemical to its new water supply that would have prevented the city's pipes from corroding and leaching lead. (Goodnough, 2016)

As the event unfolded, news stories reported that three state officials and two emergency managers were charged for misconducts in terms of handling the water. Also, private sectors were sued for their involvement in the crisis. These stories fit into this frame because they aimed to acknowledge who was responsible for the Flint water crisis.

This frame had one sub-frame, *Democrat vs. Republican criticisms*. On one hand, Democrats criticized the failure of the Snyder's admiration for neglecting affected people and its ineptitude in handling the problem. On the other hand, Republicans attributed the crisis to E.P.A. because the agency was "a source of government incompetence and overreach" (Goodnough, Smith, & Bosman, 2016).

Frame 3: The Remedial Efforts Frame

Journalists paid attention to how the state government would fix the water problem in Flint, and this was reflected in their news reporting. A news story addressed difficulties in replacing the old pipeline that continually leached lead into the water. Efforts to switch the water supply back to the one in Detroit would not solve the problem as "the pipes are so deeply corroded that lead is still poisoning the water" (Bosman, 2016). Other new stories discussed the possibility of pressing charges against those responsible for the Flint water crisis even though such actions would not be easy to carry out. A few items asserted possible remedial and therapeutic plans from both Democrat and Republican parties to handle the issue. Moreover, the federal government took the issue in its hand and announced plans to protect residents of Flint. In one story:

> The Department of Health and Human Services announced a $10 million grant on Wednesday for health services in Michigan, including $1 million for a health center in Flint that is treating those affected by the water. White House officials said the federal government had already provided nine million liters of water and 55,000 water filters. (Shear & Bosman, 2016)

Frame 4: The Health Crisis Frame

News coverage of the Flint water crisis in *The New York Times* framed it in terms of a health crisis by highlighting diseases related to the consumption of the lead-contaminated water from the Flint River. One journalist stated that:

> The Legionnaires' cases started popping up as Flint residents were complaining about the foul-smelling, discolored water flowing into their homes after the city switched to a new water source, the Flint River, in April 2004. Soon they were reporting rashes and stomach ailments, and whistleblowers eventually pointed to alarming levels of lead in the water supply and in children's blood. (Goodnough, 2016)

Concerns over using the Flint River's water further led to several residents feeling paranoid and worried about their health. One news story interviewed many residents who were directly affected by the Flint water crisis. They spoke out about how being exposed to the water put pressure on their mental health. One interviewee elaborated, "I poisoned other people's children" when she offered her children and their friends drinks made with the Flint River's water (Goodnough & Atkinson, 2016). Within this frame, children were presented as most susceptible to health issues once exposed to the water. One account suggested that children's consumption of lead-contaminated water would have detrimental effects on their "growth, behavior, and intelligence over time" (Goodnaugh, 2016).

In review, four major frames emerged from the qualitative frame analysis of the 29 *The New York Times* articles: 1) causes and effects, 2) responsibility, 3) remedial efforts, and 4) health crisis. Most of the articles were published within the first five months of President Obama declaring a state of emergency. During this timeframe, *The New York Times* published 22 articles about the Flint Water Crisis. Additionally, journalists combined frames in certain instances to construct the news stories of the Flint water crisis.

Discussion

The reporting of the Flint water crisis on the pages of *The New York Times* indicated an emphasis on its causes and effects. News stories further highlighted the incompetence of state officials in handling the issue and underlined the effects that the crisis had on the people of Flint. Several news stories specifically identified and perpetually addressed those responsible for the crisis. Governor Snyder, state officials, and state agencies were to be held accountable for ignoring people's complaints and for taking too long to respond to the crisis. Moreover, the remedial efforts frame allowed journalists to discuss what had been proposed to control the issue and to have it handled. Unfortunately, news stories underscored

some of the obstacles that the community would encounter in its efforts to contain and solve the water crisis.

The New York Times asked the question of whether the economic condition and racial factor contributed to the failure of Governor Snyder's administration in its responses to complaints from residents of Flint regarding the quality of the water. This approach allowed the newspaper to adopt Taylor's (2000) environmental justice frame. In other words, addressing the question of racial and economic status in its coverage prompted journalists of *The New York Times* to construct news stories that would gain public support for demanding and obtaining justice for the people of the city of Flint. Readers could feel more sympathetic towards the aggrieved community in that the state governor and his administration had done their constituents wrong. Indeed, the Flint water crisis does have long-lasting effects on Flint's people. In other words, it is our contention that the newspaper took this matter in its own hands when it provided spaces for journalists to criticize the state government for its delayed attention and lackadaisical responses toward this environmental catastrophe. Journalists further used *The New York Times* to communicate messages that demanded answers for the state's wrongdoings and requested justice for Flint's residents in their coverage.

Pan and Kosicki (1993) addressed a close relationship between framing analysis and agenda setting theory. When news stories on the Flint water crisis framed it as a health crisis, they underlined its severity. The health of the people, in particular children, were being undermined and in danger. Thus, *The New York Times* journalists' adoption of the health crisis frame indicated their intention to amplify problems with the Flint water crisis. Journalists, therefore, constructed this issue in a way that would garner their readers' attention as well as would provide a validation for seeking justice for the affected community. This could be seen as journalists' attempt to set an agenda.

Future Research

Due to the ongoing investigation status of the crisis, *The New York Times* only covered what was discovered. Whether the people of Flint succeeded to combat against this environmental injustice and whether remedial efforts from the federal and state governments would work remain unknown. Once everything is settled, future research should investigate whether *The New York Times* adopts different frames to cover the Flint water crisis. A limitation of the study included is its small sample size and a focus on only one newspaper—*The New York Times*. Therefore, a comparison on the news coverage of this crisis between mainstream and alternative news media (i.e., print, broadcast, and/or digital/online news media) would help better comprehend how frames would be different between different media platforms.

Conclusion

Examining how the Flint water crisis is framed in a mainstream United States national newspaper is valuable, especially during major national environmental disasters, in that it indicates how the kind of frames journalists adopt or utilize come to matter. The significance of this research then expands scholarly work on coverage and framing of environmental issues in the print news media, and calls attention to the need for news media outlets to recognize how a variety of factors, such as race and class, can be tied to environmental injustice. Much is still to be learned from how environmental injustice is framed in the media, especially since the Flint water crisis is still ongoing (CNN Library, 2019; Hanna-Attisha, 2019; Renwick, 2019; Stephens, 2018). However, by showing how *The New York Times* perceived the events surrounding the Flint water crisis and constructed news stories about it, this study not only shed new light onto the issue, but also emphasized the important and integral role of news media outlets in keeping the public informed of this issue, so that the American people could hold the state and federal government accountable for misconduct or wrongdoing.

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Appendix A

List of *The New York Times* Journal Articles (Sorted by Oldest to Newest)

Southall, A. (2016, January 17). State of emergency declared over man-made water disaster in Michigan city. *The New York Times.*

Bosman, J., & Smith, M. (2016, January 20). 'I let you down,' governor says of Flint crisis. *The New York Times.*

Eligon, J. (2016, January 22). A question of environmental racism in Flint. *The New York Times*.

Perez-Pena, R. (2016, January 23). Governor denies race affected Flint response. *The New York Times*.

Steinhauer, J. (2016, January 29). Senate democrats seeking federal aid for Flint crisis. *The New York Times*.

Goodnough, A. (2016, January 30). Flint tallies tainted water's cost to its children. *The New York Times*.

Goodnough, A., & Steinhauer, J. (2016, February 4). Congressional grilling on Flint's water crisis takes on a partisan tone. *The New York Times*.

Chozick, A. (2016, February 8). In Flint, Clinton prods congress and calls response to crisis 'immoral'. *The New York Times*.

Bosman, J. (2016, February 12). Why it won't be cheap or easy to fix Flint's water crisis. *The New York Times*.

Goodnough, A. (2016, February 23). Flint outbreak was treated with silence. *The New York Times*.

Davey, M., & Bosman, J. (2016, February 27). Emails show Michigan aides worried about Flint's water a year before acting. *The New York Times*.

Bosman, J. (2016, March 5). 2 who helped expose flint water crisis win PEN awards. *The New York Times*.

Goodnough, A. (2016, March 15). Former E.P.A. official to defend handling of Flint water crisis. *The New York Times*.

Goodnough, A. (2016, March 16). House panel denounces E.P.A. actions in Flint crisis. *The New York Times*.

Goodnough, A. (2016, March 18). Michigan governor tells congress he was misled on Flint water. *The New York Times*.

Bosman, J. (2016, March 24). Report on Flint cites 'injustice'. *The New York Times*.

Davey, M., & Perez-Pena, R. (2016, April 21). Three officials facing charges on Flint water. *The New York Times*.

Davey, M., & Goodnough, A. (2016, April 25). Emails deepen criminal cases in Flint, but charges may be tough to prove. *The New York Times*.

Goodnough, A., & Atkinson, S. (2016, May 1). Flint water crisis also hits at mental health. *The New York Times*.

Bosman, J., & Atkinson, S. (2016, May 3). Michigan governor backtracks, seeking to meet Obama in Flint. *The New York Times*.

Shear, M. D., & Bosman, J. (2016, May 5). 'I've got your back,' Obama declares in Flint. *The New York Times*.

Atkinson, S. (2016, May 5). One defendant to cooperate in water inquiry. *The New York Times*.

Smith, M., & Bosman, J. (2016, June 23). Contractors are blamed by state over Flint. *The New York Times*.

Haimerl, A., & Goodnough, A. (2016, July 30). 6 more state workers charged over Flint water crisis. *The New York Times*.

The Associated Press. (2016, September 14). In plea deal, ex-Michigan official admits silence in Flint water crisis. *The New York Times*.

Davenport, C. (2016, September 15). Senate approves funding for Flint water crisis.

The New York Times.
Bosman, J. (2016, October 20). E.P.A. waited too long to warn of Flint water danger, report says. *The New York Times*.
Chokshi, N. (2016, November 11). Judge orders that bottled water be delivered to residents of Flint, Mich. *The New York Times*.
Davey, M., & Smith, M. (2016, December 21). 2 former Flint emergency managers are charged over tainted water. *The New York Times*.

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Between Friends, an "Implicit Trust": Exploring the (Non)Disclosure of Private Mental Health-Related Information in Friendships

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Friendships are one of our key relationships through life, yet little is known about our communication processes with them, particularly regarding mental health conditions or concerns. In this study, I utilize Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM) to explore the process of how individuals discuss their mental health conditions or concerns with a friend. Using a CPM-guided thematic analysis of 17 interviews, I found that friends use various disclosure criteria (context, motivation, and risk-benefit ratio) and experience two boundary issues (implicit privacy markers and confidant privacy dilemmas) in their experiences of disclosing their mental health condition(s) or concern(s) with a friend.

Introduction

Friendship is one of the most ubiquitous relationships we experience as humans. McAdams (1997) notes that "the intimacy experienced by two 'chums' represents the pinnacle of human experience" (p. 157). Although the details of friendships may differ across universally, the idea of the friend seems to not be bound by culture (Adams & Plaut, 2003; Kron, 1993; Ting-Toomey, 1981). Despite the inevitable presence of friendship in our lives, our understanding of friendship processes remains scant.

What we do know about friendship is largely developmental and definitional. By adolescence, Rawlins (1992) describes that individuals understand the "voluntary, mutually accomplished, ongoing personal attachment" aspects of friendship (p. 59). By young adulthood, friends begin to influence our identity, career, dating life, community, and leisurely activities (p. 103). In fact, young people mention friendship as the most salient love they experience (Fehr & Russell, 1991). As such, friends are typically defined by equality, no blood relation or sexual intimacy, enjoyment, trustworthiness, and similar age ranges (Fehr, 1996). Despite the voluntary nature of a friendship, friends continually remain "a core aspect of our lives" (Fehr, 1996, p. 1), particularly regarding social support.

Despite the conceptualization of friendship as a unique close relationship, many studies do not exclusively examine the friendship relationship as opposed to that of familial relationships in mental health-related research. Many researchers use a single item measure to identify the role of friendship in mental health distress (e.g., "frequency friends help you out," Miller, Rote, & Keith, 2013, p. 7; "how many friends do you have who live nearby, say within an hour's drive," Taylor, 2015, p. 54) or place friendship alongside familial relationships (e.g., McLeod, 2015; Rüsch et al., 2014; Rüsch, Evans-Lacko, & Tornicroft, 2012). Although these studies include friends in their studies, friendship is often conceptualized in tandem with family relationships. Even though friends may fill similar relational roles as familial relationships (i.e., siblings), both types of relationships differ when considering various contextual variables (Carr & Wilder, 2016) such as mental health or illness, particularly when discussing social support.

Nonetheless, researchers continually describe social support as a key process inherent within the friendship relationship (Helsen, Vollebergh, & Meeus, 2000; Procidano & Heller, 1983; Walen & Lachman, 2000). Our friends fulfill various supportive needs through instrumental support (Courtois & Verdegem, 2014), emotional support (Crush, Arseneault, & Fisher, 2018), and relational support (Coyle, Malecki, & Emmons, 2019). Within these various supportive processes, friends are essential for our individual and relational well-being (Parks, 2011), particularly in approval-seeking behaviors (Zimmer-Gembeck, Hunter, & Pronk, 2007), mental health disclosure (Venetis, Chernichky-Karcher, & Gettings, 2018), and social strain (Walen & Lachmann, 2000). It is important to note that our friendships become more important as individuals age in seeking social support for chronic conditions (Heinze et al., 2015), particularly as young people move from dependence on parental figures to friends for health-related conditions (e.g., diabetes; Peters et al., 2011). This is particularly concerning as individuals now need to learn how to manage their stigmatized conditions (e.g., mental health condition(s) or concern(s)) without the supervision of a parental role.

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When considering the societal stigma regarding mental illness (Corrigan & Fong, 2014), the friendship relationship is an even more important area of inquiry. Vangelisti (2009) describes that social support can moderate the effects of mental health, and researchers note that individuals will discuss mental illness with their practitioners, romantic partners, and/or family members along with the effects of such disclosures (e.g., Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Ogolsky, 2013; Schulze & Angermeyer, 2003; Wilson, Gettings, Hall, & Pastor, 2015). However, our knowledge of the role of friends in health-related research is not well understood. We know that friends disclose their mental illness with other friends (Venetis et al., 2018), and individuals, particularly adolescents, may disclose their mental health to seek social support from friends (Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2005). A friend may be among the first interpersonal relationship to notice an individual suffering from a mental health condition like depression (Castonguay, Filer, & Pitts, 2016). However, we still do not fully understand why friends serve this supportive role.

Despite knowing that friends are a pivotal relationship for social support, friendship is unique from other interpersonal relationships, and individuals disclose and seek social support from friends regarding mental health, we do not yet fully understand how and why friends decide to disclose and the aftermath of disclosing mental health condition(s) or concern(s) with a friend. Thus, understanding friendship as a relational context is pivotal in understanding discussions surrounding mental health. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the decisions and processes regarding individuals disclosing their mental health condition(s) or concern(s) with their friends. In order to understand these disclosure processes, I consider communication privacy management theory (CPM) as the guiding theoretical framework for the study.

Communication Privacy Management Theory: Criteria and Boundary Processes

Researchers employing a CPM (Petronio, 2002, 2018; Petronio & Durham, 2015) perspective examined various health contexts in relation to disclosure. To date, social scientific researchers studied various health contexts such as cancer (Donovan-Kicken, Tollison, & Goins, 2011), chronic illness (Rafferty, Hutton, & Heller, 2017), eating disorders (Herrman & Tenzek, 2017), family health history (Hovick, Yamasaki, Burton-Chase, & Peterson, 2015), and miscarriage (Bute, Brann, & Hernandez, 2017). Researchers using a CPM lens recently found that when an individual cannot rely on family and/or friends for mental health-related social support, they often turn to other sources and feel distanced from these close relationships (Wilson et al., 2019). Withholding such disclosure from close relational others could exacerbate mental health symptomology due to less available social support resources (Köhler, Schäfer, Goebel, & Pedersen, 2018). Therefore, understanding how individuals make disclosure decisions on whether to discuss their mental health conditions or concerns, especially with friends, could illuminate the (in)effective strategies for private, mental health-related information management. Thus, I utilize CPM to explore conversational decisions around a stigmatized issue, mental health, with those sought as a support system, friends. To explore these relationships further, I consider both (a) criteria for disclosure and (b) the boundary management process.

Criteria for Disclosure

Petronio (2002) identified various criteria for disclosure including culture, gender, motivation, context, and a risk-benefit ratio. Although each criterion could have bearings on the disclosure processes of mental health between friends, I focused on context, motivations, and the risk-benefit ratio due to their prevalence in other invisible illness health-related studies (for context, see Bute, 2013; for motivations, see Cacioppo, Cacioppo, & Boomsma, 2014; for risks and benefits, see Romo, 2016). To follow, I specifically discuss (a) life circumstances in context, (b) loneliness and ambiguity in motivation, and (c) relational risks and benefits.

First, Petronio's (2002) criterion of context included life circumstances as one of three types of contexts in CPM. Although the other two contexts, trauma and therapy, may occur during an individual's mental health journey, discussing life circumstances aligned the best with the current study. Petronio cited Braithwaite's (1991) work on disabilities to explicate the life circumstance criterion in which there are two key theoretical aspects to consider for mental health: a waiting period and a need for information. Braithwaite identified that those affected by a disability want to be seen as a person first before identification of the disability. Thus, individuals affected by a mental health condition or concern may wait to gauge their friend's level of acceptance on a topic. Bute (2013), however, conceptualized life circumstances as those events that could prompt disclosure (e.g., divorce), and, therefore, this criterion needs more theoretical evidence for its catalyst nature (Petronio, 2010). An individual receiving a mental health diagnosis may want to seek support from a friend, serving as a catalyst for disclosure. However, these motivations may differ in various aspects.

Second, Petronio (2002) describes motivation in terms of reciprocity and liking and attraction. In describing liking and attraction, she describes a tenet of ambiguity and loneliness. Within this tension, she explains that those who are lonely may not disclose information unless they are able to move from tight control to moderate control of the information. In ambiguity, the driving motivation is wanting information or wanting the other to know information. Cacioppo et al. (2014) described that loneliness (stemming particularly from depression) may invite others into a social support role through physical symptoms (e.g., crying, disclosure). Because friendships are an important facet of social support, motivations for disclosure of mental health in seeking social support merits attention.

Finally, an analysis of a risk-benefit ratio may lead to (non)disclosure (Petronio, 2002). In relational development, Petronio (2002) associated risks with a threat to the growth or maintenance of the relationship while benefits enabled growth or maintenance of the relationship. In her study, Romo (2016) explored the risk-benefit ratio in discussing formerly overweight/obese individuals. Her participants cited discrimination and stigma as a risk that lead to concealment while inspiring others and building relationships as a catalyst for disclosure. Because those affected by a mental health condition or concern face stigma and discrimination as well (Butler, 2016; Kim & Stout, 2010), a risk-benefit ratio analysis is imperative to the understanding of disclosure of mental health conditions or concerns between friends. Given that individuals seek friends for social support in mental health-related disclosures, but we do not fully understand how these disclosure decisions are made, I propose the following research question:

> RQ1: What, if any, privacy criteria did the participants use regarding the disclosure of mental health condition(s) or concern(s) with a friend?

Boundary Processes

Petronio (2002, 2010, 2018; Petronio & Durham, 2015) explicated boundaries of private information including concepts such as boundary coordination and boundary turbulence. In exploring the disclosure of mental health between friends, it is important to understand (a) how individuals use boundary linkage rules and (b) experience facets of boundary turbulence due to the prevalence of research citing that disclosures of mental health occur with friends (Venetis et al., 2018), yet how such disclosures occur is not well known.

In understanding boundary linkage rules, Petronio (2002) identified various linkage rules when moving from a personal (self) boundary to a collective (shared with another) boundary. These rules involved selection of disclosure regarding confidant, timing, and topic. In confidant selection, individuals consider gender, age, levels of intimacy, status, and frequency prior to linking boundaries. Particularly, those in symmetrical status (peer) relationships as opposed to complimentary status (higher position) relationships are more likely to perform a boundary linkage (p. 93). Because individuals are likely to disclose private, mental health information to peers in support-seeking behaviors (Rickwood et al., 2005), friendship is a particularly notable relationship in considering boundary linkage to understand the processes of effective (non)disclosure.

While Petronio (2002) mainly discussed sex differences, researchers discovered various aspects of boundary linkage and disclosure surrounding topic selection, highlighting inappropriate disclosures as an aspect of boundary linkage. Shimkowski (2018) studied inappropriate disclosures of parents' marital issues and how this affects their children. She describes Petronio, Jones, and Morr's (2003) conceptualization of the interdependence dilemma in which family members experiencing privacy issues must navigate how the disclosure of information affects the self, family, and relationship. In her results, Shimkowski (2018) found that children's mental well-being and emotional regulation were indeed affected by inappropriate parental disclosure, thus showing that sensitive disclosures could negatively affect relationships. However, because we know that friendships are based on voluntariness, sensitive disclosures could have more of an effect on friendship relationships, which is imperative to understand because as children age, they tend to rely less on parents for support and more so on peer relationships (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Sensitive topic coordination could also result in thicker boundaries of which disclosure is more closely regulated (e.g., wa Ngula & Miller, 2010) to avoid failure of private information flow.

When the boundary coordination process fails, boundary turbulence, or the disturbance of the boundary process, occurs (Petronio, 2002). Petronio (2002) identified several potential manifestations of boundary coordination failure, including fuzzy boundaries and dissimilar boundary orientations. Fuzzy boundaries, or boundaries with ambiguous ownership, could occur in various situations, but Petronio (2010) noted that fuzzy boundaries often occurred when one individual in a romantic dyad kept information private that their partner believed to be information belonging to the couple. Knobloch et al.'s (2013) discussion included an analysis of relational uncertainty and depression when a military spouse returns home from war. Although spousal health may be perceived as a collective boundary, mental health can remain in an individual boundary because "face threats are salient" and uncertainty in the relationship can lead to "trouble talking openly about reintegration stressors" and

mental health issues (p. 762). Although uncertainty surrounding the unmapped territory of mental health in family relationships can lead to family and adjustment issues, such applications outside of the family domain remain scant. However, considering friendships when mental health conditions or concerns are the topic of conversation could identify how fuzzy boundaries manifest in this relational context, perhaps demonstrating why individuals may experience stigmatized reactions from their peers in these disclosures (Moses, 2010).

Petronio (2002) also described dissimilar boundary orientations, or what occurs when one partner is not flexible with a boundary change, as an indicator for boundary turbulence. She primarily cited family and cultural background as indicators for dissimilar boundary orientations (e.g., open boundaries vs. closed boundaries) in relationships. As Hesse and Rauscher (2013) described, "boundary turbulence is typically studied when a privacy rule is breached" (p. 95). They described that boundary turbulence could be a reason for nondisclosure if the other individual may not have a similar boundary orientation. This, again, can vary by the orientation of the perceived privacy of a topic. Although these scholars focused on emotional intelligence and alexithymia (inability to identify emotions), Hesse and Rauscher's (2013) study could help explain issues of the disclosure of mental health between friends in considering privacy regulation of such information.

Because friends are a unique system of support seeking behaviors and are inherently unique relationships based on their voluntary nature, the consideration of various aspects of disclosure between friends, particularly around stigmatized health issues such as mental health, becomes important particularly in noting friends' pivotal supportive roles in our lives. In order to explore how individuals with a mental health condition or concern choose whether to disclose with a friend, I pose the following research question:

> RQ2: How do individuals interact and navigate privacy boundaries with friends regarding mental health condition(s) or concern(s)?

Methodology

Situated in the interpretive paradigm in order to fully explore the first-hand, lived experiences of individuals' disclosure of mental health conditions with a friend (Baxter & Babbie, 2004), I used an in-depth, semi-structured interview guide[1] in order to allow for the interview to be adjusted and adapted for each individual participant and tell about their experience in the beset way (Lindlof & Taylor, 2018). I used CPM as a guiding theoretical framework for constructing parts of the interview guide to understand how individuals decide whether to disclose their information and the process of this disclosure, or the central phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2016). I also conducted a pilot interview with a scholarly colleague who fit the participant criteria to test the effectiveness and flow of the interview guide (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I made no changes to the interview protocol after conducting the pilot interview based on the feedback from my colleague, but conducting the pilot helped me assess my "performance of [interviewing] in real interview situations" (Barriball & While, 1994, p. 333). In order to participate in this study, the participants had to be at least 19 years old, self-reported they sought professional help for a mental health condition or concern, and discussed this topic with at least one friend.

Procedures

Prior to conducting interviews, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board. I used criterion sampling so that my participants were all at least 19 years old, self-reported they sought professional help for a mental health condition or concern and discussed the topic with at least one friend (Lindlof & Taylor, 2018). With the IRB's approval of the criterion sampling, I recruited participants through an online university research board, social media (Facebook & reddit), a communication listserv, and flyers on campus. To accurately fit within the criterion sampling, participants were required to self-report they sought professional assistance for their mental health condition or concern. Although on the denotative level *conditions* and *concerns* may differ, those merely seeking services for mental health often "have already experienced significant impairment, clinical symptoms, and stigma" (Henderson, Evans-Lacko, & Thornicroft, 2013, p. 777). Therefore, the participants were likely to have similar lived experiences for inclusion in this study.

I conducted both face-to-face interviews and interviews via telephone when participants were in another geographic location (Creswell, 2016). Interviews (N=17) ranged from approximately 18-62 minutes, lasted 35.07 minutes on average, and resulted in 156 pages of double-spaced transcripts. In all instances, participants received and agreed to an informed consent prior to participating in the interview. More females (n=13) than males (n=4) participated, and most were Caucasian (n=14) with one participant identifying as Hispanic-Caucasian, one

[1] Contact the corresponding author for the full interview guide.

identifying as Hispanic, and one identifying as Asian-American. Participants enrolled in a communication studies course were able to receive compensation in the form of research credit with their instructor's approval. Participants ranged in age from 19-47 (*M*=22.125) and most were from the Midwestern United States (n=15), one from the West Coast, and one from the East Coast. Participants were either in college (n=11), in graduate school (n=4), or graduated from college with a bachelor's degree (n=2). Participants disclosed a variety of mental health conditions: anxiety (n=12), depression (n=10), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (n=1), bipolar disorder II (n=1), borderline personality disorder (n=1), and eating disorder (n=1). Some participants reported multiple mental health conditions, which is common as many individuals with mental health conditions experience comorbidities, meaning that multiple conditions often exist simultaneously in one individual (Prince et al., 2007).

Data Analysis

To understand participant experiences of mental health disclosure with a friend through a CPM lens, I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis. Throughout my analysis, I used CPM as a sensitizing theoretical framework (Bowen, 2006), although I did not use CPM-related terms as a priori categories for thematic development. In this way, I balanced the emic (allowing the participants' experiences to speak for themselves) with the etic (evaluation of these experiences through previous categories or theories) to best make sense of the phenomenon under inquiry (Lindlof & Taylor, 2018). First, to familiarize myself with the data, I listened to and transcribed each interview. Second, I listened to the interviews while reading over transcriptions to ensure accuracy of the participant responses. Third, I generated initial codes through reading through the transcripts and identifying codes I found theoretically satisfying as they related to the purpose of this project. To reflect participant insights, experiences, and voices, I identified those exemplars that explicated general themes and fit my research question**s** in the results below.

Because I conceptualized the research questions and interview guide utilizing a CPM theoretical framework, I used CPM as a sensitizing framework in identifying themes for the research questions (Bowen, 2006). In identifying these themes, I incorporated Owen's (1984) criteria for inclusion as a theme: recurrence (similar findings across the data); repetition (similar words/phrases across the data); and forcefulness (participant emphasis during the interviews). To fully incorporate this method, I first looked for themes that reflected participant decisions in deciding whether to disclose their mental health with a friend. Second, I identified themes that embodied experiences of navigating privacy boundaries regarding mental health disclosure with a friend. In this step, I first analyzed a subset of the data (n=8) to identify initial theoretical themes and concepts. I analyzed the remaining data (n=9) with these themes in mind while remaining open to new ideas and insights. Through my analysis of the additional transcripts, I found no new themes demonstrating that I reached theoretical saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lindlof & Taylor, 2018).

After identifying themes, I undertook a data conference (Braithwaite, Allen, & Moore, 2017), a term developed for defending the interpretive themes I found throughout the data. To conduct this conference, I presented my analysis to scholars in a doctorate-level interpersonal communication course discussing how these themes worked with one another, and I provided justification for their inclusion in this study. After completion of this preliminary analysis, I conducted member checks with participants to further validate the findings of the study (Creswell, 2009), of which participants did not identify any new data or conceptual conflicts.

Results

In my analysis, I found that participants used three of Petronio's (2002) disclosure criteria (context, motivation, risk-benefit ratio) and demonstrated two aspects of boundary processes (privacy markers, confidant privacy dilemmas). I will first discuss the disclosure criteria and then the boundary processes.

Contextual Criterion: *We Were There for Each Other*

Petronio (2002) classified life circumstances, or the decision to disclose after an event in life categorized by a waiting period and a need for information, as one of the categories for the contextual criterion. Every participant noted that they did not immediately open-up to their friend about their mental health. Some participants waited until their own friends talked about mental health. Barney[2], a 19-year old man, said that "we were both going through a rough patch in high school, and were both just there for each other" in which he found out his friend had ADHD,

[2] I assigned participants a pseudonym to maintain participant confidentiality.

and he reciprocated the same information to his friend (2: 40-42[3]). Other participants decided to wait due to uncertainty regarding the friendship. For example, Josie, a 20-year-old woman, described:

> I kept that [support animal] a secret a lot because I didn't want them to ask me why I needed it and all of the questions behind it. So, I kept that to myself just because these were brand new friends, and I didn't want to be like…I just didn't want to tell them that I had a mental health [condition], just in case they started treating me differently. (140-143)

The participants demonstrated the life circumstances criterion because they were uncertain about how their friends would react. The participants required a fundamental context of trust in the friendship before disclosing their mental health condition or concern. Once the participants waited and established their individual threshold of trust, they could identify their motivation for disclosure.

Motivational Criterion: *I'm Here for You*

Participants demonstrated the motivational criterion for disclosure, particularly in terms of support-seeking. While Petronio (2002) noted that individuals are motivated to disclose to alleviate ambiguity through information-seeking disclosure, participants described this criterion more as a method to seek emotional support. In fact, Josie embodied this theme as she said:

> I would say for me, when I told one of my friends from back home, and they handled the situation well, responding like, "I'm here for you," you know, "I understand what you're going through even though I might not have the illness." But she [this other friend] kind of just told me that, you know, I should go get help. That there were options for me, which I knew that. But she didn't really seem to offer her support. It was kind of just shoving me off and you should go get some help. (1: 212-218)

Additionally, Kevin, a 28-year-old man, described how "it was interesting to have someone affirm what I had been going through—that it sucked. There was something I could do about it, and it wasn't wholly my fault that I was stuck in the bits where I was stuck" (7: 111-113)

Through these exemplars, we hear how participants disclosed not because they wanted information about mental health, but rather to receive emotional support from a friend. In fact, when participants received informational support, they viewed this as inappropriate or dissatisfying information to receive. Participants were already aware of many of the available resources, and they wanted their friend to support them emotionally. However, participants did not make the decision to disclose based only off life circumstances and motivations, they included analysis of the situation as well.

Risk-Benefit Analysis: *Will They Tell Someone How I'm Feeling?*

Participants echoed Petronio's (2002) risk-benefit analysis criterion considering relational development as the primary factor for disclosure. Once participants did disclose, however, every participant identified *relief* as the primary emotion that they felt post-disclosure, showing a sense of satisfaction that they disclosed this private information with a friend. Karen, a 19-year-old woman, described how "after getting to know her, I knew that I could trust her. I knew that she wasn't going to judge me. I knew that I could tell her anything, and she would be there for me" (4: 52-53). Kevin explicated further:

> I knew that he was a good friend, and I knew that anything I told him would be confidential. That's the one thing that comes to sharing things like [mental health] is, like, do I think they will go and tell someone? Will they tell someone how I'm feeling? To just keep that within my smaller circle of friends is ideal (7: 90-93).

As reflected from life circumstances, participants demonstrated a need for trust in deciding to disclose. While Karen's exemplar illustrated a similar concern as Josie as they did not want judgement, Kevin showed a different concern as he did not want his friend to tell other individuals. Kevin's statement reflects most of the participants' concerns in this study, implying that an individual disclosing mental health information requires a level of trust and boundary coordination between friends. These exemplars demonstrated that the risk of stigma would be outweighed by the benefit of relief and social support only if participants felt a sense of trust in the friendship.

[3] Numbers after quotations reflect interview number and transcript line numbers.

Boundary Ownership Rules: *It Was Just Kind of Implied*

Petronio (2002) described the process of boundary ownership rules as one in which the interactants create rules to form the boundaries of the information. One such category of boundary ownership rules particularly salient in the data was privacy markers, or the verbal or nonverbal communication about what one can or cannot do with the information. Up until this point, the participants demonstrated cautious disclosure to friends about their mental health, considering various criteria to disclose or withhold the information.

Despite this apprehensive disclosure, most of the participants did not explicitly create boundaries. Alexa, a 47-year-old woman, summarized this experience best when she said, "I never specifically said, 'Don't tell anyone,' but I guess it was just kind of implied as we were both in the same boat" (5: 111-112). Edgar, a 30-year-old male, also described that "I didn't tell him what he could or couldn't do with the information. I knew I could trust him, and I wouldn't have told him if I knew he was going to spread it" (7: 65-66). Janet, a 21-year-old woman, also did not provide privacy markers, but hers was intentional in that "I'm kind of an open book in that way. Sharing my struggles may help someone else. If [my friend] were to tell someone else, it may help them realize they are not alone, too. I only saw it doing good" (6: 72-73).

While it seemed that participants understood the implications from the disclosure criteria when considering mental health a sensitive issue to disclose with a friend, the lack of privacy markers would initially contradict this risk due to the fluidity of privacy boundaries participants created without these markers. However, because participants based the disclosure on strict criteria built around trust, they perceived their relationship with their friend to already have boundaries surrounding private and sensitive information. The participants did not perceive a need to necessarily further define the boundaries of the information between friends. The participants did not expect there to be a privacy dilemma upon disclosing the information.

Confidant Privacy Dilemmas: *They Needed Support as Well*

Not all boundary coordination went smoothly, and Petronio (2002) explained that sometimes boundaries become turbulent. Although the participants did not demonstrate fuzzy boundaries and dissimilar boundary coordination as prominent themes, the participants embodied one aspect of boundary turbulence: confidant privacy dilemmas. Petronio described confidant privacy dilemmas as the circumstances following a sensitive disclosure in which the confidant, or receiver of the information, is unsure how to handle the situation, and the confidant may need further assistance outside of their abilities in handling the disclosure. Petronio identified two paths that confidants may take when faced with a confidant privacy dilemma: the risky path (talking directly with the discloser) or the cautious path (avoiding the issue entirely). However, the participants did not demonstrate either path, yet described a confidant privacy dilemma. For example, Josie described:

> I mean, I was mad [that she told someone without asking me], but then I understood because she was just looking out for me and it wasn't like she just told anyone, she told one of my close friends that I didn't tell. But, I also didn't feel like I was ready to tell her, specifically. (1: 233-235)

Kyle, a 22-year-old man, also described:

> She told her parents because she needed someone to talk to about it. I was okay with it because I knew she needed support as well because I was going through a lot. It worked well for me in the long run, but, yeah. (8: 214-217)

The participants' confidants did not resolve the confidant privacy dilemma with the initial discloser as Petronio's (2002) paths would suggest. Rather, participants disclosed with a third party to either find further assistance for the friend in need or find a therapeutic source for themselves. Although some participants experienced initial frustration after this privacy dilemma, participants still expressed satisfaction with their friends' actions after reflecting on the purpose of enacting upon the confidant privacy dilemma.

Discussion

My purpose in this study was to understand how persons who experience a mental health condition(s) or concern(s) interact and navigate privacy boundaries with friends regarding their mental health conditions or concerns. Specifically, I explored how friends used criteria for disclosure as described by Petronio (2002) in determining the conditions for which to disclose their mental health condition or concern with a friend. Additionally, I explored the (absence of) boundary coordination and turbulence between friends' disclosure about mental health

conditions or concerns. I chose to focus on the friendship relationship because friends are unique from other relationships through their voluntary nature while also serving as someone for which to provide social support. In the following section, I provide (a) a summary of the findings, (b) implications of the findings, (c) limitations of the study, and (d) future directions for research.

Summary of Findings

Participants exemplified both disclosure criteria and (a lack of) boundary coordination. In discussing disclosure criteria, the participants demonstrated context, motivation, and a risk-benefit analysis. Contrary to previous research on CPM and health, participants did not show strong tendencies for boundary linkage, fuzzy boundaries, and dissimilar boundary orientation. Rather, when discussing the boundary coordination process, participants embodied (the absence of) privacy markers and confidant privacy dilemmas.

Regarding the criteria, participants reported a waiting period, seeking emotional support, and analyzing risks and benefits. Previous research would suggest that invisible illness disclosures encapsulate these criteria, but the participants in this study demonstrated alternative narratives for conceptualizing these criteria for disclosure. With the waiting period, although it could be assumed that participants wanted recognition as people first like in Braithwaite's (1991) study, the participants focused on the requirement to build trust prior to disclosure. Seeking emotional support and discounting the need for information adds further insight into Petronio's (2002) conceptualization of the motivational criterion. The participants showed that reducing ambiguity could come from removing the feelings of loneliness and isolation often experienced by those affected by mental health condition(s) or concern(s) (Cornwell & Waite, 2009) rather than seeking more information to reduce ambiguity. In considering risks and benefits, this criterion worked in tandem with context and motivations as participants waited until they thought their friend would not share the disclosure with others and feel emotionally supported. Although they acknowledged such disclosure was risky, the participants' follow-up actions post-disclosure did not indicate a need for strict boundary coordination.

Petronio (2002) described that boundary linkage occurs more often in peer relationships. Previous researchers also described that fuzzy boundaries and dissimilar boundary orientation occurs often in health-related privacy situations between relational partners (Knobloch et al., 2013; Knobloch, Sharabi, Delaney, & Suranne, 2016; Petronio, 2010). However, I found very little, if any, evidence in support of this claim when considering the friendship relationship both in the literature and this study. Rather, when discussing boundary coordination, the participants mostly exemplified an absence of privacy markers, which could be counterintuitive in the sense that individuals may experience stigmatization from peers when disclosing mental health information (Moses, 2010). In terms of boundary turbulence, participants described instances of confidant privacy dilemmas rather than fuzzy boundaries or dissimilar boundary orientation, and the dilemmas they reported did not fit within Petronio's (2002) predetermined categories.

Taken together, the participants in this study demonstrated the unique nature of navigating privacy with a friend regarding mental health disclosure. The participants' experiences give important conclusions when considering mental health and friends through a CPM lens. I provide implications of the results to show the consequences of such disclosures.

Implications of Findings

First, the participants' experiences allow for theoretical extension of CPM in considering disclosure criteria for disclosing mental health with a friend. In first analyzing each criterion separately, the participants embodied an innovative demonstration of these criteria. First, the participants provided more insight into the contextual criterion, particularly in discussion of life circumstance. Petronio (2002) cited Braithwaite's (1991) work as the exemplar of life circumstances through visible disability. The participants described similar experiences to what Braithwaite mentioned in her work, such as a waiting period to disclose the information. What the participants of this study add, though, is a notion of similarity, meaning that participants were more likely to disclose when they knew their friend also had a mental health condition or concern. This ties in with Bute's (2013) finding that the life circumstance criterion can be influenced by social factors and that friends typically choose friends who are similar (Burleson, Samter, & Lucchetti, 1992). This worked into the motivation criterion because friends disclosed to seek emotional support with those whom relational trust or similar situations had been established. These results coincide with the risk-benefit analysis in that participants waited to disclose until they could either trust the friend or identify that the friend had a similar situation.

It may not be surprising that these participants experienced a phenomenon of trust across criteria, especially in the framing of invisible illness. As Hall & Miller-Ott (2019) found in their investigation of women affected by fibromyalgia in the workplace, their analysis of Petronio's (2002) criteria for disclosure compounded as well

through notions of stigma and gender. In similarly assessing commonalities across disclosure criteria, although I identified various criteria in the data, it became clear that the context, motivation, and risk-benefit ratio were all tied together through some aspect of trust, which is not surprising given the voluntary nature of the friendship relationship (Fehr, 1996). The notion that these criteria did not exist in isolation expands upon Petronio's (2010) later conceptualization of disclosure criteria.

Petronio (2010) added the term *critical incident catalyst* to describe what causes individuals to experience privacy boundary shifts, specifically citing unexpected health demands as an example. Although Petronio focused on family relationships, my study of the friendship relationship and mental health draws similar implications. Petronio's analysis of stigmatized health disclosures (e.g., HIV/AIDS) provided further implications for the participants in this study. For example, those affected by HIV/AIDS in a family are likely to target specific others and not tell the whole family based on the circumstance, need for support, and the targeted disclosure made the discussion less risky as opposed to the whole family. Similarly, participants in this study were likely to disclose their mental health condition(s) or concern(s) based on the circumstance of the friendship (i.e., trust and similar experience), need for emotional support, and disclosing to a certain friend, not an entire friend group. As the participants embodied the criteria working in tandem as a catalyst from a critical incident, the initially separate disclosure criteria play out as various decisions and experiences under one enacted experience of disclosure in stigmatized health-related information. However, where Petronio describes the fear of boundary-leakage, or unwanted sharing of private information, the participants of this study were much less stringent about privacy markers in discussing their mental health with a friend.

Second, Petronio's (2002) discussion of privacy markers would lead one to expect that sensitive, private information would have explicit rules such as, "Don't tell anyone about my mental health condition(s) or concern(s)." Petronio (2010) also described that coordinated ownership rules between couples can lead to improved mental and relational health outcomes. One may also expect that individuals would create more strict coordination due to the voluntary nature of the friendship relationship. However, despite the stigmatized nature of mental health conditions or concerns in the friendship relationship, the participants of this study did not use explicit privacy markers. Most participants explicated that they trusted the friend or that previous conversations with the friend on sensitive topics remained confidential, so explicit privacy markers were unnecessary. Other participants did not provide explicit privacy markers because they wanted their lived experience to help others. This result is important because it shows that discussing a mental health condition(s) or concern(s) with a friend provides a unique context for discussing this stigmatized health topic. Because of the strict disclosure criteria (circumstance, motivation, and risk-benefit analysis), individuals did not feel the need to further limit the sharing of information through privacy markers, citing that these were implicit boundaries based on the nature of the friendship.

Another surprising aspect of the data regarding privacy markers was the actual length of participant responses. As previously discussed, when a topic such as mental health is on the table, one would expect strict privacy markers surrounding the conversation. Participants, however, expressed that they did not create such boundaries. Furthermore, explanations for the lack of boundaries was often short in length and duration during the interview. Typically, qualitative researchers provide lengthy and numerous exemplars to demonstrate a theme (Suter, 2009). However, the exemplars provided throughout the results section reflected these parts of the data as most participants had similar short exemplary responses for the lack of strict privacy markers. This further demonstrates that privacy markers were not of cognitive concern for participants during the disclosure of the private information. However, this may be corroborated by the strict criteria participants created when contemplating disclosure of the private information. Once an individual identified their friend as trustworthy, non-judgmental, and supportive, concerns of further dissemination of private information were outweighed by the perceived benefits of disclosing their mental health information with their friend. However, the results showed that some participants' confidants violated the implicit privacy rules.

Thus, in considering Petronio's (2002) conceptualization of confidant privacy dilemmas, there is little surprise that the participants in this study provided experiences of confidant privacy dilemmas. In her work, Petronio detailed the experiences of a family member receiving information about an uncle's addiction as burdensome. However, when discussing mental health with a friend, the participants in this study described that their confidants followed neither path (risky nor cautious) in their dilemma outlined by Petronio. However, Petronio (2010) discussed these dilemmas in that family members may disclose private health information to others to achieve a better health outcome, but this may hinder the relationship with the discloser. Her description of this dilemma fits better with the participants of this study as they discussed their confidants disclosing to others to either find more support for the discloser or for the confidant themselves. Thus, a third path, *the broken path*, may be a necessary addition to the theory to describe the violated boundaries in the best interest of both/either the discloser and the confidant.

All-in-all, the lived experiences of those affected by a mental health condition(s) or concern(s) and discussing this information with a friend show unique contributions to research on privacy and health. The participants from this study not only demonstrated many of Petronio's (2002, 2010) concepts and ideas, but extended them into better understanding private information processes surrounding mental health disclosure with a friend. Despite the theoretical and relational contributions of this piece, I consider the limitations and future directions for research on mental health and friendship.

Limitations and Future Research

In addressing the limitations of my data, my participants are not inherently diverse. My participants were mostly female, Caucasian, and between the ages of 19-30, with one above that age range. All participants were also college educated to some extent. Due to this homogenous sample, the lived experiences of these participants cannot represent the breadth of voices of those with similar experiences. Thus, the results should be interpreted within the context of this study. Although my recruitment was not limited to college educated, Caucasian individuals, researchers should expand their recruitment calls beyond college study websites, discipline listervs, and personal social networks to achieve a more representative sample.

Second, only participants currently enrolled at the university of study were compensated for their participation in the form of extra credit. The other participants did not receive compensation for their participation. Although participants were aware of this in the recruitment and informed consent, researchers in the future should provide some level of compensation for the participants in the study to ensure an equitable experience and provide incentive for others to overcome barriers (Meth, 2017), particularly in health-related studies (Grady, n.d.).

Third, researchers should further consider the role of the confidant in receiving sensitive health-related information. Petronio (2002) set up the reluctant confidant for future research because reluctant confidants occur frequently in health-related disclosures. The participants in this study demonstrated that confidants experience privacy dilemmas when receiving information about a friends' mental health. One participant even noted that there may be a psychological contagion, or effect that comes from receiving the information, and/or a need to disclose this information to alleviate the burden of withholding the information. Thus, exploring how a confidant feels when receiving information would provide a perspective further building on the various roles that friends may fill as confidants (McBride & Bergen, 2008).

Fourth, exploring the phenomenon of mental health disclosure between friends is not merely a face-to-face disclosure process. In an increasingly digital age, it is pivotal that scholars replicate studies like mine in a computer-mediated context. Previous scholars noted that miscommunication between friends occurs over texting and there should be clear expectations for what is appropriate to text and what is inappropriate to text (Kelly & Miller-Ott, 2018). Thus, future researchers should consider the role of texting and other forms of mediated disclosure in their inquiries about disclosure of mental health condition(s) or concern(s) between friends.

Finally, future researchers should continue to explore the nature of a friendship relationship and how that relates to other close relationships. As seen in the warrant of this study, much of the understanding of health-related disclosures comes from talking with practitioners, romantic partners, and/or family members despite friendship being one of the relationships used for social support. One such question these researchers could answer would be why family members may create more stringent privacy boundaries through privacy markers regarding stigmatized health issues, as seen in Petronio (2010), than friends.

Overall, I provided an analysis of how individuals navigate privacy boundaries in disclosures surrounding mental health with their friends. Although this study is not without its limitations, I provided theoretical extension based on participants' lived experiences of mental health disclosure with a non-family member. The participants in this study provided the field with a basic understanding of how boundary processes manifest between friends discussing a mental health condition(s) or concern(s).

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Twitter Users' Sense of Empowerment and Communicative Behavior: An Examination of the #Burkini Conversations on Twitter

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Communication scholars have invested considerable attention in examining the connection between social media and political participation. However, Twitter users' sense of empowerment and communicative behavior about collective discontent have received limited scholarly scrutiny. This study employed Habermas's theory of the public sphere and Bandura's concept of self-efficacy. Content analysis of Twitter messages revealed that Twitter users predominately used personal commentary, criticism, and media surveillance to communicate about the Burkini ban. This study revealed that tweets predominately reflected Twitter users' sense of autonomy. Communicative behavior on Twitter about the #burkini highlights that global networked publics used Twitter for deliberation and contestation of public policy issues. Theoretical and practical implications of the research findings are discussed.

Introduction

Europe faced a soaring refugee crisis and the growing influence of populist political rhetoric that considers new asylum seekers to be a threat to security, culture, and stability. In 2015, more than 1.3 million refugees applied for asylum in European countries (Connor, 2016). The majority of refugees cross the Aegean Sea to reach Europe. More than 3,770 people died or were reported missing while attempting this crossing (UNHCR, 2015). The majority of the refugees come from war-torn countries like Syria (49%), Afghanistan (25%), and Iraq (15%) (UNHCR, 2016). With the rising tide of asylum seekers, the populist rhetoric that started to resurface in European public discourse portrayed the new refugees as violent and a threat to national sovereignty (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2016). Since the refugees come mainly from Muslim countries, the racialization of the refugee crisis has spawned a climate of Islamophobia in Europe.

Amid the growing political tensions spawned by the refugee crisis, more than 30 French cities have imposed bans on wearing the burkini—a garment worn in public by Muslim women that covers the entire body except for the face, hands, and feet (Bittermann, McKenzie, & Shoichet, 2016). On August 23, 2016, the *Guardian*, a British newspaper, reported that armed police confronted a Muslim woman resting on a beach and made her remove her burkini. They fined the woman on the grounds of not wearing "an outfit respecting good morals and secularism" (Quinn, 2016). A report of this sparked heated public discussion, both in France and across the globe about the burkini ban and the French idea of secularism (McKenzie, 2016). Human rights organizations criticized the French ban, arguing that such an act discriminated against people based on their faith and strengthened the climate of Islamophobia. Eventually, this public discussion created a social media buzz, with people sharing their opinions on the burkini ban. The hashtag #Burkini became a trending topic on Twitter after the *Guardian* broke the story. The burkini ban resurrected the French ban on the burqa and headscarves that Muslim women wear. Social media users as networked publics engaged their power to express collective discontent and resist the dominant discourse that marginalized the experiences of women in the name of national security and secular ideology.

Communication scholars have invested considerable attention in examining the connection between social media and political participation. Such studies mostly investigated online information-seeking behavior, political efficacy, second screening, news consumption, political persuasion, and political participation (Barnidge, Gil de Zúñiga, & Diehl, 2017; Gil de Zúñiga, Garcia-Perdomo, &

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McGregor, 2015; Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). For example, Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela (2012) used a survey to reveal the relation between political knowledge, efficacy, social capital, and political participation. Barnidge, Gil de Zúñiga, and Diehl (2017) investigated second screening and political persuasion on social media. These studies predominately used survey to examine user behavior. This line of inquiry contributed significantly to our understanding of social media and political expression. However, we have limited knowledge about social media users' sense of empowerment and their communicative behavior about collective discontent. Such understanding contributes to social media studies by highlighting how global networked publics use social media to combat discrimination to foster social change.

This present study fills this gap by examining users' behavior on social media by examining their Twitter messages. Employing a quantitative content analysis, this study analyzed 4,560 Twitter messages. The purpose was to investigate users' communication behavior about the burkini ban on Twitter. More importantly, this study examines users' sense of empowerment on Twitter about collective discontent.

Literature Review

Public Sphere, Networked Publics, and Collective Discontent

The idea of a public sphere refers to a discursive space for deliberation and rational exchange of ideas. Habermas (1991) posited that the bourgeois public sphere emerged in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. Citizens gathered in coffee houses and salons to debate and express opinions connected to the common interests of society. Participation in a public sphere was egalitarian and aspired to generate discursive agreement on issues related to public concerns. Scholars argued that the public sphere fosters democratic engagement to formulate political will among citizens, which is crucial for democracy (Dahlgren, 2005; Maireder & Schlögl, 2014). Scholarly interest in social media rejuvenates discussion on democracy and networked publics.

Democratic plurality on social media is closely connected to the active citizenship model of networked publics. The idea of networked publics signals a seismic conceptual shift from mass media-centric publics to networked architecture and affordance-based publics (Benkler, 2006). Networked publics use the discursive space of social media to challenge dominant narratives. Boyd (2007, 2011) argued that digital communication technologies foster the formation of networked publics. In her latter study, she posited networked publics are "simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice" (p. 39). Such conceptualization of networked publics focuses on the technological affordances of social media and how citizens use such platforms for deliberation and contestation. Ito (2008) highlighted the intersections of social, cultural, and political structures that influence the performance of networked publics. In Ito's (2008) formulation, networked publics are engaged citizens who aspire to be "reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors, engaging in shared culture and knowledge through discourse and social exchange as well as through acts of media reception" (p. 3). At the core of the idea of networked publics is the empowered practice of citizenship anchored in the networked affordances of digital media (Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013; Becker & Copeland, 2016; Maireder & Schlögl, 2014). Empowered citizens often use social media to express their dissent to dominant narratives and voice their concerns about collective discontent.

Studies have illuminated how citizens and activists used social media for expressing collective discontent (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Bennett and Segerberg (2013) argued that social media users employed the communicative affordances of digital communication platforms to protest against social injustice, networking with other users, and making inquiries (Men & Tsai, 2012, 2013; Smith, Men, & Al-Sinan, 2015). Previous studies (Bimber et al., 2012; Bimber, 2017; Castells, 2011; Copeland, Hasell, & Bimber, 2016; Smith, 2010) revealed that citizens use digital media to participate in contentious communication, express their opinions, and criticize dominant practices. Gerbaudo (2012) highlighted how activists exploited the interactivity and networked features of social media to mobilize people for collective action. However, Morozov (2011)

argued that digital communication technologies foster passivity and people are more inclined to engage in slacktivism rather than aspire to be involved directly in collective dissent. Keating and Melis (2017) revealed that a significant proportion of social media users never use such platforms to express an opinion about social injustice.

Nagle (2017) argued the techno-utopia that was anchored in the trust of the wisdom of crowds and user-generated content is being replaced by the implosion of racist, sexist, white supremacist, and violent ideology on social media that signal a bleak reality. The author articulated the way the alt-right, 4chan, and extremist ideology have used social media to openly express hostility toward mainstream cultural sensibilities toward feminism, racial equality, identity politics, and political correctness. Scholars posited that social and online media have become a breeding ground for right-wing populist discourse that invites racial, social, and political tensions to mold the society based on the white-conservative ideology (Haider, 2018; Lilla, 2018). Lilla (2018) stated that the Facebook model of political engagement puts a premium on the self-centric practices rather engage in creating a common history. Such sense of engagement prompted individual-centric and conservative leaning ideology to flourish and garner prominence.

The scholarly disagreement dictates further examination of the communicative behavior of networked publics about collective dissent. This study fills the research gap by examining Twitter users' communicative behavior about the burkini ban. For this study, user posts on Twitter were categorized as personal commentary, media surveillance, expressing criticism, networking, call for action, and inquiries. Such categorization is consistent with previous studies on social media and collective discontent (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Men & Tsai, 2012, 2013; Smith et al., 2015). This study addresses the following research question:

> RQ 1: How do global networked publics use Twitter to communicate about the burkini ban in France?

Social Cognitive Theory, Empowerment, and Self-Efficacy

Social cognitive theory is anchored in the idea of human agency that highlights our capacity to reformulate social environment, adapt with social changes, and reflect on our experiences to achieve desired outcomes (Bandura, 1977, 1986; 2001; 2002; Chiles & Zorn, 1995; Smith et al., 2015; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Bandura (2001) argued that we intentionally make choices about our actions, set goals to achieve desired outcomes, and adapt or regulate our actions based on the changes in our lived experiences. As social agents, we do not just respond to external stimuli; instead, we intentionally and proactively engage with social circumstances and formulate our course of action (Bandura, 2001; 2002). Scholars posited that our sense of mastery and assertiveness are shaped by our direct and observational experiences (Bandura, 2001; 2002; Chung & Park, 2019; Stefanone, Yue, & Toh, 2019). Such a sense of self-mastery and assertiveness is anchored in our sense of empowerment.

Empowerment refers to the increased sense of mastery, control, self-determination, and assertiveness in individuals' lived experiences to produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Chiles & Zorn, 1995; Smith et al., 2015; Wood & Bandura, 1989). In the context of social media, empowerment is reflected in the networked publics' capacity to contribute online and seek influence in social change initiatives (Smith & Taylor, 2017; Voorveld, Niejens, & Smit, 2010). Networked publics can exert influence on social media by taking part in conversations, contributing to social change initiatives, sharing information about personal beliefs, and networking with like-minded individuals.

Users' sense of empowerment is closely linked to Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy. The idea of self-efficacy refers to the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1977, p. 3). Chiles and Zorn (1995) argued that self-efficacy is connected to an individual's sense of self-belief that he or she can perform required tasks with desirable outcomes. Scholars identified three crucial components of self-efficacy: enactive attainment or mastery experience, vicarious experience, and sense of autonomy (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Chiles & Zorn, 1995; Smith et al., 2015; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012).

Enactive efficacy refers to individuals' personal experiences of using generative skills to tackle real-life challenges. Scholars argued that enactive attainment is linked to our experience of successfully performing tasks or actions with desired outcomes. Such a sense of proficiency is crucial for future self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Recine, Werner, & Recine, 2009; Resnick, 2003, Smith et al., 2015). Bandura (1997) posited that enactive efficacy is connected to our "knowledge of the rules and strategies for constructing effective courses of behavior" and such perceived mastery "provides people with the tools to manage the demands of their everyday life" (p. 80). Chiles and Zorn (1995) defined enactive attainment as "the experience of mastery of a task that creates a feeling of confidence" (p. 4). Scholars (Smith et al., 2015; Tsang, Hui, & Law, 2012) revealed that our knowledge of self-mastery is anchored in our earlier experience of success which motivates us to exert influence through actions. In the context of social media, networked publics' sense of enactive attainment or self-knowledge is a crucial factor in psychological empowerment (Smith et al., 2015; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). Use of social media is conducive to enactive attainment as it demonstrates our "perception of connectedness, mastery and control, and ability to effect change" (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012, p. 2). Enactive attainment fosters user participation on social media through their expressions like commenting on social injustice and expressing criticism (Smith et al., 2015; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012).

Scholars argued that self-mastery or confidence is not the only source of empowerment (Bandura, 1977; Recine et al., 2009; Resnick, 2003; Smith et al., 2015). We are inspired or feel empowered to see success in others who have capabilities similar to ours. Such sense of self-efficacy is known as vicarious experience (Smith et al., 2015). Bandura (1977) argued that when we see others performing successful actions that generate an expectation of future success, we intensify our efforts to reach desired outcomes. Bandura posited "seeing or visualizing people similar to oneself perform successfully typically raises efficacy beliefs in observers" (p. 87). In the context of social media, the networked public can model the experiences of others who have successfully used social media to exert their influence in social change (Smith et al., 2015).

Networked publics often exercise their sense of self-autonomy to manage their online persona that are directly linked to their political expression (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014; Papacharissi, 2011, 2012). Publics employ their agency on social media to create, curate, and circulate messages to project their personalities. Furthermore, people often use digital platforms to connect and maintain relationships with myriad audiences in multiple social realms. Such actions require maintaining different aspects of social media users' personalities. Strategic self-representation in online platforms demands users' sense of self-autonomy (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014; Papacharissi, 2011, 2012). Therefore, scholars linked users' sense of self-autonomy to their online expression (Smith et al., 2015; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). For example, Stavrositu and Sundar (2012) investigated the connection between blogging and empowerment and found that users' sense of agency or autonomy is directly connected to empowerment. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2015) posited that social media affordances like interactivity and user-generated content nurture a sense of autonomy that exhibits communication power of networked publics.

For this study, users' sense of empowerment is categorized as enactive attainment, vicarious experience, and sense of autonomy. This study examines tweets to investigate users' sense of empowerment about the burkini ban and poses the following question:

> RQ2: How do global networked publics express their sense of empowerment through their Twitter messages about the burkini ban in France?

Methodology

Quantitative Content Analysis

This study employed content analysis to examine the Twitter discussion on the burkini ban. Data were collected after the *Guardian* reported the burkini ban incident on August 23, 2016. For this study, 98,811 tweets on the burkini ban were collected, using NodeXL, a social network analysis and data visualization software for social media data. Data were collected from August 23, 2016, to August 31,

2016. The rationale for selecting August 23, 2016, as a starting point of data collection is that #Burkini emerged as a trending topic on Twitter after the *Guardian* broke the story on August 23, 2016. The endpoint of data collection was August 31, 2016, because the worldwide online discussion on burkini bans significantly diminished after August 31, 2016 (Google Trends, 2016).

The researchers removed any non-English tweets and then used random sampling to select 4,560 Twitter messages. This procedure is similar to those used in earlier studies on social media (Saxton, Niyirora, & Guo & Waters, 2015; Smith et al., 2015). For this research, we employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches to develop codes. We explored scholarly literature to determine the existing constructs for empowerment, communicative behavior, and gender; and employed qualitative grounded theoretical approach to identify new codes. The purpose of using a mix of deductive and inductive approaches is to identify existing constructs that were validated by scholarly research and to explore unique practices that had not mentioned by the literature (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Mazid, 2019). This process is grounded in the scholastic practices of social science research (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2017). We developed a total of ten codes through the process that reflect the constructs of empowerment, communicative behavior, and gender. The majority of the codes (eight codes) were similar to Smith et al., (2015) and Men and Tsai (2012, 2013). The researchers developed two new codes that were included in the codebook.

The study coded tweets for ten items to examine users' communicative behavior, empowerment, and gender. The items for users' communicative behavior are: personal commentary, expressing social criticisms, media surveillance, social networking, call for action, and making inquiries. For this study, personal commentary is operationalized as Twitter user comment about the burkini ban through his or her tweet. Twitter provides a unique opportunity to comment on sociopolitical issues. Twitter users employ the technological affordances of the platform to express personal standpoint or perspective about social discontent. For example, networked publics used Twitter to express personal comments about collective discontent during the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movements that highlighted their opinion about contentious social issues (Gerbaudo, 2012; Goodwin & Jasper; 2015; Howard & Hussain, 2013). Personal commentary on Twitter helps users to connect with a broader community of networked publics and could mobilize people for connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Tweets that reflect users' criticisms about government, police, and social practice of controlling women's bodies are operationalized as expressing social criticism. Media surveillance is identified when tweets refer to any media sources. This study operationalized social networking as tweets engaging in communicating directly with other Twitter users. The call for action is reflected in tweets when Twitter users encourage people to take action or ask for an immediate response about the burkini ban. This study defined making inquiries as when users asked for information about events, occurrences, and clarification about social practices related to the burkini ban.

For the sense of empowerment, we coded three items: vicarious experience, the feeling of autonomy and control, and enactive attainment. For this study, vicarious experience is operationalized as tweet reflecting others' experience, behavior, and expression of discontent. Tweet that reflect users' sense of control and determination is identified as sense of autonomy. This study defined enactive attainment as tweets that demonstrate users' sense of mastery and personal experience. We also coded one item for the gender of social media users which was identified by examining their Twitter profiles.

The unit of analysis for this study was a unique tweet. Each item was coded dichotomously as *yes* for presence and *no* for absence. This study randomly selected 4,560 unique tweets and then data were coded by two trained researchers who first participated in a training session. Second, for the first round of coding, we each coded 450 tweets. Third, we resolved any inconsistencies and updated coding definitions. Fourth, after two rounds of coding, we reached good intercoder reliability agreement. The Cohen's Kappa for intercoder reliability were .92 (personal commentary), .90 (expressing social criticisms), 1.0 (media surveillance), 1.0 (social networking), .88 (call for action), .96 (making inquiries), .94 (enactive attainment), .90 (vicarious experience), .96 (sense of autonomy) and 1.0 (gender). Such agreement in coding reflects good reliability among coders (Stemler, 2001).

Results

Research question 1 wanted to examine Twitter communication of global networked publics about the burkini ban in France. Table 1 and 2 depict the descriptive results of Twitter communication of global networked publics and gender related to the burkini ban discussion. This study reports that global networked publics use Twitter predominately for personal commentary (*f*=2808, 61.57%) and engaging in social criticism (*f*=2076, 45.52%). Global networked publics also use Twitter for media surveillance (*f*=936, 20.52%), networking (*f*=576, 12.63%), call for action (*f*=60, 1.31%), and making inquiries (*f*=30, .65%).

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of Twitter communication of global networked publics		
	Coding Items	Frequency (%)
Twitter communication of networked publics	Personal commentary	2808 (61.57%)
	Media surveillance	936 (20.52%)
	Expressing criticism	2076 (45.52%)
	Criticism of government	378 (8.28%)
	Criticism of controlling women's bodies	1440 (31.57%)
	Criticism of law and policy	258 (5.65%)
	Networking	576 (12.63%)
	Call for action	60 (1.31%)
	Inquiries	30 (.65%)

The results further reveal that predominately female (*f*=2196, 48.15%) Twitter users engaged in social conversations on the burkini ban. Social media scholarship reported mixed findings about gender and social media participation (Khan, 2017; Lin & Lu, 2011; Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012). For example, Khan (2017) found that males engaged in more participatory behavior on social media than did women. However, the results of this study illuminate that women are more active on Twitter about socio-political issues that resonate with their lived experiences.

Women are at the forefront of using social media to challenge patriarchy and misogynist social practices. They also use social media to mobilize people to dismantle unequal power relations in society. For example, after President Trump was inaugurated as President of the United States, women took the street to protest and express their outrage toward the president and the future political environment that may threaten women's progress (Gantt-Shafer, Wallis, & Miles, 2019; Kitch, 2018; Weber, Dejmanee, & Rhode, 2018). Women used social media to organize the most massive single-day demonstration in U.S. history (Weber, Dejmanee, & Rhode, 2018). The protest is known as the Women's March on Washington. The sister marches mobilized more than 5 million people worldwide. The Women's Marches were organized in more than 80 countries around the globe and 400 cities in the U.S. (Weber, Dejmanee, & Rhode, 2018). The Women's March was not only a U.S. protest rather it was mobilized throughout the globe. Therefore, it is evident that women proactively use social media to combat misogynist practices.

Table 2: Gender and tweeting about the burkini ban		
	Coding Items	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	1542 (33.81%)
	Female	2196 (48.15%)
	Unable to determine	822 (18.02%)

Research question 2 wanted to investigate Twitter users' sense of empowerment demonstrated in their tweets. Table 3 reports the descriptive analysis of Twitter users' sense of empowerment. This study reports that global networked publics expressed different types of empowerment on Twitter: sense of autonomy (f=1404, 30.78%), enactive attainment (f=408, 8.94%), and vicarious experience (f=198, 4.34%). Smith et al. (2015) examined the users' sense of empowerment in the context of the public protest in Turkey. They reported the use of sense of autonomy at 12.2%, enactive attainment at 5.1%, and vicarious experience at 44.2%. Such differences in findings reflect the choice of communicative event. Smith et al. (2015) examined the users' sense of empowerment in a social protest where citizens were involved in both online and offline protests. This study examined the exercise of users' sense of empowerment related to a contentious social issue and such discussion occurred mostly in an online setting.

Table 3: Descriptive analysis of Twitter users' sense of empowerment		
	Coding Items	Frequency (%)
Twitter users' sense of empowerment	Vicarious experience	198 (4.34%)
	Sense of autonomy	1404 (30.78%)
	Enactive attainment	408 (8.94%)

Discussion

This study makes several remarkable contributions to the existing literature on social media and online advocacy and empowerment. First, in the context of online collective discontent, global networked publics use Twitter predominately for personal commentary (61.57%), criticism (45.52%), and media surveillance (20.52%). Such a scenario reflects the centrality of social media users' communication power in public discussion on contentious social practices. Social media users often shape political discourse by sharing their voices in digital platforms that eventually replace the dominance of political elites and their influence in framing public discourse. Twitter communicative behavior about the burkini ban highlights that global networked publics use Twitter for deliberation and contestation of public policy issues. Such practices strive to reformulate, reimagine, and recreate social and cultural ideologies and practices. The burkini ban discussion on Twitter supports the claim that networked publics actively harness the communicative affordances of social media to seek social change (Bimber et al., 2012; Bimber, 2017; Castells, 2011; Copeland et al., 2016; Gerbaudo, 2012; Smith, 2010; Tufekci, 2017).

The discussion of the burkini ban incident revealed the irony of religious and secular practices. Western societies often identified headscarves, burqa, and Muslim attires as signs of religious domination over women's bodies. In 1990s, Muslim headscarves became the frontier of cultural conflicts in French society. The secular societies often failed to acknowledge the way people can re-frame cultural symbols to signify identity, freedom, and choice. In many instances, Muslim women embraced religious attire as personal choice and infused the essence of liberty to make such decision. Women often contested the cultural meaning of wearing religious attire and re-signified the headscarves and burkini as resistance to cultural otherness.

Second, the findings of this study weaken the validity of the slacktivism thesis of social media use. Aligned with earlier studies (Bimber et al., 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Tufekci, 2017), this study argues that Twitter users actively participate in contentious policy issues to seek social change. Global citizens use Twitter to challenge discrimination based on Islamophobia and misogyny and reformulate exclusionary social practices. For example, our results show that Twitter users expressed criticism about the ban of burkini (45.52%). Such communicative behavior requires significant initiative and a

considerable knowledge base about the historicity of social discrimination. Therefore, the idea that social media users are slacktivists needs scholarly reformulation.

The scholarly tendency of dismissing online participation as trivial requires a new understanding of online civic engagement. Zuckerman (2014) provided the much-needed conceptualization of online participation. He categorized online participation as thick and thin level of engagement. Networked publics engage in thin participation to raise their voice, sign petition, change profile picture, and other relevant actions to promote change. The thick participation is geared toward the active solution of social problems. We need to consider thick and thin participation as a continuum; rather than a binary construct. The networked publics expressed grievances about the ban and challenged discrimination. Later, France's highest administrative court overturned the burkini ban. The backlash of the burkini ban continues in France today as the right-wing populist faced defiance from Muslim women and their alliance.

The results of this study highlight that women formed the majority of Twitter users who discussed the burkini ban. Eslen-Ziya (2013) found that social media have been crucial to circulate information, to unite women's activists, and to gain national and international attention about social injustice and gender discriminatory practices. This is also aligned with the new wave of online activism for speaking-out and empowering women around the globe. A good example of this is the #MeToo movement, which went viral in the wake of sexual harassment accusations and revelations. Similar hashtags were used in Italy and France. In Italy, women used the #QuellaVoltaChe that means "That time when," and French women confronted their harassers by telling them #BalanceTonPorc that means "snitch out your pig" (LaMotte, 2017). Although social media provides an accessible platform for women to tackle gender discriminatory practices, the sustainability of these movements is yet to be determined. Future studies are needed to explore the strategies to help sustain the movement on social media.

Third, this study reveals that users' sense of empowerment that is predominately demonstrated in their tweets is the sense of autonomy. Social media users mainly used their sense of autonomy or agency to engage in the burkini discussion. Smith et al. (2015) reported the predominant mode of empowerment on the online protest was vicarious experience (44.2%). This study argues that the difference in findings reflects the communicative events of research. This study examined the burkini discussion whereas Smith et al. (2015) investigated collective protest in which thousands of citizens participated, that encompassed both online and offline actions and confrontations. Furthermore, the burkini discussion was centered on one incident in Nice City in France, where police fined a Muslim woman for wearing a burkini on a beach. Therefore, global networked publics had limited exposure to others' experience regarding marginalization through enforcing a dress code. However, the picture posted in the *Guardian* report recalled cultural imagery that the slain ghost of patriarchy is still implementing a dress code to control women's bodies even in the 21st century. Such a haunting scenario invoked human agency to subdue discriminatory practices in the name of national security and secular ideology.

Fourth, this study provides a crucial vantage point for policymakers. The results highlight how collective discontent is expressed on social media which could be a valuable source for mining public opinion (Smith et., 2015). Policymakers need to embrace social media to analyze public sentiment and determine key players. Such a practice could lead to a sustainable government-public relationship. Moss, Kennedy, Moshonas, and Birchall (2015) revealed that mining social media data can help the government in myriad ways (Smith et al., 2015). Furthermore, social data can help the government to ameliorate political polarization and bridge gaps between contentious publics by creating a common ground for the collective good. Scholars need to investigate the role of social media algorithms in accelerating or combating political polarization where populism is resurfacing as a mode of political participation.

Fifth, the findings of this study make a valuable contribution to strategic communication scholarship. Earlier, scholars revealed how empowered employees are considered a crucial asset to organizations (Spreitzer, 1995). Now, empowered users' can be considered a vital component of organizational success because such users can help organizations build online communities and secure sustainable relationships between organizations and the publics (Smith et., 2015). Such a relationship will help organizations build a reputation and enhance their share of voice in the online discussion about their

brands. Furthermore, brands can measure their share of voice across different audience segments by investigating the connection between empowered users and electronic word-of-mouth.

This study has a few limitations. The major limitation of the study is that we did not analyze French-language tweets. The inclusion of such tweets could reveal cultural and social dynamics regarding the burkini ban in French society. The researchers were not proficient in French and resource constraints posed a challenge to recruit multilingual coders. However, the burkini ban discussion on Twitter was not just a local phenomenon; rather global networked publics participated in the discussion. The photo of the burkini ban incident was first published in a British newspaper and created contentious responses around the globe. The local is often tied to global, and the burkini ban incident highlighted the way a local incident can create a ripple effect around the globe. The proliferation of social media has created a global network of activists and people who challenge the misogynist practices. For example, the Women's March on Washington mobilized people around the globe, and women took street in 80 countries. In the context of #MeToo, the networked publics from 85 countries created 1.7 million tweets that included the hashtag #MeToo on their tweets (Park, 2017). Therefore, the tweets that reflect the expression of global networked publics demand scholarly scrutiny.

Another limitation of the study is that data were analyzed to examine users' sense of empowerment and communicative behavior. However, the connection between user networking potentials like user profile status on Twitter (the total number of tweets posted by the user), user friends (number of friends), user followers (number of followers) and empowerment remain unexplored in this study. Future research needs to tap into the networking potentials of Twitter users to examine the link between networking potentials and communicative behavior. Also, this study has not explored the relationship between gender and empowerment. Scholars could examine how gender and sexual orientation are connected to online communicative behavior and empowerment.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, political participation on social media have received considerable attention from scholars. They mostly investigated democratization, political efficacy, information seeking, and other online behavior. This approach of research predominately used survey to examine online behavior. However, the networked publics' sense of empowerment and communication behavior about contentious social issues received limited scholarly attention. This study provided a much-needed discussion on users' sense of empowerment and online communicative behavior by analyzing tweets. This study contributed to the ongoing dialogue on the networked public sphere, empowerment, and communication and social change. The study revealed that global networked publics could influence political discourse by sharing their voices online and reframing public policy issues.

Furthermore, the results of the study revealed that Twitter has become the much-needed platform to exercise users' sense of autonomy about social issues. The findings of this study weaken the slacktivism thesis by revealing how actively Twitter users resist discriminatory practices. As Twitter is becoming a crucial vehicle for public communication, policymakers and communication professionals need to leverage the potentials of empowered users to build relationships and mining public opinion. Policymakers need to understand the value of online public opinion to resolve conflict, negotiate polarized issues, and build government-public partnership. This study hopes to generate new scholarly interest in empowerment and social media.

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Small but Mighty: Examining College Student Perceptions of Small Businesses' Social Media Use

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Using the relationship management theory as framework, this study examines college student perceptions of how small businesses use social media to cultivate relationships with them. We conducted an online survey of 156 college students across the U.S. Results indicate that college students expect small businesses to use Facebook and Instagram as platforms and prefer they implement assurance and positivity strategies. However, together, the strategies did not predict attitude but did behavioral intentions. In terms of theory, this study advances RMT by analyzing it in the context of small businesses. Practically, the results highlight the importance of effective small business social media use to cultivate relationships with college students to ensure growth and prosperity.

Introduction

Social media has increasingly become a tool for businesses to reach their customers, and as this trend continues, the need for accessible and strategized social media techniques grow. In particular, small businesses lean on social media to meet their goals as they do not have time, money, or personnel to allow for experimentation. Small businesses can be defined as an organization that has less than 500 employees and are independently owned and created for profit (Anastasia, 2015). For small businesses, building relationships over social media is a viable strategy due to medium's affordable and accessible nature.

One theory that may provide small businesses direction on how to cultivate relationships with customers is the relationship management theory (RMT) in public relations. RMT outlines how organization-public relationships are cultivated and maintained. It provides guidance on strategies to build relationships with key stakeholder groups. This theory has been applied in several different contexts such as nonprofits and how they relate with their donors (Bertagnoli, 2018) and how *Fortune* 500 companies can build relationships with internal and external publics (Ki & Hon, 2007). However, few researchers have looked at RMT in the context of small businesses. With most small businesses having limited time and resources, social media provides an excellent medium for small businesses to build relationships with key publics.

Using RMT as framework, this research investigates how small businesses can cultivate and maintain relationships with customers by utilizing social media. One important demographic for small businesses to target are college students. Current college students, who most are classified as generation Z (Gen Z), are more likely to support local businesses (AT&T, 2017). And, as local businesses are the backbone of the U.S. economy (Nelson, 2015), members of Gen Z provide increased opportunities for growth and sustainability. According to a recent Piper Jaffray report, Gen Z contributes about $830 billion to U.S. retail sales each year (Christe, 2019). Gen Z also has a strong affinity for social media. For example, 80% of surveyed teens get their beauty tips from social influencers (Christe, 2019). Thus, we gauged Gen Z expectations of small business use of social media to cultivate relationships with them. This research offers valuable insight for small businesses that are seeking to increase the return on investment from their social media implementation and to cultivate stronger relationships with a specific public over social media.

Literature Review

Defining Small Businesses

Defining small businesses has been the subject of debate over the past 20 years within national, state, and local governments as well as the business community itself. This has led to an evolving definition of what constitutes a small business. Peterson, Albaum, and Kozmetsky (1986) define a small business to have less than 100 employees with less than $1 million in gross receipts. The Small Business Administration (SBA) offers a definition that is more focused on qualities rather than quantities. According to the SBA, a small business is created for profit,

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independently owned, and can either be "a sole proprietorship, corporation, or any other recognized legal form" (Anastasia, 2015, p. 90). For the SBA, a small business has less than 500 employees, while a subset of small business, the microenterprise, must have less than 10 employees and has very low income and restricted access to funding (Anastasia, 2015). Anastasia (2015) notes that family-owned, or mom-and-pop businesses, usually fall into the microenterprise category. Based on these definitions, Headd (2015) and Nelson (2015) estimated that there were over 28 million small businesses in the United States in 2012, with 5 million of these small businesses having less than 20 employees.

Small business use of social media. While small businesses are often at a disadvantage compared to larger businesses when it comes to time and resources, they still find ways to use social media to their advantage. In fact, according to a survey administered by Apenteng and Doe (2014), 80% of small businesses had a social media presence at that time. Other research shows that in 2014, 75% of small businesses had a company page on a social networking site, and 61% used social media to identify and attract new customers (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Of these numbers, more than 70% were using Facebook, 58% were using LinkedIn, and 39% were using Twitter (Miller & Washington, 2013).

While these numbers make it clear that small businesses are already using social media, the most effective social media platforms for small businesses have yet to be identified. Taneja and Toombs (2014) posit that effective social media platforms for small businesses will help them "reach people faster, build relationships, and connect with potential customers" and will allow small businesses "to showcase and secure their brands" (p. 250).

Costs and benefits of using social media. Shilpa and Janhavi (2017) attribute the widespread use of social media by small businesses to its ability to connect a small business with a larger audience and attract more customers. They note the potential for small business use of social media to be a means to cultivate meaningful relationships with audience members. The ability to build flexible and cooperative networks with other small businesses using social media is also a benefit for small businesses (Barnes et al., 2012). Most importantly to this study, social media offer great potential for "interactive and more bottom-up, participatory methods of collaboration compared to previous waves of technology such as customer relationship management" that are especially useful for "cost-conscious small firms that rely on personal interactions and relationships in conducting business" (Barnes et al., 2012, p. 690-691).

Taneja and Toombs (2014) identify several additional benefits of social media for small businesses. These include visibility with customers, viability against competitors, sustainability in minimizing vulnerability, differentiation from competitors, and affordability (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010; Stelzner, 2012). Alternatively, Taneja and Toombs (2014) identify a lack of technological sophistication as a major limitation for small businesses pursuing a social media presence. Weak security, lack of originality, and reputation are other risks and challenges to the implementation of social media tactics for small businesses (Bressler, 2012; Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Taneja & Toombs, 2014; Urstadt & Grifantini, 2008). Despite these limitations, research maintains that social media is an important tool for small businesses (Taneja & Toombs, 2014).

Gen Z and social media

Broadly, past research shows that members of Gen Z are highly involved with social media (Duffett, 2017). They are the first generation to be raised in the era of smartphones and many do not remember a time before social media (Williams, 2015). Known as "digital natives", most members of Gen Z are active on social media and demonstrate a level of proficiency and comfort with technology that no other generation before them possess (Palley, 2012). They use social media as a general source of information or entertainment and are skilled at filtering out "non-relevant information" and judging "information posted online, especially the product characteristics communicated via social media" (Dabija, Bejan, & Tipi, 2018, p. 197). When it comes to interacting with businesses online, most Gen Zers prefer to create brand stories and forge relationships with brands through social media (Read, Robertson, McQuilken, & Ferdous, 2019). These interactions have resulted in both positive and negative attitudes toward the brands (Gensler, Volckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013).

A specific subset of Gen Z are college students (the sample public for this study), which are an important public for small businesses as they have growing purchasing power as they enter the workforce. Overall, college student use of social media is high, with "72% of all college students hav[ing] a social media profile" and "45% of college students using a social media site at least once a day" (Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013, p. 2).

Generally, research has identified four common social media uses for college students: emotional, cognitive, social, and habitual (Wang & Tchernev, 2012). According to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973), emotional uses, or needs, refer to a "strengthening aesthetic, pleasurable, and emotional experience" (p. 166); cognitive needs gather "information, knowledge, and understanding" (p. 166); social needs strengthen "contact with family, friends, and the world" (p. 167); and habitual needs "are ritualized and help bring structure to one's day"

(Wang, Tchernev, & Solloway, 2012, p. 1830). Aside from these general uses, other researchers have found that college students use social media to build social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007) and publicly construct a concept of self (Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013).

Moreover, college students use social media to learn about products and to ultimately aid in their purchase decisions. Members of Gen Z are more focused on innovation and are conscientious when making purchasing decisions (Priporas, Stylos, & Fotiadis, 2017). Priporas and colleagues (2017) note that, in general, members of Gen Z use social media to collect information about products and to connect and interact with brands and retailers. Moreover, social media can play an integral role in their purchasing decisions as they use social media to learn about a product's characteristics, usage possibilities, and other customers' opinions. As small businesses rely heavily on social media to connect with a wider audience and to gain new customers (Shilpa & Janhavi, 2017), gaining an understanding as to how college students perceive small business social media is imperative. College students make up a large consumer group that, because of their reliance on social media to gain information about businesses, may influence the success or failure of small businesses. Therefore, the first research question is as follows:

> RQ1**:** Which social media platforms do college students prefer small businesses use and how do they expect them to use the platforms?

Relationship Management Theory

Small businesses are looking to gain loyal customers and are using social media to do so. And, college students are a growing group with purchasing power that use social media to seek information and build interactive relationships. For small businesses to seize this opportunity, they must learn to build relationships with this stakeholder group using social media. Relationship management theory provides a theoretical framework to do so.

Modern public relations practice has evolved from disseminating information one-way to a more relational and managerial perspective (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Ledingham, 2006). 'Modern' public relations can be defined as "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994, p. 2). Relationships exist between the organization and its key publics, in which the actions made by both parties impact the social, economic, political, or cultural well-being of each other (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). For small businesses, these relationships exist between those associated with the business and their various stakeholders, including customers, employers, suppliers, etc.

Recent studies on public relations have captured this view. Beginning with Ferguson's (1984; 2018) suggestion that the unit of analysis that should be focused on in public relations scholarship is the relationship between organizations and publics, a rich body of research has been developed that examines these organization-public relationships (OPRs) including how these relationships are created, how they are managed, and the different types of OPRs. Recent OPR research has focused mainly on models of OPRs that typically include relationship antecedents, cultivation strategies, and relationship qualities (e.g., Grunig & Huang, 2000).

Exploring the relational perspective, Ledingham (2003; 2006) suggested making relationship management into a general theory of public relations. The theory states that "effectively managing organizational relationships around common interests and shared goals over time, results in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics" (Ledingham, 2003, p. 190). At its core, the theory values how communication processes and strategies within an organization can build relationships that bring greater understanding and benefits for both the organization and its publics (Ledingham, 2003).

To balance organizational interests with public interests, two-way symmetrical communication strategies were proposed as ways to most likely achieve favorable relationships (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000; Grunig & Huang, 2000, Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ki & Hon, 2009). These relationship cultivation strategies (Hung, 2007) include access, positivity, assurance, network-building, openness, and task sharing. *Access* is when an organization ensures that there are communication channels for publics to interact with it (Hon & Grunig, 1999). *Positivity* is "anything the organization or public does to make the relationship more enjoyable for the parties involved" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 14). *Assurance* is the "attempt by parties in the relationship to assure the other parties that they and their concerns are legitimate. This strategy also might involve attempts by the parties in the relationship to demonstrate they are committed to maintaining the relationship" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 15). *Network-building* occurs when organizations build "networks or coalitions with the same groups that their publics do, such as environmentalists, unions, or community groups" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 15). *Openness* is clear disclosure of the organization's actions, intentions, thoughts, and feelings (Hon & Grunig, 1999). *Task-sharing* is when an organization and its public team up to solve an issue or complete a task, often "community issues, providing employment, making a profit, and staying in business" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 15).

RMT and social media. New research has extended the findings of how relationships are measured and maintained into the world of social and online media. As social media becomes more widely used—and therefore more necessary in reaching audiences—research has responded to the need to understand how RMT and social media can be a blended tool. Hallahan (2006) argued that with online media, organizations can have more balanced relationships with key publics by fostering understanding, but these organizations must be committed to and have knowledge on how to use these online tools appropriately. Building OPRs online starts with building awareness, creating opportunities for interaction, and formulating chances to build impressions and drive action (Hallahan, 2006). These online OPRs can lead to positive attitudes toward the organization, increased communication activity, and possible repetitive behaviors such as purchases (Hallahan, 2006).

Social media platforms are natural channels to encourage two-way communication between organizations and publics (Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton, 2012). On social media, opportunities exist for organizations to engage with many different stakeholder groups in one place through proper relationship management (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015). For example, RMT was examined as a means to reach internal and external stakeholders in small businesses and nonprofits (Maxwell & Carboni, 2014). Applying relationship management principles to customer relations and engagement with luxury brands over social media, Guha, Harrigan, and Soutar (2018) found that allowing customers and brands to co-create on social media leads to engagement, purchases, and brand loyalty. Maecker, Barrot, and Becker (2016) examined data collected from customers of a mobile phone service provider to explore the role of interactions through corporate social media channels. Results reinforced the potential for social media use to lead to higher profitability for businesses by understanding public expectations of the brands social media profiles.

The present research carries the importance and value of relationship management into the digital age and lays a foundation for continued research in how relationships can be fostered through social media. Much of the research addresses how businesses can use social media to manage relationships with customers, but research has yet to deeply focus on small businesses. Therefore, the following research question was developed to examine the relationship cultivation strategies used by small businesses.

> RQ2**:** For small businesses, which relationship cultivation strategies (access, positivity, openness, assurance, network-building, and task sharing) do college students prefer on social media?

The Impact of Social Media Use on Attitudes and Behavioral Intentions

A major line of relationship management research explores how effectively managed relationships can be connected to positive outcomes such as attitude formation and behavioral intention (Bruning, 2000; Ki & Hon, 2007). As this study focuses on social media being a vehicle for forging positive consumer-small business relationships, exploring perceptions of social media use on attitudes and behavioral intentions is necessary.

Attitude is typically defined as "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 6). This definition breaks attitudes down into three parts: (1) attitudes are learned, (2) attitude predisposes behavior, and (3) attitudes are consistently either favorable or unfavorable toward an object. Research has indicated that an individual's attitude toward the internet and social media is related to their internet use (e.g., Poude, Zamani, & Abedi, 2011). Shin and Shin (2011) found that attitude influences a users' intention to use SNS. Wang, Jackson, Wang and Gaskin (2015) discovered that positive attitudes toward social media use led to more recreational use of social media including connecting with others and for using it for entertainment purposes.

In a public relations context, the publics' attitude can help measure the overall impact or effectiveness of a particular public relations program or activity. Knowing the attitude of the public allows practitioners to understand what the public says about something, but also what they feel and how they may act (Lindenmann, 2002).

Positive attitudes can in turn lead to positive behavioral intentions including purchasing intention. Behavioral intentions are "the intention to perform a particular behavior, a plan to put behavior into effect" (Perloff, 2003, p. 92). Behavioral intentions are typically treated as a predictor of actual behavior because inquiring about people's behavioral intention tends to be identical to behavior because most social behavior is under the control of the individual (Perfloff, 2003). According to the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), behavioral intention is an intermediate variable between attitude and behavior.

From a social media perspective, several characteristics of the medium can lead to positive behavioral intentions, including intent to purchase. These include perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and social norm. Perceived usefulness describes the degree to which a person believes using something in particular will help them in some way. Perceived ease of use is the degree, which a person believes a platform will be effortless (Davis, 1989). On social media, social norm is the degree to which a person perceives that other people believe they should or should not perform a specific behavior. In the context of purchasing intention in social media settings, this means

that a person can be influenced by someone online. While examining the role these three characteristics play in social media's influence on purchase intention, Sin, Nor, and Al-Agaga (2012) discovered that although all three characteristics are influential, perceived usefulness is the most dominant factor that influenced young consumers' online purchase intention through social media. Based on the previous literature, this study examines how relationship building strategies impact college student attitudes and behavioral intentions toward small businesses via social media.

RQ3: Do college students perceive their (a) attitudes and (b) behavioral intentions toward small businesses to be impacted by relationship cultivation strategies? And if so, which ones?

Methodology

An online survey of college students over 18 years of age was administered. The data were collected from February 25 to March 24, 2019. The initial number of respondents was 171. However, participants who were under 18 years of age, were not college students, were not active on social media, or took the survey in less than five minutes were removed. The final sample consisted of 156 respondents.

Participants and Procedures

Participants were recruited through a convenience sample. Following IRB approval, in addition to recruiting students from the researchers' home university, the researchers sent emails to faculty at four universities across the U.S. These faculty were personal contacts of one of the researchers. The universities were located along the east coast, south, Midwest, and southwest. Recruited faculty were asked to share the survey link, via Google Forms, with their students. Although attempts were made to broaden the geographic reach of the survey, the majority of the participants came from the researchers' home university in Ohio (n = 136). The participants from the Ohio-based university were recruited through a department-wide email sent from the department's student advisor. Participants were eligible to be entered in a drawing for three $15 Amazon gift certificates.

Of the respondents, 83% (n = 130) were women and 16% (n = 25) were men. One participant chose not to declare sex. The median age was 20, with 34 of participants identifying as first years, 39 identifying as sophomores, 40 as juniors, 38 as seniors, and 5 identified as graduate students. 88% were Caucasian (n = 137), 6% were Hispanic (n = 9), 4% were Asian (n = 6) and .6% were African-American (n = 1). Two participants marked "other".

Measures

For each measure, means and standard deviations were first assessed. Then, where appropriate, the measures were collapsed to individual composite measures using principle axis factoring with a direct oblimin rotation. Direct oblimin rotation "is a general form for obtaining oblique rotations used to transform associated with factor analysis to simple structures" (Jackson, 2005 p. 6). Only variables that had factors loadings higher than .6 were kept for further analysis because these are considered to be statistically significant (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). Only factors that had an eigenvalue greater than 1, based on the extraction sums of squared loadings, were kept.

Attitude toward small businesses on social media. Adapting Kang and Yang's (2010) attitudinal scale, this variable examined participants' attitude toward small businesses' use of social media. The scale consisted of four semantic differential questions: (a) appealing/unappealing (M = 2.24, SD = .88), enjoyable/unenjoyable (M = 2.28, SD = .85), good/bad (M = 2.23, SD = .82), and useful/worthless (M = 2.32, SD = .93) where 1 was the positive choice. Using a principal axis factoring with a direct oblimin rotation, these 4 items loaded on one factor with an eigenvalue of 2.33. However, enjoyable/unenjoyable had a factor loading of less than .6, so it was thrown out. The analysis was run again with the remaining variables. These variables loaded on one factor with an eigenvalue of 1.55, which explained 51.7% of the variance based on the extraction sums of squared loadings. The resulting scale led to a Cronbach's alpha of .76.

Behavioral intentions. Adapting Kang and Yang's (2010) behavioral intention scale, this variable examined participants' behavioral intention based on their interaction with small businesses on social media. The scale consisted of four questions measuring a variety of behavioral intentions, including offering support (M = 4.01, SD = .95), purchase intention (M = 3.90, SD = .79), recommending the small business to a friend (M = 3.92, SD = .81), and sharing positive word-of-mouth (M = 3.90, SD = 1.04). Using a principal axis factoring with a direct oblimin rotation, these 4 items loaded on one factor with an eigenvalue of 1.81, which explained 52.3% of the variance based on the extraction sums of squared loadings. The resulting scale led to a Cronbach's alpha of .80 (1 = *not likely at all,* 5 = *very likely*).

Relationship cultivation strategies. Adapting Hon and Grunig (1999), six strategies that gauge how organizations attempt to build a relationship with different publics were examined. Each strategy was analyzed separately. All items were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly agree,* 5 = *strongly disagree)*. To ensure the items for each strategy loaded onto one factor and could be collapsed to individual variables in order to properly test them, principal axis factoring with a direct oblimin rotation was used.

Access examines whether an organization provides publics channels to engage directly with them (Hon & Grunig, 1999), was measured using four items. An example item reads, "When users have questions or concerns on social media, I expect small businesses to be willing to answer their inquiries" (α = .94, *M* = 2.00, *SD* = .72). The 4 items loaded on one factor with an eigenvalue of 3.36, which explained 84% of the variance based on the extraction sums of squared loadings. *Assurance* relates to an organization's attempt to demonstrate they are committed to the relationship with the public (Hon & Grunig, 1999). It was measured by four items. An example item reads, "I expect small businesses to communicate the importance of users on social media" (α = .96, *M* = 1.96, *SD* = .77). The 4 items loaded on one factor with an eigenvalue of 3.47, which explained 86.7% of the variance based on the extraction sums of squared loadings. *Network sharing* occurs when organizations collaborate with the same groups their publics do. This was measured by three items (Hon & Grunig, 1999). An example item reads, "I expect that the partnerships that small businesses are involved in on social media are helpful to its users" (α = .97, *M* = 2.19, *SD* = .84). The three items loaded on one factor with an eigenvalue of 2.76, which explained 91.9% of the variance based on the extraction sums of squared loadings. *Openness* refers to the organization's attempt to be transparent about its actions, intentions and feelings with its publics (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Measured with four items, an example question reads, "I expect small businesses to report to users what they have done in the past on social media" (α = .96, *M* = 2.34, *SD* = .85). The 4 items loaded on one factor with an eigenvalue of 3.52, which explained 88% of the variance based on the extraction sums of squared loadings. *Positivity* refers to the actions the organization makes to ensure the relationship it has with its publics is more enjoyable (Hon & Grunig, 1999). This is measured with five items. An example item reads, "I expect that small businesses' communication efforts with users on social media to be courteous" (α = .97, *M* = 1.85, *SD* = .73). The 5 items loaded on one factor with an eigenvalue of 4.32, which explained 86.5% of the variance based on the extraction sums of squared loadings. Finally, *task-sharing* captures an organization's attempt to work with its publics to solve an issue or complete a task (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Measured with three items, an example question reads, "I expect small businesses to work with users on social media to develop solutions to problems that benefit users" (α = .96, *M* = 2.14, *SD* = .84). The 3 items loaded on one factor with an eigenvalue of 2.71, which explained 90.2% of the variance based on the extraction sums of squared loadings.

Perceptions of small businesses' social media use. Adapted from Akar and Topcu (2011), this scale examines participant perception of company social media use. The scale, consisting of six items, can be categorized in two sections. The first section gauges participant perception on how necessary it is for companies to use certain types of social media platforms for marketing purposes (Akar & Topcu, 2011). This subsection consists of three questions, "It is necessary for small businesses to use social networking sites such as Facebook for the purposes of marketing" (*M* = 1.62, *SD* = .77), "It is necessary for small businesses to use photo sharing sites like Instagram for purposes of marketing" (*M* = 1.83, *SD* = .85), and "It is necessary for small businesses to use video sharing sites like YouTube for the purposes of marketing" (*M* = 2.99, *SD* = .90). The next subsection pertained to the purposes of social media use, specifically gauging perceptions of how certain aspects of social media use impacts purchasing decisions (Akar & Topcu, 2011). This subsection consists of three questions, "I believe that advertisements from small businesses on social media would affect my purchasing decisions" (*M* = 2.25, *SD* = .87), "I believe that reviews for small businesses' products/services/locations on social media would affect my purchasing decision' (*M* = 1.94, *SD* = .86), and " I believe that when small businesses directly engage with me on social media (i.e. answer my questions, reply to my comments, or share my posts) would affect my purchase decisions" (*M* = 1.71, *SD* = .70). All items were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly agree,* 5 = *strongly disagree)*.

Results

Research questions were tested with SPSS 24. However, before research questions were explored, a series of bivariate correlations were run among the independent and dependent variables. Composite variables were created for each of the relationship cultivation strategies. All variable associations were strongly significant at the $p < .05$ or $p < .01$ level. Correlations between variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Correlations between variables in the model.

	Attitude	BI	Access	Assure	Network	Open	Positivity	Task-Sharing
Attitude	-							
Behavior Intention	-.50**	-						
Access	.13	-.28**	-					
Assurances	.16*	-.29**	.96**	-				
Networking	.19*	-.31**	.91**	.96**	-			
Openness	.14	-.27**	.92**	.95**	.97**	-		
Positivity	.14	-.29**	.98**	.97**	.93**	.94**	-	
Task-sharing	.16	-.31**	.92**	.97**	.97**	.96**	.94**	-
Perceived SB social media use	.19*	-.32**	.97**	.97**	.93**	.95**	.98**	.95**

Note. BI = behavioral intention; SB = small business.
** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The first research question examined college student perceptions of how small businesses should use social media. Per Akar and Topcu (2011), indices were calculated for each social media use. For platform type, results indicated that participants perceive small businesses should use social networking sites like Facebook (M = 1.62, SD = .77) and photo-sharing sites like Instagram (M = 1.75, SD = .82) more than video-sharing sites like YouTube (M = 2.99, SD = .90) (1 = *strongly agree)*. Lower mean scores indicate higher preference on social media platform type.

For perceived purpose of social media use, results indicated that participants believe that small businesses should directly engage with them on social media, including answering questions and replying to comments (M = 1.71, SD = .70) more than advertising (M = 2.25, SD = .87) and posting reviews (M = 2.41, SD = 1.17). Although, all three purposes were higher than average (1 = *strongly agree;* 5 = *strongly disagree),* it was important to unpack whether the participants preferred a specific purpose on different platforms. To do this, multiple regression was run for each action serving as the outcome variable and the preferred platforms serving as the predictor variables. All three social platform types were significant predictors of places where consumers expect small businesses to advertise, but video sharing sites like YouTube were the strongest predictor ($F(1,154) = 476.80$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .76$) over photo-sharing sites like Instagram ($F(1,154) = 308.93$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .67$) and social networking sites like Facebook ($F(1,154) = 5.13$, $p = .03$, $R^2 = .02$). For asking questions, photo-sharing sites like Instagram ($F(1, 154) =$

754.52, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .83$) and video-sharing sites like YouTube ($F(1,154) = 250.53$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .62$) were significant, meaning consumers are more likely to ask questions on these site types. Social networking sites like Facebook were not significant for being a place participants view as a good place to ask questions ($F(1,154) = 3.71$, $p = .06$, $R^2 = .02$). All three social media platform types were significant predictors of sites that consumers would post reviews. Photo-sharing sites like Instagram ($F(1,154) = 637.39$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .81$) were the strongest predictors, followed by video-sharing sites like YouTube ($F(1,154) = 322.67$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .68$). and social networking sites like Facebook ($F(1,154) = 7,36$, $p = .007$, $R^2 = .05$).

RQ2 examined which relationship management strategy college students preferred on social media for small businesses. Comparing means, college students prefer the positivity strategy most (1 was highest) ($M = 1.85$, $SD = .73$), followed by assurance ($M = 1.96$, $SD = .77$), then access ($M = 2.01$, $SD = .72$), sharing tasks ($M = 2.14$, $SD = .85$), network sharing ($M = 2.20$, $SD = .84$), and openness ($M = 2.34$, $SD = .85$). Although all six strategies were rated higher than average, these results indicate that college students prefer small businesses to be positive in their social media communication when they attempt to build relationships with college students.

RQ3 examined if college students perceive their (a) attitudes and (b) behavioral intentions toward small businesses to be predicted by relationship cultivation strategies and if so, which ones. Using multiple regression, results showed that together, relationship cultivation strategies did not predict college student (a) attitude ($F(6,149) = 1.19$, $p = .31$, $R^2 = .05$) but did predict (b) behavioral intention ($F(6,149) = 3.39$, $p = .004$, $R^2 = .12$). When examining the cultivation strategies individually, not surprisingly based on the collective results, we discovered that none significantly predicted attitude. However, regarding behavioral intention toward small businesses, individual analysis of the cultivation strategies revealed only openness approached significance ($\beta = .61$, $t(154) = 1.80$, $p = .07$), but no strategy individually was statistically significant.

Discussion

This study examines college student perceptions of small businesses' social media use. College students, mostly comprised of Gen Z members, make up a growing customer base for small businesses. Using the relationship management theory as framework, we attempted to understand how college students expect small businesses to use social media and how those uses impact attitude and behavioral intentions.

Past research has outlined relationship cultivation strategies and their potential to build lasting organizational-public relationships (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Kang & Yang, 2010). This work extends these findings to small businesses, a unique type of organization. The findings of this study also build on the ways that RMT can be a tool for relationship building in the growing world of social media (Guha et al., 2018; Maecker et al., 2016; Maxwell & Carboni, 2014).

When considering college student perceptions of how small businesses should use social media, we found that social networking sites, like Facebook, and photo sharing sites, like Instagram, were perceived to be the most beneficial social media platforms to engage on with small businesses. This is supported by past research that also details how Instagram and Facebook are more popular and effective marketing and relationship-building tools for small businesses (Sharma, 2018; DeMers, 2015). Brands gravitate toward the eye-catching visual content on Instagram, and Instagram has a proven ability to grow customer engagement (Sharma, 2018). In general, images posted on Instagram get 23% more engagement than on other platforms (Sharma, 2018). And, Gen Zers are attracted to the highly visual nature of Instagram (Christe, 2019), especially when engaging with brands.

Facebook has one of the highest rates of conversion in terms of ecommerce, which can have a large impact on small businesses' financial return (DeMers, 2015). Additionally, customer engagement on Facebook is incredibly high—featuring curated business pages where customers can view content, post comments, and receive replies from the brand and other customers—provides an opportunity for small businesses and Gen Z members to engage with each other. Other research also corroborates our findings in that engagement has meaningful, real-world implications for small businesses, particularly in terms of brand recognition and loyalty with college students (Mersey, Malthouse, & Calder, 2010). However, trends seem to indicate that Gen Z is spending less time on Facebook (Premack, 2018). This though does not mean that brands should completely ignore Facebook. In fact, for connecting with brands, Facebook is still a viable platform; it is just that brands need to be creative in capturing Gen Z's attention. According to Hodak (2018), "[Gen Z] isn't interested in Facebook ads littered with OMGs and LOLs. Marketers must meet Gen Z consumers on their social channels at the right times and with campaigns the generation cares about."

For RQ2, results indicated that college students preferred the positivity and assurance relationship cultivation strategies the most. This means that when college students are looking to build relationships with organizations, they respond best to the use of more optimistic language. As research indicates, college students

prefer social media messages that are more positive, citing that students found positive messages to be more attractive and intimate (Bazarova, 2012; Park, Jin, & Jin, 2011). Regarding assurance, college students thrive on encouragement. Research indicates that Gen Zers are anxious about their future and expect their life to be harder than their parents (Turner, 2018). They value honest and transparent communication, thus brands who communicate honestly will capture the attention of Gen Zers.

Finally, for RQ3, which looked at cultivation strategies' impact on attitudes and behavioral intentions, results showed that together and individually, the cultivation strategies did not impact attitude, but they did impact behavioral intentions collectively. The reasons for these results may stem from the fact that if college students are already connected to the brand on social media, they most likely have a positive attitude toward them, but that efforts by small businesses to make long-lasting relationships with their customers does ultimately influence their intent to support and purchase the brand. Interestingly, not one strategy alone impacted behavioral intention. It is possible college students do not differentiate between strategies, but care ultimately that small businesses are making an effort.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The present study has theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study expands the work on organization-public relationships by looking at a unique subset of organizations: small businesses. With over 3.7 million small businesses making up more than 75% of private-sector employers in 2013, small businesses are key players in the American economy (Headd, 2015). However, small businesses are worth studying for more than just their economic importance. These businesses are different from the organizations that are typically examined empirically, such as nonprofits (e.g. Maxwell & Carboni, 2014) and *Fortune* 500 companies (e.g. Ki & Hon, 2007, because of their size and place in the community. Small businesses can have more interpersonal relationships with their customers that can last over a long period of time. Empirically, this study highlighted the positivity and access strategies as the most preferred by participants. This differs compared to research on corporations (Vorvoreanu, 2009) but is similar to that of nonprofits (Bortree, 2010). For corporations, research showed that there was an expectation of distance and surprise when companies interact with customers, especially on social media (Vorvoreanu, 2009). The results of Vorvoreanu's (2009) study showed that participants (also college students) assumed efforts to cultivate relationships were merely transactional highlighting more efforts to advertise then to build a two-way relationship. Most small businesses do not have large professional teams to handle public relations, many meet their publics face-to-face and manage their relationships without any formal training. Interestingly, perceptions made by college students on nonprofits' efforts to cultivate relationships with them are similar to that of small businesses, most likely due to these same reasons. Because of these differences and small businesses' integral role in local economies, the inclusion of small businesses in OPR research is an important development.

Another theoretical implication stems from the high correlation found between the individual relationship cultivation strategies. Although previous studies have found these variables to be highly correlated (e.g., Bortree, 2010), most studies still test them independently in order to determine which strategy is most beneficial or impactful among a given public. However, it is quite possible that general public groups cannot differentiate the strategies and just respond generally to the fact that organizations are being strategic in their cultivation efforts. This possibility may explain why the collective use of relationship cultivation strategies significantly impacted behavioral intentions but none of the strategies were individually impactful.

Practically, this research shows that Instagram and Facebook are great platforms for small businesses to cultivate relationships with college students online. In a world overwhelmed with new social media formats, these two highly engaging platforms are solid starting places for small businesses looking to establish themselves. The capacity of these platforms to be both visual and conversational allows them to produce the kind of content Gen Zers and college students want to see. These publics do not want to be advertised "at"; they want to be a part of the conversation. Small businesses can build loyal, two-way relationships with these publics by using interactive content on their social media feeds—this includes creating polls, contests, and actively responding to comments and questions. This makes college students feel like they are valued and heard.

Another important takeaway for small businesses that are looking to attract and build lasting relationships with Gen Z and college students over social media is to develop content that conveys positivity and assurance. Small businesses can adopt an upbeat tone of voice in their messages, making sure to highlight hopeful and positive themes throughout their shared content. Although this study didn't examine specific types of positivity or assurance, in general, when it comes to creating a sense of commitment on social media, small businesses can do so by taking the time to authentically respond to comments, showing that they truly care about the happiness and well-being of their customers.

Although the positivity and assurance strategies were most preferred, all of the strategies were positively perceived. Therefore, small businesses are encouraged to use the other strategies as well. For example, small businesses could focus their social media strategy to be as transparent as possible. For small businesses, building a sense of transparency with customers can include using social media to share plans, ingredients, and new products with college students. They can also introduce employees and staff members, especially the people responsible for posting content on social media; clarify store policies; and provide information about when products will come back in stock.

Small businesses could also emphasize network sharing through their social media presence. This can include commenting on and liking the social media content of other comparable small businesses, creating a community of support. If small businesses collaborate with other small businesses, they should leverage these partnerships on social media, making sure to post about joint promotions, events, and special products. Moreover, small businesses share a unique position within local communities. By creating a network with other similar business types, small businesses can boost the local economy and bolster support from young professionals who want to give back to their community.

In summary, the results of this study provide guidance for scholars and small business practitioners on how to cultivate relationships with college students specifically, over social media. Ultimately, college students expect small businesses to make an effort to cultivate relationships with them over social media. And, although all six strategies are perceived to be important, college students desire for small businesses to promote positivity, understand what makes up their customers, and connect with their interests. This research supports existing literature that these six strategies do cultivate relationships between small businesses and college students, which leads to positive behavioral intentions. And, on social media, efforts such as engaging with their customers and answering questions will go a long way in building those relationships.

Limitations and Future Directions

The limitations of this study point to directions for future research. First, the number of participants is low for a robust survey. This may explain why some results approached significance but were not statistically significant. Second, a convenience sample was used. Although an attempt to collect data from participants across different regions of the U.S., the sample consisted largely of communication students who may have more expertise using social media compared to other types of college students. The participant pool was also heavily female, Caucasian, and from Ohio. This was mostly due to the fact that the majority of communication majors at the researchers' university (the students most sampled in this study as the researchers had direct access to them) are Caucasian females from Ohio. Future studies should explore all types of students, strive for a more diverse sample, and expand data collection to include other type of publics in addition to college students. This can be accomplished by going through a national survey panel company and/or setting up quotas for race, gender, and location. For example, future studies could focus on other groups of publics, as small businesses have the potential to build relationships with employees, future customers, and even other small business owners. This could also include other Gen Z participants as not all classified as Gen Z are college students. Third, the survey method was based on self-reporting. Other methods, such as experiments, where the type of social media or small business could be controlled for, could further investigate different strategies and compare how they impact attitude and purchase intention. Fourth, the relationship cultivation strategies were highly correlated. Although, the purpose of this study was to see which strategy was preferred as they have not been tested in the context of small businesses, future studies could combine the strategies into one composite variable and test the overall use of cultivation strategies on various outcome variables. Fifth, this study tested perceptions of small business use of social media in general. Future studies could describe a specific type of small business or even compare different types of small businesses (i.e., a restaurant and a clothing boutique) and see if the strategies differ. Also, participants were not necessarily customers of a specific small business. Future studies could examine how current customers interact with their favorite small businesses. Finally, this study only examines cultivation strategies. Future studies can expand this study to examine what types of relationships and what dimensions of the relationship are cultivated between small businesses and customers.

Conclusion

Social media offers a low-cost opportunity for small businesses to interact with their publics. Since most small businesses do not have the time or resources to pursue expensive PR strategies, social media is a valuable way for small businesses to build the relationships that will help sustain their business. Social media, especially social networking sites, help foster these relationships through online engagement, where Gen Z members and college

students look for positive content and commitment from small businesses. Moreover, social media is a great place for small businesses to build social networks with similar businesses, grow the local community and attract young professionals who want to do the same. Members of Gen Z are the future of the economy. By cultivating relationships with them, small businesses can tap into their buying potential, which will ultimately help small businesses grow and prosper.

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Legislating Ohio's Crisis: Using the Third-Person Effect Hypothesis to Ascertain Ohioans' Attitudes Toward [Decriminalizing] Drug Addiction and Issue 1

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News reports suggest that Ohio leads the nation in drug abuse and is ranked in the top 5 states for populations with addiction challenges (Centers for Disease Control, 2018). While many efforts have been made to help combat addiction issues and the opiate epidemic, an ongoing debate about effective treatment and rehabilitation has ensued. This debate heated up in the fall of 2018 when Ohioans faced Issue 1, a proposed constitutional amendment that would have reduced penalties for drug offenders. In this study, we aimed to use Davison's (1983) Third-Person Effect Hypothesis as a theoretical lens to examine perceptions of media coverage of Issue 1, attitudes toward Issue 1, and other factors that contributed to Ohioans' vote on the Issue. Our findings suggest that there are applications for the Third-Person Effect Hypothesis, and that these include perceptual biases and behavioral effects that extend beyond reactions to purely media content. In fact, our respondents not only indicated third-person perceptual biases toward media coverage of/in support for Issue 1, but also exhibited these biases toward a hypothetical passage of the issue. We found that the more perceptual bias respondents indicated for Issue 1 passing when considering the impact on their friends/relatives, the more likely they were to have cast a "no" vote.

Introduction

News reports suggest that Ohio leads the nation in drug abuse and is ranked in the top 5 states for populations with addiction challenges (Centers for Disease Control, 2018). In a 2017 report, the CDC ranked Ohio second in overdose deaths behind West Virginia. The National Center for Health Statistics reported that Ohio's rate of overdose deaths grew 41% from 2016-2017. In 2016, unintentional drug overdoses caused the deaths of 4,050 Ohioans, a 32.8 percent increase from 2015. According to a *Dayton Daily News* report, Montgomery County has the highest rate per capita of overdose deaths, followed by Fayette, Clark, and Clinton (Wedell, 2018). Southwest Ohio could be described as "ground zero" in the drug abuse epidemic.

While many efforts have been made to help combat addiction issues and the opiate epidemic, an ongoing debate about effective treatment and the criminalizing of addiction has endured. Proposed alternatives to criminalizing – and thereby incarcerating – drug users have included required treatments programs including "drug courts." In November 2018, Ohioans faced another alternative, a ballot initiative entitled Issue 1, which included a reduction in [criminal] penalties for drug offenders. Issue 1 failed, with 63% of voters rejecting it. Nevertheless, the initiative and its supporters helped raised many questions about Ohioans' attitudes toward drug addiction, how theory can help to describe how these attitudes are shaped, and how Ohioans [including those living in "ground zero"] perceive initiatives to treat addiction?

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Literature Review

Drug Use and Addiction

Drug use for medical and social purposes can be traced back to thousands of years B.C.E.; however, the first recorded study of drug addiction can be dated back to a study of morphine addiction (Levinstein,1878). Subsequent research on combating addiction lacked scientific resources, leaving it largely misunderstood – if not ignored. By the 1960s, the scientific community was still at a loss for how to treat drug addiction, and thus turned it over to law enforcement under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Drug Abuse Control (BDAC) and the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) (DEA, n.d.), deprioritizing prevention and rehabilitation (Musto, 1996). The "War on Drugs" was born.

In 1973, the Nixon Administration created the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) because "the introduction of drugs into American culture and the efforts to 'normalize' drug use started to take a terrible toll on the nation" (DEA, n.d., para. 1). Massive efforts to curtail drug trafficking and use continued. In Ohio, which has taken a "zero tolerance" stance on drug use (Wedd, 2015), the state prison population nearly quadrupled between 1980 and 2016 (ACLU of Ohio, 2016). Scholars have argued that this has perpetuated a criminal justice system that supported aggressive policing and mass incarceration for drug offenses in the United States, thereby removing treatment as an option (Duke, 2010) while human rights groups claim that nearly 90% of inmates have some history of drug use (ACLU of Ohio, 2016).

While scholars have argued that the War on Drugs led to racialized over-incarceration of urban Black males specifically, the more recent opiate epidemic has hit rural Ohio profoundly. This epidemic has been largely attributed to what began as addiction to over-prescribed prescription painkillers (Zezima, 2018). Rural judiciaries often lack the resources (e.g., sufficient treatment options), leaving incarceration as the only choice. In addition, judges in rural areas may reflect the often more conservative beliefs of their constituents, opting to lock up offenders (Glunt, 2015), leading to overcrowding of local jails.

Opiate Addiction in [Rural] Ohio

"Ground zero" describes an epicenter of a catastrophe, and Ohio trails West Virginia as the center of what has been dubbed by the media as "the opiate epidemic." In fact, media reports indicate that opiates are responsible for nearly 68% of all drug overdose fatalities. Perhaps what has been most troubling to Ohioans is how the drug abuse crisis has crept into the rural areas. No one seems immune. As one Ohio Farm Bureau writer described it:

The drug epidemic has swept into Ohio and taken hold unlike any other health care crisis before it. Opioids. Heroin. Fentanyl. Carfentanil. Meth. It used to be conventional wisdom that drug problems were confined to the big cities and urban areas. No more. (Milligan Stammen, 2017, para. 4-5)

As a result, national news entities turned their focus on Ohio to cover the epidemic, garnering media attention that Ohioans are typically used to only in major election years.

Legislative approaches. One response to the [de]criminalizing of drug use (and subsequent addiction) has come via proposed legislation to either make certain types of drug use legal (e.g., legalizing the use of small quantities of marijuana with Issue 3 in 2015, which was rejected by 64% of voters) or reduce criminal penalties for drug [ab]users (e.g., Issue 1 in 2018).

Issue 3. As described above, Ohio voters rejected Issue 3 nearly 2-1 in 2015, the first time they faced a Constitutional Amendment that would legalize marijuana. The legislation was controversial, namely because of its "monopoly" clause. In fact, several news organizations identified a list of reasons it failed, citing the monopoly, which would have made it legal for only 10 previously chosen "grow" facilities (Saker, 2015). Past research suggested that the monopoly was the most popular reason for opposing Issue 3 (Wagstaff & Knopf, 2017). However, Legislative efforts did not cease. In September of 2016, Ohio Legislators passed House Bill 523, making Ohio the 28th state to legalize marijuana for medicinal purposes (The Ohio Legislature, 2016). Subsequently, Legislators passed House Bills 248, 4, and 497, all of which were specifically aimed at containing the opiate epidemic (Wedd, 2015).

Issue 1. The primary purpose of Issue 1 was to reduce penalties for crimes obtaining, possessing, and using illegal drugs, as well as to repurpose funds previously used to incarcerate offenders (Ohio Secretary of State, 2018).

Proponents. The main proponent of Issue 1 was the Ohio Safe and Healthy Communities Campaign, a non-profit group, which was predominantly financially supported by out-of-state donors including the Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative, a philanthropic organization founded by Facebook mogul Mark Zuckerberg and his wife (Borchardt, 2018). All in all, the campaign spent more than $17.6 million to advocate its position (Ballotpedia, 2018), making it extremely likely that media users of all types were exposed to several pro-Issue 1 messages. Supporters of the proposed amendment included then-gubernatorial candidate Richard Cordray, former Governor Ted Strickland, former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich, singer John Legend, Netflix CEO Reed Hastings, several local Democratic parties and elected officials, the American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio, and several faith-based non-profits in Ohio.

Proponents argued that Ohio could redirect the $1.8 billion that Ohioans spend on a "broken prison system where too many people who pose little public safety risk are incarcerated" into underfunded treatment programs (Ohio Secretary of State, 2018, "Vote Yes" Argument #2). Instead, they argued, money could be better spent on treatment programs for addiction, which would reduce recidivism. Proponents were also careful to underscore that those who were a danger to public safety would remain incarcerated.

Opponents. The Vote No to Protect Ohio Committee led the campaign in opposition to Issue 1, spending a bit more than $1.7 million to convince the voting public to vote "no." Major contributors to this campaign included Ohioans for a Healthy Economy and Western & Southern. Opponents included then-Governor John Kasich, then-gubernatorial candidate Mike DeWine, the Ohio Republican Party, several local Republican organizations and officials, the Fraternal Order of Police of Ohio, Inc., and several state judicial associations and no media editorial boards publicly supported it (Ballotpedia, 2018).

Opponents claimed Issue 1 undermined treatment programs, reduced sentence time for violent offenders, and shifted cost burdens to local governments. The Ohio Revised Code 2925.11 indicates that possessing or using a deadly drug is classified as a felony, but Issue 1 would have changed this from a felony to a misdemeanor, which could have eliminated jail time. Opponents of Issue 1 also criticized it for failing to prescribe effective treatment for offenders, which judges and law enforcement officials argued is best motivated by punishment such as the threat of jail time (Govaki, 2018). Opponents underscored the importance of protecting communities from drug offenders, whom they feared would get a proverbial "slap on the wrist," as Ohio Supreme Court Justice Maureen O'Connor argued, "I fear for the safety of our state" (Stratford, 2018, para. 8). In fact, O'Connor, a major opponent, issued a statement warning voters that Issue 1's "passage would gravely endanger Ohioans" (O'Connor, 2018, para 11). This intent to protect others may be explained by Davison's (1983) Third-Person Effect Hypothesis.

The Third-Person Effect and Issue 1

The Third-Person Effect Hypothesis (Davison, 1983) consists of two major components or tenets: the perceptual tenet, which suggests individuals may perceive that others (i.e., third-person "they") are more influenced by [media] communication than themselves (i.e., first-person "me"), and the behavioral tenet, which indicates individuals who perceive negative media effects on others will do something about these perceptions, typically by supporting the restriction of the content (see Perloff, 1989; 1993; 1999; 2002). Scholars claim that the perceptual bias serves as the best predictor of behavioral outcomes (Peiser & Peter, 2000).

The perceptual bias is a function of "determining how different from ourselves the other people in question are, thereby moving ourselves outside of influence's way" (Andsager & White, 2007, p. 80). As Perloff (2002) suggests, individuals "should be loathe to admit that they are influenced by messages when such admission reflects negatively on the self" (p. 495), typically manifested as support for censorship or other media content restrictions (Perloff, 1999), yet this can certainly apply beyond the willingness to censor (Wei, Lo, Lu, & Hou, 2015). However, past research has also examined different manifestations of behavior such as voting. For example, the behavioral outcome motivated by political advertising intended

to persuade individuals to vote for a candidate or issue could be manifested as the vote itself (Golan, Banning, & Lundy, 2009; Griswold, 1992). Likewise, a concern for safety could motivate one to vote in a certain way as a form of protective measure (Liu & Lo, 2014). Still, few Third-Person Effect studies have explored behavioral outcomes beyond the aforementioned support for censorship. Thus, in the context of this study, perhaps the third-person effect is two-fold: (1) Individuals opposed to the Issue may have believed that others were "duped" by communication (e.g., news stories, social media, advertising) about it (perception); therefore, they would be highly motivated to go vote against the issue in order to protect themselves [and others] (behavior); and (2) Individuals opposed to the Issue may have believed it passing would have affected other people more than themselves (e.g., it would create a "slippery slope" for getting away with drug offenses (perception), and thus were highly motivated to go vote against it in order to help prevent rampant drug abuse from happening (behavior)).

Within the context of evaluating legislation to make a voting decision, most people gather information from media, which include both mainstream news sources, social media, and advertisements. Nevertheless, as indicated above, individuals are not readily willing to admit that these sources influence their attitudes or ultimate decisions (e.g., voting behaviors) – a third-person effect. The question is how this perception manifests as voters take to the polls to engage in voting behavior as it pertained to a public health crisis (i.e., a proposed legislative response to dealing with drug offenses). This, of course, is an answer to requests to increase research efforts on [different manifestations of] the behavioral component (Xu & Gonzenbach, 2008).

Considering media messages about Issue 1, which received a lot of [media] attention, it is important to investigate third-person perceptions of media coverage and advertising about the proposed legislation and specific voting behaviors. As mentioned above, if an opposer to Issue 1, concerned that others would be misled or misinformed by the message, saw an advertisement urging a "yes" vote (which was not unlikely, given that proponents of Issue 1 spent nearly $17 billion compared to opponents, who spent roughly $1.7 billion), is it likely that the individual would be more likely to cast a "no" vote to offset the others? If so, what led to these perceptions?

Antecedents to Third-Person Perceptions

Several individual differences and demographic variables have been examined for their role in contributing to third-person perceptions (e.g., Conners, 2005; Haridakis & Rubin, 2005; Lasorsa, 1989; Perloff, 1989; Tiedge, Silverblatt, Havice, & Rosenfeld, 1991; Paul, Salwen, & Dupagne, 2013; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). These investigations have helped to "explain the theoretical underpinnings of the third-person effect" (Paul, Salwen, & Dupagne, 2000, p. 83). As Perloff (1993) suggests, individual differences "reflect or indirectly point to underlying conceptual factors that actually are impacting on perceptions of media effects on others and the self" (p. 175).

Background Characteristics

Locus of control. One factor to consider is locus of control, or "the general belief that one's behavior can have an impact on the environment and that one is capable of controlling outcomes through one's own behavior" (Maddux, 1995, p. 22). This describes how much individuals feel they are in control of their daily lives (Rotter, 1966). While internally controlled individuals tend to believe they control their behaviors and outcomes, externally controlled individuals tend to believe their lives are controlled largely by other forces such as fate or luck. Past research suggests that people who are internally controlled exhibit greater third-person perceptual bias than those who are more externally controlled (Haridakis & Rubin, 2005). This control has been attributed to people's tendency to "overestimate how much control they have over situations," which leads to "perceived invulnerability," and to the possibility that the "illusion of control may lead to third-person perceptions" (Peiser & Peter, 2000). Haridakis and Rubin (2005) found that individuals with high internal locus of control tend to underestimate the effects of exposure to negative media content on themselves, while worrying about the effects it has on others. Thus, internally controlled voters, may fear the worst when considering the impact of media coverage of Issue 1 – and its subsequent potential passing.

Drug [ab]use (i.e., personal experience). Media effects scholars have long-suggested that personal experience and interpersonal relationships – not just media – play an important role in shaping people's perceptions (e.g., Klapper, 1960), including third-person perceptions in that lived experience leads to greater third-person perceptual biases, particularly when taking political ideology into account (Johansson, 2015). Nevertheless, the question remains: Does lived experience of using and/or abusing drugs (or being exposed to drug use by others) impact third-person perceptions about media coverage of Issue 1 on the self [and others] as well as the hypothetical passage of the Issue?

Political ideology. While there is not published evidence to suggest that political ideology contributes to third-person perceptual biases for one end of the spectrum more than another, the political nature of Issue 1 does make it relevant. A proverbial political line was drawn between Democrats who largely endorsed Issue 1 and Republicans who largely opposed it (Ballotopedia, 2018). Thus, it is important to see if party lines impacted perceptual biases toward media coverage of Issue 1, toward its hypothetical passing, and toward vote cast on the Issue.

External Factors

In addition to the background characteristics that may influence third-person perceptions, external factors also may play a role. This includes perceived desirability of a message – in this case, promoting Issue 1 – and his or her perceived social distance from a variety of target "others."

Message desirability. Scholars have argued that the type of media message and its desirability are inextricably related (Gunther & Thorson, 1992) because individuals "operate to maintain and enhance their self- identities" by identifying socially desirable behavior, imitating it, and "discounting it for others as a way to maintain the relative superiority of the self" (p. 578). Taken within the context of the third-person effect, individuals [have a desire to] feel impervious to negative messages while feeling responsive to positive ones (Gunther, 1995; Gunther & Mundy, 1993). Thus, research has indicated that third-person perceptions are greater when messages are "deemed antisocial or in some way harmful or dysfunctional to society" (Lo & Paddon, 1999, p. 80).

Moreover, several studies have identified a relationship between the behavioral tenet of the third-person effect hypothesis (i.e., support for content restrictions) and "negative" media content (see meta-analyses by Eveland & McLeod, 1999; Sun, Shen, & Pan, 2008; Xu & Gonzenbach, 2008). This research aims to investigate third-person perceptions and voting behavior as they pertain to a public health crisis, so it is important to highlight research providing empirical support for third-person perceptual biases as they pertain to public health and to politics. Past research has found links between perceptual biases and behavioral effects as they pertain to receiving news about health crises including the Fukushima nuclear crisis (Wei, Lo, Lu, & Hou, 2015), the pandemic H1N1 flu outbreak (Lee & Park, 2016), a tainted food recall (Wei, Lo, & Lu, 2010) and the avian flu outbreak (Wei, Lo, & Lu, 2008). These studies also identified multiple manifestations of the behavioral tenet including self-protection and taking corrective action (consistent with findings by Rojas, 2010).

There is also vast support for third-person perceptual bias as it pertains to political communication, including: political advertisements (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Cohen, Mutz, Price, & Gunther, 1988; Hong & Riffe, 2008; Paek, Pan, Abisaid, & Houden, 2005; Rucinski & Salmon, 1990; Salwen 1998; Wei & Lo, 2007) election coverage (e.g., news coverage, polls) of controversial figures or issues (Cohen & Tsfati, 2009; Gardikiotis, 2008; Golan, Banning, & Lundy, 2008; Pan, Abisaid, Paek, Sun, & Houden, 2006; Price & Stroud, 2006; Wei, Lo, & Lu, 2011;), stories about political unrest (Perloff, 1989), and news coverage of poll results in that supporters of the candidate losing in the polls were more likely to indicate political participation intention to help boost that candidate's chances (Kim, 2016).

Certainly, there is much evidence to suggest that messages that are interpreted to be negative or are believed to cause negative effects contribute to third-person perceptions. Thus, we sought to determine whether eligible Ohio voters would perceive media coverage of and/or media messages in support of Issue 1 as being socially undesirable, and whether their interpretations would contribute to the third-person perceptual bias and subsequent behavior (i.e., self-reported vote on Issue 1).

Social distance. Past research suggests that we also must consider perceived social distance, or the differences that individuals perceive between themselves and others (in this case, the students in their schools). Findings have suggested that individuals attribute their own resilience to negative media influences to internal strengths or traits. Likewise, they ascribe others' vulnerability to these same influences to some internal weakness (e.g., immaturity, lack of intelligence, naiveté) (Paul, Salwen, & Dupagne, 2000). The *social distance corollary* of the third-person effect hypothesis suggests that perceived effects change as individuals compare themselves with their close social circle instead of progressively unfamiliar others (Cohen, et al., 1988; Gunther 1991; White, 1997). Individuals view unfamiliar or distant members of the population as being unlike themselves. In other words, "they" are not like "me" (or people close to me), and this gap widens as social distance becomes greater. The generalized other is perceived as being incapable of protecting oneself from dangerous media effects (Andsager & White, 2007) (or perhaps simply danger), and the strength of the perceived effects are amplified as individuals compare themselves to increasingly distant others (Cohen & Davis, 1991). This could pertain to perceived distance between individuals and close others such as friends and relatives, individuals and others who were eligible to vote on Issue 1, and all other Ohioans who would have been affected by Issue 1. In this study, it was important to determine whether the relationship impacted third-person perceptions toward (1) media coverage of and/or in support for Issue 1 and (2) the would-be passage of Issue 1, as well as individuals' vote on Issue 1.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Hypotheses

The main assumption of the third-person effect is individuals believe that media messages affect others more than themselves. Thus, we posited the following:

H_{1a}: Individuals judge media coverage supporting Issue 1 as having a greater effect on their friends/relatives, Ohio voters, and other Ohioans, respectively, than on themselves.

H_{1b}: Individuals judge the passing of Issue 1 as having a greater effect on their friends/relatives, Ohio voters, and other Ohioans, respectively, than on themselves.

In addition, we posited that desirability of media coverage of Issue 1 – particularly coverage of messages in support of the Issue would impact third person perceptual bias, attitudes toward Issue 1, and vote on Issue 1 (i.e., to tap the behavioral tenet):

H_{2a}: When message desirability decreases (e.g., desirability of media coverage supporting Issue 1), third-person perceptual bias among respondents increases.

H_{2b}: The message desirability of media coverage of support for Issue 1 would be negatively associated with support for Issue 1, comfort with Issue 1, and ultimately vote on Issue 1.

In addition, we predicted that third-person perceptions for media coverage supporting Issue 1 and the passing of Issue 1 would impact comfort with the Issue:

H_{3a}: The magnitude of third-person perceptions for media coverage supporting Issue 1 (for each of the comparison groups) would be positively associated with comfort with Issue 1.

H_{3b}: The magnitude of third-person perceptions for the passing of Issue 1 (for each of the comparison groups) would be positively associated with comfort with the Issue.

Likewise, because of past research to suggest that social distance impact third-person perceptual bias, we posited:

> H_{4a}: Greater social distance (i.e., between the respondent and friends/relatives, Ohio voters, and other Ohioans) would be related to greater perceptual bias for media coverage in support of Issue 1 for each of the self-to-comparison groups.

> H_{4b}: Greater social distance (i.e., between respondents and each of the comparison groups) would be related to greater perceptual bias toward the passing of Issue 1.

Past behavior seems to play a role in predicting future behavior, so we also predicted this would be true among Issue 3 and Issue 1 voters. We proposed:

> H_5: There is an association between past vote on Issue 3 and on Issue 1.

Finally, past research suggests personal experience and interpersonal relationships – and not just media – play an important role in shaping people's perceptions (e.g., Klapper, 1960), and that third-person perceptions may also be influenced by beliefs that others are more influenced by media while oneself is more influenced by personal experience (Johannson, 2015). Thus, we posited that personal experience with drug (ab)use might shape feelings about Issue 1:

> H_6: Past drug users and abusers will be more supportive of Issue 1.

Research Questions

In addition, we posed research questions to better ascertain the nuances of associations among the aforementioned variables. First, given what we knew about the failure of Issue 3 – and that Ohio voters took issue with certain portions of it, we asked about attitudes toward the various portions of Issue 1:

> RQ_1: What were the respondents' overall attitude toward Issue 1 and the favorability of its various provisions?

We also wondered what motivated voters to turn out in the November 2018 election:

> RQ_2: What were respondents' motives for voting in November 2018?

Because of the multitude of endorsements in favor of Issue 1 from liberal interest groups – and the converse for conservative interest groups, we questioned whether this divide would be present among voters. Therefore, we asked:

> RQ_3: What is the relationship between political ideology and comfort with Issue 1?

In addition, we were interested in how individual differences/background variables and external factors impacted third-person perceptual bias toward media coverage of Issue 1 and toward the hypothetical passage of Issue 1. Thus, we asked:

> RQ_{4a}: How do background variables (i.e., political affiliation, LOC, drug use, drug abuse, past vote on Issue 3, Issue 1 support) and external factors (e.g., exposure to media messages from a variety of sources about Issue 1, message desirability, and social distance) predict third-person perceptual bias as it pertains to media coverage of/in support for Issue 1?

> RQ_{4b}: How do the background variables and external factors predict third-person perceptual bias as it pertained to the passage of Issue 1?

Finally, we were interested in how the aforementioned individual differences/background characteristics and the third-person perceptual bias influenced actual vote on Issue 1:

RQ_{5a}: How do the background variables and external factors plus third-person perceptual bias as it pertained to the passage of Issue 1 predict vote on Issue 1?
RQ_{5b}: How do the variables, coupled with third-person perceptual bias toward the passage of Issue 1 for each of the comparison groups?

Methodology

The goal of this research was to collect information about perceptions of drug (ab)use and associated legislation – namely Ohio's November 2018 ballot Issue 1. In order to collect this information, a survey link and QR code was distributed in late-January to early February 2019 via the authors' online social networks (i.e., LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook), other relevant Facebook pages (i.e., for supporters, opponents, the Ohio Democratic Party, and the Ohio Republican Party), and enabled it to be subsequently shared with others. This has become a widely accepted data collection technique, given recent problems with survey completion rates (Boulianne, 2015). A unique aspect of this sample was the ability to reach a variety of constituents in what has been dubbed "ground zero" for Ohio's opioid epidemic.

Respondents (N = 545) received the link and scannable QR code via a variety of social networks and were encouraged to share it with their networks as well. Respondents had to be eligible to vote in Ohio. After eliminating incomplete surveys, the resulting sample (n = 346) was used for all statistical analyses. The age range was 23 to 82 years (M = 38.9, SD = 15.66), 30.6% were male while 68.8% were female, and 0.6% were other/prefer not to say. In terms of ethnicity, 93.4% were Caucasian, 4% were Black/African-American, 0.3% were American Indian or Alaskan Native, 0.3% were Asian, 1.2% were Hispanic or Latino, and 0.9% were Other. Among respondents, 9.8% had some or all high school education, 74.3% had some or all college education, and 15.9% had graduate education (e.g., masters, professional, or doctorate degree). The median household income was between $60,000 and $69,999. In terms of voting, 88.4% were registered Ohio voters, 10.1% were not, and 1.4% did not know. Considering Counties represented, the highest percentages were from "ground zero" in Ohio's opioid epidemic: 20.5% from Clinton, 15% from Montgomery, 10.1% from Warren, and 9.2% from Marion. In total, respondents represented 50 of Ohio's 88 Counties.

Measures

Third-person perceptual bias. In third-person effect research, perceptual bias is said to occur when respondents underestimate the effect of media on oneself and overestimate it on others. In most third-person effect research, perceptual bias is measured by parallel-phrased questions regarding perceptions of media effects on self and on others (Price & Tewksbury, 1996). This measure was adapted from Haridakis and Rubin (2005), included a "self" question that asked respondents to indicate on a 5-point scale how affected (1 = not at all affected and 5 = very affected) they believed they would be by exposure to media coverage supporting Issue 1. The mean estimated effect of coverage on friends and relatives (M = 2.93, SD = 1.08), other Ohio voters (M = 3.44, SD = 0.98), and other Ohioans (M = 3.40, SD = 0.97) was greater than the mean estimated effect of the story on oneself (M = 2.39, SD = 1.15).

We calculated third-person perceptual bias scores by reverse coding responses to the self-item (i.e. whether media coverage supporting Issue 1) and summing and averaging it with each of the three comparison groups. Thus, higher scores on the pair of self and friends/relatives (M = 3.27, SD = 0.57), self and Ohio voters, (M = 3.52, SD = 0.61), and self and Ohioans in general (M = 3.51, SD = 0.62) indicated greater third-person perceptual bias.

In addition, we also calculated third-person perceptual bias as it pertained to the passage of Issue 1. The mean estimated effect of Issue 1 passing on friends and relatives (M = 3.67, SD = 1.48), other Ohio

voters (*M* = 3.76, *SD* = 1.63), and other Ohioans (*M* = 3.80, *SD* = 1.78) was greater than the mean estimated effect of the passage on oneself (*M* = 2.92, *SD* = 1.48). We also calculated third-person perceptual bias scores by reverse coding responses to the self-item (i.e. whether media coverage supporting Issue 1) and summing and averaging it with each of the three comparison groups. Thus, higher scores on the pair of self and friends/relatives (*M* = 3.29, *SD* = 0.86), self and Ohio voters, (*M* = 3.34, *SD* = 0.90), and self and Ohioans in general (*M* = 3.36, *SD* = 0.96) indicated greater third-person perceptual bias.

Locus of control. To measure locus of control, we used an abbreviated version of Levenson's (1974) scale in which respondents indicated how much they agree with 12 statements (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) that reflect chance control, powerful others control, and internal control (Lindbloom & Faw, 1982) (Hanson & Haridakis, 2009; Haridakis & Rubin, 2005; Rubin, 1993). Responses were summed and averaged to create an overall locus of control score in which higher scores indicate greater internal control (*M*= 3.84, *SD* = 0.55).

Political party affiliation. Respondents indicated their party affiliation on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strong Democrat to 7 = strong Republican. Among them, 29.5% indicated they were independent or neutral, 21.7% indicated they were Republican, 15.3% indicated they were moderate Republicans, 12.1% indicated they were Democrat, 9.5% indicated they were moderate Democrats, 6.1% indicated they were strong Democrats, and 5.8% strong Republicans. We summed and averaged these to reveal that they were relatively moderate overall (*M* = 4.24, *SD* = 1.62).

Drug ab[use]. To ascertain past drug use among respondents, we asked them to indicate past or current use of a variety of illegal drugs (for recreational use). In order to simplify, we recoded the responses to indicate non-user (0) or past/current user (1); 40.5% reported being a past or current user. Likewise, to determine whether respondents had ever abused drugs, we asked them to indicate whether they had faced a variety of outcomes of drug abuse, including [in]voluntary treatment, criminal convictions, and incarceration. To simplify, we recoded the responses to indicate non-abuser (0 = never faced treatment, conviction, punishment, or incarceration) or abuser (1 = faced treatment or some variation of punishment for drug abuse). Among respondents, 10.7% reported facing some sort of treatment or punishment for drug abuse.

Frequency of voting behavior. Respondents were then asked how often they voted in elections; 11.3% indicated "never," 6.9% indicated "rarely," 16.5% indicated "sometimes," 24.6% indicated "very often," and 40.8% indicated "always."

Past vote on Issue 3. To gain a sense of past vote on other recent drug-related legislation, we asked respondents to indicate how they voted on Issue 3 in 2015. Respondents indicated that 41.3% did not vote on Issue 3, 27.5% voted against Issue 3, 23.7% voted for Issue 3, and 7.5% did not remember.

Exposure to Issue 1 messages. To gain a sense for respondents' media exposure to messages about Issue 1, we asked them how frequently they saw/heard messages concerning Issue 1 from a variety of sources (measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 = never and 5 = very often). We summed and averaged each for a total exposure measure (*M* = 2.81, *SD* = 0.91), with the most coming via social media (*M* = 3.32, *SD* = 1.27).

Attitudes toward Issue 1. To get a sense of support for the various provisions outlined in the ballot language, we also asked questions about the perceived favorability of each (measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 = not favorable and 5 = very favorable). We also asked respondents to indicate the overall favorability of Issue 1 to them (*M* = 2.66, *SD* = 1.41), friends and relatives (*M* = 2.56, *SD* = 1.16), Ohio voters (*M* = 2.68, *SD* = 1.03), and Ohioans in general (*M* = 2.73, *SD* = 1.03). In addition, we asked how comfortable they were with Issue 1 (on a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 = extremely uncomfortable and 5 = extremely comfortable) (*M* = 2.76, *SD* = 1.29). In addition, respondents indicated their overall support for Issue 1 (also on a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 = strong opposition and 5 = strong favorability) (*M* = 2.66, *SD* = 1.40).

Vote on Issue 1. To gauge the relative importance of turning out to vote on Issue 1, we asked respondents to indicate how important it was that they voted on the Issue (on a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 = not at all important and 5 = very important) (*M* = 3.38, *SD* = 1.33). We also asked respondents

to indicate their vote on Issue 1 in 2018. Among them, 42.8% voted against Issue 1, and 27.2% voted in favor of Issue 1, and 30.1% indicated they did not vote.

Message desirability. To determine message desirability, we asked respondents to indicate how they felt specifically about media coverage supporting Issue 1. Using a six-item 5-point Likert-type scale adapted from Hitchon, Chang, and Harris (1997), respondents indicated the degree (measured on a 5-point scale) to which they believed the coverage was socially desirable (M = 2.93, SD = .95), beneficial (M = 3.37, SD = 1.77), socially responsible (M = 2.96, SD = .936), favorable to themselves (M = 2.76, SD = 1.03), favorable to their friends/relatives (M = 2.93, SD = .92), and favorable to Ohio voters (M = 3.04, SD = .92). We summed and averaged responses to create an overall index of message desirability (M = 2.45, SD = 0.90).

Social distance. To ascertain respondents' perceived social distance, we adapted an index from Eveland, Nathanson, Detenber, and McLeod (1999) to measure directly perceived similarity of oneself to each comparison group. Respondents rated this perceived similarity (where 1 = not at all similar, 5 = very similar) to each of the three target groups. As recommended by Eveland et al. (1999), to "reflect social distance, the converse of similarity," we reverse coded these items so that higher social distance scores reflect greater social distance between self and each comparison group (p. 284). Respondents indicated greater social distance between themselves and other Ohioans in general (M = 3.02, SD = 0.85) than other Ohio voters (M = 2.97, SD = 0.85), and friends/relatives (M = 2.30, SD = 0.94).

Results

The goal of this study was to examine third-person perceptual biases among Ohioans, and whether these perceptual biases contributed to their self-reported vote on Issue 1 in the November 2018 election. We also examined how several variables, including background characteristics, external factors, and perceptual bias predicted respondents' vote on Issue 1.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1_a posited that respondents (n = 346) would judge media coverage supporting Issue 1 as having a greater effect on others than on themselves. We ran a series of paired samples t-tests to analyze the mean difference between perceived effects on oneself and each of the three comparison groups. Perceived effects of media coverage supporting Issue 1 were lower for respondents than for their friends/relatives, $t(345) = -8.81$, $p < .001$. Likewise, perceived effects of media coverage supporting Issue 1 were lower for respondents than for Ohio voters, $t(345) = -15.89$, $p < .001$. Finally, perceived effects of media coverage supporting Issue 1 were lower for respondents than for Ohioans in general, $t(345) = -15.298$, $p < .001$. This suggests that the respondents perceived each of the target groups as being more influenced by media coverage supporting Issue 1, indicating a third-person perceptual bias.

Hypothesis 1_b posited that respondents would judge the passing of Issue 1 as having a greater effect on each of the comparison groups than on themselves. We ran a series of paired samples t-tests to test these hypotheses to analyze the mean difference between perceived effects on oneself and each of the three comparison groups. Perceived effects of the passage of Issue 1 were lower for respondents than for their friends/relatives, $t(345) = -2.356$, $p < .05$. Likewise, perceived effects of the passage of Issue 1 were lower for respondents than for Ohio voters, $t(345) = -2.789$, $p < .01$. Finally, perceived effects of the passage of Issue 1 were lower for respondents than for Ohioans in general, $t(345) = -2.943$, $p < .01$. Thus, the results suggest that the respondents perceived all three comparison groups as being more affected by the passage of Issue 1 than themselves, indicating a perceptual bias. Both hypotheses were supported.

Hypothesis 2_a posited that when message desirability decreased (e.g., desirability of media coverage supporting Issue 1), third-person perceptual bias among respondents would increase. There was a significant negative correlation between overall message desirability and third-person perceptual bias from self-to-friends/relatives (r = -.12, $p < .05$), but not between self-to-Ohio voters (r = -.09, p = .17), and self-to-other Ohioans (M = 3.51, SD = 0.62) (r = -.096, p = .08). Hypothesis 2_a was partially supported.

Hypothesis 2_b predicted that the message desirability of media coverage of support for Issue 1 would be negatively associated with support for Issue 1, comfort with Issue 1, and ultimately vote on Issue 1. There was a significant correlation between message desirability (M = 3.00, SD = 0.79) and support for Issue 1 (M = 2.66, SD = 1.40) r = .27, p < .001 and between message desirability (M = 3.00, SD = 0.79) and comfort with Issue 1 (M = 2.76, SD = 1.29) r = .29, p < .001. Finally, results of a multinomial logistic regression analysis revealed that for respondents' vote on Issue 1, message desirability was a statistically significant predictor (log likelihood 178.45, χ^2 = 21.54, df = 2, p < .001). When contrasting a "yes" vote with did not vote (i.e., as the reference category), those viewing media coverage in support of Issue 1 as higher in message desirability were 1.7 times (OR = 1.2-2.5, p < .01, 95% CI) more likely to have reported voting "yes." Hypothesis 2_b was fully supported.

Hypothesis 3_a predicted that the magnitude of third-person perceptions for media coverage supporting Issue 1 (for each of the comparison groups) would be positively associated with comfort with Issue 1 (M = 2.76, SD = 1.29). There were significant negative correlations between third-person perceptual bias from respondents to friends/relatives and comfort (r = -.17, p <.01) and between respondents and other Ohioans (r = -.13, p < .05). There was no significant correlation between third-person perceptual bias from respondents to Ohio voters and comfort (r = -.06, p = .24). Hypothesis 3_b predicted that the magnitude of third-person perceptions for the passing of Issue 1 (for each of the comparison groups) would be positively associated with comfort with the Issue. There were significant correlations between respondents and all three groups, including self to friends/relatives (r = .30 p < .001), self to Ohio voters (r = .38 p < .001), and self to other Ohioans (r = .41 p < .001). The hypotheses were partially supported.

Hypothesis 4_a and posited that greater social distance (i.e., between the respondent and friends/relatives, Ohio voters, and other Ohioans) would be related to greater perceptual bias for media coverage in support of Issue 1 for each of the self-to-comparison groups. There was a significant correlation between perceptions of social distance between respondents and friends/relatives and third-person perceptual bias from oneself to friends/relatives (r = .11, p < .05), but not between respondents and Ohio voters (r = -.38, p = .49) nor other Ohioans (r = .04, p = .47). Thus, this hypothesis was only partly supported. Hypothesis 4_b and posited that greater social distance (i.e., between respondents and each of the comparison groups) would be related to greater perceptual bias toward the passing of Issue 1. There were no significant correlations between perceptions of social distance between respondents and friends/relatives and third-person perceptual bias from oneself to friends/relatives (r = -.01, p = .85), between respondents and Ohio voters (r = .04, p = .47) nor between respondents and other Ohioans (r = .04, p = .49). Hypothesis 4_b was not supported.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that there would be an association between past vote on Issue 3 and vote on Issue 1. Results of a chi-square indicate that there was a significant association between past vote on Issue 3 in November 2015 and whether respondents voted in favor of Issue 1, χ^2 (6) = 146.51, p < .001. Thus, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

Finally, Hypotheses 6_a and 6_b posited that past drug users and abusers would be more supportive of the Issue. Results of a paired samples t-test revealed that there was a significant difference between drug users and non-users in terms of support for Issue 1, t(345) = -34.58, p < .001 and between drug abusers and non-abusers in terms of support, t(345) = -30.92, p < .001. Post-hoc chi-square analysis revealed that there was a significant association between self-reported drug use and casting a "yes" vote, χ^2(2) = 27.86, p < .001 and between self-reported drug abuse and casting a "yes" vote, χ^2 (2) = 13.04, p < .01. Both hypotheses were supported.

Research Questions

The first research question asked about respondents' overall attitude toward Issue 1 and the favorability of its various provisions. Overall, respondents viewed Issue 1 as not very favorable (M = 2.66, SD = 1.41) (measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 = not favorable and 5 = very favorable), and the favorability of the various provisions on the same 5-point Likert-type scale. A post-hoc regression analysis revealed that the provisions accounted for 65% of the variance in support for Issue

1, R^2 = .65, F(5, 340) = 123.57, p < .001. Reducing prison sentences by 25% (M = 3.03, SD = 1.41). (β = .28, p < .001), prohibiting jail time until an offender's third offense within 24 months (M = 2.48, SD = 1.40) (β = .24, p < .001), and allowing for requests for sentence reductions (M = 2.53, SD = 1.39) (β = .29, p < .001) were all significant predictors.

We also ascertained respondents' motives for voting in November 2018. They could choose as many reasons as preferred, and we calculated the overall percentages to the whole for each. The most popular were to vote for Governor (50.6%), to vote for a U.S. House and/or Senate candidate (49.4%), and to vote on Issue 1 (47.7%).

Research Question 3_a examined the relationship between political ideology and comfort with/support for Issue 1. A Pearson's Product Moment Correlation revealed that there was a significant negative correlation between political ideology and comfort with Issue 1, r = -.44, p < .001. The more Conservative the respondent, the less comfort. There was also a significant negative correlation between political ideology and support for Issue 1, r = -.51, p < .001.

Research Question 4_a asked: How do background variables (i.e., political affiliation, LOC, drug use, drug abuse, past vote on Issue 3, Issue 1 support) and external factors (e.g., exposure to media messages from a variety of sources about Issue 1, message desirability, and social distance) predict third-person perceptual bias as it pertains to media coverage of/in support for Issue 1? This question was examined using three hierarchical regression analyses for each of the three perceptual bias evaluations: self-to-friends/relatives, self-to-Ohio voters, and self-to-other Ohioans. Background variables were entered on the first step, and external factors were entered on the second step.

The first model to predict third-person perceptual bias toward media messages in support of Issue 1 from self to friends/relatives was significant R^2 = .04, F(6, 339) = 2.52, p < .05. Political ideology (β = -.13, p < .05) and support for Issue 1 (β = -.23, p < .001) were significant. The inclusion of external factors on the second step added 5% to the explained variance. The change in F was significant R^2 = .11, F(8, 331) = 2.90, p < .001. Political affiliation (β = -.12, p < .05), support for Issue 1 (β = -.25, p < .001), frequency of exposure to newspapers stories about Issue 1 (β = -.19, p < .01), and exposure to social media posts about Issue 1 (β = .15, p < .05) were all significant predictors. The second model to predict third-person perceptual bias toward media messages in support of Issue 1 from self to Ohio voters was not significant R^2 = .03, F(6, 339) = 1.75, p = .11. The inclusion of external factors on the second step made for a significant model (R^2 = .07, F(8, 331) = 1.81, p < .05) added 4% to the explained variance, but the change in F was not significant (F change = 1.83, p = .07). Support for Issue 1 (β = -.13, p < .05), frequency of exposure to newspapers stories about Issue 1 (β = -.18, p < .01), and exposure to ads in favor of Issue 1 (β = .16, p < .05) were all significant predictors. The third model to predict third-person perceptual bias toward media messages in support of Issue 1 from self to other Ohioans was not significant R^2 = .03, F(6, 339) = 1.76, p = .11. Support for Issue 1 (β = -.13, p < .05) was the sole significant predictor. The inclusion of external factors on the second step made for a significant model (R^2 = .07, F(8, 331) = 1.88, p < .05) added 4% to the explained variance. The change in F was significant (F change = 1.93, p < .05). Frequency of exposure to newspapers stories about Issue 1 (β = -.15, p < .05), and exposure to ads in favor of Issue 1 (β = .20, p < .05) were significant predictors.

Research question 4_b asked: How do the background variables and external factors predict third-person perceptual bias as it pertained to the passage of Issue 1? This question was examined using three hierarchical regression analyses for each of the three perceptual bias evaluations: self-to-friends/relatives, self-to-Ohio voters, and self-to-other Ohioans. Background variables were entered on the first step, and external factors were entered on the second step.

The first model to predict third-person perceptual bias toward the hypothetical passing of Issue 1 from self to friends/relatives was significant R^2 = .21, F(6, 339) = 15.36, p < .001. Drug use (β = .13, p < .01), drug abuse (β = .23, p < .001), and support for Issue 1 (β = .30, p < .001) were significant predictors. The inclusion of external factors on the second step made for a significant model (R^2 = .24, F(8, 331) = 7.52, p < .001) added 3% to the explained variance. The change in F was not significant. Drug use (β = .12, p < .05), drug abuse (β = .23, p < .001), support for Issue 1 (β = .32, p < .001), and frequency of exposure to ads in favor of Issue 1 (β = .19, p < .01) were significant predictors.

The second model to predict third-person perceptual bias toward the hypothetical passing of Issue 1 from self to Ohio voters was significant $R^2 = .25$, $F(6, 339) = 18.38$, $p < .001$. Drug use ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$), drug abuse ($\beta = .18$, $p < .001$), and support for Issue 1 ($\beta = .39$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors. The inclusion of external factors on the second step made for a significant model ($R^2 = .28$, $F(8, 331) = 7.52$, $p < .001$) added 3% to the explained variance. The change in F was not significant. Drug use ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$), drug abuse ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$), support for Issue 1 ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$), frequency of exposure to ads in favor of Issue 1 ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$) were significant predictors.

The third model to predict third-person perceptual bias toward the hypothetical passing of Issue 1 from self to other Ohioans was significant $R^2 = .27$, $F(6, 339) = 21.24$, $p < .001$. Drug use ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$), drug abuse ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$), and support for Issue 1 ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors. The inclusion of external factors on the second step made for a significant model ($R^2 = .30$, $F(8, 331) = 21.24$, $p < .001$) added 3% to the explained variance. The change in F was not significant. Drug use ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$), drug abuse ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$), support for Issue 1 ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$), frequency of exposure to ads in favor of Issue 1 ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$) were significant predictors.

Research questions 5_a and 5_b asked: was examined using three multinomial logistic regression analyses for each of the three perceptual bias evaluations: self-to-friends/relatives, self-to-Ohio voters, and self-to-other Ohioans as related to Issue 1 passing.

Research question 5_a sought to examine how the variables, coupled with third-person perceptual bias toward media messages about Issue 1 for each of the comparison groups. The first model (i.e., considering the role of social distance from self to friends/relatives and perceptual bias toward media messages supporting Issue 1 from self to friends/relatives in predicting vote on Issue 1) was significant (log likelihood 318.71, $\chi^2 = 427.68$, df = 34, $p < .001$). For the role of each predictor, see Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Regression Analysis Considering the Role of Social Distance between Respondents and Friends/Relatives and Perceptual Bias from Self to Friends/Relatives Toward Media Coverage in Support of Issue 1 Predicting Vote on Issue 1

	"Yes" Vote on Issue 1		"No" Vote on Issue 1	
	β	*OR* (95% CI)	*β*	*OR* (95% CI)
Political Affiliation	-.41*	.67 (.48, .93)	-.03	.97 (.71, 1.32)
LOC	-1.35*	.26 (.10, .70)	-.25	.78 (.35, 1.75)
Support Issue 1	1.46***	4.29 (2.53, 7.27)	-1.04***	.35 (.23, .55)
TV Coverage	-.26	.77 (.47, 1.27)	.42	1.52 (.96, 2.42)
Newspaper Coverage	.35	1.41 (.86, 2.32)	.44*	1.55 (.98, 2.44)
Radio Coverage	.10	1.11 (.70, 1.76)	.03	1.04 (.67, 1.59)
Social Media Posts	.19	1.20 (.76, 1.90)	-.30	.74 (.50, 1.16)
Ads in Favor	.02	1.02 (.76, 1.79)	.39	1.48 (.90, 2.44)
Ads Opposed	.68*	1.97 (1.19, 3.27)	.10	1.10 (.68, 1.77)
Message Desirability	-.35	.71 (.37, 1.36)	-.22	.81 (.46, 1.42)
Social Distance	-.55*	.58 (.36, .91)	.13	.13 (.72, 1.78)
TPPB - Media	-.12	.98 (.46, 2.11)	.00	1.00 (.48, 2.10)
Drug Use - None	.57	1.78 (.68, 4.63)	1.18**	3.24 (1.36, 7.73)
Drug Abuse - None	-.30	.74 (.23, 2.38)	1.08	2.93 (.66, 13.06)
"Yes" Vote on 3	3.49***	32.92 (8.99, 120.56)	1.76**	5.82 (1.86, 18.17)

Note. The referent category was: "Did not vote on Issue 1." *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

The second model (i.e., considering the role of social distance from self to Ohio voters and perceptual bias toward media messages supporting Issue 1 from self to Ohio voters in predicting vote on Issue 1) was significant (log likelihood 319.35, $\chi^2 = 427.03$, df = 34, $p < .001$). See Table 2.

Table 2
Summary of Regression Analysis Considering the Role of Social Distance between Respondents and Ohio Voters and Perceptual Bias from Self to Ohio Voters Toward Media Coverage in Support of Issue 1 Predicting Vote on Issue 1

	"Yes" Vote on Issue 1		"No" Vote on Issue 1	
	β	OR (95% CI)	*β*	OR (95% CI)
Political Affiliation	-.59***	.55 (.39, .79)	-.10	.91 (.66, 1.14)
LOC	-1.14*	.32 (.12, .84)	-.18	.83 (.37, 1.89)
Support Issue 1	1.39***	4.02 (2.41, 6.68)	-1.03***	.36 (.24, .55)
TV Coverage	-.28	.76 (.44, 1.24)	.38	1.46 (.92, 2.32)
Newspaper Coverage	.37	1.45 (.87, 2.41)	.42	1.53 (.97, 2.40)
Radio Coverage	-.05	.95 (.59, 1.54)	-.01	1.00 (.64, 1.54)
Social Media Posts	.22	1.24 (.80, 1.93)	-.25	.78 (.53, 1.14)
Ads in Favor	.03	1.03 (.59, 1.81)	.47	1.60 (.96, 2.66)
Ads Opposed	.68**	1.96 (1.19, 3.25)	.06	1.06 (.65, 1.73)
Message Desirability	-.26	.77 (.42, 1.43)	-.26	.77 (.44, 1.36)
Social Distance	-.62*	.54 (.29, .98)	-.23	.80 (.49, 1.29)
TPPB - Media	-.71	.49 (.23, 1.06)	-.31	.74 (.36, 1.50)
Drug Use - None	.53	1.69 (.65, 4.41)	1.08**	2.94 (1.24, 6.93)
Drug Abuse - None	-.22	.81 (.25, 2.57)	1.13	3.01 (.69, 13.89)
"Yes" Vote on 3	3.34***	28.13 (8.10, 97.75)	1.86**	6.45 (2.02, 20.21)

Note. The referent category was: "Did not vote on Issue 1." *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

The third model (i.e., considering the role of social distance from self to Ohioans and perceptual bias toward media messages supporting Issue 1 from self to Ohioans in predicting vote on Issue 1) was significant (log likelihood 319.67, $\chi^2 = 426.72$, df = 34, $p < .001$). See Table 3.

Table 3
Summary of Regression Analysis Considering the Role of Social Distance between Respondents and Ohioans and Perceptual Bias from Self to Ohioans Toward Media Coverage in Support of Issue 1 Predicting Vote on Issue 1

	"Yes" Vote on Issue 1		"No" Vote on Issue 1	
	β	*OR* (95% CI)	*β*	*OR* (95% CI)

Political Affiliation	-.44**	.65 (.46, .91)	-.02	.98 (.71, 1.34)
LOC	-1.12*	.33 (.13, .83)	-.11	.83 (.40, 2.02)
Support Issue 1	1.36***	3.88 (2.44, 6.40)	-1.06***	.35 (.23, .54)
TV Coverage	-.25	.78 (.48, 1.28)	.40	1.49 (.93, 2.35)
Newspaper Coverage	.38	1.47 (.89, 2.42)	.39	1.48 (.97, 2.40)
Radio Coverage	.03	1.04 (.66, 1.62)	.03	1.03 (.67, 1.59)
Social Media Posts	.15	1.16 (.75, 1.78)	-.24	.79 (.53, 1.15)
Ads in Favor	.09	1.10 (.63, 1.91)	.52*	1.68 (.99, 2.83)
Ads Opposed	.62**	1.85 (1.14, 2.99)	.04	1.04 (.63, 1.70)
Message Desirability	-.26	.77 (.42, 1.43)	-.25	.78 (.44, 1.38)
Social Distance	-.02	.98 (.59, 1.63)	.11	1.12 (.67, 1.87)
TPPB - Media	-.84*	.43 (.21, .90)	-.72	.49 (.22, 1.08)
Drug Use - None	.44	1.55 (.60, 3.99)	1.09**	2.98 (1.25, 7.09)
Drug Abuse - None	-.22	.79 (.25, 2.51)	1.04	2.82 (.63, 12.72)
"Yes" Vote on 3	3.24***	25.43 (7.43, 87.11)	1.82**	6.15 (1.96, 19.30)

Note. The referent category was: "Did not vote on Issue 1." $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Research question 5b sought to examine how the variables, coupled with third-person perceptual bias toward the passage of Issue 1 for each of the comparison groups. The first model (i.e., considering the role of social distance from self to friends/relatives and perceptual bias toward the passing of Issue 1 from self to friends/relatives in predicting vote on Issue 1) was significant (log likelihood 312.92, $\chi^2 = 433.47$, df = 34, $p < .001$). See Table 4.

Table 4

Summary of Regression Analysis Considering the Role of Social Distance between Respondents and Friends/Relatives and Perceptual Bias from Self to Friends/Relatives Toward the Passing of Issue 1 Predicting Vote on Issue 1

	"Yes" Vote on Issue 1		"No" Vote on Issue 1	
	β	*OR* (95% CI)	*β*	*OR* (95% CI)
Political Affiliation	-.41*	.67 (.48, .93)	.01	1.01 (.74, 1.38)
LOC	-1.42**	.24 (.09, .67)	-.25	.73 (.32, 1.69)
Support Issue 1	1.43***	4.16 (2.43, 7.13)	-1.18***	.31 (.20, .48)
TV Coverage	-.25	.78 (.47, 1.28)	.42	
Newspaper Coverage	.33	1.39 (.84, 2.29)	.41	1.52 (.94, 2.45)
Radio Coverage	.10	1.10 (.69, 1.76)	.10	1.51 (.95, 2.39)
Social Media Posts	.18	1.20 (.77, 1.88)	-.31	1.10 (.71, 1.71)
Ads in Favor	.03	1.03 (.58, 1.82)	.31	.73 (.49, 1.09)
Ads Opposed	.67**	1.96 (1.18, 3.27)	.14	1.36 (.83, 2.24)
Message Desirability	-.35	.71 (.37, 1.35)	-.14	1.15 (.71, 1.86)
Social Distance	-.56*	.57 (.36, .91)	.18	.87 (.49, 1.55)
TPPB - Issue 1 Pass	.08	1.08 (.67, 1.74)	.70*	1.20 (.76, 1.89)
Drug Use - None	.58	1.78 (.66, 4.84)	1.26**	2.02 (1.13, 3.61)
Drug Abuse - None	-.26	.77 (.24, 2.51)	1.48*	3.52 (1.45, 8.50)
"Yes" Vote on 3	3.50***	32.99 (6.47, 121.05)	1.80**	4.39 (.92, 20.90)
				6.06 (1.93, 19.05)

Note. The referent category was: "Did not vote on Issue 1." *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

The second model (i.e., considering the role of social distance from self to Ohio voters and perceptual bias toward the passing of Issue 1 from self to Ohio voters in predicting vote on Issue 1) was significant (log likelihood 322.58, $\chi^2 = 423.81$, df = 34, $p < .001$). For the role of each predictor, see Table 5.

Table 5
Summary of Regression Analysis Considering the Role of Social Distance between Respondents and Ohio Voters and Perceptual Bias from Self to Ohio Voters Toward the Passing of Issue 1 Predicting Vote on Issue 1

	"Yes" Vote on Issue 1		"No" Vote on Issue 1	
	β	*OR* (95% CI)	*β*	*OR* (95% CI)
Political Affiliation	-.52***	.60 (.42, .84)	-.09	.92 (.67, 1.25)
LOC	-1.13**	.32 (.13, .83)	-.24	.79 (.35, 1.78)
Support Issue 1	1.36***	3.91 (2.30, 6.65)	-1.04***	.35 (.23, .55)
TV Coverage	-.23	.79 (.49, 1.29)	.37	1.45 (.91, 2.31)
Newspaper Coverage	.39	1.48 (.89, 2.45)	.45*	1.56 (.99, 2.45)
Radio Coverage	.03	1.03 (.65, 1.63)	-.01	1.010 (.66, 1.57)
Social Media Posts	.18	1.19 (.77, 1.84)	-.26	.77 (.52, 1.13)
Ads in Favor	.03	1.03 (.59, 1.81)	.40	1.49 (.90, 2.46)
Ads Opposed	.65**	1.91 (1.16, 3.14)	.09	1.09 (.68, 1.77)
Message Desirability	-.15	.86 (.47, 1.58)	-.24	.79 (.45, 1.38)
Social Distance	-.55*	.58 (.31, 1.05)	-.23	.80 (.49, 1.29)
TPPB - Issue 1 Pass	-.01	.99 (.62, 1.58)	.16	1.17 (67, 2.06)
Drug Use - None	.51	1.67 (.63, 4.40)	1.09**	2.98 (1.27, 6.99)
Drug Abuse - None	-.06	.94 (.29, 3.03)	1.23	3.43 (.73, 16.09)
"Yes" Vote on 3	3.34***	25.57 (7.56, 86.45)	1.88***	6.55 (2.10, 20.45)

Note. The referent category was: "Did not vote on Issue 1.". *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

The third model (i.e., considering the role of social distance from self to other Ohioans and perceptual bias toward the passing of Issue 1 from self to Ohio voters in predicting vote on Issue 1) was significant (log likelihood 325.91, $\chi^2 = 420.48$, df = 34, $p < .001$). For the role of each predictor, see Table 6.

Table 6
Summary of Regression Analysis Considering the Role of Social Distance between Respondents and Ohioans and Perceptual Bias from Self to Ohioans Toward the Passing of Issue 1 Predicting Vote on Issue 1

	"Yes" Vote on Issue 1		"No" Vote on Issue 1	
	B	OR (95% CI)	B	OR (95% CI)
Political Affiliation	-.42**	.66 (.47, .92)	-.04	.96 (.71, 1.31)
LOC	-1.09*	.34 (.13, .85)	-.23	.79 (.35, 1.79)
Support Issue 1	1.27***	3.57 (2.10, 6.08)	-1.04***	.35 (.23, .55)
TV Coverage	-.19	.82 (.51, 1.33)	.40	1.49 (.94, 2.36)
Newspaper Coverage	.40	1.49 (.91, 2.46)	.43	1.54 (.98, 2.43)
Radio Coverage	.08	1.08 (.70, 1.68)	.04	1.04 (.68, 1.60
Social Media Posts	.14	1.15 (.75, 1.76)	-.27	.77 (.52, 1.13)

Ads in Favor	-.03	.97 (.57, 1.68)	.37	1.45 (.88, 2.40)
Ads Opposed	.59**	1.80 (1.12, 2.90)	.09	1.10 (.68, 1.78)
Message Desirability	-.12	.88 (.48, 1.64)	-.23	.79 (.45, 1.40)
Social Distance	-.01	.99 (.59, 1.66)	.08	1.08 (.65, 1.81)
TPPB - Issue 1 Pass	.14	1.15 (.73, 1.80)	.13	1.14 (.68, 1.92)
Drug Use - None	.51	1.67 (.65, 4.34)	1.13**	3.09 (1.30, 7.31)
Drug Abuse - None	-.03	.97 (.31, 3.06)	1.01	3.01 (.66, 13.77)
"Yes" Vote on 3	3.21***	22.31 (6.74, 73.87)	1.80**	6.04 (1.96, 18.66)

Note. The referent category was: "Did not vote on Issue 1." *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Discussion

Our findings suggest that there are applications for the Third-Person Effect Hypothesis (Davison, 1983) that include perceptual biases and behavioral effects that extend beyond reactions to purely media content. In fact, our respondents not only indicated third-person perceptual biases toward media coverage of/in support for Issue 1, but also exhibited these biases toward a hypothetical passage of the issue. While perceptual biases were not always significant predictors of vote on Issue 1, there was at least one circumstance: as it pertained to the hypothetical passage of Issue 1 when considering friends and relatives. We found that, in this circumstance, the more perceptual bias respondents indicated for Issue 1 passing, the more likely they were to have cast a "no" vote. This makes sense, as respondents likely felt an obligation to vote in a way to protect their friends and relatives from being greatly affected by passage and would be in line with past findings (e.g., Golan, Banning, & Lundy, 2009; Griswold, 1992; Liu & Lo, 2014). This effect could be a two-fold protective measure in that one could be concerned about protecting their friends and relatives (and even themselves) from other drug users and abusers who would get off "scot-free," or they could have been concerned for their own friends/relatives who are drug users/abusers who could be put out on the street with a slap on the wrist. Perhaps respondents felt that felonies and jail are acceptable options if they protect a loved one from continuing to use drugs and/or overdose. As a Clinton County Municipal Judge wrote in an op-ed piece endorsing a "no" vote on Issue 1 when referencing a conversation with a woman about her addicted granddaughter:

> Ohio Issue 1 on the Nov. 6 ballot takes away my ability to keep her granddaughter alive. If it passes, I lose the ability to hold her in jail long enough to find her a rehab. If it passes, when she is caught with fentanyl, the police have to give her a ticket and wish her good luck. They cannot arrest her. They have to leave her there — probably to use again, and probably to die. (Daugherty, 2018, para. 5-7)

This underscores a concern that an addict would be on their own had the Issue passed.

Also considering perceptual bias toward the passing of Issue 1, support for the issue, coupled with self-reported drug use and/or and abuse (plus exposure to media coverage in some cases) played a significant role. This, too, makes sense in that those who used and/or abused drugs were more likely to support this Issue and experience perceptual biases toward its passage because they favored alternatives to felonies and incarceration if they were caught.

Likewise, there were other notable predictors of perceptual bias as it pertained to media exposure to coverage of Issue 1, and these were consistent with previous research (e.g., Lee & Park, 2016; Rojas, 2010; Wei, Lo, Lu, & Hou, 2015; Wei, Lo, & Lu, 2010; Wei, Lo, & Lu, 2008). Exposure to media (namely social media and newspapers) and support were major predictors; newspapers were a likely impetus for this bias perhaps because people read op-eds such as the one noted above, and members of the legislature and judiciary wrote opposition pieces arguing that reducing sentences reduced the chance of protecting abusers from themselves. Social media was also a likely catalyst for experiencing perceptual biases because it is such a popular news source for people, and one could not escape posts about Issue 1 –

particularly because one of its biggest supporters and financers is a foundation started by social media mogul Mark Zuckerberg (Ballotpedia, 2018).

In addition, specifically considering self-to-Ohioans, respondents indicating third-person perceptual bias as it pertained to "anti-Issue 1" media messages were more likely to turn out to vote "yes." This suggests that despite the large amount of advertising dollars invested in "pro-Issue 1" messages (Ballotpedia, 2018), these people felt that other Ohioans in general would either remain opposed to the Issue or would be influenced in some way by the ads, so they likely cast a "yes" vote to offset them, which is consistent with previous findings (e.g., Liu & Lo, 2014).

It is important to discuss with greater specificity other factors that contributed to respondents' vote on Issue 1, of which the majority was no – albeit the margin was closer, likely because of the preponderance of voters who reported living in the "ground zero" areas. These people were more likely to experience the epidemic first-hand and may have felt desperation. Still, lawmakers may not have appropriately this desperation in crafting this piece of legislation. As a City Councilperson who serves in "ground zero" put it, when it comes to statewide ballot issues, legislation is "written in the best interest of the authors," which suggests that authors end up piling too many provisions into one piece of proposed law. This "kitchen sink" issue was a problem much like the monopoly issue in Issue 3, which was viewed as the least favorable provision of that Issue (Saker, 2015; Wagstaff & Knopf, 2017). Perhaps disagreement with even portions of provisions of legislation is sufficient in motivating overall opposition. In our study, the least favorable provisions had to do with conversion of offenses from misdemeanors to felonies and sentence reductions, both of which made offenses and their consequences less severe. Perhaps this also explains why voting on Issue 3 was among the top 3 (also voting for Governor and voting in the Midterm House and Senate elections) most important reasons respondents indicated they voted in November 2018.

Likewise, it is also important to note that we found support for other factors that are consistently examined in third-person effect research. Message desirability ratings of media coverage of support or ads in support were low – and lower for respondents themselves when considering the three comparison groups. This is certainly not surprising given that the large amount of money spent on advertising (and respondents' indications of exposure) meant that respondents were exposed to a lot of these ads. This, of course, leads to perceptual biases and behaviors as a result of these perceptions. We also found that political affiliation (i.e., conservativism), internal locus of control, support for 1, media exposure, social distance, and vote on Issue 3 were important predictors of vote on Issue 1 in most models. These also make sense in explaining a multifaceted model for predicting vote: conservative people who believe they have more control over their lives, were exposed to media messages about the Issue, who feel dissimilar to other constituent groups, and who opposed Issue 3 would be more likely to oppose other legislation that would allow for "out of control" individuals to escape harsher punishment for drug use and abuse.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the notable findings of this study, it does not come without limitations. First, the sample consisted of respondents connected – albeit even tangentially – somehow to the authors' networks, predominantly in rural parts of southwest Ohio, and predominantly Caucasian. Nevertheless, this is the area where the opioid epidemic has hit Ohio the hardest. Future research should consider ways to expand the geographical spread and diversity of respondents.

In addition, the survey was quite lengthy – analytics suggest it took about 10-15 minutes to complete. To reduce its size, we eliminated and/or reduced several measures to help to make the survey length manageable. Thus, we may have missed important factors that should be considered in future research about drug use, drug addiction, punishment, and treatment. Finally, surveys, particularly those involving taboo subjects carry a risk of soliciting partial or dishonest responses. We took much care to protect respondents, but some may have remained skeptical.

In addition to the aforementioned suggestions, future research on this topic should also expand into other facets of drug-related issues and legislation. Applying this to other election issue settings

including drug-related state issues in other states and other ballot initiatives that change state constitutions and parsing out marijuana from other drugs would provide important theoretical and practical implications for scholars and legislators. Likewise, investigating the role that media exposure via a variety of outlets would also be useful in contributing to our understanding of how media messages impact their audiences, particularly those who seek (directly or indirectly) information to guide their voting decisions.

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Still There for You?: Why Millennials Still Love Generation X's *Friends*

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This 2016-2017 study utilized focus groups of 18-24 year-old Friends viewers to understand the role that the show continues to play in their lives. Respondents described choosing to watch Friends because of its convenient availability and its content and characters being relatable. They approached the television show as a familiar comfort. There was a nostalgic longing for the era of Friends in terms of its portrayal of less mediated communication. This study draws from previous work on nostalgia and post-object fandom to illustrate how young and new audiences interact with entertainment media that is no longer in production.

Introduction

Friends premiered in 1994 to 21.5 million viewers. During each of its ten seasons, it ranked as one of the top ten most-watched programs on television. Its last episode aired on May 6, 2004 to 52.46 million viewers ("*Friends* Nielsen Ratings Archive," 2004). Since then, *Friends* has been a mainstay in syndication, and currently plays on the cable channels TBS and Nickelodeon. On January 1, 2015, *Friends* became available on Netflix, and was renewed to remain on the streaming platform through the end of 2019 (Spangler, 2018). Netflix does not release viewing data, so it is difficult to ascertain the show's popularity via streaming, which is crucial to understanding *Friends*' overall viewership in an age where about 56% of people aged 19 to 25 watch TV and movies through streaming services rather than live television (Deloitte, 2016). Yet there is no doubt that *Friends* has staying power. Its Facebook page has over 20 million likes as of November 2019. Talk of a reunion show or special, often dismissed by *Friends*' cast and producers, remained highly anticipated by fans. In November 2019, rumors of a reunion show in the works for the forthcoming subscription video-on-demand service HBO Max started to pop up (Goldberg, 2019; Nahas, 2019). A popular meme used to engage with someone on the dating app Tinder is Joey's famous pick-up line: "How you doin'?" (DTR, 2016). This study emerged from a cultural curiosity about the continuing popularity of *Friends* (Davies, 2013; Sternbergh, 2016) and adds to research about the phenomena of post-object fandom (Williams, 2011) and nostalgia by examining new audiences for a "dormant" fan object, or one that is no longer in production (Williams, 2011, p. 269).

Our overarching research question concerns the self-reported reasons that *Friends* remains popular with young Millennials.[4] We approached the research question and conducted focus groups with an open, grounded approach. We found that nostalgia, as described by Boym (2002) played a major role in *Friends* viewing for the young adults who participated in our study. In this paper, we argue that the affinity Millennials have for *Friends* is induced by a nostalgia for times past and is linked to a desire for emotional connections that may not be available in contemporary life. This is supported by two major themes found in our focus groups: familiarity and nostalgia. Before describing our findings in depth, we first describe the show *Friends* through the generational lenses of Generation X and Millennials and situate the study in the context of post-object fandom and nostalgia. In the conclusion, we discuss the implications of younger generations viewing dormant fan objects, as well as how this study contributes to the growing literature on post-object fandoms and nostalgia.

[4] Aged 18-24 years old at the time we conducted focus groups in 2016-2017.

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Friends and Generational Differences

Generation X and *Friends*

Generation X is loosely defined as the generation after Baby Boomers, born during the 1960s to the early 1980s (Miller, 2011). When *Friends* debuted in 1994, it portrayed six men and women who were members of Generation X. Like many television shows of its era, *Friends* was about a group of urban singles. In shows like *Friends*, *Seinfeld*, and *Living Single*, nuclear families were only occasionally seen, and friends were the new family (Owen, 1997). Jarvis and Burr (2005) stated that the growing visibility of "alternative families" called attention to the shifting notion of family structure in contemporary Western society which includes single parents, stepfamilies, and gay and lesbian parents (p. 269).

Sandell (1998) argued that the alternative family depicted in *Friends* is structured by whiteness and relies on the "exclusion of racial and ethnic others" (p. 143). Indeed, the main characters in *Friends* are six, young, heterosexual, white friends living in New York, navigating romantic and platonic relationships through situational comedy. Relationships with people outside of the six friends are typically short lived and cause for conflict. Chidester (2008) asserted that the absence of any discussion about race in *Friends* reinforces whiteness as the "expected, rational point of view" (p. 170). As we will discuss in the findings and conclusion, this absence may explain why many respondents in our study expressed that they had never considered questioning the homogeneity of the cast when they were younger.

Friends was typical of sitcoms of the time. It included a live studio audience and multi-camera format, and plots often involved the annoying neighbor subplot, catchphrases, and over the top weddings (Santino, 2015). The use of stereotypes was common in the Generation X sitcom and became a kind of parasocial Myers-Briggs test for television viewers who were encouraged to identify themselves in a character. Each friend gave viewers a reason to laugh at him or her: Monica is obsessively neat, Ross is neurotic, Joey is a meathead, Rachel is flaky, Phoebe is a neo-hippie, and Chandler is bitingly sarcastic. In Owen's (1997) interviews with self-identified Gen Xers, respondents felt an affinity for television shows either because they identified with a character's situation or because a show functioned as an escape or way to zone out.

For example, when discussing *Beverly Hills, 90210* (1990-2000), one college student reported liking the show because the characters were also in college and she found the plots interesting (Owen, 1997). Yet another respondent described *90210* as "a comfort show, totally unrealistic, but you want to escape to their problems that seem so minor compared to your own" (Owen, 1997, p. 79). These were responses about television shows in production during the mid-to-late 90s, but they overlap with how Millennials talked about *Friends* in 2016-2017.

Millennials and *Friends*

According to Fry (2015), a researcher at Pew, the Millennial generation (born roughly 1981-1997) currently makes up the largest portion of the U.S. working population. Compared to previous generations, Millennials are more racially diverse, more optimistic about the future, and have more liberal views on social issues like same-sex marriage, interracial relationships, and marijuana legalization (Pew, 2018). This portrait of Millennials explains why some bloggers and media scholars have been perplexed about *Friends*' continued popularity when *Friends* no longer appears progressive. Gen X writers are amazed and confounded that a younger generation, who as a whole have been more vocal about issues of diversity and representation in media, love a show whose cast is so homogenous and whose plot never directly addressed larger social issues (Behn, 2014; Sternbergh, 2015). *Friends* has been criticized for failing to show New York's diversity with no main characters of color, its homophobic and transphobic jokes, and the inexplicable ability for single, middle class characters to live in enormous New York City apartments (see Behn, 2014; Sandell, 1998; Todd, 2011).

Millennial writers and those who interviewed Millennials offered their own explanations for *Friends*' continued popularity, among them the idea that *Friends* represents a young adulthood unencumbered by quick access to the internet, smartphones, and dating apps (Entenman, 2016; Mangan,

2016). Another explanation is that *Friends* is real, but not too real when compared to newer shows that respondents mentioned such as *Girls* (2012-2017) and *Master of None* (2015-2017), which don't allow for the same kind of escape that a sitcom does (Sternbergh, 2016). While these explanations certainly emerge in our findings, to more fully understand why Millennials are drawn to *Friends*, it is important to describe the concept of post-object fandom.

Post-Object Fandom

Post-object fandom (Williams, 2011) is a useful starting point for situating *Friends* in contemporary life and the continued affinity that intergenerational viewers have for *Friends*. Post-object fandom refers to the period of fandom for a series or media text that is no longer in production. In the case of television shows, post-object fandom begins after the last episode of a show has been released without plans to produce new episodes. Participation in post-object fandom is represented in various ways including watching reruns, DVDs or streaming television, continuing conversations about television through message boards, attending conventions, and creative acts such as fan fiction, artwork, and videos. Studies of post-object fandom have tended to focus either on the death/dying of the object (Harrington, 2013; Mittell, 2015) or on how fans deal with the afterlife of a show in various forms (Todd, 2011). Mittell (2015) categorized endings of television shows based on their concluded-ness. The "most concluded" a show can be, as *Friends* was, is to have a fully planned finale with "going away party" (Mittell, 2015, p. 322). This offers fans the most closure because it allows them to say good-bye. However, a show's death does not guarantee that it will stay dead. Recent resurrections of fellow 1990s and 2000s American television programs such as *X-Files*, *Will & Grace*, *Gilmore Girls*, and *Full[er] House* indicate that a finale is not always the final goodbye.

Literature on post-object fandom has primarily concerned fans who were old enough to experience and understand the power of the finale first-hand and fans who have a high level of engagement on, for example, internet message boards (Williams, 2011) or via objects of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), such as fan fiction. Recently, there has been a growing interest in intergenerational fandom for what Pinkerton (2016) terms "re-quels," or the reappearance of new episodes for franchises that tap into nostalgia while also attempting to gain new audiences. A recent example comes from Hills's (2018) study of the revival of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks.* While our project is focused on a dormant fan object, it is not concerned with the circumstances of the death or dying process of *Friends*. Nor is our study focused on any efforts to reboot or resurrect a media object. Instead, its locus is *Friends*' robust afterlife as an intergenerational cultural object and how nostalgia might explain some of the responses to *Friends* from young adults.

Nostalgia and Media

Nostalgia is traditionally described as a longing for a real or imaginary home (Boym, 2002). Natterer (2014) differentiates between *historical nostalgia* and *personal nostalgia.* Whereas historical nostalgia involves positive affect about a time before one was born, personal nostalgia is positive affect induced by media that reminds one of their own past or memories. In the case of the respondents for our study, expressions of personal nostalgia were far more common. As the gulf between the age of new fans and *Friends*' original run grows, there may be a growing need to study the historical nostalgia of *Friends.* Writing about nostalgia as a coping mechanism, Menke (2017) defined *media nostalgia* as "nostalgia toward media," while *mediated nostalgia* exists where "media serve only as mediators or portals to media-unrelated experiences from the past" (p. 630). Following this definition, our respondents expressed both media and mediated nostalgia.

In contemporary television, nostalgia has been studied through such lenses as changes in viewing practices (Piper, 2011), escapism from new technologies and contemporary social issues (Bevan, 2013) and the production of new television shows that tap into prefeminist nostalgia such as *Mad Men* (Niemeyer & Wentz, 2014). Nostalgia is most often associated with objects from the past or a "superimposition of two images—of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life" (Boym, 2002). As will be discussed in the conclusion of this study, we were able to both draw from

Boym's (2002) conceptualization of nostalgia and to advance this construct in terms of nostalgia involving: familiarity, relatability, and an acceptable level of datedness, particularly as it pertains to the reasons why Millennials are drawn to watching *Friends*. First, it is prudent to describe our approach to the focus groups and data analysis, as well as the appropriateness of focus groups in answering why *Friends* remains popular viewing for young Millennials.

Given the literature on nostalgia and post-object fandom, we propose the following research question:

> RQ: What meanings/understandings associated with the post-object viewing of *Friends* allows the show to remain so popular with Millennial viewers, and how does this relate to nostalgia?

Methodology

Tracy (2013) stated that focus groups are appropriate when stimulating similar "memories, experiences, and ideas" among respondents is desired (p. 167). Because the object of study was a generational and social response (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996) to *Friends*, data was collected by using 11 focus groups of 2-6 people each for a total of 37 respondents. While some of these focus groups were small in size, there were no substantial differences in responses between groups. In fact, Morgan (2017) and Morgan and Hoffman (2018) have argued that dyadic or small group interviews can yield the same data-rich interactions as larger focus groups. After the appropriate IRB approval was received, the first wave of recruitment was done through Communication courses at a large Midwestern university and respondents were compensated for their time with extra credit. The second wave of recruitment was done through snowball sampling and respondents were compensated for their time with $15 Amazon electronic gift cards. In-person focus groups took place in a university focus group room and long-distance focus groups were conducted using Google Hangouts video chat. All focus groups lasted approximately 40-60 minutes and were audio recorded for the purpose of transcription.

Respondents were asked semi-structured questions regarding when and why they started watching *Friends*, what they liked about it, and how it compared to contemporary television they were watching in terms of structure and content. Because the goal was to understand emerging adults' responses to *Friends*, all respondents were between the ages of 18 and 24 (mean = 20.1) at the time of data collection. These young adults would have been between the ages of 6 and 12 at the time the *Friends* finale aired, meaning that as children and young adults, they had primarily watched with family, watched the show in syndication, and/or watched in streaming online. This group of respondents was quite homogenous, with most identifying as female (N = 32) and white (N = 32). While the particular demographic of interest was age, the fact that many of the groups were predominantly women—or in some cases completely women—may have affected the responses and group dynamics.

Emergent codes were noted and refined by the first author. Transcripts were then coded by the first and second authors using these codes. In this final version of coding, the following codes were applied: familiarity, with its subthemes of relaxation and relatability and nostalgia with its subthemes of longing and acknowledgement of change. In the sections that follow, we explicate these findings as they speak to our main research question regarding young adults' affinity for *Friends* and support these findings with quotations from respondents. All respondents' names have been replaced by pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. In the presentation of data, quotations grouped together thematically are followed by the respondent's name and age in parentheses. When respondents from a single focus group are in conversation with each other, quotations are presented in dialogue, with the respondent's pseudonym and age preceding their speech.

Results

Familiarity

In an article for *New York Times Magazine* reprinted on *Vulture*, Sternbergh (2016) interviewed several self-identified *Friends* fanatics in their early 20s and found several similarities between them. One was that they identified *Friends* as an escape or comfort. *Friends* was so comforting, in fact, that many of them said they fell asleep to the show (Sternbergh, 2016). Comfort, in our interpretation, is connected to the overarching theme of familiarity which involves *Friends*' omnipresence in respondents' lives, its light humor, and their ability to relate to characters, situations, and affective dimensions of the show.

"Always On." When asked about their watching habits, many respondents said that they had first watched *Friends* in syndication on TBS or Nickelodeon. Even though all seasons of *Friends* were released on Netflix in 2015, some respondents continued to watch it on television. When we asked how they began to first watch *Friends*, they described it as being "always on." *Friends* played throughout their childhoods and they continued to watch it via television, DVD, and most recently, on Netflix: "I started watching *Friends* in high school because when I would stay up late, that would be one of the things that was always on, so I started watching that and then I've been watching it every once and a while on Netflix, because I think it's a very funny show" (Valerie, 21).

One reason *Friends* continues to be an omnipresent object of nostalgia is that it has never left the television screen since 1994 and continues to gain new audiences through its availability on Netflix. Watching *Friends* on Netflix may be a different experience without ads and with the added ability to binge watch at whim, but the culture of streaming has also been normalized. Those who watched *Friends* on television as children can now re-watch it on Netflix.

Another key part of *Friends*' familiarity is that many young adults were introduced to the show by an older family member or a peer:

> I would just be watching TV or playing downstairs when I was younger. My grandma would be watching it on TV, so I would just kind of sit there and watch. So, I've always been familiar with it. And then last year, I roomed with a girl who was obsessed with it. So, that's all she would literally watch. I would just sit there with her and laugh and that's how I'm familiar with it. (Cassidy, 20)

> I was probably in eighth grade or something, and I started watching it because my older sister used to watch it all the time, and she bought all the seasons on DVD and she'd watch it every day. And so, of course, since I'd be in her room all the time, I just ended up watching it too. And I got addicted to it. So now that it's on Netflix, I'm like, ok. Cool. (Toni, 20)

In this way, *Friends* became part of the tableau of childhood for many respondents. Continued viewership was connected to family and friends who first introduced the show to respondents. The long-standing relationship respondents have with *Friends* explains how the show became a "go-to" to play in the background while completing other tasks and something that offered "mindless" relaxation.

Relaxation. There are two ways in which respondents described *Friends* as a tool used to relax. Its light humor and familiarity leant it a "background noise" quality. They also said that watching *Friends* does not require deep concentration; one can start at any episode. In comparison to contemporary shows of 2016-2017, respondents felt that *Friends* did not take on social issues, and this adds to its lightness. In their study on working class and middle class women in south London, Skeggs and Wood (2011) found that working class viewers watched more television and tended to use it more as background noise than middle class viewers, but that middle class viewers expressed more guilt and ascribed more power to the television itself. Students coming from a variety of income backgrounds used *Friends* as "background noise," but the feeling of guilt and wasting time was not present in their responses. When asked about

how they typically watched *Friends*, two respondents answered: "I think it's one of those shows that's very easy to keep up with while you're multitasking. It's lighthearted. You don't have to pay that much attention to understand what's going on and still like it" (Linda, 20).

So, if I just want something in the background, I might pick *Friends* as a show that I watch. I don't usually sit down and be like, "I'm going to watch *Friends*." Like, I just sort of stumble upon it. At this point, I've seen the whole thing at least once, and I've seen certain seasons multiple times and I would probably just pick a good episode and have it on as I'm in and out doing stuff. (Sloane, 24)

In these responses, the television set as an object has lost its omnipotence and control, though specific television shows have the potential to be addictive. This could be the result of the increased use of streaming media. Platforms such as Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, and YouTube allow young adults to access desired media and to watch and rewatch at their leisure. Even though young adults can seek out and find what they want to watch when they want to watch it, they still used television as background noise, just as Skeggs and Wood's (2011) working-class women respondents did.

A quality that lends itself to "background noise" was what respondents described as the show's "lightness." According to them, *Friends* did not require much concentration to enjoy. This quality was mentioned most often when respondents were asked how *Friends* compared to more contemporary television shows:

> It's, like, easy because after I watch anything that's scary and intense, I watch an episode of *Friends* afterwards. So, I just watched *13 Reasons Why*, and that's very heavy. And I needed some *Friends*. (Nikki, 23)

> There's so much drama in reality TV, and I feel like *Friends* is very lighthearted and there's not really any drama. (Lilly, 18)

Friends was described as less intense than other television shows; it allowed viewers to relax and complete other tasks. Most episodes resolve conflict by their end, which may add to its comforting quality. One respondent shared a powerful story about the comforting nature of *Friends*:

> My father passed away in April, and right after that happened, I started to rewatch *Friends*. And it kind of helped me through my grieving process and brought a little bit of humor back into my life. I would watch it basically every day up until now. And it kind of just reminded me that life moved on even though we go through difficult situations. (Kim, 22)

Friends' comforting qualities expand beyond its lightness as background noise; it also relates to the characters and situations portrayed in the show. *Friends*' uncomplicated content, episodic closure, and relatable characters and situations made it a ready and convenient source of comfort for the emerging adults in our focus groups.

Relatability. *The Brady Bunch*, a nostalgic Gen X favorite, fared better in terms of longevity than one of its contemporaries, *The Partridge Family*. Sherwood Schwartz, *The Brady Bunch*'s creator, argued that *The Brady Bunch*'s characters faced more relatable problems. *The Partridge Family* often directly addressed social issues of the 60s and 70s, causing it to become dated more quickly than *The Brady Bunch* (Owen, 1997). Like *The Brady Bunch*, *Friends* remains relatively undated because it did not touch directly on particular social issues of its day, giving it a "timeless" relatability for some of our respondents.

The fact that *Friends* left out important social issues of its day is also something that led us to pursue this research. As individuals on the cusp of Generation X who watched *Friends* during its original broadcast, we approached this project with questions about how *Friends* would speak to young Millennials. To our surprise, the focus groups overwhelmingly expressed that *Friends* remains popular because of its relatable situations and characters. The characters on *Friends* are young adults, but none are

college students. Nonetheless, respondents related to the general situation of being a young adult, which they described as "not knowing what to do," experiencing romantic relationships, and building friendships:

> Yeah, you can definitely relate to it more now in college. I mean, as a freshman, I know especially that you can relate to it now more than I could a year ago. Yeah, I see a lot of Rachel and her being independent for the first time as well. Just kind of in the setting that I'm in now. (Isaac, 18)

> I guess, I feel like by the time I'm out of college, I need to have my life together. And I know that it's just a TV show, but it's nice to see that I don't. That when I get there, I can still be figuring it out. And it makes you kind of see adults differently. That they're still people and trying to figure it out. Because I understand that more now - that when I was younger, I was just watching it because it was funny. But now I get that aspect of it. That it's ok if you don't know what you're doing. (Kaleigh, 18)

Respondents found *Friends* relatable because they were also newly independent, navigating new friendships and romantic relationships, and unsure of what life would be like post-college. These relatable problems, as well as a lack of specific social issues mentioned in the show, allowed respondents to enjoy *Friends* well after it became dormant.

In the case of our young adult respondents, *Friends* served as a nostalgic vehicle for those who grew up watching it, especially when they were introduced by an older family member. Furthermore, young adults called *Friends* "relatable," a sentiment expressed when they identified with a character or situation in the show and/or found it affectively realistic. Respondents related to the general affective dimensions of a television show based on the relationships of six young adults, but is the 90s sitcom a truly "timeless" piece of television? We wondered how nostalgia would be expressed for a show that, as popular journalism has pointed out, displayed problematic views on sexuality and gender (Kaplan, 2018; Smith, 2018) and presented an unrealistic and homogenous portrait of New York City in terms of class (Bennett, 2015) and race (Baxter-Wright, 2017).

Nostalgia

In our previous section on familiarity and its subthemes of relaxation and relatability, respondents framed *Friends* as a lighthearted show that they related to on an affective level. They identified themselves in similar situations as the young adults portrayed on screen. In this section, we dig deeper into how young Millennials interpreted *Friends* as a show from the past that has relevance and offers entertainment in the present.

Respondents recognized that *Friends* is a sitcom from the 90s. When asked how *Friends* represented its time period, focus groups first brought up technology, fashion, and sitcom conventions which made *Friends* seem a bit "cheesy." Two respondents in one focus group pondered the effect of the *Friends* set and a live audience:

> **Isaac**, 18: Filmed in front of a live studio audience. *The Office* didn't do that. They threw out the jokes and it was such dry humor, people were able to get it.
> **Collin**, 19: Yeah, I think nowadays if I were to hear or watch a comedy with a laugh track, I would think it's really cheesy. So, I don't know, maybe we've just kind of drifted away from being spoofed and laugh lines just kind of...
> **Isaac**, 18: Are we really laughing at the quality of the joke or are we laughing at the other people that are laughing?

Although at first, respondents thought of *Friends* as timeless, there were moments when they recognized the show as dated. In the discussion of structure and the presentation of humor in *Friends*,

what emerged was that respondents enjoyed the humor, but found that it was very much associated with the period in which *Friends* was filmed and didn't always believe that this format could be successfully repeated. Thus, the elements of nostalgia that emerged from our focus groups were:

1) The connection of *Friends* with childhood and becoming a young adult.
2) A longing for past socializing rituals, unmediated by smartphones and apps.
3) A sentiment that *Friends* comes from a "simpler" time when television was not as aware or self-conscious of social issues.

A connection to childhood. Because nostalgia is often conceptualized as a longing for something past, it is not surprising that young adults who had watched *Friends* as children connected it fondly with childhood. When asked if there were significant moments they related to *Friends*, some respondents framed *Friends* in terms of a crucial moment or time in their early lives:

> One thing that did always strike me when I was growing up in middle school. I was raised in a really Christian household and everything that came with that. And so, I did notice - I was like, "Mom, why does every single relationship - why are they having sex on the first date? I don't get that." So, that opened weird conversation and weird doors, but like, I always did notice that. (Alice, 19)

> I mean, it was like the 90s and early 2000s, so I feel like I was growing up and I was born '95, so then I would have been 5 years old when it came to the 2000s, so it was just growing up, going to middle school, going to elementary school, meeting friends, kind of becoming a person…with a personality. (Ellen, 21)

Friends became part of the self-narrative that young adults had about their childhoods. Although they did not express a sense of loss at the show's finale and thus felt no threat to ontological security described by Williams (2011), their inclusion of *Friends* in important self-narratives of growing up make them a unique audience to include in studies of post-object fandom.

Unmediated socialization. Respondents expressed a longing for the rituals of the "simpler time" portrayed in *Friends*, particularly when it came to relationships and communication. *Friends* creator Marta Kauffman said the show was more popular post-9/11 because of its optimism (Sternbergh, 2016). Entenman (2016) contended that *Friends* remained popular because it satisfied a longing for simple social connections unmediated by smartphones.

Respondents in this study expressed similar sentiments. First, they observed that everyday communication and socialization was different in *Friends*, mainly because of differences in technology: cell phones and laptops were primitive, online dating was not yet normalized, and hijinks ensued when answering machines were involved. When technology played a role in a *Friends* episode, it typically did so through humor. What stood out to respondents was the necessity of face-to-face communication. When asked how *Friends* would be different today, one respondent said: "Well, the kind of technology, I think, like, there'd be a lot more – there'd be computers and cell phones, and they'd be using those to come up with topics to talk to each other instead of actually [pause] talking" (Jennie, 18). This is particularly notable in focus groups when respondents discussed the differences between how dating rituals are portrayed in the show versus how they understood the contemporary culture of dating:

> **Lilly**, 18: Well now I feel like if you're flirting with somebody, you favorite their Tweet or you like their Instagram picture, and then they put in the actual face effort, you know what I mean? It's just different.
> **Cassidy**, 20: It's simpler to be like, oh I like her. Her Instagram pic was cute. You know? Rather than, they had a lot of one-on-one things. They had dates. I think I liked it back then more than now.

> **Moderator**: What did you like about it? Or about the way they show it?
> **Cassidy**, 20: I don't know. I just felt like it was more respectful. More one-on-one, in person type things.
> **Linda**, 20: More genuine.

Respondents expressed these ideas with some amount of sadness, wishing that they could go back to the moment before highly mediated communication was the norm. Because the first cell phones with texting capabilities were released in the early 90s, and the iPhone first came out in 2007, when the oldest respondents were 13, it is likely they never experienced a dating culture unmediated by texting, social media and email.

While both men and women made observations about the differences in dating culture, focus groups that were entirely women expressed a longing for these rituals:

> **Toni**, 20: I wanted to say like, dating-wise, I feel like it's different now. I know that my friends, they don't really go out on dates. It's more like hooking up type of thing. Back then, it was like....
> **Erica**, 19: Yeah, it was more traditional. And now we have a thing. What does that mean? But there it's like, "I'm seeing you. Would you like to go get coffee?"
> **Moderator**: So, in the show, there's a lot of asking people on dates, and you feel like that's different now.
> **Jane**, 20: Yeah, sadly. I wish it was like...
> **Sidney**, 20: I want their life.

Friends had a simple premise: friends who hang out and talk to one another. When you have a romantic interest in someone, you ask them out; when you break up with someone, you must look into their eyes, or at least speak into the phone. Without having ever experienced such a dating culture, respondents looked back on such unmediated dating interactions with nostalgia.

Lacking self-consciousness. *Friends* is a show which contemporary media scholars and popular writers have pointed out has problematic messages about sexuality and a lack of diversity (Chidester, 2008; Sandell, 1998). Asking questions about race, gender, and sexuality was difficult in focus groups because the show simply didn't address these issues in a very purposeful and self-conscious way. But when respondents were asked if *Friends* could be remade today, the issue of diversity was a clear point of distinction between 90s television and contemporary television: "It would definitely have to have like more actors of color, and like, not be as heteronormative. Like, there needs to be a little bit more diversity, and like not everybody is straight, and white and cis-gendered" (Mandy, 21).

Some respondents noticed these problematics, while others appeared to only recognize them when brought up in the focus group. One phrase that came up over and over again was that *Friends* didn't make diversity a "big deal," and this was connected to its quality of being laid back and lighthearted:

> I don't really watch any other shows from the '90s, so I don't know if this is correct, but they had gay characters on there, and I feel like that's kind of a big thing that they never made a big deal about it. (Kaleigh, 18)

> …Ross is dating Charlie, this professor, and she's a black woman. And I think I watched that and until this second, I didn't think about it...I think that people would comment on the fact now that they're like, oh cool, they have an interracial relationship, whereas then it wasn't a good or a bad thing, that's just how it was, so while there is conversation, I think it's - I feel like back then, it was more a blissful - it is what it is, ok. But now, we're starting to question it more and stuff. Which could have pros and cons. (Alice, 19)

Some respondents interpreted that diversity was simply not a priority in the production of *Friends*, as can be seen in the responses above. Other respondents, as will be described below, considered the presence of any diverse representation on *Friends* to be normatively better than TV shows that came before *Friends*.

The longing expressed in young adults' responses appeared as nostalgia for an era which some interpreted as being post-racial, in the sense that race existed, but that it was of "no consequence" (Squires, 2014, p. 18). Another respondent in the same focus group, Ronnie, commented:

> I think it's pretty cool though because if you put the show in context with time period, I mean it goes from like, well, before the show, segregation, and it being like blacks/whites separated. That's it…It's like Ross dated...there's… [African-American actress] Gabrielle Union, she played the girl moving in one time. And Ross wanted to date her and Joey wanted to date her. And so, it's really lighthearted and then now when you look at it, people are sort of looking for that and looking for that diversity. Whereas before this show came out, it was like, yeah, that's not going to happen. (Ronnie, 18)

Other respondents noted the progression of being cognizant of diverse representations from the 1990s until the present, and rationalized the lack of diverse characters in that manner:

> I think it gives me an idea of what the culture was like when the show came out. And the example of diversity - ok, we've come a long way that we can recognize that. It's still obviously not where it should be, but the fact that that's a conversation now that wasn't there then. I think that shows me a lot about where we've come since the show, but yeah, so [inaudible] I don't think it makes me hate the show because like nowadays that's something that should be in the show because we know about it...back then...because they were a little less educated or talked about it less. And I don't think it would make me not want to watch it, but it's just something that I keep in mind now. (Alice, 19)

> I think it's just also become so much a bigger deal now than it was in, like, with people noticing it and stuff. And yeah, it was a big deal then, but I didn't think about that at all, but I've never heard anyone say that, but now that I'm thinking of all the characters in the show - even the side characters - there's not that many different than the main. (Jodi, 19)

In focus group conversations about race on *Friends*, respondents acknowledged that the show was predominantly white, but there was no agreement on what the presence or absence of a minority on the show meant. For some, the presence of a Black character whose Blackness was not explicitly discussed was a part of normalizing people of color on television. This was what specifically made *Friends* different from contemporary shows – that it could have a Black character without any discussion of race. This appeared to be tied to respondents' ideas about television during the *Friends* era. It is now "expected" that casting for a new television show will address diversity, but during the 90s, people simply weren't aware enough for this to be an expectation.

In our focus groups, we found that the theme of nostalgia as expressed by young Millennials was a longing for past rituals. As a feeling of loss, nostalgia was additionally conveyed as an acknowledgment of changes in society and in the production of television. Respondents' acknowledgment that *Friends* was a show set in the 1990s did not affect their enjoyment, and in fact, often offered relaxation or a break from the seriousness of contemporary shows. Many referred to *Friends* as light-hearted or said that it did not take itself too seriously. The understanding of *Friends* as a representation of 90s postracialism, sometimes spoken about with a nostalgic longing, is one of the more striking findings of this study and one which we would encourage scholars to pursue further in the fields of post-object fandom and younger generations' understanding of the past through media consumption.

Conclusion

This study emerged from a growing curiosity about the continued popularity of shows from Generation X, as illustrated by the resurgence of reboots and remakes (e.g., *X-Files*, *Full[er] House*, *Will & Grace*, *Gilmore Girls*, etc.) as well as the existence of a younger audience for television shows that are now over twenty years old. *Friends* has enjoyed a sustained popularity and was made more accessible to a younger generation since its appearance on Netflix. Embedded in this curiosity about why Millennials are drawn to *Friends* is a recognition that *Friends* has drawn strong critiques about its unrealistic depiction of New York City in terms of race and class as well as containing frequent homophobic and transphobic jokes. Before beginning the focus groups, we believed these critiques would be obvious to respondents, but that they would dismiss the critiques as products of the time in which *Friends* is situated. This did not appear to be the case and demonstrates one important strength in interpretive empirical work. Although quantitative data on the demographics of viewership is limited, a clearer picture of *Friends*'—and other shows from the 1990s and early 2000s—current fan base can be conceived through qualitative research projects that focus on young audiences' affinity for television no longer in production.

Our findings showed that feelings of nostalgia required a television show to have some amount of familiarity and relatability. While respondents expressed an affinity for the "simpler time" that *Friends* portrayed, they also related to characters and situations in the show. They articulated that the show was a comfort in its simplicity, and whatever drama began was wrapped up by the end of most episodes. Many respondents said that they had never considered how homogenous the main cast was or that if they had, they felt this was normal for a 90s social group or that it was not an intentional move by the producers and writers. Nonetheless, when comparing *Friends* to contemporary comedies, respondents noted that *Friends'* production style is dated, and that if a similar show were remade today, it would have to include a more diverse cast to satiate a public that increasingly demands diverse representations on television.
Respondents described experiences of both media and mediated nostalgia, as defined by Menke (2017). Drawing from this and also Boym's (2002) understanding of nostalgia, we posit a conceptualization of nostalgia in TV viewing in the following, nested, ways:

(1) Nostalgia involves an element of familiarity or being "at home." This is represented in the convenient availability of *Friends* and the comfort that the show offers young adults in times of distress or transition.
(2) The characters, settings, and stories must be relatable and realistic. Although nostalgia involves an element of fantasy, if the gap between fantasy and reality is relatively small, fans will make the leap to relate what is portrayed onscreen to their own lives. In the case of young adult viewers of *Friends*, their interpretation of what is relatable and realistic is often triggered by its comparison to contemporary television, especially the genre of reality TV.
(3) Finally, nostalgia in television viewing recognizes an element of datedness. Young adults' affinity for the show is influenced by their acknowledgement that *Friends* is a product of its time. Indeed, this datedness is, in part, why they like it. It portrays, in their words, a simpler time. This datedness can also conflict with the realness of a television show.

Further research on nostalgia as it relates to television viewing could be applied to other television shows of the 1990s and 2000s. In particular, *Seinfeld* and *Frasier* were two other '90s shows that some respondents were watching. How might the attraction to these shows be similar to or different than the attraction to *Friends*? How does the influx of remakes originating in the 1990s and 2000s affect nostalgia in those who did or did not watch the original series? How might shows produced later, but still readily available through syndication and/or streaming services, such as *The Office* and *Parks and Recreation*, invoke a sense of nostalgia in post-object viewers, given that these shows do somewhat more to address social issues? These are only a few of the questions we believe future research on nostalgia in television can address. We believe nostalgia will begin to play a greater role in the research of post-object fandom,

which originally focused on fans coping with the ending of a show's production rather than a new generation of audiences for an already dormant media object.

The findings presented here paint a small but substantial picture of how emerging adults aged 18-24 interpreted *Friends* and why the show remains popular with this age group, a question that many have raised in popular media. The findings show that this age group enjoys *Friends* both as a clear product of its time and as something that continues to be relevant in the present. When emerging adults talked about *Friends* with a longing for a past never experienced, they did not do so in terms of turning back time. In other words, though they longed for unmediated communication, they did not state that they would change their own communication habits. They enjoyed watching *Friends* specifically because it projected a moment connected to the simplicity of childhood and a cultural past that could never actually be experienced, only relived vicariously through watching *Friends*.

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Resisting the New Legal Orthodoxy: "Religious Freedom" as Battle Cry in Religious Right Culture War Rhetoric

James W. Vining

In the Spring of 2012, the rapidly growing movement to legalize same sex marriage hit an obstacle as North Carolina residents voted to amend their state constitution to make marriage between one man and one woman the only legal domestic union. Religious Conservatives, such as the Christian Action League of North Carolina's Mark Creech, led the wave of support for the so-called "Marriage Amendment." This paper explores motivational logic in and implications of Mark Creech's theologically-infused political action rhetoric. The terministic screen in Creech's address at a Marriage Amendment Rally is identified through a careful cluster-agon analysis. The paper then highlights how the theological logic animates and constrains the terministic screen of the rhetoric. Beyond providing insights into this particular case study, understanding the logics at work in Creech's speech can aid rhetorical scholars in understanding the logics at work in the culture war political action rhetorics of other Religious Right rhetors.

Introduction

On April 30, 2012, Rev. Mark Creech gave the keynote address at the "Marriage Amendment Rally" at Poovey's Chapel Baptist Church in Hudson, North Carolina. The rally, and Creech's speech, called conservative Christians to actively support Amendment One, or as Creech called it – the marriage amendment, in North Carolina's May 8, 2012 statewide election.

North Carolina 2011 Senate Bill 514 placed Amendment One on the ballot as a for and against vote by the citizens. The ballot read, "Constitutional amendment to provide that marriage between one man and one woman is the only domestic legal union that shall be valid or recognized in this State." The Bill stated that a majority was needed to approve the constitutional amendment (Senate Bill 514, 2011). This amendment not only made it unconstitutional to recognize same sex marriages, including marriages deemed legal in other states, it also made it unconstitutional to recognize civil unions of any kind in the State of North Carolina (Amendment One, 2012). Amendment One drew considerable attention from around the nation (Dalesio, 2012; Blumenthal, 2012) and can be seen as representative of legislative and legal struggles over same-sex marriage in America at that time.

Rev. Creech's political action rhetoric, including his April 30, 2012 address, was representative of the rhetoric of leaders in the Religious Right who opposed same-sex marriage. Creech was the leader and primary spokesperson of the Christian Action League of North Carolina, an organization that described itself as a "Christian public policy organization representing conservative evangelicals from seventeen denominations in the Tar Heel state" (About CAL, n.d., para. 1). When the Religious Right movement became a political powerhouse in the 1980s, the Christian Action League aligned themselves with much of its agenda (Carpenter, n.d.). The Christian Action League was affiliated with the American Family Association, a national conservative group that the Southern Poverty Law Center considered an anti-gay hate group (Three anti-gay groups, n.d.). In addition to leading the Christian Action League, Creech had numerous writing outlets and speaking engagements ("Rev. Mark Creech," n.d.), suggesting that his rhetoric resonated with conservative evangelical audiences.

The majority of Creech's (2012) keynote address was an argument for why the audience should support Amendment One. Creech's reasons appealed to the audience's deepest motivations. Creech devoted the most time to the argument that the audience should support the amendment because God had designed marriage to be between a man and a woman. Second, Creech claimed that passing the marriage amendment would create a better world for the audience's children. Third, Creech argued for the marriage amendment by claiming that heterosexual marriage was the "cause of Christ." Fourth, Creech argued that

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it was the obligation of Christians to be politically engaged on biblical issues and that marriage was the key biblical issue. Finally, Creech argued that the amendment would protect religious freedom and the rights of religious citizens.

The remainder of this paper explores the appeals and implications of Creech's rhetoric by identifying the terministic screen in his address at the Marriage Amendment Rally. First, I identify the internally consistent logical framework of the speech through a close analysis of the speech's implicit strategies. Second, I argue that the specific theological logic contained in Creech's rhetoric, for example, that God's people are in a holy war against liberals, played a role in the speech's larger internally consistent logic system. The theological logic therefore animates and constrains Creech's political action text in ways that offer his audience deep and broad motives of purpose, fear, and urgency. Furthermore, I propose that understanding the logics at work in Creech's speech can aid rhetorical scholars in understanding the logics at work in the culture war political action rhetorics of other Religious Right rhetors.

Internal Logic, Terministic Screens, and Cluster-Agon Analysis

Kenneth Burke's (1974) conception of terministic screens provides insights into ways symbols use humans and humans use symbols. Whether or not the symbol user is aware of its existence, a terministic screen is an internally coherent perspective through which a human interprets the world. Terministic screens are visible as they work in texts through systematic vocabularies with internal logics. All humans communicate through terministic screens and those terministic screens are manifested, therefore observable, in symbolic communication. A terministic screen is not deterministic of what a rhetor will say, in fact it may not necessarily predate the text, but it does act as a constraint that influences a rhetor's rhetorical choices with its coherent logic. This theory impacts how I view the political action text in this study by claiming there is a coherent system of symbols within the text, a system that has placed constraints on the development of the text and can be identified through the text.

Identifying and understanding terministic screens seems then to be an important work of rhetorical scholars. Burke (1974) claimed, "the injunction, 'believe that you may understand' has a fundamental application to the purely secular problem of 'terministic screens'" (p. 47). When one has identified the particular terministic screen that is guiding the observations and understands the logical pattern that holds the screen together, the observations will then be clear and understandable as they fit the pattern of the screen. In other words, understanding terministic screens will help the rhetorical scholar understand the texts emerging from the terministic screens. The process can, and perhaps must, also be reversed; the rhetorical scholar can identify and understand a particular terministic screen by understanding a rhetor's texts. Furthermore, once identified, a particular terministic screen can allow a critic to foreshadow what and how that screen's adherents may think and speak about various undeclared issues (Olson, 2009). This rhetorical theory directly connects with rhetorical methods. A text itself provides evidence of the terministic screen that a rhetor is operating from as the words of the text can reveal an internally consistent logical frame. A cluster-agon analysis of the text will help the rhetorical scholar identify those themes.

I used Burke's cluster-agon analysis in my study in order to identify the terministic screen revealed in Creech's April 30, 2012 speech. Burke (1968) claimed that the dramatistic method was "the most direct to the study of human relations and human motives is via a methodical inquiry into cycles or clusters of terms and their functions" (p. 445). The interrelationships between the associated clusters in the text itself are the rhetor's motives in which he or she communicates the text (Burke, 1973, p. 20). This approach brings with it a dramatistic understanding of texts, but it answers the questions directly from a close, careful, and rigorous analysis of the text (Burke, 1973, p. 69).

In my close reading, I identified the dramatic alignment and interrelationships as directly revealed in the text. I answered two basic questions: "what goes with what?" and "what is opposed to what?" (Burke, 1973, p. 69). The first question was answered by identifying what symbols were linked together in a text. At times this clustering of terms together was literally that terms were placed next to one another

or were repeatedly mentioned together (Brummett, 2011, p. 107). Symbols of a text could also be recognized as "going together" by sharing a common value, characteristic, or setting. Another way terms could be clustered together was that they were on the same side of a struggle described in the text. This leads me to identify ways terms in a text may be opposed to one another. Symbols in a text may be placed in opposing clusters of terms if the text presents the symbols in conflict with one another or simply as a contradiction to one another (Brummett, 2011, p. 110).

The Internal Logic of a Culture War's Marriage Battle

The explicit tactics in Creech's speech, discussed in the introduction, provided a useful overview of the text. However, a deeper level of analysis, identifying the implicit strategies of a text, is needed to discover the text's terministic screen. In this section I describe my cluster-agon analysis of Rev. Mark Creech's (2012) keynote address.

The Cosmic War Between Good and Evil in North Carolina

My cluster-agon analysis of Rev. Creech's marriage amendment speech identified the relational alignment of terms in the text, thus revealing a crucial piece of his terministic screen (See Appendix). The analysis shows how certain terms clustered together through a variety of relationships, while other terms conflicted with each other. The analysis revealed a clear division of terms into two large and evenly-sized opposing clusters. Each cluster focused on a single key term that was surrounded by numerous related satellites of terms.

In the following sections I describe the findings of my cluster-agon analysis. First, I describe the key terms for the two large clusters in conflict in Creech's speech and the sources of authority in the terministic screen which act as a ground for the rhetoric's logical framework. Then, I carefully explain the inner-workings of each cluster, first the positive and then the negative, detailing the smaller satellites of terms surrounding the key terms and the relationships between the satellites of terms within the cluster and how they contribute to the textual conflict.

Authoritative sources and logical grounding. Before explaining the driving conflict in Rev. Creech's terministic screen, it will be helpful to identify the authoritative sources that serve as a grounding for the logic, and therefore the relationships and judgments in the terministic screen. Creech's logical framework was grounded in sources that would likely be held as authoritative by his religious audience. Creech's terministic screen positioned God, and then the Bible, Jesus, and "facts" as the authoritative sources supporting the dramatic relationships at work in the speech (See Appendix). Creech repeatedly claimed, twenty-three times in all, that God was the ultimate source and advocate of traditional marriage and, in the logical framework, thus a supporter of the marriage amendment. For example, approaching the end of his speech, Creech proclaimed, "I believe God defines marriage." God's position as the ultimate authority also served as the grounding of Creech's identification, description, and condemnation of people opposed to Amendment One. God, then, served as the ultimate grounding for the conflict between the two sides of the debate over Amendment One.

Next, underneath the authority of God in Creech's terministic screen, Jesus and the Bible, mentioned ten and six times respectively, were sources of authority that revealed God's will. Creech claimed, "Its only in the first two chapters of Genesis that we can discern God's purpose for human relationships, sexuality, and marriage." This quotation demonstrated the logic that God's position on marriage was only known through the Bible. This logic was also demonstrated with Creech's use of another Bible passage to show Jesus' affirmation of the Genesis Bible passage as God's position on marriage. Creech's rhetoric repeatedly rooted his position in these three sources of authority. For example, he called marriage between a man and a woman the "purpose of God" and the "cause of Christ." The final term, invoked three times, that served as an authoritative grounding in Creech's terministic screen was the term "fact." Creech's rhetoric claimed that the "facts" of the situation supported the marriage amendment and its promised end results and displayed the folly and falsehood of the opponents of Amendment One.

The cosmic war expressed in state politics. My analysis of Rev. Creech's "Marriage Amendment" speech revealed an underlying conflict between two clusters of terms; one cluster with the key term "good" and the other cluster with the key term "evil" (See Appendix). First, Creech framed the speech with a description of his work at the Christian Action League as "exposing" and "curing" the evil in the world. Creech depicted evil in the world as attitudes and actions that arrogantly defy God, God's ways, and the good of others in order to promote deviant self-interests. In the particular situation addressed in the speech, "evil" is attempting to "redefine marriage." Second, as Rev. Creech presented his work combating something negative, he also presented his work as being done on behalf of a larger good. Creech presented the Christian Action League as working to promote the "common good" and preserve what is good in culture. Creech concluded the speech rooting his marriage arguments in God's "goodness," exposing the divine grounding of terms. In this speech, Rev. Creech depicted "good" as necessarily rooted in the divine, revealed in the scriptures, and benefiting humanity. While Creech claimed that the stakes of the battle over Amendment One are extremely high, the logic signals that North Carolina Amendment One is a particular battle in a larger war between "good" and "evil."

The conflict between good and evil is central to the terministic screen in Rev. Creech's "Marriage Amendment" speech. While good versus evil may initially appear to be a simplistic conflict, my cluster-agon analysis uncovered two complex opposing clusters of terms supporting the key terms. These complex opposing clusters display the dramatic relationships generating from and contributing to the central conflict between good and evil. My analysis of Rev. Creech's speech revealed that the two opposing clusters were near perfect reflections of one another.

The Cluster of Good

I will now further highlight how the parallel opposing clusters display the strength of the clash between good and evil as it manifest conflicts between the cluster's various supporting terms. As revealed above in the discussion of the speech's agon, the cluster of terms for what Rev. Creech was advocating for in his speech centered around the term "good" (See Appendix). Within the logical framework of Creech's rhetoric, "good" is grounded in the goodness of God. According to Creech's logic, God's goodness is revealed most clearly in the Christian Scriptures, is consistent with human experience and "facts" about the world, and provides clear guidance to the ways of human flourishing and the common good. The nature and importance of the "good" in Creech's positive cluster will be more fully explained in the following analysis of the various satellites of supporting terms.

The good agent. "God's people" acts as the term for the agents in Creech's positive cluster. The term is also the identity that Creech is clearly inviting the audience to take upon themselves. This identity places great dignity for the audience as belonging to God and great responsibility to act on God's behalf. Early in the speech Creech stated, "Christians are the ones who keep the world from going completely rotten and as light they arrest the darkness by exposing the evils of their day." At the end of the speech he called for "the passionate intensity of God's people to save America, to save our state from moral ruin." The logic's motivation for action based in an identity as God's people is complemented and strengthened by the logic that the positive clusters key action, and the good associated with it, is dependent on God's people. God's people, as the agent in the "good" cluster, are connected to satellites of motivating purposes, an attitude, and types of agency with which they take the primary good action.

The good purposes. In Creech's terministic screen the people of God act for the purposes of the "cause of Christ" and the "good of children." Creech explicitly stated these purposes at a transition point in his speech: "I hope you're not only thinking about the cause of Christ, but I hope you're thinking about your children, your grandchildren, and what kind of world they're going to be living in." In the logic of the speech, Creech lifted the issue of the definition of marriage as exclusively a man and a woman to the level of theological primacy as to call it the "cause of Jesus Christ." This motivation would be central for agents identified as the "people of God." Creech expanded the motivational purpose beyond what some might call the religious realm of life, saying "it's not only a spiritual battle, but it's also a battle about them (our children) and their future." Creech further emphasized the purpose of benefiting the children by

having the audience affirm their love for their children and grandchildren and promising that the marriage amendment will help the audience pass on a better world for their children.

The good attitude. The motivational force of the two purposes of Creech's terministic screen led to an attitude that would distinguish the actions of the people of God. I have distinguished this attitude as "passion" and it acts as the third satellite in the "good" cluster. Toward the conclusion of the speech, Rev. Creech made an emotional plea for the audience to "be passionate." He argued that the stakes of the battle between good and evil, manifested at the time in the vote for Amendment One, were extremely high and demanded passionate action. Furthermore, Creech claimed that the political opposition, operating on behalf of evil, were full of passion and the side that engaged the battle with the most passion would win the battle.

The good agencies. The primary term in this agency satellite is "Christian action to protect traditional marriage." Creech began, and framed, his speech by emphasizing the necessity of "Christian action" to expose and combat the "evil of their day." Creech defined "Christian action" as "being involved in the political process."

The secondary terms in the agency satellite reveal more specific agencies available for the "people of God" to exercise the central agency of "Christian action to protect traditional marriage." The agency terms are similar to the action steps identified in the discussion of Creech's explicit strategies. The specific means that God's people can use to take Christian action to protect traditional marriage are voting, educating, and giving financial support. Voting was the most significant secondary agency. Voting was mentioned frequently in the speech and is most directly related to the cluster's central act. Creech also highlighted the role of education as means of agency for the people of God. In his terministic screen, "educate" related directly to the authoritative terms of the "Bible" and the "facts." Educate also counteracted the "evil" cluster's agency term of "lies."

The third and final term in the agency satellite is financial donation. Creech briefly mentioned the need for financial donations to assist efforts to "educate" the public on the "facts" about Amendment One. In Creech's terministic screen, this means of action could offset the advertising spending acting as a means for the opposition to propagate their "lies." The satellite of terms of agency in Creech's "good" cluster provided the audience with a strong and unified agency in "Christian action to protect traditional marriage." It also provided clear and multifaceted means of response for the audience with various levels of commitment to take the cluster's central act.

The good primary act. The primary act that the "people of God," and the audience who is invited to embrace that persona, take in Creech's terministic screen is to "support the traditional 'marriage amendment.'" According to Creech's logical framework, supporting North Carolina's Amendment One was the focus of Christian action because it was the only way to defend traditional, and divinely-designed, marriage against relentless, and fundamentally evil, attempts to "redefine marriage" by removing the requirement it be between a man and a woman. As discussed above, the "good" cluster's primary act of supporting the traditional marriage amendment is the focus of the cluster's satellites for the agent's purpose, attitude, and agency.

The good end results. This is a particularly large satellite of terms because Creech spent a considerable amount of time discussing the good end results of the action he called his audience to take. The primary term in the end results satellite is "better world." The end of a "better world" directly fulfills one of the agents' two purposes in the cluster's purpose satellite, thus providing a logical motivation. The satellite also contains two secondary end results which, according to the speech's logical framework, contribute to a "better world." The secondary end results of supporting the traditional marriage amendment are "traditional marriage" and "religious freedom."

Rev. Creech argued extensively that marriage as exclusively one man and one woman contributed to a better world. He primarily relied upon the terministic screen's authoritative sources of God and the Bible, identified in the agon section above, to present traditional marriage as the basis for a stable society, family commitment, and gender bonding. First, Creech exclaimed that the Bible clearly revealed that traditional marriage was God's first institution and the institution God planned to serve as the cornerstone of society. Creech argued that God's plan of traditional marriage was rooted in God's goodness and

intended for the good of humanity by creating stable and flourishing societies. Second, Creech presented traditional marriage as producing stable societies in part because a marriage between a man and a woman produced a deep family commitment, a commitment Creech claimed was not possible in same-sex coupling. Creech supported this claim with traditional marriage as God's plan in the Bible and with "facts" about declining marriage rates in countries with same-sex marriage. Finally, Creech claimed that traditional marriage contributed to a better world because of the differences, attraction, and bonding that can take place between the two genders of man and woman. Creech supported this claim with appeals to both the audience's experience and the Bible's revelation that God's image is revealed in male and female, which Creech claimed meant God is most fully revealed in the union of a man and a woman. Within Creech's terministic screen, the goodness of supporting the traditional marriage amendment was supported by presenting the goodness of traditional marriage and the good that it brings to the world.

The final secondary end contributing to the better world created by God's people supporting the traditional marriage amendment is "religious freedom." The marriage amendment was positioned as the final protection against social, legal, and government-enforced persecution of citizens for acting on their religious and heartfelt beliefs in marriage as exclusively a man and a woman. Creech warned that the inevitable result of the "redefinition of marriage," repeatedly attempted by the opposition, was government forcing a new "legal orthodoxy" of marriage on unwilling citizens. The "religious freedom" end served as a sharp contrast to the "religious persecution" end of the redefinition of marriage cluster, presenting a clear choice for Creech's conservative religious audience. Creech's logic provided a motive of preserving the audience's ability to maintain their capacity to practice deeply held beliefs in the face of a rhetorically constructed assault on their religious freedoms by the evil agents of the terministic screen's negative cluster.

The Cluster of Evil

The key term and centerpiece of the negative cluster in Rev. Creech's "Marriage Amendment" speech's terministic screen is "evil" (See Appendix). The term "evil" is clearly in opposition to the term "good." The designation of what is "good" and what is "evil" in Rev. Creech's terministic screen is grounded in the terministic screen's sources of authority. In this logical framework, "evil" is a rejection of the goodness of God and God's plans that are revealed in the Bible. Furthermore, such a rejection of goodness leads to harm for humans. As with the "good" cluster, I grouped the various supporting terms around "evil" in satellites based on the roles that the terms play in the cluster. These roles include agent, purpose, attitude, agency, act, and end results. The "evil" cluster of terms and their logical relationships with each other, as well as their relationship to the oppositional terms in the "good" cluster, provide insights into the dynamic logic in Rev. Creech's "Marriage Amendment" speech.

The evil agents. Going beyond merely naming opponents on a specific public policy, Creech described these agents in extremely stark terms, such as, "those people who are robbing our nation of its soul." The "evil" agents satellite is in clear opposition to the agents - "God's people" - in the "good" cluster. The first and primary agent in the satellite are a broad assortment of liberal political activist groups that Creech referred to as the "left-wing cadre." The "left-wing cadre" included "abortionists," "evolutionists," "atheists," and "gay rights activists." While the causes identified were diverse, they were unified by their political action work for causes deemed "evil" in Creech's terministic screen. A second type of agent in the evil cluster are groups of "sexual deviants," who, Creech warns, are driven by "evil" desires to push the government to legalize various sexual behaviors and have any imaginable sexual pairing be called marriage. A third agent in the satellite are corrupt government leaders who willingly betray the will of the people to appease the "left-wing cadre" and "sexual deviants." More specifically, Creech mentioned "showboating politicians" and "activist judges." Finally, "the media" are included as an agent in the "evil" cluster as Rev. Creech fiercely condemned the media for its lack of objectivity and for intentionally misleading citizens with lies in order to advance the central act of the "evil" cluster. Having identified the agents in the "evil" cluster, I will now identify the purpose, attitude, and agency with which the four types of agents approach the cluster's central act.

The evil purpose. The purpose in the "evil" cluster is "serving personal preference." Creech accused the opposition of arrogantly acting against the goodness of God and the good of humanity in order to serve their "personal preferences" on sexuality, relationships, and marriage. More specifically, Creech accused the agents of seeking their own "sexual convenience" and the advantage of "government benefits." The self-serving purpose in the "evil" cluster is a sharp contrast to the purposes in the "good" cluster, which are focused on God and future generations. Within the speech's terministic screen, the nature of the contrast between "good" and "evil" purposes contributed to the clear choice that Creech's speech presented to the audience.

The evil attitude. The attitude in the "evil" cluster is "relentless." While North Carolina had laws restricting marriage to one man and one woman at the time of the speech, Creech claimed the legal restriction was under relentless attacks by the "evil" cluster's agents. He pointed out how the opposition had "redefined marriage" in other states, and he claimed that they were constantly looking for opportunities to "redefine marriage" in North Carolina. The "relentless" attitude of the "evil" agents increases the urgency of action in the "good" cluster, further warranting its call for "God's people" to manifest a "passionate" attitude.

The evil agency. My analysis identified one primary agency and four secondary agencies through which the agents could act. The primary agency of the "evil" agents in the terministic screen was "political activism against traditional marriage." Rev. Creech described the opposition as being relentlessly engaged in various types of political activism in their self-serving attacks against traditional marriage. The satellite's four secondary terms are the agent's specific means of political activism. The first secondary means in the agency satellite is the opposition's lies and deceptive talking points. Creech directly made the accusation that the opposition would "argue something when you know it's not right, but, yet, you're doing it to scare folks out of voting for something." The second secondary means of the opposition is the large amount of funding given and used to propagate their self-serving lies about marriage and Amendment One to the general public. Third, the opposition attempts to use legislation to establish and impose a new "legal orthodoxy" of marriage upon citizens without their consent. Finally, in the "evil" cluster of the terministic screen, the opposition would use government force to accomplish their primary act. Creech warned that once legislation was passed the government would "exercise its broad enforcement powers" to ensure compliance to the redefinition of marriage by all citizens regardless of their religious and moral convictions. The five means in the agency satellite revealed how the agents may logically attempt to accomplish the cluster's central "evil" act.

The evil act. In Creech's "Marriage Amendment" speech, the primary "evil" act is the "redefinition of traditional marriage." As noted earlier, "redefinition of marriage" is how Creech references the legalization of same-sex marriage. Creech explained his opposition's attempts at action as, "a concerted effort … today to redefine the sacred institution of marriage to include same-sex coupling." The analysis of the "evil" cluster has revealed the purpose, attitude, and agency that the "evil" agents bring to this primary action. Furthermore, and explained in further detail in the description of the end results satellite, in the logic of Creech's speech, the legalization of same-sex marriage would not merely be an additional option for marriage. Instead, it would be a redefinition of a divinely-designed institution and the establishment and enforcement of a "new legal orthodoxy" upon unwilling citizens, to the detriment of the world.

The evil end results. The sixth satellite in my analysis of the negative cluster contains a primary and two secondary end results of the act. The primary end result in the satellite is a "worse world." The two secondary end results contributing to the "worse world" are "same-sex marriage" and "religious persecution." These end results directly conflict with the end results in the terministic screen's positive cluster, "a better world," "traditional marriage" and "religious freedom." This sharp contrast provides a clear choice for the audience and, for those embracing Creech's terministic screen, a powerful motivation for action toward the "good" and away from the "evil" end results.

Rev. Creech argued that the "redefinition of traditional marriage" would result in "same sex-marriage," which was banned at the time in North Carolina, thus creating a "worse world." While Creech spent a considerable amount of time discussing same-sex marriage, it was entirely from the perspective of

showing its inferiority to traditional marriage. Creech presented three outcomes of same sex marriage that he argued would make the world worse. First, Creech claimed that same-sex marriage would result in marriage becoming irrelevant. He cited the decline in marriage rates in nations where same sex marriage is legal as support to this claim. A second result of same-sex marriage in Creech's negative cluster is a lack of family commitment. Creech claimed that same sex marriage lacked the depth of traditional marriage and was based in "personal preference" and "sexual convenience" and therefore could not generate the depth of commitment required for healthy families. Third, Creech highlighted that same-sex marriage would remove the role of gender from marriage. In Creech's logical framework, the elimination of gender differences and roles would result in the elimination of attraction and bonding that can only happen between two distinct genders.

Finally, the next secondary end result of the "worse world" resulting from the redefinition of traditional marriage and contributing to the "worse world" is "religious persecution." Creech claimed that the redefinition of traditional marriage would establish a new "legal orthodoxy" to which the Government would force citizens to conform to. In the speech's logical framework, the legalization of same-sex marriage would legally exclude the traditional definition of marriage. As a result of this "radical change," citizens who held to the traditional definition of marriage due to religious convictions would become "the legal equivalents of bigots for acting on their religious or heartfelt beliefs." Creech warned that aggressive legal action would be taken against anyone holding to moral or religious convictions about marriage as the government would act to enforce the new definition of marriage. Creech supported these claims and increased the urgency of his call for action by citing lawsuits and fear of lawsuits in states where same-sex marriage is legal.

The Theological Logic of Creech's Marriage Battle

The cluster-agon analysis of Rev. Creech's (2012) Marriage Amendment Rally address revealed the speech's dramatic alignment in its terministic screen. The terministic screen provided dramatic conflict, personal and cosmic purposes, and a high-stakes decision for the audience. In the terministic screen, God's people, guided by God's revelation in the Bible, are God's agents of good in the world. God's people have God's plan for marriage, a plan that is crucial to the good of the world. However, in the terministic screen, God's plan and goodness in the world is under aggressive and relentless attack by agents of evil, and God's people must actively battle these agents. Specifically, in Creech's logical framework, evil agents are attacking goodness by attempting to redefine marriage. God's people have one chance to prevent the redefinition of marriage and save the state from great peril by acting to pass the "marriage amendment." In summary, the speaker has divine clarity and authority regarding a current issue on the ballot, a ruthless enemy was attempting to defy God and ruin humanity, and the audience had a clear role to play to avoid disaster.

One of the more striking elements of Creech's speech was the prominence of theological claims in the explicit tactics. The analysis of Creech's implied strategies revealed that theology also played prominent roles in the speech's terministic screen. In this section, I will identify and explore several points of theology in Creech's terministic screen in order to evaluate how specific theological logics constrain and animate the speech. The terministic screen reveals a number of particular claims about God and God's interactions with the world that are integral to the internally consistent logical framework that the speech reflects and generates, exposing the motivational dynamics at work with Creech and his audience. While the terministic screen reveals the logical appeal of Creech's rhetoric, the in-depth analysis of the text also reveals tensions or weaknesses in the logic of the terministic screen, including weaknesses related to certain theological logics.

God Works Primarily through the Political Action of Conservative Christians

One significant theological statement in Rev. Creech's terministic screen is that God works in the world primarily through the political action of God's people. While the Bible is the primary source of knowing God's will in the terministic screen, God's people are the primary way that God works in the

world. As noted in the textual analysis, Creech appears to use "God's people" for conservative evangelical Christians like himself and the congregation where he delivered the marriage amendment rally keynote address. In the speech's logical framework, the agents of "good," as defined by God through the Bible, are God's people.

This theology logic carries a second significant point; God works through God's people specifically through political action, which Creech calls "Christian action." Christian action was described in the agency satellite of the "good" cluster. Creech clearly expressed this theological logic in framing his speech with the motto of the Christian Action League, "The only lasting cure for evil and injustice is Christian action." The specific agencies identified in the speech indicate that "Christian action" refers to political action taken by Christians (i.e. conservative evangelicals) rather than some type of action that is uniquely "Christian."

God's People are in a Holy War Against Liberals

A related theological inspiration in Creech's terministic screen is that God's people, whom Creech seems to equate with conservative evangelicals, are in a holy war against liberal activists including progressive interest groups, the media, and liberal judges and politicians. The conflict between God's people and liberal activists is rooted in their identity as agents of opposing clusters in the terministic screen. The conflict of the agents is as large as the cosmic conflict between good and evil. God's people promote God's goodness and combat evil. Liberal activists attack God's good plans and work evil in the world. Furthermore, within the speech's logical framework, liberal activists are opposed to God and are condemned by God.

The fight between God's people and liberals in this speech was focused on the issue of marriage; the two sides take different actions, motivated by conflicting purposes, and moving toward dramatically different end results. However, the speech and terministic screen reveal a deeper divide than the issue of marriage in at least three ways. First, Creech mentioned a variety of political and social differences that divide liberals and God's people, expanding the violent term of a "fight" beyond the vote on Amendment One. Second, the contrast between "religious persecution" in the negative cluster and "religious freedom" in the positive cluster reveals a crucial underlying conflict in which the liberals attack the core identity of "God's people" as a religious people and God's people fight back in a desperate attempt at survival. Third, Creech offered no possibility of the opposition changing their ways and aligning with God's people. There is no mention of a "Godly liberal" joining God's people in this particular fight. Instead, the "liberal cadre" is a rhetorically created coalition relentlessly attacking God's people and the ways of God. According to Creech's terministic screen, God's people must act to defeat liberals for the glory of God, the good of humanity, and their own survival as a religious people.

The theological logic that God's people are at war against liberals provides several elements of motivation for action. First, the threat of a ruthless external enemy provides a clear point of contrast which can serve as a source of identification and cohesion for the audience. The strong sense of a unified group identity, heightened by the alignment with God and God's good in the world, opens the audience to take unified action; in this case, supporting the traditional marriage amendment through Christian action. Second, as I argued above that the theology of being on God's side and doing God's work increased the depth and breadth of motivation for the audience, I propose that this alignment with the divine is all the more motivating when put in terms of group identity in the context of a war against opponents who are not aligned with the divine. This theology expands motivation beyond actions, end results, and even purposes, to a motivation of a dearly-held and cosmically-significant identity as God's people. Third, the war between God's people provides the audience with a motivation of a fight for survival. The stark contrast between God's people and liberals, seen clearly in the oppositional clusters they inhabit in my rhetorical analysis, and the framing of the efforts of liberals as attacks on God's ways and the religious freedoms of God's people places the battle over state marriage law in the context of a larger war for survival.

This theological inspiration in Creech's terministic screen, while problematic for civil democratic discourse, inflicts very little tension on the coherence of the speech's logical framework. In fact, I propose

that the powerful motivation of this theology as identified in the previous paragraph is so rhetorically compelling that it compensates for many of the tensions in logic in other theological inspirations. However, this theological inspiration does create one tension in the internal logic. If, as indicated in Creech's terministic screen, God supports religious freedom and God supports God's people, defined as conservative evangelicals, and opposes liberals, then there seems to be a tension with what kinds of freedoms God would favor for people of religious faith who are politically liberal due to their religious faith. The logic of a war between conservative evangelicals and liberals suggests that religious freedom must be limited to freedom of those of a particular religion, a definition many would find problematic. While not an element of this speech, Creech has dealt with this tension when addressing Rev. Dr. William Barber and the liberal-leaning Moral Monday meeting by dismissing their religious beliefs (O'Neil, 2013).

God Supports Religious Freedom for Conservative Christians

Another piece of theological inspiration in Rev. Creech's terministic screen is the logic that God is on the side of religious freedom, at least for God's people. This theological logic emerged from Creech's framing of North Carolina's Amendment One as a fight to protect citizens' rights to hold their "heartfelt" religious convictions about marriage against the threat of religious persecution by liberals and the government. In this fight, God's people are on the side of God's purpose of marriage, and God is on the side of God's people to hold, practice, and promote God's position on marriage.

This theological logic places God on the side of the audience in the midst of rhetorically constructed threats to their religious freedom, specifically the freedom to hold religious convictions and practices of traditional marriage rather than a hypothetical liberal redefinition of marriage. The theological logic that God is on the audience's side complements the theological logic that the audience is on God's side. As the various theological emphases interacted in Creech's terministic screen, a theological logic developed in which God and God's people support each other against attacks of their liberal enemies.

This theological logic that places God on the side of religious freedom contributes to a tension in the terministic screen that also contains a logic that condemns questioning of one specific understanding of God's plan. It becomes unclear what type of religious freedom God could support if God is also against change or questioning of the status quo or dominant religious view. While Creech decried the scenario of the government interfering with a citizen's "heartfelt" religious belief that marriage was an exclusive union between a man and a woman, the logic of the terministic screen would firmly oppose different beliefs and practices about marriage beyond Creech's definition, even if those beliefs where "heartfelt" and religious. Amending the North Carolina Constitution so that there is no possibility of change in the definition of marriage appears to conflict with the claim that God supports the religious freedom of individual citizens given that citizens hold divergent understandings of marriage based, at least in part, on divergent religious beliefs and practices.

Culture War Theology's Logical Patterns of Motivation

My close textual analysis of Rev. Mark Creech's (2012) keynote revealed the terministic screen at work in the political action text. I have focused specifically on the activity of theology of conflict in the terministic screen. The analysis has identified a logic that appeals to many religious Conservatives who encounter Rev. Creech's rhetoric. In this logic: the speaker has divine clarity and authority on the current issue on the ballot; there is an enemy attempting to defy God, harm humanity, and eliminate the audience; and the audience has a clear role to play to avoid disaster. I have also identified points of weakness in the logic of the terministic screen, places where the theological inspirations appear to lead to conflicts and complications within the logical framework. Understanding the logic of the terministic screen, both the points of strength and weakness, allows the rhetorical scholar to make predictions of where the rhetoric will lead those who accept the invitation of the terministic screen. I will conclude this paper by

forecasting two key directions Rev. Creech's terministic screen may lead his audience if it were to remain consistent over time.

First, Creech's theologically-infused political rhetoric will likely contribute to further decay in democratic deliberation in politics. His rhetoric demonizes the social and political opposition, moving beyond attacks on specific differences of policy or political philosophy to attacks on identity. The logic of the rhetoric fosters a deep distrust and animosity toward outsiders because of the rhetorical construction of the outsider's identity as evil. Judgment of the political opposition, in this case a cosmic condemnation, is made on the basis of their identity prior to any political actions, purpose, or goals. The absolute division between the identity of two political opponents in the terministic screen eliminates the need for or appeal of dialogue, compromise, or collaboration. When adopted, the logic of war against a dangerous and fully-other enemy reduces political action to mobilizing one side to defeat, and perhaps, if the logic is taken far enough, even punish or eliminate the political opposition. The logic of this rhetoric does not allow the "fight" to end with one particular battle over a specific policy difference. Instead, because the conflict runs as deep as the very identity of the political adversaries, the fight must continue until the war is complete and the opposition is defeated. The tendency of this logic toward extremism is made all the more extreme through the theological logic that places the source of judgment, in this case the blessing of conservative evangelicals and condemnation of political liberals, in the highest imaginable authority, God. This theological logic does not necessitate but certainly can facilitate a win-at-any-cost ethic of political warfare.

Second, the logical framework of Mark Creech's theologically-infused political action rhetoric will likely leave no room for dissent within the conservative evangelical community he represents. This conclusion of the logical framework is not the result of any one particular theological inspiration examined in my analysis of the speech. In fact, some of the theological inspirations in the terministic screen, namely, the audience as God's people, the importance of religious freedom, and the Bible as the highest authority, should provide a logic against exclusion of dissenting voices in the religious community. However, I argue that some of the logical tensions identified in the previous section will likely lead to a logic that will not tolerate any descent on Creech's proclamations on what the Bible says and how it should be applied to the immediate social and political context. More specifically, this logic of exclusion will most likely be engaged on issues related to the rhetorically constructed war between God's people and liberals, as the logic of war rhetoric leads toward authoritarian leadership and the exclusion of dissenting opinions. A theological logic that recognizes the community as God's people, values religious freedom, and claims the Bible as the highest source of God's revelation could logically lead to a rhetoric of free and respectful dialogue and debate over the interpretation of the Biblical text and its appropriate application. However, the fear and urgency in the theological logic of the (culture) war rhetoric incited by Creech invited him to act as the authoritative voice of God's plan and purpose for the audience. This approach induced some of the points of tension in the logic discussed above in the analysis of Creech's theological rhetoric, particularly the large gaps in the logic between claims of the Bible's authority on marriage and sexuality followed by specific theological claims about Amendment One and other issues not addressed in the biblical text. In practice, Creech placed himself in the position of highest authority by declairing God's position on the marriage amendment. This logic leads to Creech, not God's people or even the Bible, acting as the voice for God in this (culture) wartime crisis, and likely leaves no room for dissenting opinions. It is likely this authoritative wartime rhetorical style would continue beyond the debates over marriage in North Carolina and on to other political battles in the culture war, once again placing Creech or another like-minded preacher in the position of authority to declare the will of God and making adherence of his decrees the litmus test of faithful membership as one of "God's people."

This analysis of Rev. Mark Creech's (2012) Marriage Amendment Rally keynote address has identified numerous theological emphases in Creech's terministic screen, identified motivations and tensions in the logic generated by certain theological logics, and anticipated outcomes of some of the logics in the theologically-animated rhetoric. My analysis has demonstrated the logical outcomes of specific theological emphases at work in the terministic screen. While the theological logics are not the

only element at work in Rev. Creech's political action rhetoric, I argue that the specific theological logics participate in the rhetoric's logical framework in ways other theologies would not participate.

In the course of this analysis I have mentioned that a few of Creech's theological statements reflect the specific segment of the conservative evangelical theological tradition to which he and his audience belong. If my claim that specific theological logics tend to animate and constrain political action rhetoric in certain ways, then the common theological logics found in Creech's terministic screen and in other conservative evangelical political action rhetoric should exhibit similarities. Recent rhetorical studies of American conservative evangelicalism (Crowley, 2006; Edwards, 2015) have revealed both theological emphases and rhetorical logics similar to what I have found in this analysis of Rev. Creech's political action text. More specifically, these studies of conservative evangelical rhetoric have identified that the logical outgrowth of theological rhetoric about the absolute authority of the "plain reading" of the Bible to current events combined with theological rhetoric of divinely-sanctioned culture war against the political opposition often leads to authoritative, divisive, and Machiavellian political discourse that threatens civil discourse. And while, as noted in the analysis of Creech's terministic screen, no specific element of conservative evangelical theology directly necessitates such toxic rhetoric, combinations of certain theological inspirations may act in ways that poison the fountain of public discourse.

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Appendix

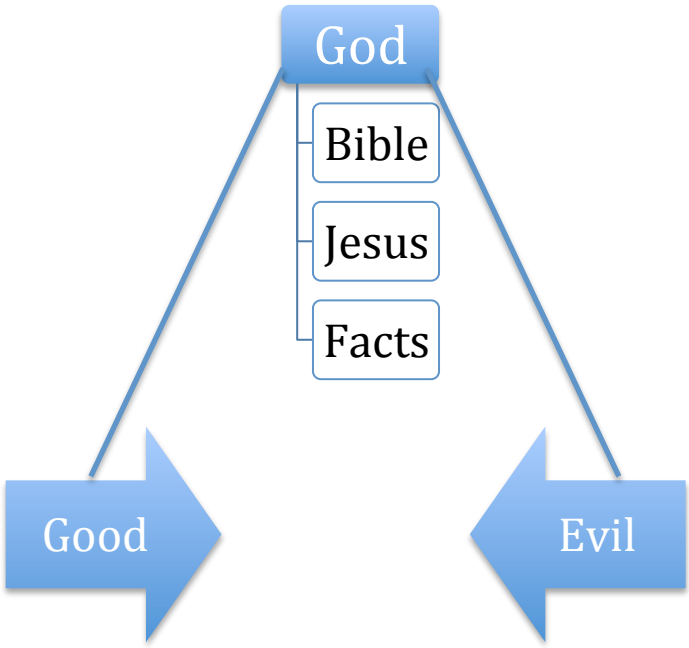

Figure 1. The Marriage Battle's Authority and Agon

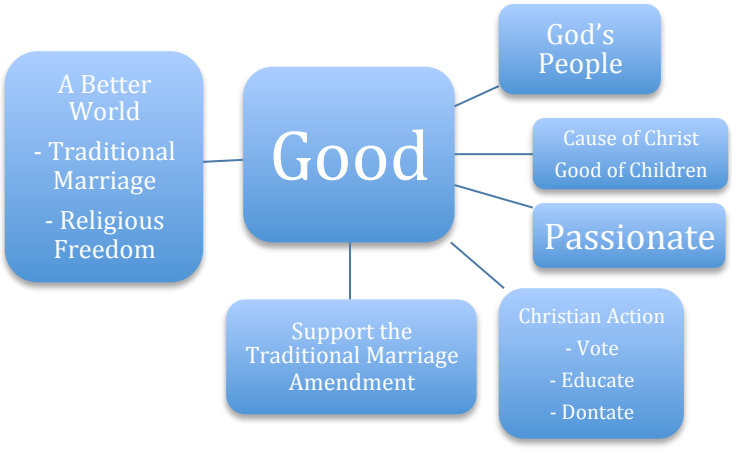

Figure 2. The Marriage Battle's Good Cluster

Figure 3. The Marriage Battle's Evil Cluster

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Reclaiming the "Native" in Organizational Communication Research

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In this essay, we reconsider the traditionally pejorative notion of "going native" and alternatively define the role of a native engaged scholar as distinctly valuable to the study and practice of organizational communication. We envision this role as constituted in three interconnected qualities that we describe as (a) intimacy with the subject matter, setting, or people that stems from one's insider status or firsthand experience, (b) partnership with natives to craft the nature and aims of the research, and (c) commitment to a contribution that proves meaningful for participants over time. In articulating the researcher role of a native engaged scholar, we seek to coalesce disparate practices embraced within engaged scholarship, participatory action research, autoethnography, feminist inquiry, as well as established field researcher roles. Using case illustrations based on colleagues' and our own research, we illustrate this role in action and its benefits. Notwithstanding its merits, we close by acknowledging the inherent tensions of empathy, commitment, and identity that arise when taking on this role in scholarly research.

Introduction

The phrase "going native" has long since held a depreciatory standing in scholarly inquiry. By most accounts, anthropologists first devised the term when cautioning scholars against becoming overly enmeshed with the tribal natives they studied, as doing so was deemed a considerable threat to quality academic research (see Kanuha, 2000; Malinowski, 1922). Hence, the persistent warning against going native has besieged many researchers who work as complete participants in their areas of research (Gold, 1958). As recently as 2011, Lindlof and Taylor described the propensity and signs of going native in this way:

> …complete participants who are deprived of the opportunity for extensive and collaborative reflection may lose their analytic detachment. The extreme form of this condition is famously known as "going native." Its symptoms include over identifying with a group's ideology; participating unreflectively in its rituals; uncritically advocating its interests; failing to document what is happening; and (in some rare cases) choosing not to return "home." (p. 146)

As young scholars, we were trained to view complete immersion as "natives" as risky and potentially compromising the production of scholarly knowledge. Certainly, we did not want to become field researchers who lost our capacity or willingness to "question everything" and abdicated our responsibility to critically analyze phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 81). Thus, we initially avoided nativeness to our participants and research settings, or in the very least concealed it from our peers for fear of scholarly derision.

Over the past decade, some sub-disciplines of the field of communication have seen shifts in our collective attitude toward being embedded in one's research site. Indeed, "going native" is no longer universally the "dreaded accusation [it was] in the 'old days'" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. vii). Scholars working under the banners of engaged scholarship (e.g., Barbour & Gill, 2014; Barge, Lee, Maddux, Nabring, & Townsend, 2008; Lewis, 2012), participatory action research (e.g., see Ellingson, 2017), autoethnography (e.g., Miller, 2002), and feminist inquiry (e.g., Harter, Leeman, Norander, Young, & Rawlins, 2008) no longer eschew the integration of researcher with context but, rather, embrace it for its many benefits. Moreover, several scholarly texts on qualitative research methods have argued for

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attending to the researcher's (embodied) role (native or not) as a co-creator of knowledge throughout the research process (e.g., Ellingson, 2009; Manning & Kunkel, 2014; Tracy, 2013). Even so, pockets of the discipline continue to embrace an objectivity bias that views nativeness with some wary skepticism.

This wariness is not without cause as the phrase "going native" has a complicated history, and scholars have interrogated the modern applicability and ethicality of the phrase (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffins, 1998; Tracy, 2013). Likewise, as we considered our scholarly experiences as individuals embedded in our research sites, we too began to ponder and reimagine the definition and implications of nativeness. Namely, we questioned the coupling of the words "going" and "native"—as together they suggest a state of becoming instead of being. Together, these words were historically employed to describe perceivably unacceptable scholarly (in)actions—where over time a researcher failed to practice self-reflexivity—and consequently lost sight of their researcher identity. Interestingly, the juxtaposition of the words, going and native, suggested a rogue scholar might experience a *shift into a native role* throughout the research process. In contrast, we envision natives as those individuals who are *already* deeply embedded in the communities and contexts under study.

Thus, we position nativeness as sincere identity embraced *prior* to engaging in scholarly pursuits, rather than a becoming that occurs during data collection. This construction of nativeness affords scholars a language with which to talk about their role as they study *their own* cultures, organizations, hometowns, churches, community clubs or groups, etc. In other words, one does not go native nor become native, rather, one simply *is* native. Nativeness, then is part of a scholar's identity—an embodiment that is often rife with contradiction. Our goal in this essay is three-fold. First, we seek to advance a new researcher role known as a *native engaged scholar* (referred to as NES or engaged native)—and in doing so underscore the utility of recasting the notion of nativeness within communication scholarship.

In defining this researcher role, we coalesce practices drawn from varied methodologies employed, and roles adopted, within the discipline of communication. Second, we aim to highlight the utility of the NES role in action by examining three case illustrations, one of which features our own research. By drawing on cases with which we have unique familiarity, we are able to delineate the particularities associated with nativeness that are omitted in these published studies. Third, we illuminate the lived tensions inherent when scholars embrace an NES role. Given the complexity of being an engaged native, we offer suggestions navigating the tension-imbued reality of this researcher role. Together, these three aims support NES as a distinct researcher role and positionality that we envision as suited to various methodologies and approaches implemented throughout organizational communication scholarship. Next, we delineate the three main qualities of the engaged native role.

Defining the Engaged Native

The native engaged scholar is a researcher role that necessarily embodies three qualities that we refer to as *intimacy*, *partnership,* and *contribution*. Intimacy entails a closeness to the site and a personal investment that marks the researcher as an insider. Partnership denotes co-creation of the research aims and scope with those in the community under study, and contribution requires that the researcher strive to create meaningful and lasting value for the spaces in which he or she is embedded. Though these qualities are not entirely novel within the vast landscape of communication research methodologies, to date, scholars have not directly woven together these qualities, nor have they named a distinct researcher role for individuals embodying all three qualities. We propose that as a constitutive whole these three qualities of intimacy, partnership, and contribution represent a distinct researcher positionality that can enhance numerous lines of organizational research.

Herein, we expound on the engaged native's enactment of partnership, intimacy, and contribution and cite some ways that it aligns with the practices of engaged scholarship (see Dempsey & Barge, 2014; Barge & Shockley-Zalabak, 2008; Simpson & Shockley-Zalabak, 2005), participatory action research (see Frey & Carragee, 2007), autoethnography or narrative ethnography (see Goodall, 2004; Tillmann, 2009), and feminist inquiry (see Buzzanell, 2000). In other words, in crafting the researcher role of an engaged native, we draw on these disparate but related methods and epistemologies to identify three

meaningful qualities or touchstones of this new positionality. Notably, scholars working within each of these approaches or traditions resonate with aspects of the engaged native researcher role, yet no one of them fundamentally necessitates this researcher positionality.

Intimacy

The first quality of the NES role is intimacy, which we summarize as the pursuit of research that "hits close to home." Intimacy refers to a deep or familiar relationship between the researcher and the site, the members, and/or the topics and issues under study. That is, the engaged native's scholarship is infused with their personal history, inclinations, and experiences. Research questions are not pursued simply as a matter of scholarly curiosity. There is a more profound connection and meaningfulness that pours over into multiple aspects of one's identity (e.g., as coworker, friend, family member, volunteer, neighbor, or citizen).

Intimacy clearly aligns with the values of autoethnographic inquiry and narrative ethnography. In Goodall's (2004) words, "What is personal is at the heart of what it means to be a communication professional. Our lived experiences and scholarly reflections about them are the work, and the creative expressions, of applied communication researchers" (p. 193; see also Tillmann, 2009). Perhaps nowhere is this quality of intimacy more exemplified than in Miller's (2002) autoethnographic account of her emotional labor as a professor in the wake of a fatal campus accident. More recently, it also manifests in Kramer's (2018) analysis of role incompatibility, which is based on his own seemingly incommensurate struggle with professional, spiritual, and other life identities.

Beyond autoethnography, intimacy further resonates with an array of organizational studies broadly linked with feminist inquiry. Lucas and Buzzanell (2004) provides one such exemplar and testament to the benefits of intimacy with their study of the occupational socialization and identification of miners. As a daughter from a long lineage of miners, Lucas argued that, "as an *insider* she not only had access to stories but also was familiar with research participants' values and language" (p. 279, emphasis added).

Partnership

Engaged natives not only enter the research setting as intimate insiders or empathizers, they also join forces with those they study. This second quality of partnership entails actively involving members throughout the research process. Together, the engaged native and other natives consciously and collaboratively observe, discuss, analyze, and/or intervene in the lived experiences of the organization, group, or team under study. This partnership dimension resonates foremost with the values of engaged scholarship, which require that researchers exhibit respect for participants by inviting them to participate in the formation of project goals and methods of inquiry. In fact, the emphasis on collaboration with non-academic voices throughout the research process is perhaps the most distinctive value of engaged scholarship (Dempsey & Barge, 2014). Deetz's (2008) commentary on this bedrock value of engaged scholarship speaks to the benefits of partnership. He claims that when academics and practitioners examine issues together as equals, "a world of possibilities that was not seen before opens in front of the parties" (p. 290). Additionally, though participatory action research does not wholly dictate that scholars must collaboratively design and implement their research with participants, such partnership often organically emerges from this interventional approach, as many prior efforts have demonstrated (e.g., Campo & Frazer, 2007).

The NES's pursuit of partnership also complements the feminist value of co-equal status between researcher and researched, which is fostered by giving primacy to participant voices in reporting and writing (Gergen, 1988). For example, in their multi-year study of Passion Works collaborative art studio, Harter and colleagues (2008) embedded themselves in the staff's routines and created art alongside client artists so that they could better represent their perspectives and experiences. Thus, in addition to exemplifying the engaged scholarship and action research commitments to collaborative research, the engaged native's stance as partner also upholds the feminist ideal of participant empowerment.

Contribution

The final quality of the NES role is contribution, which we define as producing locally meaningful knowledge or change alongside the traditional contribution of scholarly knowledge. Certainly, scholarly insight is an important part of the contribution that engaged natives offer by being immersed in organizational practice. For as Boyer (1990) argued, theory and practice are co-occurring and mutually informing. Additionally, though, the NES role facilitates contribution in the sense of giving something useful that matters to the organization or group at hand.

Contribution is vital to participatory action research and engaged scholarship, both of which seek to "make a difference *through* research…by researchers intervening into discourses to affect them and documenting their practices, processes, and products" throughout the research project (Frey, 2009, pp. 209-210). Whether it be committing to telling more authentic stories of cancer survival (Ellingson, 2017), offering coping strategies for working within the ever-present risks in nuclear power plants (Barbour & Gill, 2014), or facilitating the organizational messaging of a victim's recovery center (Crabtree & Ford, 2007), activist and engaged communication researchers clearly embody the engaged native's role as contributor. Together these qualities of intimacy, partnership, and contribution distinguish the engaged native role from other field researcher roles—an argument which we elucidate next.

Distinguishing the Engaged Native Role

Scholars have formed multiple typologies and designations for field researcher roles often conceptualized in terms of the researcher's degree of immersion in site under study. At one end of this "continuum of enmeshment" (Tracy, 2013, p. 106) is the researcher who becomes deeply embedded as an active participant (i.e., complete participant, Gold, 1958; Spradley, 1980; Tracy, 2013; complete member researcher, Adler & Adler, 1987). Thus, both NES and complete participants are fully immersed in the scene. However, the engaged native is distinct in terms of its preexisting relationship with the scene even prior to the study's inception. As such, though complete participants may be local to the site or even claim membership, they do not necessarily encounter the same manner of intimacy that anchors engaged natives to the sites under study.

Further along the continuum are roles that more detectably engage the participant *and* researcher positionalities. Some of these roles wear the participant hat more prominently and frequently (participant as observer, Gold, 1958; active participant, Spradley, 1980; and play participant, Tracy, 2013). For Tracy (2013), this type of role is "improvisational and unbounded," and the flexibility inherent allows the field researcher to pivot and flex alongside the study participants (p. 109). Other roles elevate the researcher stance as more primary over the participant role (focused participant observers, Tracy, 2013; observers as participants, Gold, 1958). These "moderate participation" field researchers stay more on the periphery (Spradley, 1980, p. 60). Rather than establish a primacy or hierarchy of positionality as researchers in these roles do, native engaged scholars strive to *concurrently* and fully embrace the dual identities of participant and scholar. The distinct intimacy of engaged natives spurs this striving, but also obligates them to face tensions that those who separate and oscillate between participant and researcher do not face.

Finally, at the other end of the continuum are researchers who function as removed observers who attempt to watch carefully yet not intervene in the scene (i.e., complete observer, Gold, 1958, Tracy, 2013; passive observer, Spradley, 1980, peripheral member researcher, Adler & Adler, 1987). Engaged natives would not adopt a complete observer (Gold, 1958) role given their pre-existing relationships to the site and/or participants. Irrespective of an engaged native's desires, the partnership dimension of the NES role would prevent them from disengaging from a community to the extent required of a complete observer. Moreover, engaged natives would struggle to leave the scene without intervening and/or suggesting improvements for those who remained (i.e., contribution dimension). Ultimately, although the role of a native engaged scholar is certainly enmeshed, as Tracy (2013) suggests of other field researcher roles, the engaged native role challenges the tacit assumption that the enmeshment process begins at project inception. Rather, engaged natives enter into their researcher role as already, or perhaps always, enmeshed. In turn, we explore the unique value of the native engaged scholar role, and of the qualities of

intimacy, partnership, and contribution in confluence, through the telling of three scholars' stories who have already charted out as engaged natives.

The Organizational and Scholarly Value of Engaged Natives

The following narratives are based on the scholars' respective publications as well as direct correspondence with the authors. Beginning with Lacy's own experience, we illustrate each scholar's embodiment of the interconnected qualities of intimacy, partnership, and contribution and underscore the meaningful messiness of this role. We chose these three cases—each of which features a scholar who meets the criteria of an engaged native—because we were given access to the untold, unpublished threads of the stories behind the scholarship. It is our goal to use each of these cases to highlight to unique and complicated role of an engaged native as lived out in the research scene and beyond.

Volunteering with Child Watchdogs

While pursuing my doctorate, I volunteered with Child Watchdogs or CW (pseudonym), an advocacy organization that supports children in foster care. I became quickly entrenched in not just the world of the children but the staff and the organization as a whole. Notably, I observed staff supervisors struggle to empower volunteers toward self-sufficiency yet also provide oversight and boundaries to ensure their effectiveness. During this time, my research interests turned toward the negotiation of roles and relationships between supervisors and subordinates. Thus, after two years at CW, my scholarly and volunteer roles began to converge. I was nominated for the Volunteer of the Year, marking my shift to an insider who was intimately engrained in the organizational lifeblood. As a trusted member, I gained a platform to speak with the CW director about the volunteer-staff role relationships and the possibility of a research study to shed light into these dynamics (see McNamee & Peterson, 2014, 2016; Peterson & McNamee, 2015).

The director was excited to pursue the study. Thus, my intimate positionality gave rise to the partnership aspect of the engaged native's role. Together, we discussed opportunities for growth and insight and how the study might be designed to facilitate these discoveries. The director collaborated with me to craft the interview guide and also actively facilitated and encouraged staff and volunteers' participation. Unfortunately, she unexpectedly departed the organization shortly after data collection and preliminary analysis was complete (due to unrelated factors). Amidst this departure and other organizational changes, the findings from this study remained unshared for some time and the promise of a contribution hung in the balance. For example, critical findings regarding volunteers' frustrations with their supervisors and desires for different forms of support and recognition went months without being voiced and acted upon.

Eventually, however, my organizational role shifted from volunteer to board member where I gained a broader understanding of the implications of my study findings and a renewed desire to explore their potential applications. As the board grappled with reports of lagging volunteer retention, I found the organization's governing body a willing and consequential audience for sharing the research and, therefore, a newfound opportunity arose to make a meaningful contribution in the end. For example, I now conduct staff training sessions focused on enhancing their task and relational communication with CW volunteers. Because I had intimately lived the life of a volunteer yet also partnered in the research from the vantage point of a trusted high-level insider, I was able to yield unique scholarly insight into volunteer-staff role dynamics and offer a meaningful contribution to the organization that carried forth well beyond the life of the study.

Wilmington Raised

As a native of the area, Anna Wiederhold's (now Wiederhold-Wolfe) relationship with the Wilmington, Ohio residents she studied was quintessentially intimate (see Wiederhold, 2015; Wiederhold Wolfe, 2016). She grew up just outside of town and participated in athletics at the local high school where her father taught for decades. Thus, a common place-based history and shared social connections fostered

a natural intimacy with the participants, or mutual familiarity as Anna referred to it (Wiederhold, 2015). Embeddedness within the community forged her connection to Wilmington as a site for studying public narratives and community change. It also facilitated access to two key informants, former classmates, who were working toward economic revitalization in the area. Because of her history with these classmates and the small-town goodwill that came with "being a Wiederhold," Anna was invited into conversations and spaces that eclipsed the access typically afforded to a non-native (A. Wolfe, personal communication, May 21, 2018). Such intimacy enabled her to coproduce the research at play in partnership with the community. Anna reimagined the community with her former classmates and shaped her data collection methods accordingly. She invited participants to choose interview sites they deemed illustrative of the economic dynamics in the community, and in these settings, "interviewees became tour guides and storytellers, positioned as local experts" (Wiederhold, 2015, p. 608). Participants also traced their connections to the community, thereby identifying others who Anna should interview.

These ongoing partnerships paved the way for widespread buy in and lasting change. Ultimately, Anna presented her findings to the city council, and within a month, they approved a program that incentivized individuals to reside in the area. This case highlights the engaged native's distinct advantage when attempting to foster trust and access. For Anna, the seed of trust sprung forth from birth and was rooted in her family name: as one city council member intimated when invited for an interview, the connection to the Wiederhold dynasty, as he referred to it, afforded her the access of a researcher and the goodwill of a neighbor. Their conversation flowed as the councilperson shared insights that he knew she would understand as a native. Participants trusted her investment and collaborated with her to the idyllic end: a lasting contribution for the community itself.

Facilitation at Freedom Church

Ryan Hartwig's relationship to Freedom Church began in the typical way: he attended services, participated in its ministries, and became a member. In the years that followed, Ryan embedded himself deeply into the church while also pursuing his doctorate. As a committed member, he eventually obtained the senior pastor's permission to conduct a study about the culture of the church's pastoral staff. From there, his intimate connection to the site intensified: He began a new role as organizational consultant, and, eventually, his dissertation focused on the church's executive team and their efforts to develop a strategic ministry plan.

Ryan's distinct methodological approach, which he describes as ethnographic facilitation—a methodology where scholars "employ ethnographic practices", facilitate group discussions "to promote change or development" and "report their findings to scholarly and relevant practitioner communities", resonates deeply with the NES quality of partnership (Hartwig, 2014a, p. 60; see also Hartwig, 2014b). He advocated for "shared leadership models" by helping team members to understand and actively participate in their own communication practices and culture (p. 64). He viewed himself as a facilitator and scribe and stressed to the executive team their responsibilities in ultimately developing the strategic plan. As an engaged native, Ryan also desired to use his research to benefit the church. However, Ryan's commitment to contribution was not fully championed by his primary partner in the research, the senior pastor. After presenting the executive team's strategic plan to the pastor and perceiving a favorable response, he subsequently prepared to share it in a larger meeting with church members; but when the meeting convened, the pastor was conspicuously absent. In Ryan's words, "his lack of being there was a big flashing billboard that this doesn't matter" (R. Hartwig, personal communication, June 6, 2018). Moreover, this absence disrupted Ryan's identity as an engaged native: "Not only is he a co-participant in my research, he's also my pastor. How do I sit in the pews [after he failed to show up]? It was painful" (R. Hartwig, personal communication, June 6, 2018). Feeling unsupported, Ryan and his family eventually left the congregation, and without support from the pastor, the team's strategic ministry plan was never implemented.

Ryan's case represents a somewhat cautionary tale of the native engaged scholar. His deep and ongoing connection as a native and his collaborative dynamic with the executive leadership team helped him co-produce actionable strategies for the community. These qualities of partnership and intimacy

seemingly set him on a trajectory for fulfilling the final promise of NES roles: the commitment to a lasting impact for the people involved. However, without the continuing endorsement of his original partner, this contribution was left unfulfilled. Ryan's story illustrates the importance of securing widespread partnership and alludes to other complexities of the NES role.

Together these cases offer a novel look into the lifeworlds of native engaged scholars and illustrate the often overlooked, understated, and unpublished benefits of *being* native prior to engaging in academic inquiry. Indeed, the intimacy, partnership, and contribution qualities embraced by NES help these individuals to know their communities deeply. This deep and intimate embeddedness, fostered over time, can help facilitate the discovery of authentic knowledge (see Cheney, 2000; Janesick, 2000). Moreover, these cases resonate with Lewis' (2012) view of partnership; she posits, "Fundamentally, our knowledge is better if we partner in diverse learning communities rather than simply aloofly draw our own conclusions and then generously share them with those who are the objects of study" (p. 188). Finally, the above cases illustrate that engaged natives not only embody the values of engaged and applied scholarship which seek to do "something that matters, something that counts for real people who encounter a variety of dilemmas, issues, and problems in their everyday lives," but we contend that engaged natives' ongoing relationships with communities ensure that they affect not just change but lasting change (Trethewey, 2002, p. 81). Non-natives, in contrast, are often unable to remain with the organization under study long enough to see whether or not change is enacted and embraced. Instead, they often part ways with their sites long before the implementation of scholarly outcomes. Thus, for the scholars in the stories above, and other engaged natives like them, Boyer's (1990) articulation of meaningful theory development rings true: "Theory surely leads to practice. *But practice also leads to theory*" (emphasis added, p. 16). Next we speak to the unique complexities that engaged natives face as they embrace their varied positionalities as both engaged native and engaged scholar.

The Inevitable Tensions

While the role of an engaged native enhances scholarly inquiry and benefits organizations, groups, and communities, we acknowledge that it is not free from problems and complications. Indeed, analogous to traditional engaged scholar (e.g., Dempsey & Barge, 2014) and activist-consultant roles (e.g., Crabtree & Ford, 2007), we accept the role of a native engaged scholar as inherently tension-filled. Thus, to conclude, we expound on how native engaged scholars have and will continue to struggle with, endure, and embrace three tensions that we refer to as *empathy*, *commitment*, and *identity*.

Tensions of Empathy vs. Skepticism

Because of their personal tie and commitment to the research, engaged natives are often privy to or even concomitantly endure the lived struggles, frustrations, and failures of their participants. Accordingly, these relationships are often marked by a mutual respect that motivates greater disclosure and candor from participants and ultimately yields an important benefit: richer data. That is, engaged natives experienced the quotidian lives of their participants, and as such, they have the unique capacity to know which questions to ask and how to phrase the questions to garner meaningful responses. Certainly, such familiarity with organizational culture, norms, and history enable the NES to speak the language of the community and pursue important questions for insight and discovery, all of which are beneficial to rendering rich data and nuanced interpretation.

At the same time, engaged natives' intimate and often insider positionality can make them prone to take on participants' emotions thereby experiencing emotional contagion which often leads to burnout (see Andreychik, 2019). Similarly, engaged natives may overlook meaningful nuances from their insider vantage point and take for granted that their individual native experience mirrors all others. This perceived empathy may result in a distorted perspective and false sense that "I'm a member so I know how it is" which shrouds other views and experiences. Finally, empathy may also unwittingly fog one's critical lens such that the researcher struggles to detect dysfunctions, abuses, and other unhealthy organizational dynamics at play. In this way, tensions of empathy resonate with Dempsey and Barge's

(2014) distance-empathy tension, where "a fully immersive, empathetic stance" might preclude critical analysis and application (p. 674).

In order to productively navigate the tension of empathy—reaping the benefits and assuaging the challenges—we suggest that engaged natives consider co-authorship. Bringing on a collaborator can help engaged natives layer a critical lens over their scholarship and aid them in discerning blind spots where their nativeness might indeed be a hinderance to the advancement of theoretical knowledge. Additionally, we encourage researchers in NES roles to even more conscientiously engage in practices that Tracy (2010) collectively refers to as *sincerity*. Such practices include self-reflexivity about "their own voice in relation to others" and "*how* they claim to know what they know," as well as "transparency" or "honesty about the research process" (e.g., methods of entry, relationships with participants, fieldnoting practices, etc.) (p. 842). Important questions for the engaged native to ask include: What do I know about the culture *as* an insider? What knowledge, practices, values, or beliefs might a non-native question? What assumptions am I making because of my position in this community, and what other possibilities might exist?

Tensions of Commitment to Scholarship vs. Community

Engaged natives also experience tensions of commitment as they navigate the liminal space between native and scholarly obligations, questioning: Where do my commitments lie?, To what extent will I partner with my participants in order to co-produce knowledge?, and, in line with Dempsey and Barge's (2014) scholar-practitioner tension, How do I focus on creating theoretical insights and practical contributions? Undoubtedly, when engaged natives are perceived to be all in, organizational and community members are more willing to share the less glamorous aspects of their lifeworlds, which ultimately can produce novel scholarly insight and actionable data for their communities. However, when these commitments diverge or compete, engaged natives might find themselves with fragmented commitments, struggling to maintain multiple competing interests and, at times, abandoning one commitment for another.

For one, if native engaged scholars prioritize partner relationships, seeking to do no harm to their organizations or communities at all costs, they may inadvertently sacrifice scholarly contributions. Notably, they may sidestep important examination of wicked challenges that may face their communities of study (e.g., abuse, bullying, unethical practices). By contrast, if engaged natives prioritize their scholarly commitments and pursue unmitigated transparency, they may produce profound scholarship, but at the expense of members' reputations and standing in the organization. Even worse, this move may perpetuate the exploitation of lower power members or groups. Moreover, even as engaged natives' efforts to work alongside organizations may receive favorable nods from colleagues, these partnerships often do little to advance cases for promotion and tenure as they take valuable time away from other scholarly endeavors. As such, if engaged natives continually put partnership ahead of scholarship, it can stall career advancement (see Ellingson & Quinlan, 2012 for a review).

To navigate tensions of commitment, we encourage scholars to reject the false dichotomy between allegiance to site or scholarship and to embrace Ellingson and Quinlan's (2012) perspective that "altruism and professional ambition" can coexist (p. 394). In practice, scholars might consider using dendritic crystallization (Ellingson, 2009) to produce multiple genres of representation and put them in conversation with one another (e.g., grounded interpretive analysis alongside applied reports). These kinds of couplings could help engaged natives to see where their allegiances, commitments, and positionalities shift or change with respect to audience. In line with this reasoning, we encourage scholars to ask: Whose voice am I representing? And consequently, whose voices am I omitting? What commitment am I currently prioritizing and to what ends? These self-reflective questions can help engaged natives own our analytic lens(es) while at the same time challenging us to consider what we choose to share, when we choose to share, who we choose to share with, and why we choose to share at all.

Tensions of Identity as Scholar vs. Member

While tensions of empathy facilitate engaged natives' insight in the first place and tensions of commitment are related to their willingness to convey those insights, tensions of identity speak to how adopting a NES role personally influences the engaged native. Indeed, because of their closeness to the site and their dual identity as both native and scholar, engaged natives have a greater capacity for discovery as well as the propensity to see recommendations through to completion. The engaged native's research project has a greater degree of intensity which can yield high levels of self-fulfillment and accomplishment while at the same time vulnerability, opening up the NES to personal harm that comes from being deeply embedded in a site. When the research study does not go as planned, feelings of failure can overwhelm the engaged native. In this way, tensions of identity are somewhat related to Crabtree and Ford's (2007) discussion the activist-consultant dialectic, in that the activist's participatory (vs. observational) stance and personal (vs. professional) lens can leave the activist exposed.

Researchers sometimes lack the capacity to fully realize their practical recommendations in the communities under study, and engaged natives in particular mourn their inability to effect change in a community that is indelibly bound to themselves. Given the vulnerability inherent in this role, we encourage NES to attend to our varied identities and entertain self-reflexive questions like Richardson's (2000) "How did the author come to write this text?" (p. 254). Other introspective questions include: What are my identities with respect to this site? Who am I in relation to the current audience? How do I protect myself and/or make myself more vulnerable in this context? What practices can I enact to avoid burnout as I embody the NES role? If I show this side of my identity, what consequences will it have for me, and how will people judge me based on that identity? Questions like these can inspire NES to "use our own emotions as an amplifier, promoting us to interrogate further" (emerald & Carpenter, 2015, p. 748).

Conclusion

In this essay, we reclaim and recast scholarly understandings of nativeness by focusing on individuals who pursue research projects with intimate ties, partner with people on the ground to mold and shape the research, and contribute to the organization or community beyond the life of the research. Our cases illuminated how engaged natives' profound trust, knowledge, and commitment can facilitate greater access, unique scholarly insights, and expanded possibilities for lasting change. Ultimately, although the role of an engaged native is not without tension or complication, we encourage scholars involved in activist and engaged research, autoethnography and narrative ethnography, and feminist inquiry to consider taking on this role in their respective research agendas. Our articulation of the engaged native role is also pedagogically consequential. Doctoral curricula should attend to the traditionally pejorative and ethically complicated practice of "going native" in the classic sense while at the same time distinguishing that nativeness in and of itself is not something to be denigrated. As engaged natives ourselves, we celebrate the complex relationships to the people and places we have studied and the consequent scholarly insights, and we continue to honor the challenges that come with living into this role.

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Graduate Student Identity Salience and Mental Health

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Through an intergroup theory lens, the current study examined the relationship between graduate student identity salience, social support, and mental health. Results indicated a negative relationship between graduate student identity salience (i.e., how strongly a graduate student identifies as being a graduate student) and depression. Further, there was a positive connection between graduate student identity salience, social support from faculty, and willingness to disclose distress. These findings demonstrate support for the influence of both social support and social identity theory on graduate student identity salience. Further, the results inform graduate programs on how to improve the experiences for graduate students in their programs.

Introduction

A report on graduate student well-belling revealed that 47% of doctoral degree seeking students and 37% of master's degree seeking students had symptoms of depression (The Graduate Assembly, 2014). Graduate students often have high academic expectations and heavy workloads between coursework and teaching, which can create extra stress in their lives (Thrasher, Walker, Hankemeier, & Pitney, 2015). In fact, "graduate students are more than six times as likely to experience depression and anxiety" as the general population (Evans, Bira, Gastelum, Weiss, & Vanderford, 2018, p. 282). Yet, despite the increase in mental health problems, many graduate students persist in their programs until graduation. One explanation for this could be the graduate student's identity salience, or how central a graduate student's role as a graduate student is to their identity (Stryker, 1968). Since identity salience often motivates student behaviors, it might also motivate graduate students to stay in their programs despite struggles with mental well-being (Burke & Reitzes, 1981).

The connection between graduate student identity salience and mental health represents an understudied area of intergroup communication, which can help contribute to improving graduate student experiences with well-being. Along with understanding how intergroup communication influences graduate student identity and mental health, exploring factors that can improve graduate student anxiety, stress, and depression is paramount. Social support has been shown to improve graduate student mental health in the past by reducing the stress, anxiety, and depression levels of graduate students (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Social support happens mostly through communication and relates to social identity theory (SIT) since it promotes mutual network relations (Cobb, 1976) that can build in-group identification and positive group images (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

One theoretical framework to understand graduate student mental health is through SIT, which suggests that group membership influences our self-concept and self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Further, people tend to view certain identities as more salient, meaning they are more central to who people perceive themselves to be. To this end, how strongly a graduate student identifies with their role as a graduate student may influence their experiences with their program and their well-being. Thus, using an intergroup perspective, the current study explores how identity salience impacts graduate student stress, anxiety, and depression. In addition, the current research also considers how social support from peers and faculty members' influences graduate student mental well-being and identity salience.

Further, another negative outcome of mental health issues is that the stigmatization around mental health challenges can prevent graduate students from disclosing about their mental health issues. Previous research on mental health identities recognizes that individuals with mental health disparities are often

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embarrassed or ashamed to talk about their identities (Onken & Slaten, 2000). Past studies have found that identity often motivates undergraduate student behaviors (Burke & Reitzes, 1981), which could help to explain how graduate students handle their mental well-being. Additionally, willingness to disclose about mental health disparities can aid in recovery (Vogel & Wei, 2005). Yet, the stigmatization of mental health prevents people from communicating about their mental health issues (Wrigley, Jackson, Judd, & Komiti, 2005). Since graduate students have high rates of mental health problems (Evans et al., 2018), having outlets to express their mental health issues is especially prudent. Social support may help reduce the stigmatization on communicating about mental health issues (Vogel & Wei, 2005) and has been shown to help graduate students feel more comfortable talking with peers and faculty members about personal problems (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Therefore, the links between graduate student identity salience, mental health issues, willingness to disclose distress (WDD), and social support need to be understood in order to help graduate students have a more successful experience in their graduate programs. Further, it can also help departments to understand how to assist students who experience mental health issues. To explore graduate student experiences with mental health and identity, first previous research surrounding graduate student roles and intergroup theories, mental health, social support, and the communicative outcomes of graduate student roles and mental health challenges is examined. Lastly, the results of a project researching graduate student identity salience and mental health disparities is analyzed and explained.

Literature Review

Intergroup Theory and Graduate Student Roles

One framework to understand the experiences of graduate students is through an intergroup perspective. Intergroup scholarship posits that people often communicate with others based social group categorizations, depending on the context and relationship history (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Intergroup theories explain that we create our social and personal identities based on these group categorizations (Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Further, people's self-concepts and self-esteem are often influenced by group memberships (Stryker, 1968; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). One framework to understand how graduate student identity influences their experiences during graduate programs is SIT.

As explained through SIT, people tend to categorize themselves and others based on group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Based on this framework, people tend to perceive some identities as more salient or important to them than other identities. For instance, a graduate student might perceive their identity as a graduate student as more important than other identities, making up their identity salience as a graduate student. Identity salience specifically refers to how central or important a group membership is to a person's social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In addition, identity salience includes three dimensions: centrality, ingroup affect, and ingroup ties (Cameron, 2004). *Centrality* refers to how significant a group membership is to a person. Further, *ingroup affect* describes how emotionally attached a person is to a group. Last, *ingroup ties* is whether or not a person feels that they belong in a group. Additionally, SIT posits that individuals attempt to raise their self-esteem through positive group membership, which is referred to as self-enhancement. To understand if they are a part of a group that enhances their identity, individuals will compare their in-group with similar out-groups. If a person's primary group membership is seen as negative, they will either try to leave the group or alter the negative image of the group. If an individual cannot achieve either of these, it can be detrimental to their overall self-esteem. Group membership, however, also improves self-esteem (Crabtree & Haslam, 2010). Specifically, if a person with a stigmatized identity is able to join a group of similar people, being a member of a community helps to buffer the negative impact that their stigmatized identity can have on their self-esteem. In other words, identifying with a group helped them to receive support and create a sense of belonging that increased their overall self-esteem. Since graduate students are often comparing themselves to both members of their in-groups and out-groups, SIT can help to reveal how a graduate student's identity salience influences their overall mental health.

Another important concept from SIT is social mobility, or a person's ability to move from group to another (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The graduate student identity represents a unique form of social mobility because it offers the chance for greater mobility and social enhancement (whether a graduate student is seeking to be a professor or work in the corporate world), but only if the student successfully completes their degree. Meaning that while being a graduate student, there is little chance of social mobility, but staying a graduate student ultimately offers a greater level of mobility later on, making their identities fluid and temporary. Thus, graduate students may feel extra stress to perform the role of graduate student correctly; otherwise, their mobility could be delayed or even halted. The desire of mobility could add to graduate student mental health struggles, which the next section explores.

Graduate Student Anxiety, Depression, Stress, and Social Support

Graduate students have reported higher levels of mental health issues than the general population (Evans et al., 2018). In fact, in one study around half of the graduate students surveyed indicated that they had experienced emotional well-being issues, such as depression or stress, or reported that their friends or colleagues experienced mental health challenges (Lustig, Madon, Hyun, & Quinn, 2006). Stress, anxiety, and depression can have several negative impacts on graduate students (Baldwin, Daugherty, Rowley, & Schwartz, 1996). Graduate student mental health disparities have led to substance abuse (Newbury-Birch, Walshaw, & Kamali, 2001), high dropout rates (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000), suicide ideation (Lipson, Zhou, Wagner, Beck, & Eisenberg, 2016), and academic dishonesty (Baldwin et al., 1996). These effects may be impacted by graduate student identity salience. Stryker (1968) noted that identity salience could influence the impact identity conflict had on the person. Depending on how important graduate students feel their role in graduate school is, it may influence their stress, anxiety, and depression levels. Further, previous research has already shown that identity salience predicts levels of self-esteem (Crabtree & Haslam, 2010). Thus, it would make sense that graduate student identity salience would predict graduate student levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> H1: Graduate student identity salience will predict graduate student depression (1a), stress (1b), and anxiety (1c).

Related to graduate student stress, anxiety, and depression is graduate student intent to graduate (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). In addition to academic and mental health disparities, Lovitts and Nelson found that graduate student emotional distress influenced attrition rates at doctoral programs, with most doctoral programs having a dropout rate of around 50%. Yet, another study found that when students believed they belonged at their institution, thrived as students, and believed the institution cared about them, they reported increased intentions to graduate (Ash & Schreiner, 2016). To further understand the link between anxiety, stress, depression, and graduate student intent to graduate, we explore the following research question:

> RQ1: How are graduate student identity salience, depression, anxiety, stress, and intent to graduate related?

One factor that has been shown to influence graduate student levels of anxiety, depression, and stress is social support (Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989). Social support is "information leading the subject to believe that he is cared for and loved, esteemed, and a member of a network of mutual obligations" (Cobb, 1976, p. 300). Social support can come from family, academic faculty, and peers (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Receiving social support from peers has been shown to help to reduce levels of stress (Cobb, 1976; Cohen & Wills, 1985). Further, Cohen and Wills posited that social support could act as a buffer between stress and the negative impacts of stress on people.

Previous research has shown that social support can have positive impacts on graduate students (Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989; Yeh & Inose, 2003). For instance, Yeh and Inose found that social support systems for international graduate students reduced their overall amount of stress in their programs.

International students often experienced higher levels of stress because of language barriers and being in a new culture, but their stress was lowered by social support. Additionally, Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) found that social support from peers helped to reduce international graduate student stress. For first year graduate students in general, social support moderated the relationship between their stress and satisfaction with their department (Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989). Meaning that if graduate students experienced higher levels of stress but received an appropriate amount of social support from the department, they were still highly satisfied with their program.

In addition to stress, social support has been shown to influence student depression (Wright et al., 2013). For instance, Wright and colleagues found that higher levels of social support reduced undergraduate student levels of depression. While not focused on graduate students specifically, this study provides support for the relationship between depression and social support. Further, Munir and Jackson (1997) found that for female graduate students, social support from advisors was related to graduate student anxiety. For the current study, social support from peers and faculty may be related to graduate student identity salience as well as potentially reduce levels of anxiety, depression, and stress (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Since social support creates feeling of mutual networks (Cobb, 1976), it may increase feelings of in-group connectedness and group identity salience. To explore these relationships the following hypotheses and research question are proposed:

> H2: Graduate student levels of social support from faculty members will predict graduate student depression (2a), anxiety (2b), and stress (2c).

> H3: Graduate student levels of social support from peers will predict graduate student depression (3a), anxiety (3b), and stress (3c).

> RQ2: How are graduate student social support from peers and faculty related to graduate student intent to graduate?

Willingness to Disclose Distress

One important communicative outcome of social support, identity salience, and mental health is graduate student willingness to discuss mental health concerns with others, also referred to as distress disclosure (Kahn & Hessling, 2001). Distress disclosure represents an interesting area in communication studies because people are often conflicted as to whether they should disclose negative personal information or not (Onken & Slaton, 2000). Individuals tend to stigmatize mental health disparities, which makes others uncomfortable disclosing information about mental health problems (Eisenberg, Downs, Golberstein, & Zivin, 2009). Stigmas of mental health can include lacking social skills, being more embarrassing in public, and being undesirable to be seen with in public (Segal, Coolidge, Mincic, & O'Riley, 2005).

People who have mental health challenges often feel ashamed of their health status and do not want to discuss their issues with others because of these stigmatizations, especially with members of in-groups (Onken & Slaton, 2000). Fear of stereotypes and being treated differently than others prevents people from disclosing their mental health concerns to others. Based on the social expectations of graduate students (Thrasher et al., 2015), they may not be willing to disclose mental health issues in fear of being seen as weak by other members of their in-group. Previous intergroup research has shown that people tend to avoid disclosing stigmatized identities to members of their in-groups in order to avoid stereotypes (Onken & Slaton, 2000). Therefore, graduate student identity salience may predict if a graduate student is willing to disclose distress. To understand the relationship between graduate student identity salience and graduate student WDD, the following hypothesis is examined:

> RQ3: How are graduate student identity salience and graduate student willingness to disclose distress related?

Although research has not examined how graduate students disclose mental health concerns and distress, scholars have explored how college students in general disclose distress (Wei, Russell, & Zakalik, 2005). Wei and colleagues found that self-disclosure was a mediator between depression and attachment avoidance, and if students were willing to disclose distressing information, they built better relationships and experienced less depression. Further, Vogel and Wei (2005) discovered that students who had attachment problems in college tended to perceive less social support and were not willing to disclose that they had mental health problems. This shows support for a relationship between WDD and social support. Additionally, research has indicated that if international students received more social support, it reduced their tendencies to experience mental health challenges (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Therefore, if people are allowed to talk with others about their problems, they experience less depression, anxiety, and stress. To further understand the relationship(s) between social support, WDD, and graduate student depression, anxiety, and stress the following research questions are explored:

RQ4: How are graduate student levels of social support from faculty and peers related to student willingness to disclose distress?

RQ5: How are graduate student willingness to disclosure distress and graduate student depression, anxiety, and stress related.

Method

Participants and Procedures

To research the above hypotheses and research questions, a quantitative analysis was conducted. Volunteer and snowball sampling were used to collected data from 181 graduate students in the United States. More specifically, a questionnaire was shared on e-mail listservs, social media sites, and by asking graduate students to share the study with their peers. The sample included 95 masters level students (52.5%), 68 doctoral level students (37.6%), and 18 declined to answer (9.9%). One hundred and six of the participants identified as female (58.6%), 53 were male (29.3%), one was genderfluid (0.5%), four preferred not to answer (2.2%), and 17 did not respond (9.4%). The age range of the participants was 21-55 (M = 28.62, SD =7.98). A 3.77 average GPA was reported with a wide variety of concentrations listed, the most common being: communication studies, media, and education. Additionally, there were 130 White/Caucasian (71.8%), 10 Asian participants (5.5%), one Native American (0.5%), seven Black/African American (3.9%), seven Hispanic/Latino (3.9%), two Multiracial (1.1%), two Asian/White (1.1%), one White/Arab (0.5%), one Japanese/Brazilian (0.5%), one selected Other (0.5%), and 19 declined to answer (10.5%).

After receiving approval from the University IRB, the participants were sent a link to an online questionnaire on Qualtrics.com assessing their graduate student identity salience, current mental health status, perceptions of social support, WDD, and intent to graduate. Demographic questions included sex, ethnicity, program level, appointment in program, major, age, year in school, and GPA. Participants were provided with a consent form at the beginning of the questionnaire, which they had to agree to before completing the study.

Instruments

Identity salience. The three-dimensional strength of identity scale measures the strength that an individual identifies with a group (Cameron, 2004; Obst & White, 2005). The three dimensions include: centrality, ingroup affect, and ingroup ties. Together, the three dimensions can be used to assess a person's identity salience for a particular group. For this study, the scale focused on how strongly a graduate student identified as being a graduate student. This measure contains 12 questions answered on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Very Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Very Strongly Agree*), with higher

means indicating a stronger identity salience with a group. One example question is: "I often regret being a graduate student." For the current study, the reliability was .80 for graduate student identity salience.

Social support. This adapted version of social support scale measures how much social support graduates feel they have with peers and faculty members (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988). It was adapted from the original to target graduate student peers and faculty members specifically. This measure contains 10 questions answered on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Very Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Very Strongly Agree*). The scale has two subscales, one scale for social support from peers and the other from faculty. An example question is: "My peers really try to help me." Mean scores closer to seven indicated higher levels of social support received from peers and faculty. For the current study, the reliability for the peer scale was .94 and .91 for the faculty scale.

Depression, anxiety, and stress. The depression, anxiety, and stress scale (DASS) measures graduate students' current levels of anxiety, depression, and stress (Lovibond, 1983). This measure contains 21 questions answered on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Did not apply to me at all*) to 4 (*Applied to me very much, or most of the time*). For this measure, higher mean scores revealed higher levels of stress, depression, and anxiety. The scale includes three subscales for anxiety, depression, and stress. One example question is: "I tended to over-react to situations." Reliability for the current scale was .86 for the anxiety subscale, .88 for the stress subscale, .87 for the depression subscale, and .94 for the overall scale.

Distress disclosure. The distress disclosure scale measures graduate student willingness to communicate about mental health distress (Kahn & Hessling, 2001). This measure contains 12 questions answered on a 5-point Likert-Type scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*), with scores closer to five indicating more willingness to disclose distress. An example question is: "I prefer not to talk about my problems." The reliability from the current study was .90.

Intent to graduate. The intent to graduate scale is a researcher created four-item measure examining students' likelihood to graduate from their current program. The questions asked for responses on a 5-point Likert-type scale with answers ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 5 (*very likely*), with scores closer to five indicating a higher intent to graduate. The four items were: "I will graduate from the same program I started in." "I will transfer to a different program at the same institution to finish my degree." "I will not finish my degree." and "I will transfer to a different institution to finish my degree." The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was .71.

Results

To examine the initial relationships between variables, Pearson correlations were run between graduate student identity salience, depression, stress, anxiety, intent to graduate, WDD, social support from faculty, and social support from peers. See table 1 for all correlations between variables.

Table 1
Correlations Among Scaled Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Intent to Graduate	--							
2. SSF	.13	--						
3. SSP	.06	.46**	--					
4. WDD	.05	.05	.16*	--				
5. Graduate Student IS	.15*	.15*	.14	.28**	--			
6. Depression	-.24**	-.23**	-.15*	-.20**	-.20**	--		
7. Anxiety	-.26**	-.12	-.04	-.04	-.07	.67**	--	
8. Stress	-.13	-.07	-.01	-.13	-.10	.71**	.76**	--

**Indicates that correlations are significant at p < 0.05*
***Indicates that correlations are significant at p < 0.01*

Note: Meanings for variable acronyms include: Between Intent to Graduate (IG), Social Support from Faculty (SSF), Social Support from Peers (SSP), Graduate Student Identity Salience (IS), and willingness to disclose distress (WDD)

The first hypothesis posited that graduate student identity salience would predict graduate student depression, anxiety, and stress. Correlations between the variables can be seen in table 1. To explore the hypothesis, three linear regressions were run with graduate student identity salience predicting depression (H1a), anxiety (H1b), and stress (H1c). For H1a, graduate student identity salience significantly predicted graduate student depression levels [$F(1, 176) = 7.48$, $p = .007$, $R^2 = .041$, $R^2_{adj} = .035$], meaning that graduate student identity salience predicted 3.5% of the variance in graduate student levels of depression. More specifically, based on the correlation results, graduate student identity salience predicted lower levels of depression. Further, for H1b, graduate student identity salience did not significantly predicted graduate student reported levels of anxiety [$F(1, 176) = .77$, $p = .381$, $R^2 = .001$]. Last, the results from H1c revealed that graduate student identity salience did not significantly predict graduate student stress [$F(1, 176) = 1.85$, $p = .176$, $R^2 = .01$]. Overall, hypothesis one was partially supported with graduate student identity salience significantly predicting graduate student levels of depression.

In addition, the first research question considered how graduate student identity salience, intent to graduate, and graduate student mental health were all related. Graduate student identity salience was negatively related to intent to graduate ($r = -.15$, $df = 175$, $p = .048$). For mental health, intent to graduate had negative correlations with depression ($r = -.24$, $df = 176$, $p < .001$) and anxiety ($r = -.26$, $df = 176$, $p < .001$). Thus, these research questions showed support for a positive relationship between graduate student identity salience and intent to graduate. Last, the results demonstrated that graduate student intent to graduate was negatively related to both depression and anxiety. Post hoc analyses were conducted to see how graduate student identity salience, anxiety, and depression predicted graduate student intent to graduate. Specifically, two linear regressions were conducted. The first model examined depression and anxiety as predictors of intent to graduate. Results revealed that graduate student levels of depression and anxiety together predicted 7.4% of the variance in graduate student intent to graduate [$F(2, 175) = 7.010$, $p = .001$, $R^2 = .074$, $R^2_{adj} = .064$]. Interestingly, separately neither anxiety ($t = 1.803$, $p = .073$) nor depression ($t = 1.248$, $p = .214$) were significant predictors of intent to graduate. The second linear regression examined if graduate student identity salience predicted graduate student intent to graduate. Results revealed that graduate student identity salience predicted 2.2% of the variance in graduate student intent to graduate [$F(1, 175) = 3.952$ $p = .048$, $R^2 = .022$, $R^2_{adj} = .016$]. Overall, graduate student mental health seems to be a slightly stronger predictor of graduate student intent to graduate than graduate student identity salience.

The second hypothesis predicted that if graduate students reported higher levels of social support from faculty, they would experience less depression, anxiety, and stress. Initial correlations showed a relationship between graduate student perceived social support from faculty and depression ($r = -.23$, $df = 173$, $p = .002$). To further test H2a, a linear regression was run with social support from faculty predicting graduate student levels of depression. Results revealed that social support from faculty significantly predicted 5.2% of the variance in graduate student levels of depression [$F(1, 173) = 9.46$, $p = .002$, $R^2 = .052$, $R^2_{adj} = .046$]. Since anxiety (H2b) and stress (H2c) were not significantly correlated with perceived social support from faculty, further tests were not conducted using these variables (see table 1 for correlation values). Therefore, hypothesis two was partially support with social support from faculty significantly predicting graduate student levels of depression, such that as social support from faculty increased, graduate student levels of depression decreased.

Hypothesis three explored if graduate student social support from peers predicted lower levels of anxiety depression and stress. Pearson correlations were used to examine the initial links between variables (see table 1). Social support from peers was approaching significance with depression ($r = -.15$, $df = 174$, $p = .050$), but was not otherwise related to anxiety ($r = -.04$, $df = 173$, $p = .123$) or stress ($r = -.01$, $df = 174$, $p = .941$). Since the correlations did not show relationships between the variables, further statistical analyses were not conducted. Overall, hypothesis three was not support.

The second research question examined the relationships between graduate student identity salience, social support, and intent to graduate. To test these relationships, a Pearson correlation was run on graduate student identity salience, social support from faculty, social support from peers, and intent to graduate (see table 1). Graduate student identity salience was significantly related to social support from faculty (r = .15, df = 172, p = .043) but not social support from peers (r = .14, df = 173, p = .065). Intent to graduate was not related to social support from faculty members (r = .13, df = 172, p = .102) or social support from peers (r = .06, df = 173, p = .449). To further explore this research question, a post hoc analysis examined how social support from faculty predicted graduate student identity salience. A linear regression revealed that social support from faculty significantly predicted 2.4% of the variance in graduate student identity salience [$F(1, 172) = 4.165$, p = .043, R^2 = .024, R^2_{adj}=.018]. Overall, research question two revealed that social support from faculty slightly predicted graduate student identity salience as being a graduate student.

Research question three posited that graduate student identity salience would be related to graduate student WDD. A Pearson correlation revealed a significant positive correlation between graduate student identity salience and WDD (r = .28, N = 176, p < .000). To further test the research question, a post hoc linear regression was run with graduate student identity salience predicting graduate student WDD. Results revealed that graduate student identity salience significantly predicted 7.8% of the variance in graduate student WDD [$F(1, 174) = 14.771$, p < .001, R^2 = .078, R^2_{adj}=.073]. Therefore, research question three demonstrated that graduate student identity salience predicted their willingness to disclose distress.

The fourth research question explored the relationships between WDD and social support. Pearson correlations were used to look at these relationships (see table 1). Results revealed that WDD was positively correlated with social support from peers (r = .16, df = 172, p = .031). A post hoc analysis further examined how social support from peers predicted graduate student WDD. A linear regression revealed that graduate student perceived social support from peers predicted 3.1% of the variance in graduate student WDD [$F(1, 172) = 4.725$, p = .031, R^2 = .027, R^2_{adj}=.021].

Last, research question five explored the relationships between graduate student WDD and graduate student depression, anxiety, and stress. Pearson correlations revealed that WDD was negatively related to depression (r = -.20, df = 175, p = .009), but not stress (r = -.13, df = 175, p = .087) or anxiety (r = -.04, df = 175, p = .634). A post hoc linear regression was conducted to see if WDD predicted graduate student depression. Results revealed that WDD predicted 3.8% of the variance in graduate student levels of depression [$F(1, 175) = 6.981$, p = .009, R^2 = .038, R^2_{adj}=.033].

Discussion

The goal of this study was to understand how graduate student identity salience, perceived social support, mental health, intent to graduate, and WDD were related. The results indicated relationships between graduate student identity salience, depression, anxiety, stress, social support, intent to graduate, and WDD. These findings can be explained through an intergroup theory lens and social support research.

The first hypothesis examined the relationship between graduate student identity salience and graduate student depression, anxiety, and stress. The results revealed partial support for the hypothesis, with graduate student identity salience predicting 3.5% of the variance in graduate student levels of depression. Results from the first hypothesis supported previous research about how intergroup connections are related to mental health (Crabtree & Haslam, 2010). Previous research, however, specifically considered how intergroup affiliations influence positive aspects of mental health, such as self-esteem. The current study extended these findings by demonstrating that positive intergroup categorizations can also reduce negative mental health issues. More specifically, if a graduate student more positively identified as a graduate student, their levels of depression were reduced. Thus, hypothesis one supported initial claims from SIT that group membership can influence mental health (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), while extending research to consider how SIT can explain reductions in negative mental health issues.

Hypothesis two and three predicted that social support from faculty members and peers would reduce levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Support was found for social support from faculty members reducing graduate student depression, but not stress or anxiety. This supports previous research that found social support from faculty members decreased mental health challenges (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). One explanation for social support from faculty members not reducing anxiety or stress could be that even though faculty members provide social support, they still push students to succeed. Therefore, graduate student stress and anxiety levels are not necessarily reduced by the provided social support. Social support from peers, however, was not found to reduce depression, anxiety, or stress. When people are experiencing distress, social support may actually lead them to feel more negative about themselves because they are embarrassed for needing social support (Lepore, Glaser, & Roberts, 2008). Thus, one explanation for the findings in our study is that graduate students do not want to seek out social support from peers because they perceive it as a threat to their self-esteem.

Further, research questions one and two explored the relationships between graduate student identity salience, social support, intent to graduate, stress, depression, and anxiety. Results revealed that depression, social support from peers, and graduate student identity salience were related to graduate student intent to graduate. In addition, graduate student identity salience and social support from faculty were related. These results can be explained through both SIT theory and the social support construct. For instance, previous research found that social support helped students feel as if they belonged to a group, which reduced mental health disparities among these students (Lawson & Fuehrer, 1989; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Additionally, since social support fosters a sense of belonging (Cobb, 1976), it can help to increase positive connotations of group memberships. Thus, if graduate students receive social support from faculty members and peers it can improve their overall affect toward their group membership, which, according to SIT, helps to increase their self-esteem (Tajfel &Turner, 1986). Therefore, if a graduate student receives greater levels of social support, it may increase their overall identification with their role as graduate students. This in turn, can lower their levels of graduate student depression, stress, and anxiety because they feel more connected and have a more positive self-concept, seeing graduation as more obtainable.

Hypothesis four and research question three explored the relationships between distress disclosure, social support, and graduate student identity salience. The results revealed that WDD was positively related to social support from peers but not social support from faculty members. Further, support was found for graduate student identity salience predicting graduate student WDD. One explanation for these findings is through Petronio's (2002) work on privacy management. She explains that people have certain boundaries and rules for disclosing information with others, which can be based on group membership. In other words, people may be more willing to disclose information to people they perceive as their in-group members than individuals they see as out-group members. Extending intergroup theory and SIT, if graduate students perceive in-group members more positively and more highly identify as a graduate student, they may then be more willing to disclose distress to other in-group members. This was evident in the results because graduate student identity salience worked to predict graduate student WDD. Further, the nature of the student-teacher relationship might elicit more boundaries than the student-student relationship. Thus, in-group membership and boundaries are important factors in WDD about mental health issues. Another explanation for the lack of the relationship between WDD and social support from faculty could be the stigmatization of mental health issues. For instance, if graduate students are depressed they might not be willing to communicate with faculty members because of the stigmatization surrounding the disclosure (Eisenberg et al., 2009). More specifically, they could fear that their faculty would have negative reactions to their mental health issues, which could result in the faculty members treating them based on their stigmatized identity. Thus, graduate students may not be willing to disclose distress to faculty, regardless of how supportive the faculty members are. Since disclosing information about mental health is often stigmatized, these results support the findings in previous research that people do not disclose about mental health disparities (Onken & Slaton, 2000).

Additionally, the correlations from research question four showed that if students were more willing to disclose distress, they experienced reduced levels of depression. While graduate students may

fear the stigmatization from disclosing distress, these results demonstrate how important it is for graduate students to talk about their mental health issues (Wei et al., 2005). If students are able to share more of their distress, it could improve their mental health overall. Therefore, more research needs to be done to understand how graduate students can be encouraged to share their mental health issues.

The results from the current study extend research on both graduate student mental health and SIT. Theoretically, the study works to connect social support and identity salience, specifically finding that social support from faculty helped to increase graduate student identification with their role as a student. Further, the study also demonstrated how graduate student identity salience impacted their mental health, specifically finding that graduate student identity salience was negatively related to graduate student depression. While there is a lot of research left to be done on graduate student mental health, the findings from the current research illustrate that if graduate students feel they belong in a program, it helps to reduce their struggles with depression.

Implications for Graduate Programs

The findings offer several implications for graduate programs in general. Specifically, the study demonstrates the importance of social support for graduate students. In order to improve graduate student experiences, departments should focus on increasing social support for graduate students. Some ways programs could increase social support from faculty members and peers are through mentorship/advisee relationships (The Graduate Assembly, 2014). Instead of just having meetings about academics, faculty advisers could reach out to graduate students and have meetings to just see how the graduate student's life is progressing. Additionally, faculty members could offer social times with students, such as having lunch or coffee with different graduate students. Not only would this work to increase perceptions of social support but offering meetings and social appointments to graduate students could also increase a graduate student's sense of belonging in the program. Central to SIT, if a student has a stronger sense of belonging, they might identify more strongly as a graduate student. Given that having a stronger identity salience can reduce depression, helping students to feel as if they belong could help to decrease their struggles with mental health issues.

Further, the study also demonstrates the importance of disclosing distress. More specifically, the results showed how WDD could reduce depression levels. Therefore, programs should encourage graduate students to disclose their distress. While disclosing distress is important, faculty members may not be prepared to handle graduate student mental health issues themselves. Thus, one suggestion is for departments to encourage graduate students to seek counseling, allowing them to disclose mental health issues in a healthy and safe setting. Overall, graduate students need to both feel comfortable disclosing their mental health issues and have necessary outlets to do so.

Future Directions and Limitations

As highlighted in the implications section, this study demonstrates that social support is important for success in graduate school, warranting future research to continue to explore social support in graduate school. Further, the conclusions from this analysis help to extend the understanding of SIT and intergroup theory. For SIT, this study explains the relationship between identity salience and WDD, depression, anxiety, and stress. This has implications for both in-group members and out-group members. If a graduate student does not perceive themselves as an in-group member, they may experience higher levels of depression and be less willing to communicate about their problems. More research needs to be conducted to see what factors influence graduate student identity salience in their programs.

Although this study adds to current research, it does have its limitations. First, the intent to graduate scale had a low reliability; this may have influenced the results from the intent to graduate variable. Another limitation to this study is that it only measured social support from peers and faculty members, which does not account for how friends and family members may also influence graduate student experiences. Future studies should explore how families and friends impact graduate student mental health. One last limitation from the study was that the sensitive nature of the questionnaires caused

some participants to skip questions on the survey, making the reported numbers for statistical analysis differ.

Conclusion

This study extends the overall understanding of graduate students and social support to include the influence of intergroup theory. It also adds to current research about graduate student depression, anxiety, and stress. Future research should continue to explore the influence of social support on both graduate students and intergroup relations. Lastly, graduate student programs would benefit from increasing social support between faculty and graduate students.

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