Ohio Communication Journal
A publication of the Ohio Communication Association

Ohio Communication Association

2022 Executive Committee

Guidelines for Manuscript Submissions

The *Ohio Communication Journal* is an annual peer-reviewed online publication that 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 scholarship covering a wide variety of topics from every facet of the field and debut papers from undergraduate and graduate students.

The *Ohio Communication Journal* believes that research must be carried out in an ethical fashion, so we subscribe to the National Communication Association Code of Professional Ethics for Authors and we expect submissions to reflect these guidelines. These guidelines enjoin authors to use inclusive and non-defamatory language.

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

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

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

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

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

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

(6) The scholarship reported is authentic.

2021 Call for Papers

Full-Length Manuscripts

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

Short Essays

In addition to our traditional call for research manuscripts, this year (2021) we will be accepting select, short essays (2500 words max.) that reflect on teaching during the initial phases of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Such essays should elaborate on pedagogical techniques discovered and/or lessons learned during the abrupt transition to remote learning/teaching during the pandemic.

Manuscript Submission Process

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

All manuscripts should conform to the most recent edition of the American Psychological Association (APA) Style Manual 7th Edition. The cover page must contain: (1) the title of the manuscript; (2) the author's name, (3) author's institutional affiliation, (3) the mailing address, (4) the author's phone number, and (5) author's e-mail address. The second page of the manuscript must include the title and a 50–100-word abstract.

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

Volume 60 Acceptance Rate

The acceptance rate for Volume 60 of the *Ohio Communication Journal* was 38.46% for full-length manuscripts, 45.45% for short essay submissions, and 40.5% overall.

Featured Publications

Short Essays

Undergraduate Essay
Undergraduate manuscripts appearing in this journal received Top Student Paper Awards at the 2021 Ohio Communication Association Conference.

The Roles of Hierarchy and Relational Closeness in Confrontations about Idea Stealing

Nicole A. Ploeger-Lyons
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This language production experiment sought to provide insight into workers' directness and facework strategies when confronting another employee about the understudied unethical act (Graham & Cooper, 2013) of idea stealing in the workplace. Participants included 326 full-time working adults, each of whom were randomly assigned to one of nine conditions in which they were asked to form a response to a hypothetical idea thief. Conditions varied based on two workplace relationship factors—the hierarchical relationship between the confronter and confronted and the relational closeness between the confronter and confronted. The implicitness-explicitness of confrontations was impacted by hierarchy, in that peer coworkers-confronting-peer coworkers and supervisors-confronting-subordinates were significantly more explicit in their confrontations than subordinates-confronting-supervisors. There were no significant differences in confrontational explicitness based on whether the transgressor was a troublesome other, acquaintance, or friend. Study data support the notion that in cases of idea stealing, the context of hierarchy trumps the context or relational closeness in shaping workers' confrontationality. Identity frames and the communication theory of identity (Hecht, 1993; Jung & Hecht, 2004) are used as lenses to understand the detected (and undetected) differences in participants' responses across workplace relationship types.

Keywords: idea stealing, workplace relationships, organizational ethics, social confrontations, facework, communication theory of identity

Introduction

Stealing a tangible resource such as money or equipment may be among the first thoughts that come to mind when considering theft in the workplace; however, the focus of this study is the stealing of a more intangible and often unseen resource—ideas. Ideas are an interesting commodity in workplaces in that they serve to benefit the worker intrinsically (through feelings of pride and worth for generating the ideas) and extrinsically if they are recognized for the ideas (Ploeger-Lyons & Bisel, in press). Recognition for one's ideas and work may impact motivation, performance, and retention in positive ways (Rawat et al., 2015). In addition, workers' ideas, at least in part, fuel their own organizational success and often that of their work group, supervisor, and/or organization at large. To that end, a worker's identity(ies), especially as they are related to interactions with those different organizational actors, may impact and be impacted by the interactions surrounding ownership of their ideas.

While legal cases of intellectual property theft generally concern infringements of trademarks, patents, and copyrights, we frame *idea stealing* as the presentation of another's cognitive (unpatented and uncopyrighted) contributions as one's own (Ploeger-Lyons & Bisel, in press). Idea stealing is an inherently communicative and message-based phenomenon "in the sense that it requires the transgressor to have learned of someone else's ideas through listening or reading, and then present the ideas as their own through speaking or writing" (Ploeger-Lyons & Bisel, in press). Idea stealing is often linked with unjustified credit taking, or the notion that the person who receives credit for the idea or the work done

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did not originate the idea, did not produce the work, and/or is granted more than a fair share of credit (Graham & Cooper, 2013). Social sciences researchers have also likened idea stealing to plagiarism, noting that "it constitutes a deceptive impression management tactic that falsely inflate[s] the plagiarizer's reputation" (Silver & Shaw, 2018, p. 216). It stands to reason that idea stealing is grounds for a social confrontation in the workplace.

The purpose of the current language production experiment is to provide insight into such confrontations through an analysis of working adults' responses to another worker who presented the participant's ideas as their own, thus taking credit for the participant's intellectual contributions. While there are many factors workers may consider when deciding why, when, and how to confront an idea stealer (e.g., organizational culture, perceived importance of the idea, potential gain), we focus this experiment on two relational considerations. Specifically, do workers' directness and facework strategies during social confrontations differ across two dimensions present in organizational relationships: (a) the hierarchical relationship with the unethical worker (i.e., supervisor-subordinate, peer coworker-peer coworker, subordinate-supervisor); and (b) the relational closeness with the unethical worker (i.e., friend, acquaintance, troublesome other)? We apply the communication theory of identity as a lens to understand potential differences in how participants confront a hypothetical idea thief across nine possible relational types (e.g., supervisor who is a friend, supervisor who is a troublesome other).

Confronting Unethical Behaviors and Actors in the Workplace

Individual employees are considered crucial sources of detecting, reporting, and responding to ethical violations and organizational wrongdoings as they arise (Miceli et al., 2009). The communication act of *reporting* unethical behaviors to an internal or external neutral third party (i.e., whistleblowing) has received much research attention (e.g., Lindlom, 2007; Zeng et al., 2020). However, as noted by Roloff and Paulson (2001) regarding the whistleblowing literature, "There is little analysis within that literature focused on whether the witness confronted the transgressor and, if such a confrontation occurred, what took place during the encounter" (p. 53).

A smaller but growing body of scholarship has been dedicated to understanding how employees *respond* to wrongdoings and unethical actors (e.g., Bisel et al., 2011; Ploeger et al., 2011; Valde & Henningsen, 2015). Language production experiments by Bisel et al. (2011) and Ploeger et al. (2011), for example, uncovered a hierarchical mum effect in participant responses to unethical behaviors in the workplace. The hierarchical mum effect describes how one's (in)directness in responding to an unethical request is influenced significantly by hierarchical relationship, with supervisors demonstrating the most directness in responses to unethical requests from subordinates, followed by coworkers responding to coworkers, followed by subordinates responding to supervisors. Valde and Henningsen (2015) further demonstrated the role of hierarchical power in their study about the appropriateness and effectiveness of responses to unethical behaviors, in that avoiding and off-record facework strategies were identified as the best strategies to use if confronting an unethical supervisor. Clearly, hierarchy has arisen as a pervasive factor in determining how workers confront unethical concerns and actors.

Language Choices in Social Confrontations

What do confrontations look and sound like communicatively? Newell and Stutman (1991) suggested five possible confrontation initiation behaviors (i.e., hinting, seeking confirmation, blaming or accusing, nonverbal expression of emotion, and emotional statement), which vary in message explicitness and message focus (e.g., behavior of transgressor or emotional reaction of confronter). Here, we are concerned primarily with the *degree of implicitness or explicitness* of the confrontation message content. As noted by Roloff and Paulson (2001), "confronters may be extremely indirect by hinting there is a problem, moderately indirect by asking if a problematic behavior occurred, or highly direct by blaming or accusing the transgressor of acting inappropriately" (p. 56).

Face, facework, and face-threatening actions are an inherent part of organizational life and must be acknowledged in social confrontations about unethical behavior, given that such confrontations are inherently face-threatening for the transgressor. Face, as defined by Goffman (1959), is "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken up during a particular contact" (p. 213); in other words, face is the public self-image one claims for oneself. Face is negotiated constantly through social interactions (Carson & Cupach, 2000) through preventive (prior to a face threat) or corrective (post-face threat) face*work* strategies as attempts to manage or mend the effects of face-threatening actions (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Morand, 2000).

In this study, we are primarily focused on the point of view and communication choices of the confront*er*, not the confront*ed*. Not only are humans concerned with maintaining their *own* face, but Goffman (1959) also asserted that there is an expectation to assist *others* in claiming esteemed and autonomous public self-images for themselves. It stands to reason that even though the participant is the victim of unethical behavior, other-face concern may influence a participant's linguistic choices and confrontational directness.

From a facework and politeness perspective, Brown and Levinson (1987) identified five linguistic strategies when engaging in a face-threatening action (FTA): do not do the FTA, off-record FTA, negative politeness, positive politeness, and bald on-record FTA. We consider not doing the FTA to be akin to a highly implicit confrontational strategy, while a bald on-record FTA would be highly explicit. What language implicitness-explicitness strategies will participants use when considering engaging in the FTA of confronting the unethical actor? Valde and Henningsen (2015) asserted that the confronter's language choices will depend on the nature of the transgression and the nature of the relationship between the workers. In this experiment, we consider two relationship factors that may influence confrontational directness during the unique interaction of confronting idea theft—the hierarchical relationship between the confronter and confronted and the relational closeness between the confronter and confronted.

Confronting Idea Stealing and Unjustified Credit Taking

Confronting questions and violations of idea ownership has the potential to be an especially personal and potent communicative situation. Credit in general can be seen as "a valuable commodity in organizations" (Graham & Cooper, 2013, p. 403) as credit is how work, contributions, and ideas are recognized by others in the workplace. Graham and Cooper (2013) argued that "taking credit for a work activity is an inherently ethical act" (p. 404) when the communicative act is performed in such a way that credit is duly attributed. Ideally, credit will be justified when it matches the credit receiver's contribution and is thus rightfully earned; however, credit is unjustified if the credit received exceeds the receiver's contribution and efforts. In this study, the transgressor steals the participant's ideas, presents them as the transgressor's own, and gets credit for them—a classic case of unjustified credit.

Because of the importance of ideas and credit at work, we believe that, when faced with having their idea(s) stolen, workers will directly and explicitly confront the person who has stolen them. How the wronged worker will communicatively manage this situation is potentially described by Goffman's (1959) claim: "There are occasions when individuals, whether they wish to or not, will feel obliged to destroy an interaction in order to save their honor and their face" (p. 245). For these reasons, we argue that having one's ideas stolen, no matter by whom, will be confronted directly with responses containing more other-face attacks than other-face protection attempts. Thus, we posit:

> **H1:** Across all conditions, employees confront the transgressor about the idea stealing with greater explicitness than the scale midpoint.

Hierarchical Relationships

If workers do dissent or voice criticism in the organizational setting, they may be concerned with "softening the blow" (Sias, 2009, p. 27) of negative feedback—or even withholding negative feedback—

in order to help others maintain or save face. The mum effect predicts an individual's reluctance to transmit bad or negative news for fear of being associated with the news or for fear of harming the relationship at hand (Rosen & Tesser, 1972). Milliken et al. (2003) found a mum effect present in supervisor-subordinate communication: "The most frequently mentioned reason for remaining silent was the fear of being viewed or labeled negatively, as a consequence, damaging valued relationships" (p. 1453). Such hierarchical relationships are "a defining characteristic of organizations" and "are of great consequence for employees and organization" (Sias, 2009, p. 19). In a supervisor-subordinate relationship, at least one individual (the supervisor) has formalized authority over the other (the subordinate) to assign and evaluate tasks. This power dynamic has consequences for the nature of the interactions. Sias noted that subordinates are more likely to filter information and engage in upward distortion, which is "distorting information provided to a supervisor either through lying or omission" (p. 25). Clearly, hierarchy is a potent influence on workplace communication choices. Due to the nature of supervisor-subordinate relationships, it seems that, overall, supervisors are less concerned with protecting subordinates' faces as compared to subordinates' concern about their bosses' public-images (Bisel et al., 2012). Analogously, it seems reasonable to suppose supervisors engage in more direct confrontation when the concern to protect one's own face exceeds the concern for another's face, as with being the victim of an unethical action.

A hierarchical relationship defined by the *absence* of formal power and authority is the peer coworker relationship, or "employees at the same hierarchical level who have no formal authority over one another" (Sias, 2009, p. 58). These are particularly important workplace relationships because workers tend to have many more peer relationships than supervisor-subordinate relationships (Sias & Cahill, 1998), and thus, these are the individuals with whom workers likely spend most of their time in the workplace (Comer, 1991; Sias & Perry, 2004). Because of this time aspect, Sias (2009) noted that, "the bulk of organizing, therefore, occurs in the context of coworker relationships" (p. 57). Time with peer coworkers can be spent in collaboration with one another, working on shared or interdependent tasks, exchanging work-related information, or offering instrumental support. Yet, even when team members are working in collaboration with one another, they are likely still competing with one another for opportunities for advancement and supervisor positions. For any one management position, there are likely multiple "subordinate" candidates. Thus, one's ideas—their intellectual capital, so to speak—are often what give one peer coworker an advantage over another. Hence, we would expect idea ownership and credit for one's ideas to be salient in this type of hierarchical relationship. Given the above rationale on hierarchical influences on communicative strategies in situations of contesting idea ownership, we posit:

> **H2:** Supervisors confronting subordinate transgressors are the most explicit in their responses to idea stealing, followed by coworkers confronting coworker transgressors, followed by subordinates confronting supervisor transgressors.

Relational Closeness

With the amount of time spent at work, it is understandable that workers form interpersonal relationships with supervisors, peer coworkers, and/or subordinates. The present study is not concerned with how or why relationships develop at different levels of closeness (see Fritz, 1997; Odden & Sias, 1997; Sias & Cahill, 1998; Sias & Jablin, 1995), but rather the similarities or dissimilarities that arise in one's messages when confronting issues of idea ownership with coworkers of varying closeness. Kram and Isabella (1985) identified three levels of workplace relationships that vary based on interpersonal aspects like trust and disclosure: (a) information peers, which are the most superficial and contain low breadth and depth, (b) collegial peers, which are characterized by moderation and balance of self-disclosure and trust, and (c) special peers, which are akin to "best friend" status. While Kram and Isabella originally created this typology to describe peer coworker mentoring intricacies, it has since been applied to various other workplace relationships as well.

For the purposes of this study, it is noted that Kram and Isabella's (1985) and Midooka's (1990) traditional typologies of relational distance neglect a plausible relationship in the workplace—an unpleasant, difficult relationship (labeled here as *troublesome other*). Thus, this study intends to distinguish between three distinct levels of relational closeness—troublesome other, acquaintance, and friend. Like Agne and White's (2004) findings on how friendship closeness influences facework enacted in support interactions, it is argued here that the closer workers feel toward each other interpersonally, the more they will be concerned with protecting their relationship and the offender's face.

H3: Employees who are troublesome others with the unethical actor engage in the most explicit confrontations with the transgressor, followed by those who are acquaintances with the unethical actor, followed by those who are friends with the unethical actor.

Communication Theory of Identity

In order to make sense of the data from this experiment, a robust communication theory is needed—one that readily connects the complex identities of the individual, the communicative performance, the relational context, and the organizational situation. Communication theory of identity (CTI) takes a communicative approach to understanding the reciprocal relationship between identity and communication with identity *as* communication rather than merely a product of communication or vice versa (Eckstein, 2017; Jung & Hecht, 2004). Individuals internalize social relationships and roles as identities through communication. Those identities are then acted out in social behavior through communication. In the case of the current study, we can use CTI to make sense of confrontations (or lack of confrontations) regarding idea stealing by simultaneously considering the multifaceted aspects of identity.

The four frames of identity are personal, relational, enacted, and communal (Hecht, 1993). *Personal identity* is an individual's self-image or self-concept while *enacted identity* is an individual's expressed or performed identity. *Relational identity* is shaped by communication and behaviors that take place in interpersonal relationships, such as a romantic couple (Jung & Hecht, 2004), peer coworkers, or a supervisor-subordinate. The final identity frame is *communal identity*. Communal identity transcends individuals and is characteristic of a group or collective. Because Jung and Hecht (2004) described collectives as those who define their identities based on shared characteristics, organizations can be positioned within the communal frame (see Compton, 2016), making CTI particularly useful for this study.

While frames can be considered independent of one another for analytical purposes, they are not separate from one another. The frames offer a perspective on a whole and integrated identity. At times, the frames are clearly integrated with one another while at other times the frames seem to contradict. For example, as shown in a study by Paxman (2021), vegans wanting to combat a negative communal identity attempted to do so at the enacted layer of identity; thus, these individuals used one frame of identity to challenge or contest another undesirable frame of identity.

One way to better understand interpenetration is through Jung and Hecht's (2004) concept of *identity gap*s, or discrepancies between or among the frames of identity. Identity gaps are almost inevitable given the imperfect and complicated nature of communication and relationships. Identity gaps cause dissonance and lead individuals to negotiate how they communicate aspects of their identity based on the context or relationship. Some identity gaps are not easily negotiated and can lead to decreased feelings of being understood, lower communication satisfaction, and lower perceptions of conversational appropriateness and effectiveness (Jung & Hecht, 2004). In a study by Compton (2016), mixed messages between management, coworkers, and policy created a relational-communal gap for employees attempting to manage their sexual identity in the workplace that was particularly challenging and for some employees meant they had to hide aspects of their identity within the organization, or at least with certain people with the organization. For the current study, it is feasible that identity gaps caused by the

inability to reconcile identity frames may lead organizational actors to respond to idea stealing in ways that might not otherwise be predicted.

Methods

This study focused on the communicative strategies working adults produce when they confront a transgressor about presenting one's ideas as the transgressor's own. Here, linguistic confrontation strategies that one employs when responding to an unethical actor's behavior are referred to as confrontationality. Confrontationality exists on a continuum of no confrontation/highly implicit confrontation to highly explicit confrontation.

Participants

A sample of 326 full-time working adults participated in this language production experiment. Participants included 165 males and 157 females (four participants did not identify their sex), ranging in age from 21 to 70 years of age ($M = 41.97$, $SD = 12.41$). Respondents lived in 29 states within the United States; one participant lived in Australia. Participants' education levels ranged from an earned high school diploma to an earned doctorate, with a bachelor's degree being the most common educational level obtained (34%). Participants' total work experience ranged from six months to 48 years ($M = 20.92$, $SD = 13.20$), while work experience at their current organizations ranged from being a new member of their organization (employed there less than one month) to 42 years ($M = 12.47$, $SD = 12.18$).

Procedures and Design

Once approval was granted from the Institutional Review Board, full-time working adults from a variety of career fields were recruited to participate in the study through a solicitation email sent by the researcher. Upon receipt of the email, these individuals were also asked to forward the solicitation email to five other working adults. Then, those five individuals forwarded the email to an additional five working adults and so on. All potential participants were directed to an online survey hosted by Qualtrics. The study proceeded as a 3 (hierarchical position: subordinate, coworker, supervisor) X 3 (relational closeness: troublesome other, acquaintance, friend) factorial design experiment.

Scenarios
Participants were randomly assigned to one of nine conditions. Participants responded in the first person to Casey (a gender-neutral idea thief) after Casey presented the participant's ideas as their own during a meeting, as though it were a real situation. Participants crafted their responses to the unethical actor in a dialogue box; responses were not restricted to a minimum or maximum length. While the transgression (i.e., idea stealing and subsequent unjustified credit) was the same across conditions, the scenarios differed on three levels of the two independent variables: hierarchical relationship between the participant and the unethical actor (subordinate-supervisor, peer coworker-peer coworker, supervisor-subordinate) and relational closeness with the unethical actor (troublesome other, acquaintance, friend). For example, scenario one described Casey as a supervisor who is also a troublesome other to the participant. In scenario two, Casey is a supervisor who was depicted as an acquaintance. In the third scenario, Casey is still a supervisor, but participants assigned to this condition consider Casey as a friend. The remaining scenarios continued in the same fashion, but Casey was described as a coworker (for scenarios four through six) or a subordinate (for scenarios seven through nine). See Table 1 for the number of participants assigned randomly to each condition.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Confrontationality by Hierarchical Position and Relational Closeness

Hierarchical Position	Relational Closeness	Confrontationality	
		M	*SD*
Supervisor to Subordinate	Troublesome Other (*n* = 32)	2.09	1.20
	Acquaintance (*n* = 39)	2.46	1.47
	Friend (*n* = 40)	2.40	1.41
	Total (*n* = 111)	2.33	1.37
Coworker to Coworker	Troublesome Other (*n* = 41)	2.98	1.37
	Acquaintance (*n* = 42)	2.69	1.09
	Friend (*n* = 37)	2.70	1.05
	Total (*n* = 120)	2.79	1.18
Subordinate to Supervisor	Troublesome Other (*n* = 30)	1.80	1.19
	Acquaintance (*n* = 38)	1.89	1.33
	Friend (*n* = 27)	1.63	1.21
	Total (*n* = 95)	1.79	1.25
Total	Troublesome Other (*n* = 103)	2.36	1.36
	Acquaintance (*n* = 119)	2.36	1.33
	Friend (*n* = 104)	2.29	1.30
	Total Participants (*n* = 326)	2.34	1.33

Manipulation Check

Twelve working adults participated in a manipulation check in order to verify that participants likely perceived distinctions between the hierarchical positions and relational closeness levels in the conditions, and whether the behavior discussed in the scenario was perceived as unethical. The manipulation check confirmed that each manipulation was perceived as intended.

Content Analysis

A content analysis was performed on all 326 responses. Each response was coded for level of confrontationality by assessing facework strategies within participants' responses. Each response was given only one code.

Training and Coding Scheme Development

Fifteen working adults were solicited for participation in a pilot study in order to: (a) begin the development of a coding scheme for linguistic confrontationality, and (b) investigate and confirm the presence of initial confrontationality differences between conditions. Participants received one of four—of the total nine included in the full study—scenarios and were asked to respond to Casey as though it was a real situation. The four scenarios were selected because they were the most opposite conditions, in

that they represented the highest and lowest levels of hierarchical relationships (i.e., subordinate to supervisor, supervisor to subordinate) and relational closeness (i.e., troublesome other, friend).

Drawing upon previous facework scholarship as well as other language production experiments (Bisel et al., 2011; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Penman, 1990; Ploeger et al., 2011; Waldron & Krone, 1991), a coding scheme was originated for the purposes of this study. Two coders underwent two rounds of training. Coders read and reread two selections of responses (at time one: the 15 responses from the pilot study; at time two: a subset of 33 cases selected randomly from the full study data) to identify recurrent confrontational strategies in a process similar to open-coding in constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In order to open-code, coders identified and labeled each confrontational strategy and looked for similar and dissimilar examples throughout the selected data. Once open-coding was completed, recurrent patterns were well-established—enough so that no new strategy examples could be found in the selected response-sets. The coders then used these open-codes as a means of developing a content analytic scheme by ordering codes from least to most confrontational, a process parallel to axial-coding (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

At the completion of this process, coders identified five levels of confrontational directness or explicitness, ranging from 0 (*no confrontation/highly implicit confrontation*), 1 (*implicit confrontation*), 2 (*balanced confrontation*), 3 (*explicit confrontation*), and 4 (*highly explicit confrontation*). Then, the two coders selected yet another 34 cases randomly (from the full study data) to determine initial intercoder reliability. Krippendorff's α was computed for both initial interrater reliability, and interrater reliability at the end of coding (the latter referred to as coder drift). Interrater coding reliability was sufficiently high ($\alpha = .89$); a measure of coder drift was also sufficiently high ($\alpha = .85$).

An utterance was assigned a score of "0-no confrontation/highly implicit confrontation" when the response contained only face protection(s) and/or the presence of a deniable, off-record face attack. Those responses coded as "1-implicit confrontation" contained more protection attempts than face attacks. Those responses receiving a score of "2-balanced confrontation" included a balance of face protections and face attacks. Responses that were coded as "3-explicit confrontation" included more face attacks than face protection attempts. Ultimatums were often present in these responses, but the response overall included an element of face protection, even if minor. Responses that involved highly explicit confrontation were assigned a "4" and included blatant face aggravation, no face protection attempts, and no redressive action.

Results

H1: Confrontational Directness about Idea Stealing

A one sample *t*-test was conducted to test the first hypothesis, which predicted that employees—regardless of experimental condition—confront the transgressor about the idea stealing with greater explicitness than the scale midpoint. Results of the *t*-test revealed that across all experimental conditions, employees confronted the hypothetical transgressor about the idea stealing with explicitness ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.33$) greater than the scale midpoint of 2.0 (balanced confrontation), $t(325) = 4.68$, $p < .001$. Thus, H1 was supported.

H2 and H3: Hierarchical Position, Relational Closeness, and Confrontational Explicitness

A 3 (subordinate, coworker, supervisor) X 3 (troublesome other, acquaintance, friend) factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted in order to test the second and third hypotheses.

Hierarchical Position and Confrontational Explicitness

The second hypothesis predicted that supervisors-confronting-subordinates would be the most explicit in their confrontations about idea stealing followed by peer coworkers followed by subordinates-confronting-supervisors. Results of the ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for hypothesis one

concerning linguistic confrontational strategies and hierarchical condition, $F(2, 317) = 16.70$, $p < .001$, η^2 = .09. In order to determine group differences in confrontational explicitness across hierarchical positions, Tukey HSD post hoc tests were performed to correct for Type I error rate. Post hoc tests revealed a significant difference in confrontationality between subordinates responding to supervisors ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 1.25$) and coworkers responding to coworkers ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.18$), $p < .001$. There was also a significant difference between subordinates responding to supervisors and supervisors responding to subordinates ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.37$), $p < .05$. Finally, there was also a significant difference between supervisors responding to subordinates and coworkers responding to coworkers, $p < .05$. In other words, post hoc tests revealed that coworkers used significantly more explicit confrontational strategies than did supervisors or subordinates. Also, supervisors were significantly more explicit with their use of linguistic confrontational strategies when responding to the subordinate-offender than were subordinates responding to a supervisor-offender. Subordinates were indeed the most likely to abstain from direct confrontation, to use more protective attempts, and invoke implicit confrontationality in their responses. Coworkers were the most explicit in their confrontations.

Relational Closeness and Confrontational Explicitness

The third hypothesis predicted that employees who consider the idea stealer to be a troublesome other respond with the most explicit confrontations, followed by those who are acquaintances with the transgressor, followed by those who are friends with the unethical actor. Results of the ANOVA did not reveal a significant main effect for relational closeness and linguistic confrontational strategies, $F(2, 317)$ = .19, *n.s.* These data did not support the notion that confrontationality will differ with regard to closeness. In other words, without considering hierarchical positions, it did not seem to matter (significantly) if the offender was a troublesome other ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.36$), acquaintance ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.33$), or friend ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.30$). Participants tended to produce balanced confrontation (with a slight lean toward explicitness) in their responses to the unethical actor.

Interaction

While no interaction effect was hypothesized, it is worth noting that the results of the 3 X 3 ANOVA did not reveal a significant interaction between hierarchical position and relational closeness, $F(4, 317) = .84$, *n.s.* Mean scores for confrontational explicitness across the nine conditions are in *Table 1*.

Discussion

Idea stealing and unjustified credit taking are understudied unethical behaviors in the workplace (Graham & Cooper, 2013; Ploeger-Lyons & Bisel, in press). The present study sought to understand this ethical transgression from the lenses of social confrontations and communication theory of identity. The specific goals of this language production experiment were three-fold: (a) to determine overall confrontational explicitness in working adults' responses to idea stealers; (b) to determine the role of hierarchical positioning in shaping confrontations with idea stealers; and (c) to determine the influence of relational closeness with an unethical actor in responses to the transgression.

As predicted, workers across all experimental conditions responded to the transgressor/idea stealer with confrontations that were more balanced to explicit rather than implicit. The participant mean score of 2.34 for confrontation explicitness falls on our coding scheme between a "2-balanced confrontation" (i.e., balanced face protections and face attacks) and a "3-explicit confrontation" (i.e., more face attacks than face protections, but still protected face). In other words, regardless of hierarchical condition or relational closeness condition, participants formed responses to Casey, the unethical actor, that in some way protected Casey's face (even if minor) but *also* contained direct, explicit communications and in some cases, clear face attacks (e.g., "Casey, you stole my presentation..."). Our data, in tandem with Goffman's (1959) decades-old claim that, "There are some occasions when

individuals, whether they wish to or not, will feel obliged to destroy an interaction in order to save their honor and their face" (p. 245), point to idea stealing in the workplace as one such occasion.

When considering the role hierarchical position may play in confrontation explicitness, the overall effect of hierarchical relationships on the explicitness of confrontations was statistically significant and moderate ($\eta^2 = .09$). Though supervisors were predicted to use the most explicit confrontational language when confronting a subordinate idea thief, it was peer coworkers who responded to peer coworker idea thieves with the most explicit confrontations. Supervisors responding to subordinates were less explicit than peer coworkers but were still more explicit than subordinates responding to supervisors. Restated, peer coworkers' ratio of face attacks to face protections was significantly greater than both supervisors and subordinates.

Consistent with our prediction, subordinates' confrontations contained the most implicit language, the fewest face attacks, and the most other-face protection attempts. These findings resonate with the hierarchical mum effect (Ploeger et al., 2011), which asserts that subordinates use indirectness as a means to avoid threatening supervisors' face, especially when concerning unethical behaviors. In the case of the present experiment regarding idea theft, it seems subordinates again use equivocation and implicit language, thereby reducing the clarity and directness of their responses to supervisors about the ethical transgression. For example, rather than saying, "You stole my ideas" (i.e., a face attack and highly explicit confrontation), subordinates' responses were more likely to contain protective and implicit language, phrasing objections in ways like, "What just happened?" or "I'm confused about what happened during the meeting." Implicit confrontations like these delay assigning ethical meaning to idea stealing and may be a maladaptive strategy (Brown & Starkey, 2000) when considering ethics talk. If blame is not assigned, the offender may either knowingly continue or remain ignorant of the moral nature of their actions and the effect the actions had on the wronged person (Bird, 1996).

Communication theory of identity (CTI) (Hecht, 1993; Jung & Hecht, 2004) provides further insight into the use of implicit language when subordinates confront supervisors regarding idea stealing. Recall that there are four frames of identity: personal, relational, enacted, and communal (Hecht, 1993), and that identity gaps form when there are discrepancies between identity frames (Jung & Hecht, 2004). When individuals experience identity gaps, they must communicatively manage aspects of their identity related to the context or the relationship in which they are involved. In organizational life, there is often a tension between the relational and communal frames. For example, Compton (2016) argued that a manager in the relational frame could dismiss or ignore a communal frame that helped sexual minorities, which in turn impacted how employees could enact their personal frame sexual identities. Organizational policies and organizational culture (communal frame) also have the power to structure the communicative environment and create boundaries regarding employees' freedom of identity expression (Cooren, 2004). When ideas are stolen, an identity gap is created between the relational and communal frames. Explicit language use in a confrontation by a subordinate with a supervisor regarding idea stealing might satisfy the relational frame needs but implicit language use attends to the communal frame. When confronted with this identity gap, employees ultimately resolve the dissonance or gap between the identity frames by attending to the louder or more prevalent frame (communal, in this case) by doing what they know how to do best in organizations. In other words, subordinates know how to perform *being subordinate*, which means not explicitly confronting the idea stealing committed by their supervisor, and thereby communicatively managing the identity gap.

CTI forwards the notion that the identity process involves content and relational level messages and both subjective and ascribed meaning. Eckstein's (2019) study demonstrated that victims of partner violence rarely utilized only one message to construct larger narratives to rationalize to others their decisions to stay in an abusive relationship while simultaneously reinforcing their own identities in ways that avoided contradiction. As an employee considers confronting a supervisor regarding idea stealing, content and relational level messages around organizational culture, workplace socialization, and larger societal narratives about work relationships and interactions will influence the message and identity the employee constructs and ultimately communicates within the organization. In this way, CTI readily

explains why organizational members will resolve the identity gaps they are experiencing and will lean on the communal frame, which is how they have been socialized organizationally and culturally.

But why is the peer coworker-peer coworker the hierarchical relationship that used the most explicit confrontations? As noted by Ploeger et al. (2011), while "subordinates are *especially* reluctant to confront their supervisors' wrongdoing...coworkers may be as direct as supervisors in confronting wrongdoing" (p. 476). In the present study, peer coworkers' confrontations included the most direct language and other-face attacks. It is important to note that peer coworkers are status-equivalent relationships in the workplace; thus, their motivation to use or avoid explicit confrontational language is not due to a formal, hierarchical power imbalance (i.e., a communal frame). While a peer coworker is *not* especially reliant on coworkers for their "daily bread" or for promotion opportunities (like subordinates are with supervisors), peer coworkers may be those individuals with whom employees are in greatest competition with for promotion opportunities, public recognition for ideas, merit raises, and so on. Thus, for a peer to receive unjustified credit for someone else's ideas is a particularly high-stakes workplace situation; that idea might just be one that recognizes them as a viable candidate for promotion or something similar. Thus, explicit confrontations, face attacks, and direct communication are particularly common in peer coworker interactions about questions of idea ownership.

From a CTI perspective, since peer coworkers are not as reliant on coworkers for organizational rewards as they are on supervisors, they may experience less dissonance between the relational and communal frames when confronting peer coworkers about idea stealing. This relative lack of identity gap explains why workers are more willing to be explicit with peer coworkers. When confronting a peer coworker, their relational identity expression does not contradict typical communal frames that promote competition and self-promotion. In fact, the communal identity frame (that many workers have been socialized into in modern organizational life) privileges individual achievement. When corporate recognition of individual achievement is threatened due to peer coworker idea stealing, explicit confrontation (relational frame) of the transgressor is supported by the communal frame, which is not the case when the transgressor is a supervisor.

The final hypothesis in this experiment posited a relationship between relational closeness and confrontational responses. Our hypothesis was solidly unsupported; there were no significant differences in confrontational language used between workers of different relational closeness levels. It did not matter (statistically) whether the offender was a troublesome other ($M = 2.36$), a mere acquaintance ($M = 2.36$), or a friend ($M = 2.29$) who presented a worker's ideas as the offender's own. Across relational conditions, workers' responses to the transgressor were characterized by balanced to slightly explicit confrontation.

Interpersonal relationships may serve as sources of support, information exchange, and sensemaking in the workplace (Sias, 2009; Weick, 1995, 2001). However, while it is likely for relationships to form in the workplace due to close proximity, frequent contact, and shared tasks (Sias, 2009; Sias & Cahill, 1998), the development of friendships in the workplace—similar to friendships outside of the workplace—remains voluntary, not obligatory. Thus, it is natural for working adults to develop and maintain relationships of varying levels of closeness in their jobs. The very nature of these relationships—and the specific operationalization of them in this study—is indicative of different communication patterns and behaviors. However, those differences do not necessarily translate into communication differences in this study. In order to understand why this might be the case, attention must be paid to the importance of context in the meaning-making process—both the context of the workplace and the context of the unethical act of idea stealing.

While workplace friendships resemble non-workplace friendships in many ways, it seems that the context of the workplace distinguishes them. As noted by Sias (2009), "Workplace friendships are literally defined by the context in which they exist—the workplace" (p. 104). As such, a friend that someone meets through work may always be just that—a friend met through work. Thus, while it was predicted that more attempts would be made to protect the face of a workplace friend than an acquaintance or a troublesome other—as may likely be the case with non-workplace friends, acquaintances, and troublesome others—there were no detectable differences in the confrontationality with which working adults responded to the offender.

It is important to emphasize that blended relationships (part professional, part personal—part coworker, part friend) (Bridge & Baxter, 1992) may develop across all levels of the hierarchy. Yet, the results of this study suggest that when a hierarchical element is added to interpersonal relationships, hierarchy prevails as the more potent context for shaping communication strategies. A significant main effect was found for hierarchical position, but no main effect was found for relational closeness (nor the interaction). These results support the notion that in cases of unethical organizational behaviors, the context of hierarchy trumps the context of relational closeness or the interaction between them in shaping confrontationality, perhaps in part because, "Workplace relationships do not exist in isolation from the workplace itself…the workplace context impacts friendships among employees" (Sias, 2009, p. 104).

Limitations and Future Directions

Participants in this language production experiment were assigned randomly into one of nine conditions, with the same unethical action across conditions. While we discovered what participants reported they would say in response to the standardized unethical action of idea theft, such internal control needs to be supplemented by designs that maximize ecological validity. Future research could solicit retrospective accounts of how workers—as the victims of unethical behavior—responded. Additionally, a method that allows researchers to identify emotion in participants' paralinguistic delivery would add depth to understanding workers' responses beyond what we can discern from the written communication obtained here. Additional directions in this line of research could also explore confronters' *motivations* for confronting (or choosing not to confront) the idea stealer, particularly in light of face motivations, perceived importance or significance of the idea, and perceptions of teamwork and shared ownership of ideas. In this study, participants were assigned to a specific hierarchical role (subordinate, coworker, supervisor), which may or may not have been reflective of their actual work experience. Subsequent analyses should analyze the relationship between work experience and supervisory experience to determine whether confrontationality differences exist with respect to these two variables. Future studies also ought to assess the participants' perceived relational closeness with the unethical actor *after* the incident occurred. Additionally, though relational closeness was not found to be significant in this study, it should not be disregarded altogether as a potential influential variable in other studies.

Sias (2009) recommended that scholars ought to begin to study interaction processes and conversations between working adults to better understand the communicative patterns characteristic of workplace relationships. Thus, future research might be more dyadic in nature and investigate the offender's response to the victim. This study utilized a unique communication confrontationality coding scheme and provided results that speak to *descriptions* of workers' confrontationality when responding to an unethical action. Future studies ought to assess confrontationality and *effectiveness*, which would provide the opportunity to develop *prescriptive* communicative recommendations when workers encounter similar unethical behaviors in various hierarchical and relational closeness contexts. Lastly, the ethical (or unethical) decisions employees make on a daily basis have relevance indubitably to their organization's culture. From the perspective of system-level functioning, it would be provocative to study empirically how *seemingly* minor unethical instances such as the one in this study accumulate over time to influence trust in other workers and the overall (un)ethical culture of an organization.

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The Impact of Interpersonal Expectancies on Family Experiences During the COVID-19 Global Pandemic

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In the spring of 2020, the world experienced the onset of a global pandemic due to the COVID-19 coronavirus. Across the United States, families were suddenly mandated into some form of quarantine with orders to stay at home except when necessary. In the current study, rooted in the theoretical framework of expectancy violations theory, 214 participants reported their expectations about being quarantined with family members at the onset of the order. In addition, to ascertain family communication variables that impacted overall experience during quarantine, feelings of being understood by family members and family interaction satisfaction were also explored. Results indicated there is a moderate, positive relationship between quarantine expectancies and one's experience with family members during the quarantine. Additionally, quarantine expectancies and family interaction satisfaction during quarantine significantly predicted approximately 67% of the variance in one's quarantine experience. These results indicated that family members with positive expectancies related to extended family time during quarantine ultimately had a more positive overall experience, suggesting a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Keywords: expectancies, family interaction, quarantine, satisfaction, understanding

Introduction

Life was altered significantly in March 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic for most families. As governors across the United States mandated "stay-at-home" or "quarantine" orders, family dynamics were disrupted. As a result, many adults were directed to work from home, and schools moved to remote instruction across the country. For many, day-to-day routines were disturbed. Families who spent time away from one another on a day-to-day basis were forced to spend an inordinate amount of time together.

In many family units, the changes in family members' time spent together undoubtedly impacted both the frequency and quality of communication within the family; some positively and some negatively. Knowing that family dimensions may have changed during this period, it is safe to assume adult family members developed expectations about how family interactions might transcend. Thus, the primary purpose of this study was to explore the impact of expectations on family members' experiences during quarantine in the United States. We know from past research that expectations impact our communicative behavior (Burgoon, 1978). Thus, initial expectations about quarantine may have also affected ones' experience with family members during this time. Moreover, in addition to initial expectancies, communication variables among family members such as feeling understood by family members and perceived satisfaction with family interactions may have also impacted experiences during quarantine.

For some families, the extra time spent together during quarantine included long conversations, board games, and movie nights. For other families, the close quarters invited invasions of privacy, uncomfortable conversations, or worse scenarios such as domestic violence (Gosangi et al., 2020). Though worldwide quarantines for such long periods are infrequent, the effects of COVID-19 on family systems will be long-lasting. In addition, there are many life events (outside of pandemics) that cause families to engage in significantly more time together than their norm. Because families will inevitably face trying times in the future, it is prudent to study family members' communication behaviors during such periods of difficulty. Specifically, as communication scholars, we must use unique periods, such as

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the COVID-19 global pandemic, to investigate the role of expectations on family communication so that we may better equip families with the tools needed to navigate times of change.

Expectancy Violations Theory

Introduced by Burgoon in 1978, expectancy violations theory (EVT) is a lens through which we may examine the impact of expectancies on various communication behaviors. According to Burgoon and Walther (1990), expectancies are relatively stable perceptions about predicted behavior(s) of others that are created socially. Originally focused on proxemics, Burgoon (1978) developed EVT to explain reactions to the violation of expectations about personal space. Burgoon asserted that when these expectations are violated, the observer's attention is activated, and coping mechanisms are aroused. The observer then assigns valence to the violation based on their evaluation of the initiator and the degree of the violation (Burgoon & Hale, 1988).

In more recent research, the expectancy violations theory has served as a framework to investigate relational communication, including romantic and intercultural contexts (Cionea et al., 2019; Kelly, Miller-Ott, & Duran, 2017; Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015). Additionally, family expectations have been studied in a plethora of contexts including family member suicide (Miller & Day, 2002), the impact of family expectancies on relationship commitment (Weigel & Weiser, 2014), as well as parent-child communication about tobacco and alcohol use (Ennett et al., 2001). Previous research points to the expectancy violations theory as a useful framework to examine family communication expectancies during the quarantine during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The first assumption of expectancy violations theory is that communicators have an expectation about others' communication behaviors (Burgoon, 1978; Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Burgoon & Walther, 1990). It is logical to presume that people who live in the same home have expectations about living conditions, routines, and rituals among family members. These expectancies may have shifted as families spent extensive and unexpected time together during quarantine. Moreover, throughout the quarantine period, some expectancies may likely have been violated. Individuals may be aware of a violation but not be aware of why this violation occurred (Afifi & Burgoon, 2000). Nevertheless, expectancy violations impact communicative behaviors.

When expectations are violated, one assigns a violation valence or a perceived value placed on an expectation violation (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). Some violation valences are positive, while others are negative. Moreover, valence values range in impact from very small to large. The initial announcement of mandated quarantine for many, in and of itself, constituted an expectancy violation. For some, the anticipated time spent with family members (above and beyond the norm) may have been regarded positively, and for others negatively. The valence attached to said violations unquestionably affected family members' experience during quarantine. According to research conducted by Burgoon and Hale in 1988, positively perceived expectancy violations may increase relational evaluations. Therefore, it is possible that family members were able to capitalize on time spent together to evaluate and strengthen relationships during this period.

Finally, communicator reward valence is "the degree to which the other is seen as rewarding" (Kelly, et al., 2017, p. 621). After several weeks spent together in quarantine, it is possible that a series of positively valenced expectancy violations among family members resulted in an overall positive communicator reward valence. In contrast, it is also reasonable that enough negative violations surfaced and resulted in a negative communicator reward valence. Because many Americans have not lived through a global pandemic akin to COVID-19, it is unknown how expectancies about quarantine impacted the perceived experience. Thus, the following research question was advanced:

> **RQ1:** What is the relationship between quarantine expectancies and one's experience as reported during quarantine?

Expectancies about family communication are certainly impacted by many variables. Specifically, feelings of understanding (or misunderstanding) by family members, as well as our satisfaction with family interactions may have influenced perceptions of the quarantine experience.

Feelings of Understanding (Misunderstanding)

In life, we often experience interactions in which we feel understood, but this is not always the case. Perceived understanding has been defined as the way a communicator assesses their success or failure during interactions with other people (Cahn, 1981). Most of us seek out understanding from family members. Past research tells us that certain communication behaviors, such as giving feedback and emotional support, help maintain close, meaningful relationships (Cahn & Shulman, 1984; McLaren & Pederson, 2014). Likely, these same behaviors may also positively impact understanding among family members.

Unfortunately, perceived understanding can be hindered by factors such as experiencing hurtful events (McLaren & Pederson, 2014). For many Americans, quarantine during the COVID-19 global pandemic was perceived as a hurtful event mentally, physically, and financially. In addition, considering the significant amount of time spent together as family units, hurtful communication behaviors may have been more noticeable than before quarantine. As the mandated quarantine extended past initial estimations of several weeks into several months, family members may have spent more time and energy focused on communication behaviors that affected feelings of understanding or misunderstanding. To explore the relationship between feelings of understanding (misunderstanding) and one's experience with family members during quarantine, the following research question was posed:

> **RQ2:** What is the relationship between the feeling of understanding (misunderstanding) during quarantine and one's self-report of quarantine experience?

Family Interaction Satisfaction

Communication satisfaction has been defined as the pleasure felt after "successful and fulfilling interpersonal communication experiences" (Hecht & Sereno, 1985, p. 141). A significant portion of past research on family satisfaction has centered on marriage (Gilchrist-Petty & Reynolds, 2015; Worley & Shelton, 2020), sibling relationships (Dorrance Hall & Shebib, 2020; Myers, 1998; Schrodt & Phillips, 2016), and parenting satisfaction (Amaro, et al., 2019; Coyne, McDaniel, & Stockdale, 2017) specifically, as opposed to family interactions (as a system) generally. For instance, we know that sibling self-disclosure positively impacts satisfaction (Myers, 1988). Further, family satisfaction has been studied in perceptions of parent-child emotional labor (Schrodt & O'Mara, 2019) and father-daughter relationships (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008).

No matter the specific context, we have learned much about the impact of family interactions on satisfaction over the years. For instance, we know the type of family interactions and daily discussions influence feelings of satisfaction among family members (Schrodt, et al., 2008). In families across the nation, healthy family communication interactions include everyday talk, such as small talk, joking around, and reminiscing (Burns & Pearson 2011). Moreover, we know that the more expressive such interactions are perceived, the greater the satisfaction among family members (Schrodt, 2009).

During quarantine, many families had significant amounts of time to engage in everyday talk, as many families spent far more time together than pre-quarantine. For many people, the increase in the everyday talk may have been perceived positively; for others, it may be regarded negatively. Thus, it is possible that one's degree of satisfaction with family member interactions affected the perceived quarantine experience. Therefore, the following research question was advanced:

> **RQ3:** What is the relationship between family member interaction satisfaction and quarantine experience?

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 214 adults who experienced some form of quarantine in their home state during the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic. A total of 157 females, 44 males, and 13 others who prefer a term other than "male" or "female" completed the survey instrument. The large majority of participants identified as Caucasian/White (89.7%). Approximately 3.6% of participants identified as Hispanic/Latino, 3.1% identified as African American/Black, and the remainder did not indicate ethnicity. The ages of participants in this study ranged from 20-81 years. Out of the 214 total participants, 128 reported that they worked from home 100% of the time during quarantine, and 99 reported that their spouse/partner also worked from home 100% of the time during that period.

Procedure

Utilizing a convenience sample, participants were recruited via social media sites managed by the researchers. A call for participants was posted on social media sites in the summer of 2020 outlining the purpose of the study, the IRB protocol approval number, and a website to complete the online survey. Participation was voluntary, and participants were directed to a Qualtrics link that included demographic questions, as well as items intended to measure expectations at the start of quarantine, general feelings about family member understanding, family interaction satisfaction, and overall experience during quarantine. Participants were instructed to read the consent form on the first page of the survey and click "continue" to indicate their consent to participate. If they did not consent to participate in the study, they were instructed to close their browser. The survey remained open for participants for a period of two weeks.

Measurement

Participant expectancies about quarantine upon first learning of the orders were operationalized using a 6-item Likert scale created for this research study. Scale items were developed based on the work of Afifi and Metts (1998) in which they measured expectations about behavior, as well as violation valence. In the present study, items centered on expectations about perceptions of being quarantined with family members. Sample scale items included: "I expected to enjoy the time spent in quarantine with family members.", "I was excited to stay at home and quarantine with family members.", and "I felt time in quarantine would be beneficial to our family relationships." The scale employed a 5-point Likert response format ranging from *(1) strongly disagree* to *(5) strongly agree*. The Cronbach's alpha reliability for the quarantine expectancies was .809 in the present study ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 4.62$).

Feelings of understanding (misunderstanding) with family members were measured using Cahn and Shulman's (1984) Feelings of Understanding/Misunderstanding Scale. The Likert-type scale includes 24 items with response options ranging from *(1) very little* to *(5) very great*. Participants were asked to think about how they generally felt when interacting with family members that lived in the same home during quarantine. Some of the items on the scale include "annoyance", "satisfaction", "acceptance", "compassion", and "sadness". Prior research reported alpha reliability as .89 (Cahn & Shulman, 1984). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was .92 ($M = 16.16$, $SD = 4.78$).

Family interaction satisfaction was operationalized using a revised version of Hecht's (1978a) Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory. Scale items were slightly reworded to pertain to family relationships particularly. Moreover, three items were deleted as they were not relevant to the current research study. The resulting scale included 16 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale with response options that range from *(1) strongly disagree* to *(5) strongly agree*. Sample items on the revised scale include: "During quarantine, the people I lived with let me know that I was communicating effectively.", "I would like to have more conversations with my family as I did during quarantine.", and

"My family members that I lived with genuinely wanted to get to know more about me during quarantine." Previously reported reliability for this measure was .97 (Hecht, 1978a). In the current research study, the Cronbach's alpha reliability was .843 ($M = 11.77$, $SD = 3.09$).

Post-quarantine experience (when orders were lifted or relaxed) was measured using a 5-item Likert scale developed for this research study. Scale items centered on feelings about time spent with family members when the quarantine was over or relaxed. Sample scale items included: "I enjoyed the time spent in quarantine with family members.", "I was sad to see quarantine end.", and "Overall, quarantine was a positive experience for my family." The 5-point Likert scale included response options ranging from *(1) strongly disagree* to *(5) strongly agree*. The Cronbach's alpha reliability for the quarantine experience was .853 ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 4.42$).

Results

The primary purpose of the current research study was to explore participant expectancies when quarantine orders were initially announced and the impact of those expectations on the overall quarantine experience. Thus, the first research question inquired about the relationship between quarantine expectancies and one's experience as reported at the end (or toward the end) of quarantine. Correlational analysis indicated a moderate, positive statistically significant relationship between quarantine expectancies and one's experience with family members during quarantine, $r(214) = .646$, $p < .001$.

The second research question centered on the correlation between feelings of understanding (misunderstanding) with family members during quarantine and one's self-report of quarantine experience (at the end of this period). Again, the correlational analysis indicated a strong, positive statistically significant relationship between the two variables, $r = .720$, $p < .001$. Since general family communication patterns could have impacted one's report of quarantine experience, the third research question asked about the relationship between family member interaction satisfaction and quarantine experience. A strong, positive statistically significant relationship resulted between family member satisfaction with interactions and experience in quarantine, $r = .745$, $p <.001$.

To more comprehensively investigate the impact of expectations about quarantine on one's experience, taking into account feelings of being understood by family members and perceptions of interactions with family members, regression analysis was employed. As indicated in the preceding results, examination of all bivariate correlations showed that expectancies, feelings of understanding (misunderstanding), and perceptions of family members' interactions all positively related to the quarantine experience. When entered into a multiple regression analysis, quarantine expectancies and family interaction satisfaction significantly predicted quarantine experience, $F(3, 118) = 81.86$, $p<.001$; *Adjusted R^2* =.667. Quarantine expectancies, $t = 3.749$, $p < .001$; $\beta =.256$, and family interaction satisfaction, $t = 6.112$, $p < .001$; $\beta =.519$ were statistically significant, while feelings of understanding (misunderstanding), $t = 1.652$ $p =.001$; $\beta =.101$ did not remain in the regression model (see Figure 1).

To more carefully investigate the regression analysis, control variables (gender, ethnicity) were entered into the regression model. Taken together, the results did not change substantially. Quarantine expectancies, and family interaction satisfaction significantly predicted quarantine experience, $F(5, 133) = 80.86$, $p <.001$; *Adjusted R^2* =.669. Quarantine expectancies, $t = 4.563$, $p < .001$; $\beta =.266$, and family interaction satisfaction, $t = 6.557$, $p < .001$; $\beta =.498$, were statistically significant, while feelings of understanding (misunderstanding), $t = 2.416$, $p =.13$; $\beta =.195$, gender, $t = .259$, $p = .796$; $\beta =.013$, and ethnicity, $t = -.207$, $p = .836$; $\beta = .010$ did not remain in the regression model.

Figure 1

Quarantine Experience Regression Model
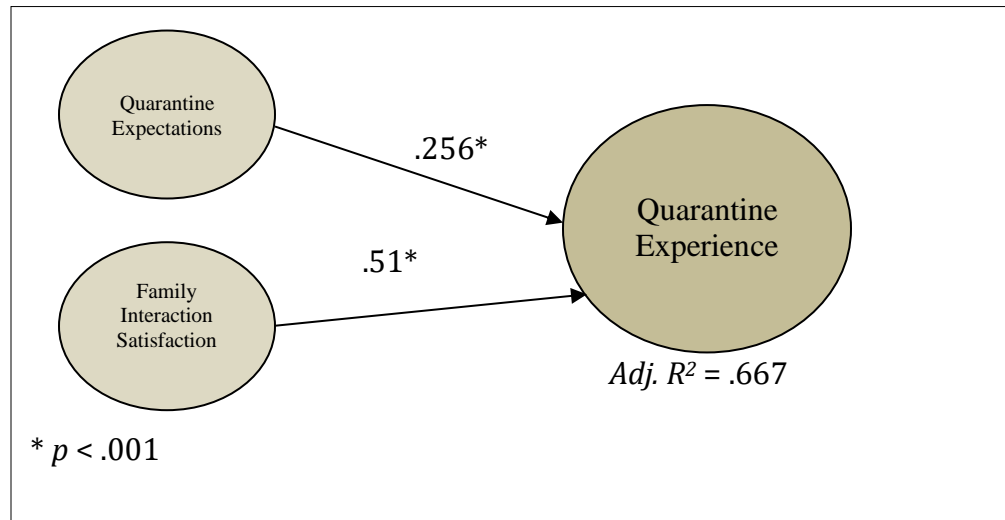
Discussion

      The primary purpose of this research study was to examine the impact of expectations about being quarantined with family members on perceived experiences reported during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Results indicated that there is a moderate, positive correlation between quarantine expectancies and one's experience with family members during that period. This finding supports the belief that expectations matter. To some extent, what we expect when we enter into a new situation will impact the outcome. Although not specifically researched in the present study, this finding suggests family members' expectancies may have resulted in a self-fulfilling prophecy during the quarantine.

      Self-fulfilling prophecies in family units may influence family members to communicate in ways (purposefully or not) that eventually result in the outcome expected. This certainly could have been the case for many family members during quarantine. Those family members who imagined extra time spent with loved ones positively behaved in ways that resulted in a quality experience. Similarly, those with negative expectations created such an experience via communication with family members. Thus, a significant implication of the current study is that expectations of family interactions impact perceived experiences with family members. Although the current study focused on expectations surrounding quarantine, this finding may easily be generalized to countless family experiences, no matter how big or small. The correlation between expectancies and expectations is not only information needed by individual family members, but professionals such as family counselors and therapists may also find this result helpful. When advising family members on communicative and behavioral issues, addressing the role of expectations in family experiences may be helpful.

      The second research question inquired about the relationship between feelings of understanding (misunderstanding) among family members and experience during quarantine. A strong correlation was found between the two variables. Therefore, as family members felt they were understood by others in the family unit, their perceived experience during quarantine was also positive. This finding speaks to the importance of taking the time to ensure that family members feel as if they are understood and confirmed in their communication. As asserted by Cahn and Shulman (1984), the more a communicator assesses an interaction as successful, the more they feel understood by family members. Although the original research was created to examine new relationships, feelings of understanding are important in well-developed family relationships. Being understood, or perceived as being understood by family members,

is important to overall reflections of family interactions. Practically speaking, family members should "check in" with one another to ensure they feel as if they are understood. To engage in effective family communication, it is not enough to assume others feel they are understood but to engage in metacommunication consistently.

In addition, the results of the third research question indicate that the more satisfying the family interactions, the more participants reported a positive quarantine experience. Hecht (1978b) argued that when expectancies are upheld, communication satisfaction results. The findings of the current study support past research. When family members' expectations aligned with their experience during quarantine, they reported a positive experience during this time. This is not to say that quarantine was positive every single day, or that every interaction with family members was constructive. However, when expectations are fulfilled, one may feel satisfied. Overall, however, the results of the current study showed that when family members entered the quarantine with positive expectations, a positive experience was reported.

Taken together, one's expectancies about the quarantine, as well as satisfaction with interactions among family members during quarantine, predicted nearly 67% of the variance in quarantine experience. Of the two variables that remained statistically significant in the regression analysis, family interaction satisfaction predicted the greatest amount of variance in quarantine experience. Therefore, we can see from these results that not only do our expectancies impact the resulting experience, but the communication that takes place among family members significantly predicts the experience reported. This should come as no surprise to communication scholars and only further adds to the existing body of literature that supports the importance of communication among family members. It is quite possible that one's expectations impacted the quality of the communication that resulted among family members, which, in turn, affected the quarantine experience.

Although it is outside the scope of this study to suggest such a claim, it is logical to assume that expectations about quarantine, to some degree, impacted communication among family members during this time. There is certainly a host of additional variables that impacted one's experience during the COVID-19 global pandemic quarantine. Considering the amount of influence and time spent with family members, however, it can be argued that family interactions played one of the largest roles in the experience of many Americans during quarantine.

Interestingly, feelings of understanding with family members did not significantly predict quarantine experience. Based on the strong correlation between the two variables, we know that feeling understood by family members is important, but possibly not significant to this particular experience. Perhaps feelings of being understood by family members are important generally, but considering the unique nature of the quarantine experience, family members assumed others felt similarly; thus, diminishing the need to attempt to make themselves understood by others. Put differently, if one believed their family members shared the same feelings about quarantine, there was less effort needed to gain understanding.

Many COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted or relaxed for people across the United States. However, the far-reaching and long-lasting results of the COVID-19 global pandemic are nowhere close to a distant memory. For some families, the experience was positive and strengthened family relationships. For others, the experience was negative and created more struggles than before the quarantine.

Families struggling with events that occurred at home during quarantine may choose to think back to what they expected at the onset of the quarantine order. Were expectancies positive? Were they negative? Based on those expectations, family members can analyze the communication behaviors which may have impacted the overall quarantine experience. Although we cannot go back and alter previous expectations, nor take back communication behaviors that may have been hurtful, analyzing these variables could be useful in learning how to move forward as a family unit in a positive direction.

Further, based on the current research study, we know that expectations about family interactions positively impact family member experiences. Consequently, we can take that information and work to optimistically impact the long-lasting results of the quarantine. Families can create new expectations, or

revise expectancies in such a manner that encourages communication needed to develop fulfilling family experiences. Once we can generalize the results of the current study to other family situations, we can create healthy family communication patterns that will only help us to strengthen family relationships.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although this study provides empirical evidence that expectancies among family members impact experiences, the current research study is not without limitations. To begin, the sample utilized in this research study is not representative of every family impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic. The large majority of participants in this study were Caucasian/White which may reflect a different experience than that of other ethnic groups. Moreover, the data was collected cross-sectionally and not longitudinally throughout the entire quarantine period.

In addition, several different variables may have impacted family communication patterns during quarantine. For instance, the number of people living in the household, the ages of family members living together, the amount of space provided for each family member, as well as the responsibilities of each family member may have impacted the overall quarantine experience. As an example, a family in which two parents were both trying to work remotely from home while helping children complete schoolwork at home may have provided a very different situation than a single parent working remotely from home while caring for an infant. Due to the nature of the current research study, variables such as these were not adequately controlled and may have impacted the results of the study.

Finally, the current study did not inquire about health issues that may impact family communication during quarantine. Family units with members coping with a positive COVID-19 diagnosis may have interacted differently, ultimately influencing one's overall experience. Moreover, if family members have underlying health issues that would exacerbate the symptoms of the virus, a positive diagnosis may impact every variable investigated in the current study including the overall quarantine experience.

Quality research often leads to more questions. In this study the primary result indicated that expectations about family interactions at the start of a mandated quarantine impacted reports of experience during that period. Essentially, it is inferred from the results of this study that self-fulfilling prophecies occurred within family units during quarantine. Therefore, future research should investigate the role of self-fulfilling prophecies in communication interactions among family members. Although we are hopeful that we will not face a similar quarantine anytime soon, the results are general enough to indicate that expectations impact family experiences. Hence, understanding the role of self-fulfilling prophecies in family interactions is important to the study of interpersonal family communication.

Due to the significance of the COVID-19 global pandemic and quarantine in the lives of so many people, future research should include the study of the long-lasting effects of time spent together with family members. For instance, how did the experience during quarantine impact relationships once mandated orders were lifted or relaxed? It is possible that some family relationships were strengthened while others deteriorated. Therefore, the communication patterns during quarantine that may have impacted the outcome of said relationships should be studied systematically. This may lend insight into the already existing body of research on communication messages that help or hinder family relationships.

Empirical research is often evaluated by the degree of practical utility. The results of the current research study offer practical and social implications. If families are experiencing conflict and seeking counseling, a counselor may draw on the results of the current research study to provide practical advice for family members. Counselors can explain how expectations impact communication, which ultimately affects perceptions of a positive or negative experience. Counselors can use this information to help family members understand the importance of the expectancies, and such an explanation may shed light on family members experiencing conflict.

Moreover, if family members were experiencing conflict before quarantine, this may have impacted expectancies once the quarantine orders were announced. In turn, these expectancies may have impacted one's overall experience during quarantine. It is prudent that anyone in the advisory role help family members recognize their communication interactions to see how this impacts overall family satisfaction.

Family members must communicate their expectations with one another. For instance, when preparing for an upcoming family event, it may be helpful for family members to communicate their expectations about the event beforehand. If we are aware of our family members' expectations, as a unit we may be able to better manage those expectations and communicate in such a way that creates a positive experience for all. Many times, we have expectations about how things may occur, and we assume that others' expectations are similar to ours, but in reality, they are different. Knowing the expectations of others might positively impact the overall experience.

For many people, family relationships play a significant role in our lives. More importantly, whether the relationships among family members are positive or negative, we know that family relationships affect many other parts of our lives. As a result, the more we can study the impact of this time spent together in quarantine with our families, the more we can learn about behaviors that will ultimately lead to healthy and happy family units.

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Tell Me What You Need: An Examination of Dialectical Tensions within Romantic Relationships with Depressed Partners

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While depression communication in romantic relationships has been heavily studied in psychological-based research, there is a lack of research grounded in communication theory. By using Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) as a framework, communicative tensions were explored within relationships where one partner suffered from depression. Through eleven semi-structured interviews with both depressed and non-depressed individuals in a relationship, two major dialectical tensions emerged. Findings suggested that couples with a depressed partner faced unique and challenging tensions including involvement/distance and openness/closedness. Implications, limitations, and future research directions are addressed.

Introduction

Depression is a serious mental disorder that affects an estimated 19.4 million adults in the United States (National Institute of Mental Health, 2021). Depression can leave one feeling sad, hopeless, guilty, angry, and worthless (NIMH, 2021) which negatively affects a depressed individual's interpersonal communication (Knobloch et al., 2011; Segrin, 2011; Sharabi et al., 2016) specifically within the context of friendships (Egbert et al., 2014) and romantic relationships (Duggan, 2007). Depressed individuals may experience high levels of relational uncertainty and hostility (Knobloch-Fedders et al., 2013) as their partners also experience hostility and relationship dissatisfaction (Knobloch & Knobloch-Fedders, 2010). While communication researchers have studied media framing of depression (Lee et al., 2019; Wang, 2019), connections between depression and media use (Eden et al., 2021), health messages (Lienemann & Seigel, 2019; Lueck, 2019), and relational uncertainty (Knobloch et al., 2016) there are surprisingly few studies that focus on the impact of depression on both depressed and non-depressed relational partners as tensions arise. More research analyzing the communication challenges that emerge for those suffering from depression and for their relational partners is needed (Segrin & Dillard, 1992; Sharabi et al., 2016). Learning more about how depression affects communication can help those *with* depression understand why and how they communicate the way they do (Segrin & Rynes, 2009), and can help those *without* depression understand their depressed partner's communication and how best to communicate with them (Knobloch-Fedders et al., 2013).

Knobloch and Delaney (2012) highlighted the need for communication scholars to engage in research surrounding depression and its impact on interpersonal relationships, specifically those with romantic ties. Toward that end, this study provided a communication-based approach using the lens of Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) (Baxter, 2011; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) to explore how couples' communication is affected by depression. RDT offers a rich framework for studying unique tensions rooted in discourse between partners.

While tensions and contradictions are natural to ongoing relationships, they are also unique to those involved. The analysis of discourse surrounding the special challenges depression places on romantic couples allows us to gain an understanding of how communicative partners construct meaning, create relational patterns, and navigate contradictions. To identify common dialogical tensions experienced by those affected by depression, this study analyzed the discourses of depressed and non-depressed partners. The following section reviews current literature on the effects of depression on communication and relational dialectics theory as a lens for studying relational tensions.

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Literature Review

Research examining the effects of depression on romantic relationships is limited; however, several studies offer insight into the challenges of communicating with depressed individuals. First, relational uncertainty, including both self and partner uncertainty, often increases as the topic of depression is avoided which in turn negatively impacts relationship quality and fuels depressive symptoms (Knobloch et al., 2016; Knobloch-Fedders, 2010). Unfortunately, as depressive symptoms increase over time, relational satisfaction decreases. Kouros et al. (2008) found that the longer married couples grappled with the negative symptoms of depression, the more likely their marital satisfaction was lower. This is perhaps explained by how partners perceive one another's communication skills.

Couples facing depression often perceive one another's communication abilities within the relationship as unskillful based on partners not contributing to conversations, verbal aggression, poor listening skills, and disagreement about problems and solutions (Basco et al., 1992). Additionally, researchers have found that those with depression tend to avoid conflict as it can lead to depressive symptoms (Mackinnon et al., 2012; Marchand & Hock, 2000; Sandberg et al., 2002). While this is a coping strategy that may help short-term, this is more detrimental for the relationship long-term as depressed couples report that they feel "reactive and powerless" when negative events occur in their lives (Sandberg et al., 2002, p. 261). While depression has clear effects on relationship communication patterns and satisfaction it also has implications specific to non-depressed partners.

Non-depressed partners may take on depressive-like symptoms and actions without having depression, and they often report feelings of isolation and hopelessness potentially influencing their partner to feel the same way (Sandberg et al., 2002). On the other hand, Rehman et al. (2010) found that when depressed wives displayed symptoms to their non-depressed husbands, the husbands would adjust their mood and behavior to take care of their wives and to cater more to their needs. Non-depressed partners often put additional effort into solving problems (Sandberg et al., 2002). Even though non-depressed partners may do their best to care for their depressed partners, it can still be difficult to communicate with them and understand where their depressed partner is coming from emotionally. Non-depressed partners face a unique tension in not having depression themselves but trying to understand and react to their partner's needs which is especially difficult if their partner is not displaying symptoms (Sharabi et al., 2016). This can make communication particularly challenging if a depressed partner is trying to express their struggles when the non-depressed partner cannot see anything wrong.

While non-depressed partners cannot fully understand what their depressed partner is going through, they may still try to help. This can create a discursive tension within the relationship of how the non-depressed partner helps their depressed partner in ways they see fit versus how the depressed partner needs to be helped. When a non-depressed partner cannot get through to their depressed partner or if their depressed partner does not react to their partner's assistance, this can leave the non-depressed partner feeling frustrated (Sandberg et al., 2002) and lead to them using negatively valenced strategies, such as no longer helping when their partner feels depressed or ignoring their partner's needs altogether (Duggan, 2007). Non-depressed partners tend to focus their hostility onto their depressed partner (Knobloch et al., 2013). If the depressed partner is showing no outward signs of change, the non-depressed partner feels as though they have failed, hence leading to higher levels of frustration.

One strategy that would help curtail those feelings would be more open communication, but previous literature shows that depressed individuals do not always want to communicate or know how to communicate their feelings effectively (Basco et al., 1992; Coyne, 1976; Sandberg et al., 2002). The research on depression communication within romantic relationships highlights the difficulties both partners face as well as some strategies used in navigating their relationships; however, a nuanced communication lens is needed to more fully understand the discursive struggles couples face as they deal with tensions within these relationships. RDT affords an opportunity to examine these competing discourses (Baxter, 2011; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Relational Dialectics

As outlined above, romantic partners in relationships affected by depression experience relational tensions. Specifically, depressed partners may engage in behaviors that affirm their negative sense of self, avoid conflict with partners which might exacerbate depression, and refuse to seek help or assistance. Non-depressed partners may take on the negative feelings of their depressed partner, avoid conflict to prevent escalation of depression, and struggle with offering help and assistance. Beyond naming tensions faced, RDT provides a useful framework for examining the interplay of discourses (Baxter, 2011).

Originally, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) researched how necessary but contradictory tensions exist within relationships. They developed RDT as, "… a theory of the meaning-making between relationship parties that emerges from the interplay of competing discourses" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 349). Discourses in this sense are contained between two people for specific, unique understanding relevant to their relationship (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). New iterations of RDT (2.0) emphasize "the interplay of competing meaning systems" and "discursive struggle" which are "not conceived as a binary problem to be solved" (Baxter et al., 2021, p. 7). Baxter and Norwood (2015) encouraged studying these struggles within specific contexts with an eye toward broader discourses.

Discourses help to construct meaning within relationships by creating a language and foundation that two people share together. However, discourses can be at odds with one another based on how each person within the relationship constructs meaning. Discourses can also occur synchronically and diachronically, further affecting how meaning is constructed. A synchronic discourse occurs at one specific moment in time, and a diachronic discourse occurs over a longer period (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). In this way, discourses can change and adapt based on the shared meaning created at different points in time. If a discourse was created synchronically, it could change meaning based on how those who created the discourse alter the definition and context of it. In depression communication, this could be manifested within a romantic relationship when partners create a discourse within or outside of a depressive episode. A discourse may take on a specific meaning outside of a depressive episode but be altered or changed within the context of the episode itself. In this way, discourses can be experienced in one way by both partners but change when the context changes.

RDT helps to explain how competing discourses work within relationships as well as why they are necessary. It also explains how meaning is created out of everyday communication (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). However, when shared meaning begins to break down, tensions are created. Within these tensions, there is a need for each side of the tension to exist. RDT provides a both/and perspective when interpreting discourses (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006). The both/and perspective points to the idea that there is no "better" side of a tension; one side of a tension is not inherently negative or positive. Instead, both ends of a tension are necessary to experience the full range of the tension. The way that opposing ends of a tension interact with one another provides the dynamic interplay of dialectics. People do not experience only one side of a tension, and what they view as a "positive" end of a tension may shift from day to day. According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), these tensions are not necessarily brought to light within the relationship. Oftentimes, the tensions will exist in the background, being "owned" by both members of the relationship. Finding a balance between the two tensions is important for maintaining homeostasis within relationships.

As noted above, depression tends to have negative impacts on romantic relationships (Sharabi et al., 2016) causing relational uncertainty and dissatisfaction (Knobloch et al., 2016; Knobloch & Knobloch-Fedders, 2010). Depressed individuals report that they are not good communicators within their relationship (Basco et al., 1992; Sandberg et al., 2002) and tend to avoid conflict (Marchand & Hock, 2000), which can cause additional relationship dissatisfaction. Partners of depressed people tend to have trouble comprehending their partners' struggles and will often get frustrated when their attempts to help their partner fail (Sandberg et al., 2002; Sharabi et al., 2016). These frustrations then get projected onto their depressed partner and perpetuate the depression cycle (Knobloch et al., 2013). However, couples will try to adjust their moods and strategies to help their depressed partner as much as they can (Rehman et al., 2010; Sandberg et al., 2002).

The struggles of trying to understand their partner and learn the best ways to help them may represent a common dialectical tension for non-depressed partners. On the other hand, depressed partners may struggle with avoiding conflict, withholding information, or seeking reassurance when sensing partner dissatisfaction, leaving non-depressed partners unsure of how to navigate interactions. RDT provides a rich framework for examining and understanding the tensions that exist between couples where one partner has depression, and the other does not. RDT can help reveal the natural, underlying tensions already at work within the relationships. Therefore, the following research question guided this research:

> **RQ 1:** How are relational dialectics experienced in romantic relationships where one partner suffers from depression?

Method

To understand tensions within romantic relationships affected by depression, eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted. Learning about experiences first-hand and in the voice of the participants provided data from the point of view of both the depressed and non-depressed partner, which is an under-represented group within existing depression literature.

To participate in the study, participants had to be at least 18 years old and currently in a romantic relationship where they had depression, or their partner had depression. Participants could not be in a romantic relationship where both partners suffered from depression. To appropriately capture the tensions experienced by both depressed and non-depressed partners, an effort was made to recruit an equal number of participants from each category. A combination of convenience and snowball sampling was used to find participants who fit the criteria. Specifically, recruiting efforts included posting on Facebook and Twitter, an announcement at a campus Greek organization, and word-of-mouth. Most participants were recruited through social media. Eleven participants were interviewed, ranging in age from 20 to 33 years old, with the average age being 24.5 years old. Seven participants had depression (depressed partner), and four participants did not have depression (non-depressed partner). Ten participants were Caucasian, and one was Hispanic. Of the eleven participants all were heterosexual, five participants were in dating relationships and six participants were married, with a total of eight participants cohabitating. Participants had been in relationships with their partners anywhere from five months to eight years. Nine participants were female and two were male.

Data Collection

After receiving IRB approval, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Two different sets of questions were prepared that would be asked of each participant depending on whether they were the partner with depression (Appendix). The discussion was altered around certain topics depending on how the participant responded to the question. Questions regarding their communication were asked such as, "In what ways do you think your partner's depression affects your communication with your partner? What are the most difficult things to talk about regarding your partner's depression? What is most helpful about your partner's communication with you? Can you provide an example?"

Due to travel distance, work schedules, and the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, different channels were used for conducting the interviews. Three interviews were conducted face-to-face, six interviews were conducted via FaceTime, and two interviews were conducted via phone calls. According to Novick (2008), computer-mediated communication is equally as beneficial as face-to-face interviews. All interviews were audio-recorded using a cell phone or audio recording software on a laptop with the participants' permission. All interviews were transcribed verbatim to produce 79 typed, single-spaced, 1-inch margin transcripts. Interviews that were conducted face-to-face were held in private meeting areas, and computer-mediated interviews were performed in a quiet, private space. Interview lengths ranged from fourteen minutes to forty-two minutes long with an average interview length of 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym matching their gender and race/ethnicity to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to analyze the data line-by-line. RDT was used as a framework to guide the coding process, using existing dialectical tensions as a foundation for open coding. Codes were combined and edited to develop 64 codes. The codes were reanalyzed and grouped into categories based on similarity and coordination. Twelve categories emerged and were given operational definitions for clarity and coherence. The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to analyze the categories against one another and existing research to create broader, larger themes. Themes were developed based on recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Owen, 1984). Two themes emerged that were significant based on the research question. The categories were reanalyzed to determine if each category supported the emergent themes.

Verification Procedures

Trustworthiness and credibility were developed based on Creswell and Miller's (2000) criteria of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), peer review, and thick, rich description. One participant in the study was given a copy of the findings and discussion to verify if the written account is accurate based on their own experiences. The participant provided affirmation of the themes surrounding tensions and maintenance strategies. A copy of the study was also given to three fellow researchers to review and suggest changes, providing an outside perspective of coherence and understanding of the research. Lastly, thick, rich description was used by providing detailed explanations of the participants' accounts to ensure that the participants' voices were conveyed and interpreted accurately.

Results

Interviews with participants revealed themes corresponding to the research question of how relational dialectics are experienced in romantic relationships where one partner suffers from depression. After interviewing participants, coding and categories were used with the framework of RDT to establish dialectical tensions. While participants in the study discussed many tensions they faced in their relationships with depressed and non-depressed partners, dialectical tensions were identified based on the presence of interdependent yet contradictory poles (Baxter & Montgomery, 1998). The dialectical tensions that emerged naturally from the interviews included: involvement/distance and openness/closedness.

Involvement/Distance

The dialectical tension of involvement and distance manifested itself in multiple ways for both depressed and non-depressed partners. First, depressed partners struggled with wanting help from their significant other versus wanting to deal with issues independently. Within this dialectic, depressed participants had difficulty communicating their needs. Secondly, non-depressed partners experienced uncertainty as they struggled to determine their partner's needs and when to offer support in relation to a depressive episode. The following sections review the findings for each partner.

Depressed Partner Dilemmas
The dialectical tension of *involvement/distance* emerged for depressed partners as they experienced a pull between needing support versus needing space to handle things on their own. For example, depressed partners shared that it was helpful when their non-depressed partner made decisions without involving them given their difficulty thinking and analyzing options during a depressive episode. Having someone else decide things for them removed that burden. Sarah said that her non-depressed partner made decisions on her behalf:

> … he's like, this is what we're going to do. And he goes ahead and organizes everything for me, and he's like this is going to be better without kind of like pointing out that I'm getting stressed and drawing attention to it. He just goes ahead and does it. That's so much help.

Decision-making was used to take stress from her, which allowed her to focus on other tasks; however, decisions made by the non-depressed partner were not always viewed positively if partners perceived the wrong decision was made. Some depressed partners noted that they did not want the help of their non-depressed partners in any capacity. Elle, a depressed partner, said, "I need to get things done and I often feel like only I can do it. Everyone else is just going to keep messing up or do it slowly." For her, any decision from her non-depressed partner would have exacerbated her negative feelings. Making what was perceived as the wrong decisions created tension for both parties and sometimes pushed the non-depressed partner to shy away from the involvement end of the contradiction.

In addition to instrumental support with decision making, depressed partners also conveyed the need for emotional and physical closeness, but to different degrees. Some depressed partners expressed a need for physical involvement and stated that simply having someone in the room during a depressive episode was helpful. Bailey, a depressed partner who had been in her relationship for five years, said:

> … what I really need is just I need a presence in the room. For every person, it's different. Some people need a hug, some people need talking to. I just need someone to just be there while I work through my own thoughts.

When depression makes communication difficult, having someone physically present can be a crucial form of support.

While participants articulated their different needs, many acknowledged how depression made it difficult to communicate effectively in those moments which suggested to their partners that they desired distance. Rebecca, a non-depressed partner, said that her depressed partner "… shuts down, almost like he wants to keep the thoughts in, which we know it's unhealthy." Since depressed partners struggle to communicate, they are not able to tell their partners what they want or what they need which deepens the involvement/distance conundrum. Elle, a depressed partner, outlined this struggle:

> I think that I've noticed I need space, but at the same time, I need him there. I don't want him rubbing my knee or rubbing my arm, trying to comfort me or the pity, I don't want any pity. I just want him to act like things are normal but be around. I don't want to be alone, but I also don't want to be babied, like something's wrong.

Even though Elle was quite specific about what she needed from her partner, she expected him to offer the right support on his own without guidance from her. Without explicit directions from their partners, the non-depressed partners are left to make decisions on their own. Ultimately, they must choose their level of involvement in their depressed partner's struggles.

Non-depressed Partner Dilemmas

Non-depressed partners experienced uncertainty in in determining how, when, and if to offer support. For example, Chad, a non-depressed partner, described how he navigated the extension of support for his partner during a depressive episode:

> Sometimes when she's really depressed, she just sort of shuts down, and it's not so much that she will stay shut down, but I got to recognize when she needs the space. Because then what will happen is I'll be like, "Why are you mad?" or "What's wrong?" Of course, you can't brute force your way out of depression, but I want to know if there's some sort of overlaying symptom I

could help with. Like, if the house is in fucking shambles and that's causing your depression or making it worse, I can help with that.

He struggled with whether he should get directly involved because he knew that she shut down. In the end, he was able to analyze the situation and decide how to be involved. In his case, he provided more instrumental support by managing household tasks which alleviated some pressure from his partner.

In addition to deciding which type of support to provide, non-depressed partners also had to determine the timing of their support based on the progression of a depressive episode. Non-depressed partners often considered whether to offer support or provide space to their partners based on whether it was during or after an event. Bailey, a depressed partner, explained how her partner would react to a depressive episode:

I think we both ease back into what I need, and he just asks me once every day. If I'm struggling, he'll ask me one or two times a day just how are you feeling. He can tell when I'm doing better and when I'm doing worse. It's changed from what you need; it's like an open question. It's turned into, "What can I do to make you smile today?"

Bailey's partner learned her physical and emotional responses to a depressive episode. During the episode, Bailey discussed that she needed space to manage the episode herself, and her partner recognized that need and gave her distance. Towards the end of a depressive episode, he was able to effectively respond to her and actively chose to communicate with her to provide support.

On the other hand, some participants had trouble determining specific needs, which led to negative outcomes. Chad, a non-depressed partner, explained the consequence of choosing the wrong strategy:

I had misread. It's more art than science. Sometimes the shutdown means I need to be there to hold her. But in this instance, I thought it was "I need space, I'll talk to you when I'm ready." It was not. That caused quite the argument. It was not good.

Chad's experience demonstrated the complexity of navigating depression. He later went on to describe the importance of providing the support needed without making his partner upset, "It's a razor's edge. You want [your partner] to feel there by choice with a comforting presence, not trapped with an agitated presence." Whether to intervene and in what way was an ongoing struggle.

In sum, the involvement/distance dialectic was experienced by both relational partners. Depressed partners had varying needs for involvement and distance at different points around their depressive episodes and often had difficulty communicating with their partners. In turn, non-depressed partners would enact strategies based on their read of the situation sometimes choosing to make decisions or being physically present or conversely providing partners space and trying not to push too hard for clarity from their partners. The uncertainty experienced by both parties also affected the degree to which couples chose to communicate about their depression within the relationship.

Openness/Closedness

The second major dialectical tension experienced by participants surrounded being open in communicating about needs surrounding depressive episodes versus being closed in order to self-isolate or cope with uncertainties created by depression. Depressed and non-depressed partners both navigated this tension with non-depressed partners enacting more strategic decisions about degrees of openness or closedness as dictated by their partners.

Closing off Communication

Depressed and non-depressed partners closed off communication in different ways and with different motivations. First, depressed partners expressed difficulty in being able to articulate what they were experiencing during an episode. Savannah, a depressed partner, noted that "… it'll be hard to convey how I'm feeling because [my partner] has never been depressed, so he doesn't get it and it's hard to put into words." Rather than struggle with trying to communicate her feelings effectively, Savannah chose to keep her communication with her partner closed to prevent miscommunication. However, non-depressed partners would often push for more openness to offer support. Bailey, a depressed partner, expressed frustration over her significant other's attempt to get her to open up, "…in those moments when he's trying to get something out of me and even I don't know. I think that's really the biggest struggle." At the same time depressed partners are experiencing an inability to communicate their own personal needs, they also struggle to consider the needs of their non-depressed partners for more open communication that involves relationship maintenance. Kathryn, who had been with her partner for eight years, captures this issue that arises in her relationship,

> He does mention to me he wishes I ask him more so like, how he really is feeling. Or like check on him, or you know. But it's not that I don't want to, I just don't honestly think about it…And sometimes I'm so caught up in, not to be selfish, but how I'm feeling, or I don't really know if he has something going on because he doesn't tell me. Or I just don't have a clue!

Kathryn's depression pushes her toward closed communication as she experiences trouble understanding or even inquiring about her partner's needs.

Another consequence of closed communication for non-depressed partners is the feeling of having done something wrong. Rebecca, a non-depressed partner, talked about how in the beginning of an episode she is often confused by the lack of communication yet expressed her desire to remain present,

> Sometimes there's not a lot of communication as he's going into it, and so I feel like "Okay, did I do something? What's wrong?" I guess a little validation that I haven't caused anything, but then also I just want him to know he can feel safe at home with me and we're together, just to talk when he's ready, but not to intentionally hold things in.

Rebecca's articulated frustration stems from not knowing how to help her partner, but also demonstrates her need for validation. Sarah, a depressed partner also noted the frustration her non-depressed partner experienced as she recounted him telling her, "… I just need you to tell me what you need, and I will do it." Non-depressed partners often tried to understand and encourage openness, but depressed partners could not always provide them with the information they needed as they leaned toward the closed end of the tension.

While depressed partners were often closed off to their partners, non-depressed partners also made decisions to avoid communicating about relational issues or the depression. As Rebecca described,

> I was just trying to be supportive and not bring my feelings into play, but I was just consistently putting myself on the back burner. I think if I had been up front about how I felt earlier on, we could have avoided a lot of heartache.

Rebecca's experience demonstrated how partners often avoided bringing up issues and neglected their own personal well-being. While couples engaged in closed communication due to an inability to articulate needs or as a way of offering support and protection, there were also times when they engaged in more open communication.

Opening Up

Depression certainly poses challenges for remaining open in communication; however, some participants described striving for openness for many of the same reasons others remained closed. Specifically, participants worked toward openness to process depressive episodes and offer psychological support but determining the timing of openness was important. Bailey, a depressed partner, commented on her partner's post-depressive episode communication, saying, "[My partner] knows I'll talk about it once it's passed if I need to." Her partner learned that she would come forward when, and if, she wanted to discuss the episode. Other participants experienced similar situations; however, one depressed partner described her desire to be open during her depressive episode instead of after the event. Elle commented, "… how I communicate with [my partner] through it is discussing I think what's going on, so when it's all over, I don't think that more needs to be said, I guess." Elle did not feel the need to discuss the episode once it had passed. This was a pattern she and her partner negotiated. Another participant, Kelsey, shared that her depressed partner remained open even when it was difficult, "…he just doesn't bottle it in, he'll tell me exactly what he's thinking, even if he knows or thinks that it might bother me, he'll still like get it out in the open so that we can talk about it."

Finally, while depressed partners made efforts to be open, non-depressed partners also took opportunities to be open in seeking to assist their partners and by processing the effects of depressive episodes. Luke felt as though his partner's depression made their communication stronger claiming, "…if anything [it]causes us to communicate more because I feel I need to check in on her a lot…" He went on to discuss how he learned over time how to deal with his partner's depression. At first, he would work to be open with his depressed partner by helping her work through or "fix" problems, but he learned that this type of openness didn't help her cope with her depression,

> A lot of times I tried to, to cope with her thoughts and behaviors by changing the thoughts and behaviors. And I tried that several times and it never works. And it usually causes her feelings of, I guess worthlessness type feelings. So, she's feeling like she's not meeting some expectation of mine, even though I'm just trying to help her. I guess she interprets it as me trying to change her because she's not what I need.

In this way, participants actively lived out the contradictions communicatively as they struggled between being open and remaining closed, both strategies influenced by depressive episodes. Finding the right balance of openness or the right kind of support to offer was navigated over time.

Discussion

Through interviews with depressed and non-depressed partners, the research question of how relational dialectics are experienced in romantic relationships where one partner suffers from depression was explored. While participants described many ways depression affected their communication, two primary dialectical tensions emerged representing internal tensions within their relationships including involvement/distance and openness/closedness.

To Be Involved or to Give Space

The tension *involvement/distance* described the competing desire of both depressed and non-depressed partners to receive and/or offer instrumental and emotional support while at other times needing to allow distance and independence. One way this tension manifested within the participants' relationships was through decision-making. Decision-making on behalf of the depressed partner was useful because depression can make it difficult for individuals to make decisions on their own (Owen et al., 2015). Non-depressed partners took control by performing tasks to take the burden off the depressed partner. This included practical tasks, such as organizing and taking care of household chores, as well as

physical and emotional support. Sharabi et al. (2016) also found that depressed partners reported relying on their partners for care, running the household, and maintaining their relationship.

In addition to practical forms of support, depressed partners expressed differing needs for physical and emotional support. Echoing the findings of Sharabi et al. (2016), most of the depressed participants in this study preferred to be alone physically and mentally and communicated a need for isolation and to avoid feeling trapped by being forced to stay present. However, others noted a need for physical presence in the room, a more passive form of support. Non-depressed participants reported a concerted effort to stay involved physically and emotionally for their partners and depressed partners confirmed that having someone else there with them helped them get through the episode.

Ultimately, both partners experienced the contradictory nature of this tension. Non-depressed partners had to navigate this edge with little information from their partners since depressed partners struggled with effective communication. Ineffective communication led to relational uncertainty as well as an inability to know how to help their partner (Harris et al., 2006; Knobloch et al., 2016; Sharabi et al., 2016). Difficulty also emerged when depressed partners outlined that "wrong" decision-making from their partner made things worse. Non-depressed partners had to find the balance of being involved and helping versus staying distant. Depressed partners struggled to communicate their need for involvement some wanting assistance others wanting more control. The complexity of navigating this tension resulted in increased uncertainty and confusion mainly for the non-depressed partner.

To Talk About It or Avoid It

In addition to staying involved versus providing space, participants also experienced a dialectical tension of being open or closed about the depression, support needed, and the impact on their relationships. *Openness/closedness* was experienced as the tension of wanting to share information specifically about the depression versus avoiding the topic or strategically deciding the amount and timing of being open. The tension manifested differently in both depressed and non-depressed partners.

Most depressed partners struggled with communicating their feelings and emotions to their non-depressed partners for fear of misunderstanding and even felt frustrated at their partners' attempts to help them talk through an episode. Fowler and Gasiorek (2017) confirmed that depression is a negative predictor of relationship maintenance behaviors which may explain depressed partners' annoyance at their partner's attempts to communicate about what is happening. This led most depressed partners to shift towards the closed end of the tension rather than providing open communication to their partners.

Additionally, non-depressed partners lacked understanding about their partner's depression and worried they had done something wrong or might make mistakes in offering support. Non-depressed partners are often unable to gauge the severity of their depressed partner's emotions surrounding a depressive episode (Gordon et al. 2013; Sharabi et al., 2016). This leads to frustration and explains why many non-depressed partners in this study moved toward the closed end of the tension engaging in avoidant communication to withhold their thoughts or mask their emotions (Sharabi et al., 2016).

On the other end of the dialectic, participants also experienced openness, although openness seemed to be a condition of communicating at the right time. Some depressed participants wanted more openness during their episodes to avoid talking about it later. Communicating about the episode as it occurred became a way for the depressed partners to get through the episode. Other participants noted that they would discuss it if they felt the need, but their non-depressed partners learned that they do not need to discuss the episode every single time. Through this, the *openness/closedness* tension was manifested both within and outside of a depressive episode and couples seemed to learn over time what would work best for their relationships. Additionally, some participants reported that open communication led to feelings of relational closeness. Sharabi et al. (2016) found support for positive outcomes of depression on romantic relationships, citing that couples valued the support and experienced feelings of closeness. Some partners found the depression gave them more opportunities to check in with each other, to take care of each other.

In light of these struggles, open communication was still beneficial for both the depressed and non-depressed partners. Open communication helped depressed partners work through their feelings and emotions during a depressive episode, and it helped non-depressed partners understand what may have caused the depressive episode for their partner and relieved some of the fear that they could have been the cause.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

Unlike previous psychology-based studies on depression in romantic relationships, this study provided insight into what depressed and non-depressed partners both need during a depressive episode to cope with and manage the episode. It is important to understand the dyadic tensions at play. By using RDT as a framework, the tensions and contradictions became more evident. Most research about depression and relationships is psychology-based; this study filled a gap by providing a communication-based approach to learning about how couples experienced and managed depression in their relationships. There was a good variety of dating-and married couples, which provided a continuum of results based on experiences and amount of time spent together. There was also a varied amount of relationship length in the sample, which proved beneficial in the results.

There were several limitations to this study. First, the sample consisted of fewer non-depressed partner participants when compared to depressed partners. While the lack of non-depressed partner participants could be explained based on privacy management rules, a more even distribution of depressed and non-depressed partners was needed to fully capture the unique tensions experienced by non-depressed partners. Additionally, all participants were under forty years old and were majority Caucasian. An ideal sample size would include greater diversity in age and ethnicity and should consider the impact of gender, race, and sexuality. Participants were also not selected from the same relationship, so no depressed and non-depressed partners that participated in the study were in a relationship together. Having the unique perspective of each partner from the same relationship could provide valuable information and insight that was lost in this study. Finally, future research needs to continue to analyze the unique situations that couples face when there is one partner that suffers from depression. While this study adds to the growing body of communication-based research on this topic, more studies need to be grounded in communication theory to add to the body of knowledge surrounding depression communication.

Conclusion

By learning more about the unique communicative struggles and tensions that these couples faced, the body of communicative depression research is growing. This research provided a deeper understanding of what specific tensions couples face when one partner suffers from depression. While other relationships may deal with similar issues, the couples in the current study faced unique tensions surrounding communication and coping strategies due to depression. Expanding and dissecting a few of the most common tensions helps researchers better understand what these couples face from a communicative standpoint. Studying the contradictions that romantic partners face when one person suffers from depression helps both researchers and people in similar situations learn and better understand what they face daily.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol- Depressed Partner

1. Tell me a little about your relationship with your romantic partner.
    a. Specifically, how did you meet, how long have you known them?
    b. What brought you together?
2. When and how did you first reveal your depression to your partner?
    a. How did they react to that news?
    b. How has your depression been treated?
3. In what ways do you think your depression affects your communication with your partner?
4. What are the most difficult things to talk about regarding your depression?
5. Describe the communication between you and your partner on a day-to-day basis.
6. Describe the communication between you and your partner during a depressive episode.
7. What do you personally need from your partner when you go into a depressive state?
8. Tell me about a time when your partner communicated in a way that contradicted what you needed.
9. Describe the successful coping strategies you used when faced with this contradiction.
10. Tell me about a time when you tried a coping strategy that didn't work.
11. How have the coping strategies you use changed over time?
12. How, if at all, have your needs changed over time?
13. What is most helpful about your partner's communication with you? Can you provide an example?
14. What is most unhelpful about your partner's communication with you? Can you provide an example?
15. What do you think your partner needs from you when you are in a depressive state?
16. Tell me about a time when you communicated in a way that contradicted what your partner needed.
17. Describe the successful coping strategies your partner used when faced with this contradiction.
18. Tell me about a time when your partner tried a coping strategy that didn't work.
19. How have your partner's coping strategies changed over time?
20. How, if at all, has your partner's needs changed over time?
21. What is most helpful about your communication with your partner? Can you provide an example?
22. What is most unhelpful about your communication with your partner? Can you provide an example?
23. How, if at all, does your communication with your partner change after a depressive episode?
24. How do you communicate about your depression with other family members? Do they know?
    a. Has your communication with family members been different since your depression was revealed? If so, how?
25. How does your partner communicate about your depression with other family members?
    a. Has your partner's communication with family members been different since your depression was revealed? If so, how?
26. How do you communicate about your depression with friends? Do they know?
    a. Has your communication with friends been different since your depression was revealed? If so, how?
27. How does your partner communicate about your depression with friends?
    a. Has your partner's communication with friends been different since your depression was revealed? If so, how?
28. If you could provide advice to other couples touched by depression, what would you advise them to do or say?
    a. What have you tried that didn't work?

b.   What have you found to work?
29. What is your age?
30. What is your gender?
31. What is your ethnicity?

Interview Protocol- Non-depressed Partner

1.   Tell me a little about your relationship with your romantic partner.
     a.   Specifically, how did you meet, how long have you known them?
     b.   What brought you together?
2.   When and how did your partner first reveal their depression to you?
     a.   How did you react to that news?
     b.   How has their depression been treated?
3.   In what ways do you think your partner's depression affects your communication with your partner?
4.   What are the most difficult things to talk about regarding your partner's depression?
5.   Describe the communication between you and your partner on a day-to-day basis.
6.   Describe the communication between you and your partner during a depressive episode.
7.   What do you personally need from your partner when they go into a depressive state?
8.   Tell me about a time when your partner communicated in a way that contradicted what you needed.
9.   Describe the successful coping strategies you used when faced with this contradiction.
10. Tell me about a time when you tried a coping strategy that didn't work.
11. How have the coping strategies you use changed over time?
12. How, if at all, have your needs changed over time?
13. What is most helpful about your partner's communication with you? Can you provide an example?
14. What is most unhelpful about your partner's communication with you? Can you provide an example?
15. What do you think your partner needs from you when they are in a depressive state?
16. Tell me about a time when you communicated in a way that contradicted what your partner needed.
17. Describe the successful coping strategies your partner used when faced with this contradiction.
18. Tell me about a time when your partner tried a coping strategy that didn't work.
19. How have your partner's coping strategies changed over time?
20. How, if at all, has your partner's needs changed over time?
21. What is most helpful about your communication with your partner? Can you provide an example?
22. What is most unhelpful about your communication with your partner? Can you provide an example?
23. How, if at all, does your communication with your partner change after a depressive episode?
24. How do you communicate about your partner's depression with other family members? Do they know?
     a.   Has your communication with family members been different since your partner's depression was revealed? If so, how?
25. How does your partner communicate about their depression with other family members?
     a.   Has your partner's communication with family members been different since their depression was revealed? If so, how?
26. How do you communicate about your partner's depression with friends? Do they know?
     a.   Has your communication with friends been different since your partner's depression was revealed? If so, how?
27. How does your partner communicate about their depression with friends?

     a.   Has your partner's communication with friends been different since your partner's depression was revealed? If so, how?

28. If you could provide advice to other couples touched by depression, what would you advise them to do or say?
     a.   What have you tried that didn't work?
     b.   What have you found to work?
29. What is your age?
30. What is your gender?
31. What is your ethnicity?

Lessons Learned Struggling to Identify Positive Deviants in a Rural Southern Community

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This study explores the potential for application of the Positive Deviance Approach for social change in the rural United States. Through the lens of the Campus Kitchen at Ballard University (CKBU), the authors examine the issues of food insecurity and unobtrusive control structures present in rural communities and posit innovative ways to address these and other intractable social issues common in many rural communities in the United States. Using ethnographic methods, the authors probe the structure of the Campus Kitchens Project's national organization and Ballard University's student leadership team to uncover hindrances that constrain sustainable social change that often are engrained in conventional charity models of development.

Keywords: social change, positive deviance approach, asset-based, structuration theory, food insecurity, unobtrusive control, rural communities

Introduction

In recent years, communication research has come to include numerous traditions of development-related action and applied studies. For example, the Positive Deviance Approach has illuminated assets-based solutions to many intractable problems around the globe, including malnutrition in Vietnam (Singhal, Sternin, et al., 2009), pre- and post-natal care for infants and mothers in Pakistan (Shafique et al., 2010), school persistence in rural Argentina (Durá & Singhal, 2009), and child protection in Uganda (Singhal & Durá, 2009). With the exception of theses explicating teen pregnancy avoidance (Diaz, 2010) and diabetes management (Boyd, 2015) in health communication, research in this area largely has focused on the above identified global south problems and urban/professional organizational populations in the United States (Lindberg et al., 2009; Singhal, Buscell, et al., 2009) and other industrialized countries (e.g., Thuesen & Schmidt-Hansen, 2011). These projects illustrate significant advances in how we address and solve problems communicatively, thereby using communication for survival, but much of the research has paid scant attention to similar intractable problems in the rural United States. These communities' intractable problems with poverty and food insecurity—essentially, the communities as wholes—often are muted (Kramarae, 2005). Deficit-based assistance and development programs routinely accomplish this muting through structures designed by outside "experts" to ameliorate community problems, yet these programs threaten the survival of rural communities because of the questionable sustainability of outside funding (Durá, 2015). The Positive Deviance Approach offers an attractive, applied organizing framework to address problems in rural areas of the United States in the same manner as researchers successfully have applied its tenets around the world.

The purpose of this ethnographic case study is to illuminate the struggles encountered while striving to employ tenets of the Positive Deviance Approach in a rural environment in the southeastern United States. We will describe our participant observation fieldwork and explicate themes of how existing cultural structures as well as program-created structures hamper asset-based, communication-focused community development and can deepen food insecurity. After a demographic portrait of Tenrah[1] County and an overview of the Campus Kitchens Project, we will offer insight into the dynamic between

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[1] This reference and all subsequent references to localities, persons, and non-commercial organizations other than the national Campus Kitchens Project (CKP) are pseudonyms to protect anonymity of all participants.

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Positive Deviance and Giddens' (1979) Structuration Theory and proffer suggestions based on our lessons learned in pursuing asset-based community development in a rural area of the United States.

Literature Review

Tenrah County, North Carolina

The US Department of Agriculture defines a food desert as an area without adequate access to fresh, affordable food, where residents often are forced to rely on fast food restaurants and convenience stores for everyday needs (Wright, 2021). Tenrah County, located just outside the Research Triangle of North Carolina, is a textbook example of a food desert. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community 5-Year Estimates (2016a, see also 2016b, 2016c), 16.2% of Tenrah County residents are classified as food insecure, and 56.8% of households with children 18 years old or younger participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Even in Bunco, the seat of Tenrah County, there are only three grocery stores: two Food Lion stores and an IGA affiliate.

This crisis can be seen even more clearly in the Tenrah County public school system. In North Carolina, 50.3% of students are eligible for the federally funded free or reduced lunch program—slightly higher than the national average of 48.1% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a). The average percentage of students eligible for the program among Tenrah County schools is 65%, and, at the beginning of the 2017-2018 academic year, Tenrah County released a list of seven schools slated to participate in the Federally funded Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). According to the Tenrah County Schools website, CEP is geared toward schools in the nation's most impoverished areas and allows every student enrolled at the school to receive free lunch without a household application. Consideration for this program is based on the percentage of students whose families participate in various government programs, such as SNAP. One of these schools, Waxville Elementary School, located in the far western corner of Tenrah County near Morgan, reports that over 75% of its students were eligible for the program before the school enrolled in CEP (Common Core of Data, n.d.). Though Morgan may seem like an extreme outlier in Tenrah County, its plight represents important underlying issues in Tenrah County's economy.

Campus Kitchens Project (CKP) Background

The Campus Kitchens Project, founded by entrepreneur Robert Egger in 2001, works to reduce food waste and fight food insecurity through a national network of food reclamation organizations on college campuses. The Campus Kitchens Project is headquartered in Washington, D.C., where the D.C. Central Kitchen delivers daily meals to the surrounding community. As far as daily operations go, the student leaders in Campus Kitchens across the country are encouraged to reclaim food from their campus's cafeterias and other local grocery stores and restaurants, secure locations to store and prepare meals, recruit student volunteers to cook the food, and deliver meals to those in need in their community. On a deeper level, the Campus Kitchens Project seeks to uncover innovative solutions to community problems using preexisting resources in a community. The Campus Kitchens Project fulfills this mission by striving to use only food reclaimed from within the community and engage community members in uncovering innovative ways to use available resources to make healthier food choices.

In spring 2016, Ballard University in Listre, North Carolina won a national launch grant to become the 53rd branch of the Campus Kitchens Project. Situated in rural Tenrah County, the Campus Kitchen at Ballard University (CKBU) is in a prime location to make an impact in the fight against food insecurity in the area. However, despite having served hundreds of meals throughout its relatively short existence, CKBU has struggled to make any sustainable change.

Structuration Theory

Anthony Giddens' (1979) Structuration Theory explores the question of whether individuals shape the reality around them or if the social structures in place shape an individual's reality. Giddens argued that although the structures around individuals affect their actions, individuals ultimately are the agents who produce those social structures. Applying this concept to social change, Giddens posited that every "social actor"—from the systemically silenced to the imperious politician—has an instrumental role in the society in which they live (p. 72). Thus, every person in a society has the potential to effect social change. Hence, Giddens' theory aligns with asset-based community development approaches (see Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996)—the foundation of the Campus Kitchens Project—in suggesting that community members from every level must spearhead social change in order for the change to be sustainable.

Further, Giddens explored how structures have the potential to simultaneously enable and constrain social change. Because any organization requires some sort of order in order to operate, structure is necessary for a society to function. However, the very purpose of structure is to limit the actions of individual agents in some way to maintain order. Thus, nearly every structure–whether physical or social, explicit or implicit–holds the power to enable and constrain change.

Food Insecurity and Structuration

Sadler et al. (2016) stated that government policies regarding food insecurity too often are based on misconceptions about accessibility. The assumption that more grocery stores, more food stamps, and more school lunch programs will cure hunger in food insecure areas runs rampant in many local governments. Sadler and colleagues posited, however, that these policies and programs actually produce and reproduce problem-causing structures they seek to address. Programs based on these misconceptions foster learned helplessness, which Hansen and Thomsen (2013) identified as "a debilitating cognitive state in which individuals may possess the requisite skills and abilities to perform reasonably, but exhibit suboptimal performance because they attribute prior successes to external causes" (p. 1010). In other words, as structures force people to become more dependent on government aid, choices regarding access to food become based less on individual abilities and more reliant on surrounding societal structures. Further, private social change organizations can foster the same dichotomy of enabling and constraining, both within the organization and in the community they seek to serve. As Kramer et al. (2017) pointed out, even organizations that encourage all members to participate fully and have a voice in every aspect of the organization may find that "full participation and task efficiency are incompatible goals" (p. 430). Thus, the balance between structure and inclusive communication remains an enigma in many organizations.

Positive Deviance

The Campus Kitchens Project purports to engage in asset-based community development (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996). One avenue for pursuing asset-based community development is the Positive Deviance Approach, suggested by Zeitlin et al. (1990) and first demonstrated in practice by Sternin and colleagues (Sternin & Choo, 2000; Marsh et al,, 2004; Sternin, 2005). Further, Singhal and colleagues recognized the inherent communicative properties of the Positive Deviance Approach as they introduced it to the field of Communication (Durá & Singhal, 2009; Singhal, Sternin, et al., 2009; Singhal, 2015). Durá (2015, p. 67) posited the "6 D's" of the Positive Deviance Approach:

1) **Define** the problem – codefined with the community
2) **Determine** the Existence of Statistical Outliers – who is at the highest risk (based on measurable data) yet succeeding beyond or in spite of the odds?
3) **Discover** uncommon but replicable behaviors and practices – who are the unusual suspects?
4) **Design** a program/intervention – amplify and operationalize PD behaviors for adoption
5) **Discern** the degree of progress – Implement ongoing monitoring and evaluation

6) **Disseminate** – amplify the behavior and tacit knowledge (see Konovalenko-Slettli & Singhal, 2017) to the larger community and other communities

In essence, the Positive Deviance Approach turns the Diffusion of Innovations model (Rogers, 2003, 2004) on its head (Singhal, 2015). Rather than focusing on early adopters as traditional diffusion research and practice dictate, the Positive Deviance Approach analyzes the behavior of those individuals most likely to be classified as laggards by the Diffusion of Innovations model (individuals with little or no social or economic capital) to determine whether they have, without any additional assets, solved a seemingly intractable problem in their community.

Being asset-based, the Positive Deviance Approach necessarily uses existing structures in a community. As Giddens (1995, p. 28) maintains, knowledgeability of community members always is bounded—no one has the complete answer to every problem in every situation. The structures of the community prevent complete knowledge. Positive Deviance projects have explained further that outside 'experts' also lack the ability to provide complete solutions to problems, because such experts often have less knowledge of enabling and constraining structures than the local community does, and that 'expert' solutions are deficiency-based rather than asset-based—looking to provide what the community lacks, rather than working with existing structures to uncover solutions. Failure of 'expert' solutions is deficiency-based in that they lack recognition of a community's enabling structures, focusing only on constraining structures. This lack of recognition illustrates Giddens' (1993) contention that intent is only one communicative element; "every interaction also has a moral and power relation" (p. 125). The Positive Deviance Approach makes a concerted effort to uncover enabling structures, frequently within the power of local communities, which often "stare us in the face, but remain invisible in plain sight" (Singhal, 2013, p. 28). Such enabling structures are not uniform across communities and organizations but must be disembedded—"transformed and recreated" (Witmer, 1997, p. 324) from outside expert to local practice. As Singhal (2015) maintains, this disembedding is inherently a communicative practice.

Considering its demographics, Morgan certainly qualifies as a community that could employ the Positive Deviance Approach to convert and adapt structures first practiced in the National Kitchen to confront food insecurity. However, while the Positive Deviance Approach has proven successful in worldwide interventions, its implementation as an intervention through CKBU has proven challenging in Morgan. Integrating Structuration Theory with the Positive Deviance Approach leads us to the following questions:

RQ1: What themes emerge that identify hindrances to uncovering positive deviance behaviors?
RQ2: Within these themes, how have traditional organizing structures sustained privileged status in the masking of possible positive deviance behavior?
RQ3: Does the CKBU leadership team's interpretation of Campus Kitchens Project policies reinforce these traditional organizing structures?

Methods

Both authors became involved with CKBU in spring 2017 and engaged in various forms of qualitative research with the organization through spring 2019. We observed advisory board meetings, leadership team meetings, and biweekly meals and conducted unstructured interviews with volunteers, board members, community members, and school personnel in an attempt to develop a deeper understanding of the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1978, 1994). Between 2017 and 2019, the lead author attended 65 leadership team meetings, 40 biweekly meals, and four advisory board meetings. The second author attended 40 biweekly meals and six advisory board meetings. Meal days comprised three shifts, the first beginning at 11:00 a.m. and the last ending around 9:00 p.m. The lead author was present at each shift and was joined by the second author during the three-hour serving shift. Leadership team meetings and advisory board meetings lasted one hour. Combined, we conducted approximately 595 hours of participant observation.

During our three years of participant observation, both authors engaged in informal, unstructured interviews with people associated with CKBU. In an attempt to preserve the conversational nature of these interviews and to avoid limiting participation, the interviews were not audio recorded. Instead, the authors took extensive reflective fieldnotes immediately after each CKBU event, recounting conversations in as much detail as possible (Papa et al., 2005). This approach allowed us to focus on the natural emergent communication patterns within CKBU's operations rather than trying to fit those communication patterns into a specific analytic lens (Papa et al., 2005). After conversations with 17 student leadership team members, eight advisory board members, and over 200 CKBU meal attendees across the three years of our research, we produced a combined total of 120 single-spaced pages of handwritten reflective fieldnotes. We analyzed these data/capta through inductive thematic analysis, uncovering patterns, themes, and categories (Patton, 1990). In this process, we used the principles of interpretive interactionism (Denzin, 1989) to interpret the case.

Interpretive Interactionism

Interpretive interactionism is an ethnographic form of research that investigates and interprets individual or group situations involving epiphanies or crises in the lives of those concerned through a six-stage process (Denzin, 1989). Following Denzin, first we framed research questions, looking outward from ourselves to generate them. We found the deep structures of our questions about food insecurity and southern culture were rooted in a desire to understand better the residents of an underserved rural area. We made a preliminary investigation of the culture to ascertain problems that affect multiple lives, organizations, or social groups. *The lead author's* preliminary investigations of the region found 16.2% of Tenrah County residents classified as food insecure and 56.8% of households with children 18 years old or younger participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a). In querying how these experiences and associations occur and try to formulate a singular statement or research question that arrives at the heart of the experience, we ask the singular statement recommended by Denzin (1989) as RQ1: What themes emerge that identify hindrances to uncovering positive deviance behaviors? Interpretive interactionism's singular statement mirrors the determining question of positive deviance (Durá, 2015; Singhal, 2018; Singhal & Svenkerud, 2018, 2019), which seeks to identify who is at the highest risk, based on measurable data, yet succeeds in spite of overwhelming odds.

As Denzin (1989) directs, as a second step, we deconstructed of existing literature germane to the problem. Throughout this discussion of methodology, we attempt to locate ourselves in terms of the culture, to make apparent our interpretive positionality as communication academics.

Third, interpretive interactionism calls for researchers to capture data and/or experience(s) relevant to the epiphany or crisis (Denzin, 1989). The most common forms of interpretive texts that relate to epiphanies are self-stories (narratives) of cultural members (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The lead author engaged many cultural members in unstructured interviews during CKBU meals. The unstructured nature of these interactions was necessitated by time constraints and in an effort to keep our presence as unobtrusive as possible, developing rapport and trust with community members (Glesne, 2016; Papa et al., 2005). Further, we sought to challenge the archetypal "negative academic" who enters a community to gather data and disseminate knowledge (Chambers, 2014), opting instead to create space for natural conversations over shared meals.

The fourth step in interpretive interactionism is the bracketing process in which preconceptions of the researcher and of previous literature are set aside (Denzin, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1983; Van Manen, 1990). We endeavored to interpret the phenomenon (culture) in terms of itself, using the vernacular of key informants when possible (Denzin, 1989). As Ono and Sloop (1995) noted, vernacular language can provide communication researchers with much information and insight about the everyday lived experience and culture of participants.

The fifth step, construction, builds on the bracketing process (Denzin, 1989). Construction reassembles bracketed elements back into the whole in tandem with the information gathered during the

capture process. The goal of the construction process "is to recreate the lived experience of cultural members in terms of its constituent and analytic elements" (Denzin, 1989, p. 59).

Sixth is contextualization, where personal experiences are obtained and presented to embody essential features of the phenomenon as constituted in the bracketing and construction phases (Denzin, 1989). Contrasts and contradictions are not ignored as outliers but are woven into the fabric of the interpretation. The main themes that emerge are compared and synthesized. Denzin (1989) maintained that the key to contextualization is how lived experience alters and shapes the process under study.

Field Research

Beginning in 2017, CKBU hosted meals every other Thursday at Sinking Sands Presbyterian Church in Morgan, North Carolina. The meals attracted an average of 20 guests, all of whom were middle-class church members who wanted to support Ballard University's charitable efforts, save for one cluster of community members who frequented the church's food pantry. Meal preparation and delivery later moved to nearby Waxville Elementary, a result of the national Campus Kitchen Project's requirements for a facility with a commercial kitchen, which Sinking Sands Presbyterian did not have. With this move–less than five miles away from Sinking Sands–meal guest demographics underwent significant change (Waxville Elementary students, guardians, and staff became a majority of the guests), a phenomenon of which we will discuss ramifications.

After gaining access to CKBU's student leadership team in August 2017, the lead author watched the organization grow and migrate further into the heart of western Tenrah County. In observing the leadership team, she gained further insight into the day-to-day tasks of CKBU and learned more about the founding of the organization, which we discuss further in the next section. Her field research centered on conversations with guests over dinner at the biweekly meals that aimed not to follow a structured interview guide or administer a survey, but to gain some insight into a day in the life of a Tenrah County citizen. She also conducted internal field research, asking volunteers and leadership team members about their motivation for serving, their interpretation of CKBU's mission, and how their experience with CKBU measured up to their expectations. The second author attended meals and advisory board meetings as participant observer, noting the interactions between cooking and serving staffs and meal guests.

Prior to moving operations to Waxville Elementary, the process was the same at every meal: Within half an hour of the Serving Team's arrival at Sinking Sands Presbyterian, seven round tables were scattered around the room, the food was placed in the metal warmers outside the kitchen, and the meal was ready to be served. Guests quietly made their way to the serving line, holding out their plates to college students armed with hairnets, ladles, and Campus Kitchens Project aprons. Once the last guest sat down to eat, the volunteers were invited to fill up a plate and eat with the guests. That invitation rarely was accepted, as volunteers stood motionless behind the makeshift serving bar, seemingly confounded at the thought of crossing over to the other side. The second author's field notes record a small, rotating group of the students who quickly self-appointed themselves as health monitors, focusing on their desire to "cure hunger in Tenrah county"—at least by religiously monitoring the temperatures of food on the serving bar for one meal every two weeks. While we shared their desire to avoid ptomaine poisoning, these activities amounted to a technical appointment, serving to maintain distance and "offering up rituals that protect the status quo" (Gunderson, 2018, p. 149) between volunteers and guests. Such was the technical proficiency that the second author nicknamed one of the chief protagonists in this saga 'Captain Thermometer,' who could be observed, "Walking with purpose, temperature probe in hand, looking for temperatures to measure and record in the seemingly ever-present notebook" (Second author field notes, September 25, 2017). By focusing on the technical, these volunteers vanquished the pressures for communion and barred any hope for community.

As the lead author's peers graciously held down the fort in case anyone came back for seconds, she grabbed a plate and crossed the fifteen-foot chasm to the non-church-member table. There, in conversations over chicken soup or spaghetti or tuna casserole, research began. She learned about all the times *Zepplin*, a well-known drifter in the town, had wandered over to *Melanie's* house and laid on her

kitchen floor to await an ambulance after a drug overdose. She heard *Christina* and *Robbie* talk about their plans to work in a nail salon and a body shop after high school. She watched *Zena* put half of her casserole and pear cobbler in a to-go box to share with her five brothers when she and her parents returned home to their empty cupboards. Although the lead author was welcomed to sit at the table each time, she rarely was invited into the conversation, and rarely did she have anything relevant to contribute.

One of the lead author's most notable meals at Sinking Sands Presbyterian was shared with *Barry*, a World War II veteran struggling to support his wife and granddaughter. *Barry* and the lead author were first in line to get their chicken soup, and as the other guests made their way to the line, one of the well-dressed church members stopped by their table and said, "Welcome to the meal." *Barry* nodded and thanked her in between bites of soup and the lead author replied, "Thank you, I'm glad to be here." As she noted in her field reflections:

> It was then that I realized that none of the guests had been there to see me help set up tables, I wasn't wearing anything that identified me as a CKBU volunteer or a Ballard student, and I was really enjoying that chicken soup—as a guest. Much to my dismay, my immediate reaction was to let her know—somehow—that I was on the Serving Team. Thankfully, I held my tongue long enough to evaluate why I wanted to tell her that and quickly came to the realization that it was because I felt less important. Ashamed as I was at my arrogance, that moment uncovered the foundation for my research: what are the structures in place at CKBU that have built an ingrained hierarchy in which one group is expected to feel inferior to the other? (Lead author field notes, September 11, 2017).

As the meals transitioned from Sinking Sands to Waxville Elementary, the second author noted the change in the atmosphere:

> Antiseptic cafeterias don't build a lot of community even with a 100 health rating. . . . Except for [the lead author], no one engages guests beyond the serving line. Volunteers who eat segregate themselves, staff members of Waxville segregate themselves by rank (teachers do not interact with custodial or cafeteria staff) . . . and guests segregate themselves racially (Latina/o, African-American, Caucasian, and multiracial) and do not engage each other, sitting at different cafeteria tables (Second author field notes, January 23, 2018).

Remarkably, the second author later discovered Ballard administration's negotiations with Waxville school leadership limited attendance to school staff and students and their families.

Results

Emergent Themes

Through nearly three years of participant observation research and document analysis, the following themes of hindrances to Positive Deviant identification and amplification emerged in response to RQ1:

Theme 1: Strict Regulations from Traditional Structures (Ballard University, CKP, Waxville Elementary)

This theme affirmed the privileging of traditional structures question posited in RQ2. Just like any functional organization, CKBU has very clear structural layers, which, up to this point, have aided CKBU in establishing a presence in western Tenrah County. As the organization has evolved and grown, however, the structures have stayed the same. After changing its cooking and serving locations a few times as the founding leadership team members got their bearings, the Campus Kitchen at Ballard University secured a biweekly presence in the cafeteria of Waxville Elementary School near Morgan,

North Carolina. Every other Monday, CKBU invited the community in and around Morgan to share a meal in the cafeteria. In the final year of our research with the organization, CKBU built a limited yet strong volunteer base, reconstructed its leadership team, and served anywhere between 50 and 250 meals every other week. Why, then, has the Campus Kitchen at Ballard University—about to enter its fifth year of existence—struggled to make any headway in cultivating meaningful, lasting community? The organization did everything by the book—and that was part of the problem.

Whether concrete regulations or not, the perceptions of limiting structures was pervasive in the CKBU environment. The training manual given to each new branch of the Campus Kitchens Project contains information on food safety, cleaning procedures, volunteer recruitment tactics, and meal delivery etiquette. The section on how Campus Kitchen meals should look privileges kitchens in urban areas where it makes sense to deliver individual meals to individual clients. A significant disconnect arises when a Campus Kitchen is started in a rural area like Tenrah County, where "next door neighbors" often live miles away from each other. Because the Campus Kitchens Project is modeled after the D.C. Central Kitchen, there are no precedents or guidelines in the manual for how a weekly community meal might look. While the national organization does produce this manual for performing a Kitchen, local CKBU structures added more to constraining structures than did the Campus Kitchens Project. One of the lead author's reflective field notes describe the situation well:

> In my first year of involvement with CKBU, the classic excuse to avoid any nearly innovative community building suggestion was something along the lines of, "we have to do things by the book." One can imagine my surprise when I finally opened "the book" and found nothing regarding the type of coherent community atmosphere I hoped to help create at CKBU (Lead author field notes, April 23, 2018).

As Foucault (1979) maintained, disciplinary power is at its most powerful when it is internalized, as members of the initial leadership of the CKBU "assume[d] responsibility for the constraints of power . . . inscrib[ing] in him[/her]self the power relation in which [s/]he simultaneously plays both roles; [s/]he becomes the principle of his[/her] own subjection" (pp. 202–203). A majority of the three founding presidents of CKBU interpreted the manual as a recipe to "cure hunger in Tenrah County," although this goal never is stipulated in Campus Kitchens Project documents, two of the three presidents assumed the directive was there and created their own docile bodies. Their mission to "cure hunger" by serving one meal every two weeks constructed an atmosphere that precluded community formation and instead "subjected, used, transformed, and improved" CKBU (Foucault, 1979, p. 136). The third founder, jaded by this limited vision, gradually withdrew from CKBU activities. University oversight was complicit in the self-subjugation practiced by the remaining two presidents, aiming to maintain the kitchen as a student-led organization while not disturbing existing traditional power structures among community organizational partners like Sinking Sands Presbyterian or the Tenrah County school system.

Theme 2: Misinterpretation/Conflicting Definitions of CKBU's Mission

Theme 2 addressed RQ3's inquiry concerning the CKBU student leadership team's reinforcement of traditional structures. The founding presidents' incongruity about curing hunger led to the second emergent theme: The overwhelming focus on hunger diminished the Campus Kitchens Project's mission to address social issues holistically. The Campus Kitchens Project sums up its mission in three phrases: strengthen bodies, empower minds, and build community. The organization is rooted in asset-based community development, a strategy that champions long-term relationship over short-term charity to foster community-driven social change (van de Venter & Redwood, 2016). As Campus Kitchens' Expansion and Partnerships Manager Matt Schnarr affirmed founder Robert Egger's mantra at CKBU's kick-off breakfast in November 2016, "you're not going to cure hunger at the end of a spoon" (Schnarr, 2016, personal communication). At the D.C. Central Kitchen, the organization from which the Campus Kitchens Project diverges, most of the employees are educationally disadvantaged adults who have graduated from the D.C. Central Kitchen's culinary school. The Central Kitchen empowers minds and

builds community by placing meal preparation in the hands of their culinary school graduates and by delivering those meals to a list of clients in the area. At CKBU, the meal preparation teams were largely university students isolated from the Sinking Sands or Waxville communities, a distinction further explored in explication of theme three.

Differing views of food insecurity between the Central Kitchen and the rural areas where CKBU operates also illuminate misinterpretation and conflicting views of mission. For example, the D.C. Central Kitchen capitalized on the urban farming trend in recent years by teaching clients how to grow their own food in downtown apartments and suburban neighborhoods and by reclaiming food from local urban farmers. While this tactic may thrive in Washington, D.C., Tenrah County was a different story. In rural areas, farming is rarely a hobby; it is a primary source of income. Even in reaching out to farmers concerning food donations and gleaning opportunities, the CKBU leadership team has found that the few farmers with excess crops have already promised their surplus to other organizations.

Community bears a different definition in rural communities as well. The D.C. Central Kitchen's meal delivery strategy seems to have been effective in fostering community partnerships and engaging community members to recognize and solve problems in their area. However, as one of the few rural branches of the Campus Kitchens Project, one community building facet of CKBU's mission should be to bring people together physically in order to provide a space for conversations between community members. Because CKBU was a recent addition as a relatively new member of such a disjointed community, its leadership team members could not expect residents of western Tenrah County to seek out the organization of their own volition. Rather, CKBU should uncover preexisting social structures in the community in order to build on them and ultimately provide a central location for dialogue where there currently is not one. This uncovering hopefully could lead to understanding the determining question (Singhal, 2018) of social change in Morgan and western Tenrah County. As the Positive Deviance Approach mandates, change must originate from within the community at the hands of community members who are succeeding despite seemingly insurmountable odds. Although we are optimistic CKBU will be the place for these conversations to occur, in current praxis, community dialogue continues to be an evanescent desire.

Theme 3: Transience of CKBU Volunteers, or "I'm just here because…"

On an early day of CKBU's existence, when meal performances were at Sinking Sands Presbyterian Church, there were too many cooks in the kitchen—and many with no desire to be there. The second author recounts a group of fraternity brothers who volunteered for that day's cooking shift in a reflective field note:

> This early meal is one of tuna mac and cheese with a side of canned green beans from the Fishes and Loaves Food Pantry, and reclaimed bread from a regional bakery. The fraternity brothers are in charge of warming the bread, a task that they immediately attempt, two hours before announced serving time. They repeatedly try to appropriate the oven over the following half hour, at which point they announce that they must leave (at 4:30 p.m.), as they must eat before their evening class begins at 7:00 p.m. Ballard University has no classes that begin at 7:00, but there was a college basketball game that evening of regional and national interest (Second author, field notes, November 20, 2017).

The serving line that night sets precedence for the next three years: University students adorned in hairnets lined up behind a serving table, silently ladling a soup kitchen meal to silent patrons with little if any meaningful connection. One could theorize, following McCroskey (1976), that "communication apprehension would most certainly have a major impact on nonverbal communication behavior" (p. 44). It also follows that the silence could be interpreted as evidence of expectancy violations (Burgoon & Aho, 1982; Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Burgoon et al., 1979). Persistent and intentional fieldwork, however, pointed to transience and the perceived lack of anticipation of future interaction (Kellermann, 1986) that influenced both sides of the table. For the University students, CKBU was a quick chance to accumulate

service hours required by campus and fraternal organizations. For the guests, it remained a free meal from a faceless other. The locations mandated for serving contribute to this continued lack of community building opportunity.

Theme 4: Physical Structure of Serving Location

      The unfortunate divide exemplified in the serving line grew worse in the three seasons of CKBU during which we conducted field research. The physical structures of the serving location graduated from a church kitchen to an antiseptic elementary school cafeteria. Guests lined up and were reduced to Dickensian Oliver Twists, docile bodies perfectly trained to be in their subservient place—partitioned to recreate societal order (Foucault, 1979, p. 143).

      The physical structure of the Waxville Elementary cafeteria was protected by the cafeteria manager, consistently surveilling her cafeteria with hierarchical observation, enacting the first prong of Foucault's (1979) disciplinary apparatus. While Foucault's third prong, examination, often is implicit (or "panoptically unobtrusive;" see Foucault, 1979, pp. 195-228), the micropenalties of normalizing judgement were visible in the cafeteria kitchen at Waxville. These micropenalties ranged from which activities were permitted in the dining area to what cafeteria equipment was available for use by CKBU. At the last meal for which the second author volunteered, new signs were affixed to the ice machine (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Waxville Elementary ice machine
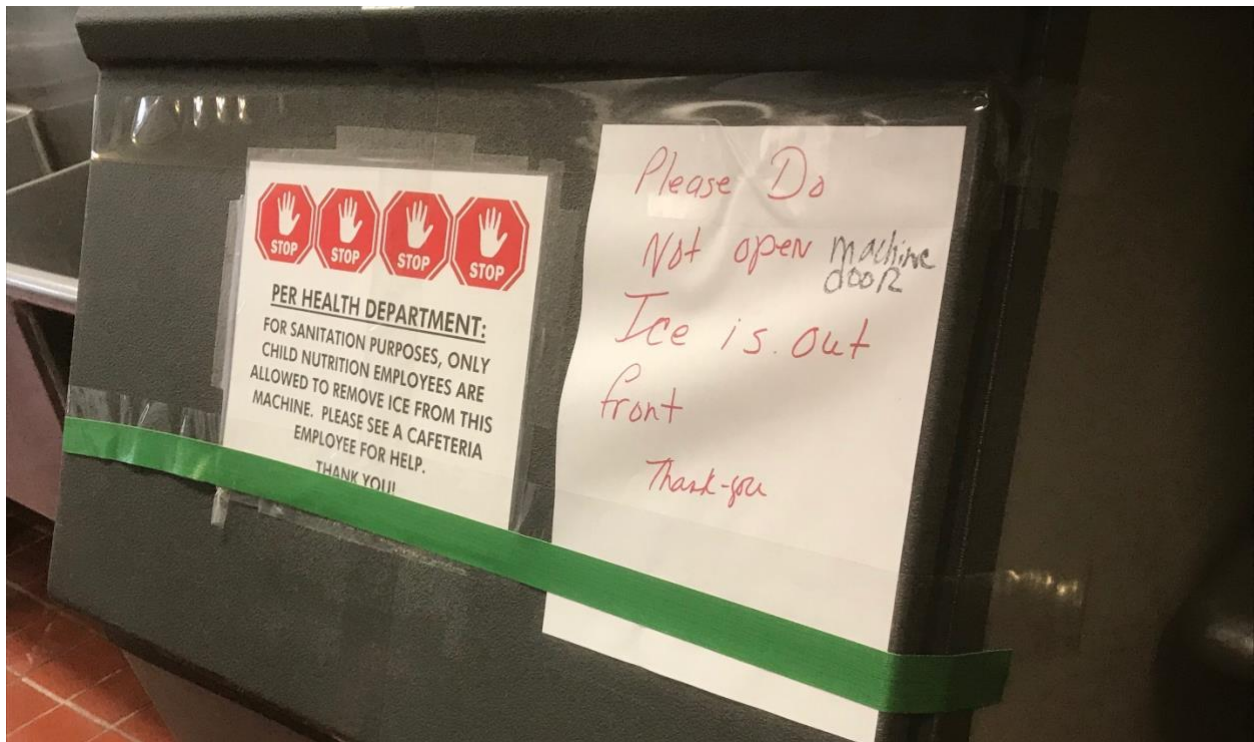
Note. The cafeteria ice machine, located on the back wall of the kitchen, is taped shut with two separate notes prohibiting anyone not on Waxville Elementary's cafeteria staff from opening it.

Neither the generic "Per Health Department" sign nor the handwritten instruction were enough. Tape was required. Although all CKBU shift captains were versed in Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points

(HACCP) guidelines (which address food management safety issues) per Campus Kitchens Project regulations, now ice was a restricted commodity.

The fixtures in the dining area of the cafeteria created an atmosphere not conducive to community. The long tables with hard, affixed stools precluded rearrangement for a more communal feel. The tables functioned as semi fixed-feature space (Hall, 1969; Jordon, 2001), adding one final nonverbal layer. The arrangement of the semi fixed features enabled the self-segregation of attendees, many of whom eat and leave without speaking a word to anyone.

In response to Research Question 2, our participant observation, informal interviews, and document review indicate that existing structures in the Tenrah County community limit the ability of asset-based, innovative solutions from diffusing in the region. For example, the limited guidelines from the National Kitchen Project that require a three-compartment sink in a commercial kitchen constrained the CKBU from fully integrating into the Western Tenrah county community. The only site that met these stipulations within a 15-mile radius was the cafeteria at Waxville Elementary. Despite the fact that the original site at Sinking Sands Presbyterian Church was engrained in the community and offered incredible potential for community partnerships (some of which we discuss in a later section), the National Kitchen prohibited continued meetings at Sinking Sands. The culinary-school-inspired urban structure of the National Kitchen did not translate readily into the rural setting of CKBU operations.

The National Kitchen structural limitations were miniscule obstacles that could have been surmounted easily if local structural constraints had not been present. Central actors in the performance of the CKBU were the county's two largest employers, the Tenrah County School System and Ballard University ([Tenrah]edc.org/top-employers.asp). In recent years, Ballard University leadership has made concerted efforts to work with rural and underserved populations (as evidenced in projects like CKBU), yet leadership remained complicit with other groups and organizations by failing to take a more activist stance. Ballard University is located in the rural South, and the residue of historical class and racial distinctions inherent in southern society remain. While these distinctions no longer are overt, they continue to operate forcefully, albeit invisibly (Foucault, 1979). This invisible power was evidenced by the limitations on who could attend the CKBU meals at Waxville Elementary. In agreeing with Ballard University's request to host the meals at Waxville, Tenrah County school administration stipulated that only Waxville children and their parents and Waxville school staff could attend the meals. Hence, attempts to communicate and interact with the larger community for engagement and social change were thwarted, and CKBU was relegated to a soup kitchen with extremely limited parameters. As Hall et al. (2014) maintain, such a traditional soup kitchen structure communicates clear division between volunteers and the people who are there for a meal.

In response to Research Question 3, CKBU student leadership reified these organizational structures as well. The three founding presidents of CKBU engaged in a struggle over direction in how to "end hunger in Tenrah County." Unfortunately, the limiting vision of two of the presidents prevailed. All three presidents came to the organization with differing backgrounds – differing majors, differing ethnicities, and differing religious traditions –but two of the presidents' visions united in a commitment to obey the letter of the law as dictated by National Kitchen guidelines. As the third president effectively was pushed out of the organization for dissenting from the "one-size-fits-all" model of the National Kitchen, lost was a vision of community and social change that could have made a difference in the area. The two presidents concurred with University and County stipulations in the move to Waxville to harmonize with the dictums of the National Kitchen. Their focus highlighted food preparation rather than community building and education, and communicated the reinforcement of existing social and political structures that continue separate different social groups in places like Tenrah County (An, et al., 2018; Atkins-Sayre, & Stokes, 2014) rather than encouraging self-produced local responses to overcome the structures (Turpin, 2017) concomitant with the Positive Deviance Approach.

Discussion and Implications

It is clear that the structures on which CKBU tried to build community had reached their enabling limit and had begun constraining any potential for growth over the course of this research. Granted, these structures helped CKBU progress in some ways: Organizations need structure to function, and the students on the leadership team made incredible strides in making CKBU a cultural beacon of social change (Durá et al., 2014) on Ballard's campus and in Tenrah County at large. The structure of a fully equipped elementary school kitchen facilitated safe and efficient meal preparation, and Waxville Elementary's preexisting familiarity in the community helped give CKBU some credibility. However, if CKBU does not transcend these structures, the organization will remain a conventional, charity-based soup kitchen.

It seemed that the root of these traditional structure issues was the two founding presidents' adherence to their limited ideas of the organization's main goal. One president saw potential for relationship-based community development, while the other two focused more on the potential 'savior-ism' of the organization. Unfortunately, the idea that 'won' was that CKBU's paramount purpose was to single-handedly cure hunger in western Tenrah County. Kramer and colleagues (2017) posited that "commitment to certain structures bolsters certain members' positions of power while limiting other options" (p. 432), a phenomenon that is clearly exemplified in the case of CKBU. As the two likeminded presidents worked together to establish CKBU's soup kitchen identity, the organization established a rhythm of reclaiming, cooking, serving, and leaving, every two weeks—minimal shallow community engagement—and, once that rhythm became structure, any suggestion for change was constrained.

Thus, the structures that need to be redefined first to allow for any positive change in the organization are the intangible social structures: the idea that a group of twenty-something-year-olds can swoop in and eradicate hunger across Tenrah County; the extreme reluctance by both volunteers and guests to cross the serving bar; the nearly palpable tension that arises when someone finally does cross the serving bar; and, perhaps most importantly, CKBU's strict adherence to "the book." If these structural constraints are not addressed, no amount of physical structural change—a new serving location, a new leadership team, a new organization altogether—will make a difference.

By creating unique conversation spaces through their biweekly meals, the Campus Kitchen at Ballard University had the potential to employ second-order change as a way to join the western Tenrah County community. Papa and colleagues (2005) cited Pearce (1998) in explaining that second-order change centers on creating environments for communication that otherwise would not be possible within communities. By forging conduits for dialogue among community members, "we are not just moving new players into positions on the board, but rather we change the board itself" (Papa et al., 2005, p. 246). Though food insecurity remains a rampant issue in Morgan, the end goal of CKBU cannot be to cure hunger. It can—and should – be to amplify the knowledge, narratives, and resources of the citizens of Morgan and the surrounding towns. It should deconstruct the normative power structures inherent in nonprofit organizing to create space for new, sustainable, community-centered practices. It should erase the lines between "server" and "served" by decentering CKBU's organizational interests in favor of the interests of the community, as defined by community members.

CKBU has a long way to go to reach these goals, but the potential remains. As one of the few rural branches of the Campus Kitchens Project, CKBU has an opportunity to rewrite the narrative of rural nonprofit organizing in a way that invites contributions from those most directly affected by their operations in the community. However, over the course of this project, CKBU reified many of the traditional organizing practices that have long plagued nonprofit work (see Clair & Anderson, 2013). For example, the shift away from serving meals at Sinking Sands Presbyterian Church represented a shift toward valuing quantity over quality (i.e., serving more meals at the expense of losing a constructive community partnership). CKBU served an average of 20 meals at each event at Sinking Sands, while the commercial kitchen and built-in population of Waxville Elementary allowed them to serve between three and ten times as many meals on any given night. So, as our research has shown, those structures that

enable larger events simultaneously constrain meaningful interaction between community members at CKBU meals.

To recall points made by Sadler et al. (2016), the structuration of government programs often hinders sustainable social change. Morgan is barely contained in the western corner of Tenrah County, placing it nearly 20 miles from Bunco, the county seat. The town's small size, coupled with its distance from the epicenter of Tenrah County government, reduces the Morgan community members' voice in their local government to a faint whisper. It follows, then, that government programs created based on the needs of slightly more urbanized Bunco would overlook the specific needs of fringe communities like Morgan. Thus, CKBU must strive to avoid becoming a "one size fits all," overly structured charity that ends up discouraging community collaboration, lest they inadvertently exacerbate the very issues they seek to help solve.

Potential for Positive Deviance

Interestingly, CKBU had a viable pathway to the application of the Positive Deviance Approach in their original serving location at Sinking Sands Presbyterian Church in Morgan. *Houten Milhouse*, the pastor of Sinking Sands Presbyterian Church, founded Fishes and Loaves Food Pantry, which works to reduce food waste in the surrounding area by reclaiming food from local businesses and working with local farmers who want to donate their extra crops. The pantry, stocked with more fresh produce than canned goods, feeds nearly 5,000 people every month (*Houten Milhouse*, personal communication). In addition to the Fishes and Loaves Food Pantry, *Milhouse* founded the Fishes and Loaves Thrift Store and the Fishes and Loaves Grill—both offshoots of the pantry that seek to reach further into the community— and the Solid Start Child Care program for parents with low incomes. In short*, Milhouse* saw needs in his community, saw ways to attend to those needs from the inside, and made them happen.

Milhouse was a positive deviant in Morgan because he promoted long-term relationships over short-term charity and operated from the belief that any sustainable change in a community must ultimately be championed by those who will be most affected by it (Pascale et al., 2010, p. 3). He was a community member who discovered how to utilize resources by deviating from the norm to produce a more sustainable result (Pascale et al., 2010). *Milhouse's* innovations using food that would otherwise go to waste mirrors CKBU's food reclamation framework, but *Milhouse's* understanding of and respect for the unique issues and resources in the community set his efforts apart as an example of successful positive deviance in the western Tenrah County community.

Another benefit to the Positive Deviance Approach is that the positive deviants' "perceived similarity with others in the community [grant] them trust and legitimacy" (Konovalenko-Slettli & Singhal, 2017, p. 24). Similarly, Wuthnow (2013) defined a leader not by their social status, but by the depth with which they engage with and care for the community. Wuthnow further described specific leadership values that are common in rural areas– trustworthiness, genuine investment, and meaningful social interaction. From what we gathered during interviews and informal interactions with community members, it is clear that residents of Morgan valued these leadership qualities more than they valued the type of formal, sterilized leadership emanating from CKBU. Thus, we posit that *Milhouse's* identity as a member of the community was key to his effectiveness; he proved his investment in the people of the area, and his fellow community members knew that the things that affected western Tenrah County affected him too. The organizations he founded were not simply drops in an ocean of halfhearted charity endeavors; they remain beacons of social change, breeding grounds for important conversations, community-centered spaces for members to learn from each other.

The juxtaposition between *Milhouse's* community-conscious presence in Morgan and CKBU's policy-conscious presence in Morgan suggests several practical implications for social change organizing in rural communities. Consistent with positive deviance praxis (see Konovalenko-Slettli & Singhal, 2017; Singhal & Svenkerud, 2018, 2019), *Milhouse's* privileging of situated, place-based knowledge created a sustainable foundation for multifaceted social change in Morgan. Meanwhile, CKBU's privileging of corporate policy and hegemonic structures that precluded full participation by community members

severely constrained their contribution to the community. Further, *Milhouse's* attention to the intersections of social problems (e.g., food insecurity, unemployment, lack of affordable childcare, etc. as co-constitutive) highlighted the shortcomings of CKBU's single-focus mission to end hunger and reinforced the facets of positive deviance that define social problems through an intersectional lens (Cho et al., 2013; Marsh et al., 2004). The brief partnership between CKBU and *Milhouse's* organizations reveals the potential for these two types of organizations to share resources and work together toward a common goal. Strict attention to detail and policy is not inherently a negative practice in social change organizing, nor is full participation on all levels inherently a positive practice in social change organizing (Dempsey, 2009). There is space between those two extremes, and we argue that the Positive Deviance Approach capitalizes on that space to facilitate sustainable, culturally informed social change.

CKBU and *Milhouse's* organizations (specifically the Fishes and Loaves Food Pantry) also offer insights into food-based community organizing and social change specifically. Barthes (1961/2013) claimed food as a signifier, a practice of communication. Food in the southern and rural United States communicates identity and can serve as a facilitator for change (Atkins-Sayre & Stokes, 2014; Papa et al., 2005), demonstrating both duality of structure (Giddens, 1993) and possibilities for positive deviance. A more robust and long-term partnership between an organization like CKBU and a positive deviant like *Milhouse* would showcase the potential for unique spaces of conversation—like community meals—to generate meaningful communication networks that allow subcommunities (e.g., university students, elementary school faculty, and long-term community residents) to coexist and work toward change within their community at large.

Limitations and Future Research

Both authors have been involved with CKBU since close to its inception, so interpretations may be skewed due to relationships formed through their close affiliations with the organization. As a participant observer with the student leadership team, the lead author had responsibilities that involved interacting with the Campus Kitchens Project representative assigned to Ballard's Campus Kitchen. These responsibilities limited her ability to challenge some of the pivotal structures imposed on CKBU by the national organization. The fact that the second author was not a college student presented challenges in that he may not have fully related to the volunteers as a peer. Although his children attend Tenrah County schools (at an elementary school 30 miles away from Waxville), his position as an academic at Ballard University may have precluded his assimilation or acceptance in to the Waxville community as a fellow Tenrah County parent.

Also significant is the fact that the Campus Kitchen at Ballard University is one small organization in one small community in the southeastern United States. Though rural communities often face similar issues, the underlying structures at the root of those issues may differ. For example, Tenrah County's position in the "Bible Belt" likely influences cultural practices of "volunteering," "service," and "community." When practiced appropriately, Long (2018) maintains that the evangelical culture of the region would support practices of "liv[ing] in right relationship with each other . . . [with] a sense of the purpose . . . to be a people whose life together, [is] an essentially social life (p. 291); a life that certainly would include food (Papa et al., 2005; Wenzel, 2016). However, some question evangelical 'conversion' culture as a limiting factor to service and community (Carter, 2007; Harmon et al., 2021; Kraft, 2015). Future research should address these possibilities in other communities, both within the southeastern "Bible Belt" region of the United States and beyond.

One catalyst for this study was to illustrate that "best practices" (e.g., the Campus Kitchens Project handbook) must be dynamic enough to change and grow as a community changes and grows. Thus, the findings in this study of Tenrah County are not applicable to every rural community experiencing food insecurity in the United States; those communities must identify their own positive deviants.

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A Dyadic Assessment of Romantic Partners' Disclosures during Stressor Conversations

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This study tested whether romantic partners' stressor disclosures mediated the association between commitment and relational satisfaction. A dyadic analysis of 54 romantic partners' stressor conversations found that disclosers and confidants were empirically indistinguishable from one another. Although disclosure amount was unrelated to relational satisfaction, both actors' and partners' disclosure accuracy and accuracy reciprocity (i.e., high similarity) were positively related to relational satisfaction. Actors' disclosure negativity was associated with relational dissatisfaction after the couples' stressor conversation. Commitment was unrelated to disclosure; however, actors' commitment was positively related to relational satisfaction. Results, as a whole suggest that when romantic couples discuss stressors, they should disclose accurately and positively to benefit their relationship.

Keywords: disclosure, commitment, relational satisfaction, romantic, dyadic analysis

Introduction

Within romantic relationships, there is a fundamental understanding that difficult disclosures will occur (e.g., Derlega et al., 1993; Petronio, 2002). Generally, the more romantic partners disclose to one another, the more satisfied they are with the relationship over time (Finkenauer et al., 2004). However, the topic of the disclosure likely matters. Disclosures during stressor conversations may contribute to relational *dis*satisfaction (e.g., Afifi et al., 2017); yet, romantic partners' disclosures about stressors can help manage the stress and contribute to obtaining social support (Willems et al., 2020). Common stressors in romantic relationships include finances, work, health, and aspects of the romantic relationship itself (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009). Therefore, this study explores *how* individuals disclose (e.g., Derlega et al., 1993; Pennebaker 1995; Petronio, 2002) and the impact of commitment (e.g., Derlega, et al., 1993; Rusbult & VanLange, 2008) to gain insight into how disclosure is associated with relational satisfaction during romantic partners' stressor conversations.

Literature Review

Stressor Disclosures in Romantic Relationships

Disclosure is the voluntary, intentional revealing of private information not already known by the confidant (Derlega et al., 1993; Omarzu, 2000; Petronio, 2002). Confidants typically are close relational others, such as family members or romantic partners (e.g., Coates & Winston, 1987; Pennebaker, 1995; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). In both dating and married romantic relationships, disclosure is associated with relational satisfaction (e.g., Brunell et al., 2007; Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000; Rosenfeld & Bowen, 1991), which is consistent with communication privacy management theory's (CPM) contention that disclosure is vital for relationship maintenance and satisfaction (Petronio, 2002, 2013). As CPM (Petronio, 2002) and other disclosure scholarship (e.g., Derlega et al., 1993; Willems et al., 2020) argues, relational satisfaction is affected by both the discloser and the confidant because disclosure is a dyadic activity in which both individuals have an active role.

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Discussing stressors requires revealing personal information related to the stressor or problem; therefore, individuals necessarily disclose during stressor conversations (Coates & Winston, 1987; Wills & DePaulo, 1991). Although disclosing difficult personal information is a basic expectation in romantic relationships (Baxter et al., 2001; Petronio, 2002), for stressors, disclosing does not always have a consistent positive outcome (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009). For instance, among college dating couples, when one partner talked about a stressor every day for a week, it decreased relational satisfaction (Afifi et al., 2017). Conversely, wives' stressor disclosures to their military deployed husbands were positively related to their own relational satisfaction, even when they thought it would put their husbands at risk (Joseph & Afifi, 2010). Some of the discrepancies may arise from how disclosure is studied. For instance, Afifi et al.'s (2017) participants were assigned to one of four conditions: talk about the stressor, avoid talking about the stressor, write about the stressor, or the control group, and Joseph and Afifi (2010) measured wives' general willingness to be open about their stressors to their husband. Therefore, it is unclear *how* the disclosure behaviors themselves affected relational satisfaction; there may be something unique about *how* disclosure occurs in stressor conversations.

How romantic partners disclose and respond during stressor conversations may be more important for relational satisfaction than whether or not they disclose (Pennebaker, 1995). While CPM focuses on the rules that influence peoples' disclosures (Petronio, 2002, 2013), the disclosure decision-making model (DD-MM) suggests that when disclosing about difficult or stressful health-related topics, the outcomes of the conversation depend, in part, on the characteristics of the disclosure (Greene, 2009). Disclosures can be characterized along several dimensions, including amount, accuracy, and valence. *Amount* refers to the quantity and breadth or how much is shared (Greene et al., 2006; Petronio, 2002; Wheeless, 1976). In intimate relationships, disclosure amount is positively related to relational satisfaction (e.g., Brunell et al., 2007; Gable et al., 2006; Rosenfeld & Bowen, 1991; Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). *Accuracy* captures the degree of sincerity and honesty of the information revealed (Greene et al., 2006; Wheeless, 1976). When exploring more general disclosures in married couples, the quality of disclosure content (such as its accuracy) explained more variance in relational satisfaction among married couples than the amount disclosed (Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000). *Valence* refers to the general tone or degree of positivity versus negativity characterizing the information revealed (Petronio, 2002; Wheeless, 1976). Highly positively valenced disclosures involve revealing enjoyable, pleasant, and rewarding information; conversely, highly negatively valenced disclosures convey unfavorable, sensitive, or upsetting information (Afifi et al., 2007; Gilbert & Horenstein, 1975). With some exceptions, highly negatively valenced disclosures are associated with lower relational satisfaction in romantic couples (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985; Bograd & Spilka, 1996; Kobak & Hazan, 1991). This suggests that disclosures during stressor conversations may involve large amounts of accurate, negatively valenced information. Thus, in line with Pennebaker's contention, examining the *how* of disclosure (i.e., amount, accuracy, and valence) may help explain the variations in the association between romantic partners' disclosures and relational satisfaction. This leads to our first hypothesis:

H₁: Disclosers' relational satisfaction after a stressor conversation will be positively related to their own disclosure (a) amount, (b) accuracy, and (c) negative valence.

Confidants

Both CPM (Petronio, 2002) and DD-MM (Greene et al., 2006) contend that people anticipate romantic partners will respond to their disclosures. Indeed, confidants (i.e., romantic partners) often feel compelled to respond (Derlega et al., 1993; Magsamen-Conrad, 2014). Disclosure responses are a confidant's immediate communicative verbal and nonverbal reply to a disclosure (Magsamen-Conrad, 2014). Disclosure responses can be characterized using the same dimensions of amount, accuracy, and valence. Confidants' disclosure responses influence both confidants' and disclosers' relational satisfaction (Afifi et al., 2013; Greene et al., 2006; Reis & Shaver, 1988). However, the specific dimensions of confidants' disclosures generally are not examined; therefore, the following research question is posed:

RQ₁: Are confidants' relational satisfaction after a stressor conversation related to their own disclosure (a) amount, (b) accuracy, and (c) valence?

Reciprocity

CPM (Petronio, 2002) and other scholarship on disclosure (e.g., Magsamen-Conrad, 2014) argue that one aspect of a disclosure response is reciprocity. Reciprocity often is conceptualized as the extent to which a disclosure response matches, or is similar to, the disclosure's characteristics (i.e., its amount, accuracy, and valence; Derlega et al., 1993; Greene, 2009; Omarazu, 2000; Petronio, 2002). In essence, one person serves as a model for the other regarding what is appropriate and fitting to reveal the conversation in terms of amount, accuracy, and valence (Rosenfeld & Bowen, 1991). Confidants may respond with disclosure amount, accuracy, and valence reciprocity to meet conversational expectations and maintain equity with the discloser (Derlega et al., 1993). Generally, romantic partners' relational satisfaction increases as the degree of similarity between disclosers' and confidants' disclosures increase (Meeks et al., 1998; Rosenfeld & Bowen, 1991). This indicates disclosure amount, accuracy, and valence reciprocity and relational satisfaction should be positively related.

Although there is a felt obligation to respond to disclosures, the traditional notion of reciprocity, or disclosure similarity, tends to be stronger in stranger relationships than in established, ongoing relationships (Derlega et al., 1993) in which there often is no expectation for high degrees of disclosure reciprocity (Willems et al., 2020). In romantic relationships, a confidant's disclosure may be responsive, or convey understanding, validation, and care by revealing personal information that is similar in terms of overall vulnerability, rather than disclose to a similar degree of amount, accuracy, and valence (Magsamen-Conrad, 2014; Reis & Gable, 2015). For instance, over the course of two weeks, individuals who disclose a high amount to a romantic partner report their romantic partner to be more responsive than people who disclose less (Pagani et al., 2019). Similarly, people are more responsive to partners' stressor disclosures when they perceive romantic partners to be responsive to their own stressor disclosures (Pauw et al., 2021). These studies indicate it is not similarity in amount, accuracy, or valence but similarity in vulnerability of the disclosure response that matters, which contradicts earlier research on disclosure reciprocity in romantic relationships (e.g., Meeks et al., 1998; Rosenfeld & Bowen, 1991). Therefore, we ask:

RQ₂: Does reciprocity characterize disclosers' and confidants' disclosure (a) amount, (b) accuracy, and (c) valence during stressor conversations?
RQ₃: Is the degree of reciprocity in disclosure (a) amount, (b) accuracy, and (c) valence related to disclosers' and confidants' relational satisfaction after their stressor conversation?

Commitment, Disclosure, and Relational Satisfaction

As CPM (Petronio, 2002, 2013) and the DD-MM (Greene, 2009) argue, disclosure and relational satisfaction are affected by the nature of the relationship. Relationship commitment, according to the investment model, motivates people to behave in ways that maintain the relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult et al., 1998). Commitment can be defined as a person's subjective belief about the long-term nature of the relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult et al., 1998). It conveys a vested interest in a partner's well-being and a willingness to cooperate (Rusbult et al., 1994). Commitment has been associated with relational satisfaction in everyday interactions and in times of stress and difficulty (Weigel, 2008; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2014). Further, according to the investment model, romantic partners' disclosures, including disclosures about difficulties or disappointments, should be explained by commitment (Rusbult & VanLange, 2008). Past research supports this contention. For instance, disclosure is positively related to commitment among college dating partners (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004) and married individuals (Stafford, 2010; Stafford et al., 2000). Among married partners, commitment is positively associated with the disclosure of general thoughts and feelings, the amount of

information disclosed, and disclosures about differences (Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000). Based on the foregoing, we test whether commitment predicts romantic partners' stressor disclosures:

> **H₂:** For both disclosers and confidants, commitment will positively predict disclosure (a) amount, (b) accuracy, and (c) negative valence during stressor conversations.
>
> **RQ₄**: For both disclosers and confidants, does commitment predict reciprocal disclosure (a) amount, (b) accuracy, and (c) valence during stressor conversations?

According to both CPM (Petronio, 2002, 2013) and the investment model (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult et al., 1998), a relationship's characteristics influence romantic partners' behaviors and relational outcomes; therefore, disclosure may mediate the influence of commitment on relational satisfaction. Indeed, actors' own communication with romantic partners mediate the effects of their commitment on relational satisfaction (Givertz et al., 2016). However, this is based on more general reports of disclosure rather than disclosure in specific stressor conversations and on correlational data. To explore whether disclosure during stressor conversations mediates the effects of commitment on relational satisfaction, we ask:

> **RQ₅:** For both disclosers and confidants, does disclosure (a) amount, (b) accuracy, and (c) valence mediate the relationship between commitment and relational satisfaction?

Partner effects

Romantic partners' behaviors and perceptions are inherently intertwined (Weigel, 2008), and "the ability to communicate self-relevant information is limited by interdependence" (Rusbult & VanLange, 2008, p. 2057). Because romantic relationships are an interdependent system, the behaviors and attributes of one person in the dyad can influence the outcomes of the other person; in other words, there are partner effects (Ackerman et al., 2011; Kenny et al., 2006). Partner effects help explain the interpersonal reality within which romantic partners act, understand, and respond to one another, and they provide insight into how cognitions and behaviors shape a conversation and influence a relationship (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). As theories on commitment postulate, romantic partners' commitment ought to affect the other's communication and satisfaction, even during times of difficulty (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult & VanLange, 2008; Weigel, 2008). Yet, Givertz et al. (2016) found only a small positive partner effect for wives' commitment on husbands' relational satisfaction and no partner effects for husbands' commitment on wives' relational satisfaction. Givertz et al. (2009) concluded that commitment is primarily associated with one's own thoughts and feelings about the relationship and not the partner's thoughts and feelings. Thus, the extent of partner effects is unclear. To explore partner effects, we ask our final research question:

> **RQ₆:** Do disclosers' and confidants' disclosure (a) amount, (b) accuracy, (c) valence, and (d) commitment affect partners' relational satisfaction after a stressor conversation (i.e., are there partner effects)?

Methods

Sample

Fifty-one heterosexual and three same-sex romantic pairs (*n* = 108 individuals) participated. The average length of the relationship was 2.5 years (*SD* = 1.9 years, 3 months to 9.5 years). The discloser (randomly assigned) was 23.56 years old on average (*SD* = 6.24; 18-44 years old). 46.3% identified as White, 20.4% as Hispanic/Latinx, 13.0% as Asian or Asian American, 7.4% as Black or African American, and 13% identified as other or multiple races. Although we recruited from a college student

population, 37% of disclosers were not enrolled in school at the time of participation, 14.8% were freshman, 22.2% were sophomores, 9.3% were juniors, 5.6% were seniors, and 3.7% were graduate students (4 did not answer this question). The majority of disclosers (61%) lived with parents or other family members (e.g., grandparent, cousin), 20.4% lived alone or with roommates, 2 did not respond, and remaining 8 lived with their romantic partner. Confidants' average age was 22.65 ($SD = 5.81$, 18-52 years old). 57.4% identified as White, 16.7% as Hispanic or Latinx, 13.0% as Asian or Asian American, 3.7% as Black or African American, and 9.3% identified as other or multiple races. 18.5% were freshman, 29.6% were sophomores, 31.5% were juniors, and 9.3% were seniors (6 did not answer this question). A majority of confidants (57%) lived with family members, 29.6% lived alone or with roommates, 8 lived with their romantic partner.

Procedures

Romantic couples were recruited from introductory communication courses at an urban, Western U.S., public, 4-year university designated as a minority serving (according to US Title III eligibility) and Hispanic serving institution (per US Title V eligibility). Recruitment occurred via in-class announcements and information posted in an online research participation system. Across both approaches, students were informed the study was investigating how people communicate about stressors with romantic partners (individuals they had been romantically involved with for at least three months; see e.g., Farrell et al., 2014), and they needed to recruit their romantic partner to participate with them. Romantic pairs scheduled an appointment to participate by contacting the first author or choosing from available times in the online research participation management system. The day before the appointment, both members of the pair received an email reminding them of the time, location, and purpose of the study.

Participation was completed in a 90-minute visit to an on-campus research facility resembling an apartment living space. When participants arrived, they were greeted by the first author or research assistant (RA) who guided participants through the study. Participants were asked to sit at separate tables, where participants provided informed consent. To start the study, participants individually completed a pre-conversation questionnaire, which assessed demographic characteristics and commitment. Then, they were presented the statement: "Stressors are things, interactions, or events that are taxing or difficult to deal with. Stressors may be normal and expected or may be unanticipated and surprising. Sometimes they are a daily hassle that you must deal with, and other times they can be major life events...These might be stressors you personally are trying to deal with, you and someone else are trying to cope with, or stressors someone else is trying to cope with that troubles you." This explanation, based on prior definitions offered by Folkman and colleagues (1986), was used to encourage participants to think broadly about their stressors. Participants individually brainstormed stressors they experienced within the previous six months. On a separate sheet of paper, they each wrote down one to five of the brainstormed stressors that they were willing to talk about with their romantic partner during the study and then indicated how stressful each stressor was for them personally.

The RA then had participants sit on a couch for several conversations. First, the romantic pair had a "warm up" conversation, intended to acclimate the participants to the research space. Next, the randomly assigned discloser chose one of the stressors off their list to discuss with the confidant. The pair was instructed to talk about the stressor just as they would at home, and then the pair was left alone in the room to talk privately. After 15 minutes, or earlier if the pair indicated they were done, the pair completed a second conversation in which the roles of discloser and confidant were switched and the procedures were repeated. This study uses data from the first conversation only to minimize practice effects. The stressors discussed in the first stressor conversation included familial and nonfamilial relationships (20.4%), academics and school-related activities (16.7%), work (14.8%), the romantic relationship (11.1%), money (9.3%), living arrangements (7.4%), car and transportation (7.4%), time management (5.6%), the future (5.6%), and health (1.9%); these are similar to stressors experienced by college students in past research (North et al., 2016). Conversations lasted between two and ten minutes.

After the conversations, participants were separated to complete a post-conversation questionnaire, which asked about their own disclosures, relational satisfaction, and several measures unrelated to the current study. Each measure was completed twice: The first half of the post-conversation questionnaire focused on the first stressor conversation and the second half of the questionnaire focused on the second stressor conversation. Each stressor was written at the top of the two halves of the questionnaire to help the participants focus their thoughts on each of the two conversations. After completing the post-conversation questionnaire, participants were debriefed, provided a copy of the informed consent, and thanked for their time.

Participants were compensated with course or extra credit if they were enrolled in a course in which instructors were offering the option (the amount of credit was at the discretion of the instructor but no more than 2% of the course grade); individuals not enrolled in a course offering credit were not compensated.

Measures

Commitment

On the pre-conversation questionnaire, both participants completed Rusbult et al.'s (1998) Global Commitment Scale, which was selected due to its established validity and reliability (Rusbult et al., 1998). Participants responded to the seven items (e.g., "I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my romantic partner.") using a 9-point scale (0 = *Do not agree at all* to 8 = *Agree completely*). After reverse scoring one item, the items were averaged; higher scores indicated greater commitment ($M = 7.89$, $SD = 1.07$, $\alpha = .87$).

Disclosure

On the post-conversation questionnaire, both participants reported their own disclosure during the stressor conversation using Wheeless' (1976) Revised Self-disclosure Scale. The measure was chosen because the items do not specify the topical content one reveals to a partner (Wheeless & Grotz, 1976) making it amenable to participants' conversations regardless of the stressor they discussed. Additionally, the measure allowed participants to report their own disclosures (Wheeless & Grotz, 1976). Participants responded to the items using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*). *Amount* was assessed via five items (e.g., "I talked about myself for fairly long periods of time"). Three items were reverse coded then all five items were averaged to obtain a single score; higher scores reflected a greater amount disclosed ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.22$, $\alpha = .72$). *Accuracy* was assessed with eight items (e.g., "I always felt completely sincere when I revealed my own feelings and experiences"). After reverse coding four items, the items were averaged, and higher scores reflected greater accuracy ($M = 5.78$, $SD = 0.98$, $\alpha = .83$). Six items captured *valence* (e.g., "On the whole, my disclosures were more positive than negative"). Two items were reverse coded, then the six items were averaged; higher scores indicated more negative disclosures ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.47$, $\alpha = .89$).

To assess the degree of correspondence, or the degree of similarity or dissimilarity, between two partners' responses on a measure, a dyadic index is necessary (Kenny et al., 2006). The dyadic index used to assess reciprocity in this study was a dissimilarity score. As Kenny et al. (2006) argued, a dissimilarity index (such as the one used here) assumes a perfect match between the two measures and the size of the dissimilarity score then reflects how different the two scores are. In other words, a dissimilarity score is useful when assuming partners act in highly similar ways (Kenny et al., 2006). Additionally, a dissimilarity score, as used here, is appropriate when the level, or average value across a set of items, is the focus of the investigation (Kenny et al., 2006). We calculated the absolute value of the differences between actors' versus partners' disclosure scores as they each reported for the first stressor conversation (e.g., amount reciprocity was calculated by taking the absolute value of the discloser's self-reported amount minus the confidant's self-reported amount). Thus, *smaller* values reflected *greater reciprocity*

(or highly similar scores), and *larger* values indicated *less reciprocity* (or greater dissimilarity between scores; Kenny et al., 2006).

Relational satisfaction

On the post-conversation questionnaire, both participants completed the Marital Opinion Questionnaire (Huston et al., 1986) to assess their romantic relational satisfaction after discussing the stressor. Directions asked participants to respond with respect to how they felt about their relationship following the conversation. The scale consisted of eight, 7-point semantic differential items (e.g., "miserable-enjoyable"). A final item provided a global assessment of relational satisfaction immediately after the conversation; response options ranged from "Completely dissatisfied" (1) to "Completely satisfied" (7). The eight items were averaged, with higher scores indicating greater relational satisfaction ($M = 6.13$, $SD = 1.70$, $\alpha = .97$); the eight-item average was strongly correlated with the single global item ($r = .77$, $p < .01$).

<div align="center">

Results

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Analytical Procedures and Preliminary Analyses

Analyses were conducted using SPSS 24. For all tests, we set alpha to .05 (i.e., when $p < .05$, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted). Preliminary analyses indicated disclosers' and confidants' perceived realism of the conversation, as measured by five items on a 7-point Likert-type scale (Afifi & Afifi, 2009; 3 missing cases of perceived realism were replaced with mean scores), was correlated with several variables and, therefore, included as a covariate in analyses.

To test the dyadic effects examined in H_1, H_2, RQ_1, RQ_3, RQ_5, and RQ_6, multi-level regression modeling (MLM) was used; MLM is ideal for interdependent data, an inherent characteristic of dyadic interactions (Kenny et al., 2006). Disclosers' and confidants' scores on all continuous variables were grand mean centered.

As a part of preliminary analyses for MLM, we assessed whether role in conversation and sex should be treated as distinguishing factors using maximum likelihood estimation (Kenny et al., 2006). All χ^2 results indicated that adding role or sex as a distinguishing factor failed to significantly improve model fit[1]. Because sex was not a distinguishing factor for the heterosexual romantic relationships, we included the same-sex romantic relationships in the analysis, leaving our sample for analysis at 54 dyads. Thus, MLM analyses treated individuals within dyads as indistinguishable. In other words, the models were the same for the discloser as the confidant and for males and females. Therefore, the discloser and confidant are not separated, and instead, we refer to actors (each individual's self-report of their own commitment, disclosure, and relational satisfaction) and partners (the effects of the romantic partner's commitment and disclosure). This allowed us to retain statistical power, which was important given the small sample (see Kenny et al., 2006 for discussion). Because disclosers and confidants were not unique, identifiable actors in the analyses (as initially assumed based on existing theory), H_1 and RQ_1 were revised into a single hypothesis (Revised H1): Relational satisfaction after a stressor conversation will be positively related to actors' and partners' own disclosure (a) amount, (b) accuracy, and (c) negativity.

Because of indistinguishability by role and sex, MLM with REML estimation procedures was applied, and we used compound symmetry with correlation parameterization as the residual structure (i.e., the model was constrained to have constant variance and constant covariance across actor and partner). Role in conversation (discloser vs. confidant) and participant sex (male vs. female) were effects coded

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[1] When sex was added as a distinguishing factor with disclosure valence as an independent variable and relational satisfaction as the dependent variable, data suggested sex did improve overall model fit. However, the model testing the hypotheses involving these variables failed to converge. Therefore, analyses treated individuals as indistinguishable and compound symmetry with correlation parameterization was used as the residual structure for all three disclosure models.

(due to indistinguishability). Perceived realism of the conversation was covaried in all MLMs by entering both participants' responses as the first two variables in the models (Hayes, 2006). For Revised H_1, RQ_3, RQ_5, and RQ_6 (which test effects of commitment and disclosure on relational satisfaction), three models were run: one for each disclosure dimension (amount, accuracy, and valence). Both actors' and partners' commitment, disclosure, and disclosure reciprocity were included. To test the effects of commitment on disclosure (H_2), three additional MLMs were tested. Each had disclosure amount, accuracy, or valence as the dependent variable.

For RQ_2 and RQ_4, MLM could not be used because reciprocity is a single outcome reflecting a dyadic-level characteristic. To answer RQ_2 (i.e., whether the disclosure in stressor conversations reflected reciprocity) three paired samples *t*-tests were used – one for each dimension of disclosure. To answer RQ_4, which asked if disclosure reciprocity was explained by commitment, three separate hierarchical linear regression models with ordinary least square estimation and non-centered variables were used (one regression model for each disclosure dimension). Actors' and partners' reports of conversation realism were entered as covariates in the first block, then actors' and partners' commitment were entered into the second block of the regression model.

Effects on Relational Satisfaction

Results for Revised H_1, RQ_3, and RQ_6, which tested the actor and partner effects of stressor disclosures and commitment on relational satisfaction, are summarized in Table 1. As the top third of Table 1 indicates, actors' and partners' disclosure amount (Revised H_{1a}) and disclosure amount reciprocity (RQ_{3a}) were unrelated to relational satisfaction. However, actors' commitment statistically significantly contributed to relational satisfaction, answering RQ_{6d} in the affirmative ($\beta = 0.257$, $p < .01$).

The middle third of Table 1 presents the results for the effects of disclosure accuracy. Disclosure accuracy had statistically significant actor ($\beta = 0.291$, $p < .01$) and partner ($\beta = 0.176$, $p < .05$) effects on relational satisfaction, supporting Revised H_{1b}. After controlling for the main effects of actors' and partners' disclosure accuracy, disclosure accuracy reciprocity was statically, negatively related to relational satisfaction ($\beta = -0.368$, $p < .05$), answering RQ_{3b} in the affirmative.

The bottom third of Table 1 presents the results for disclosure negativity. Revised H_{1c} was supported: As actors' disclosures became more negative, relational satisfaction decreased ($\beta = -0.199$, $p < .05$). Disclosure negativity reciprocity was unrelated to relational satisfaction (RQ_{3c}). However, actors' commitment was related to an increase in actors' relational satisfaction after the stressor conversation ($\beta = 0.216$, $p < .05$), answering RQ_{6d} in the affirmative.

Table 1.

Multilevel model results for relational satisfaction as predicted by actor and partner commitment, disclosure dimension, and disclosure dimension discrepancy (i.e., reciprocity).

	b	β	t (df)	Pseudo R^2
Model 1: Disclosure amount				0.118
Intercept	.139	0.000	.000 (49)	
Actor perception of conversational realism	-.030	-.032	-.344 (84)	
Partner perception of conversational realism	.038	.041	.434 (84)	
Actor self-reported commitment	.305	.257**	2.824 (85)	
Partner self-reported commitment	.157	.132	1.455 (85)	
Actor disclosure amount	.026	.027	.259 (65)	
Partner disclosure amount	.115	.121	1.160 (65)	
Disclosure amount reciprocity	-.095	-.093	-.737 (49)	
Model 2: Disclosure accuracy				0.360**
Intercept	.549	0.000**	.000 (49)	
Actor perception of conversational realism	-.117	-0.124	-1.465 (92)	
Partner perception of conversational realism	-.042	-0.044	-.524 (92)	
Actor self-reported commitment	.180	0.151	1.873 (93)	
Partner self-reported commitment	.063	0.053	.659 (93)	
Actor disclosure accuracy	.348	0.291**	3.359 (87)	
Partner disclosure accuracy	.212	0.176*	2.041 (87)	
Disclosure accuracy reciprocity	-.582	-0.368**	-3.728 (49)	
Model 3: Disclosure negativity				0.165
Intercept	-.023	0.00	.000 (49)	
Actor perception of conversational realism	-.025	-.026	-.294 (89)	
Partner perception of conversational realism	.043	.045	.505 (89)	
Actor self-reported commitment	.257	.216*	2.390 (85)	
Partner self-reported commitment	.121	.102	1.127 (85)	
Actor disclosure negativity	-.158	-.199*	-2.194 (80)	
Partner disclosure negativity	-.114	-.144	-1.580 (80)	
Disclosure valence reciprocity	.017	.015	.125 (49)	

Notes. $N = 54$ dyads; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Disclosure reciprocity

For RQ$_2$, the paired sample *t*-tests found no statistically significant differences between disclosers' and confidants' disclosure amount ($t(53) = 1.00$, $p > .05$, $r = -.202$, $p > .05$), accuracy ($t(53) = 1.971$, $p = .053$, $r = .202$, $p > .05$), or negative valence ($t(53) = 1.450$, $p > .05$, $r = .232$, $p > .05$). This indicated there were no differences in the amount, accuracy, or negative valence between actors and partners' disclosures during the stressor conversation. However, the correlations between actors' and partners' disclosure showed that amount, accuracy, and valence were not significantly correlated. As a whole, this provides mixed results for RQ$_2$.

Commitment's Influence on Disclosure

Results for H$_2$ are presented in Table 2. After controlling for both actor and partner perceived conversation realism, there was no evidence supporting H$_2$: Actors' and partners' commitment were

unrelated to amount, accuracy, or valence. Because of this, disclosure's mediating effects could not be tested. As such RQ_5 was answered in the negative: Disclosure (a) amount, (b) accuracy, and (c) negativity did not mediate the effect of commitment on relational satisfaction after a stressor conversation for disclosers or confidants.

Three hierarchical linear regression models tested whether commitment was related to disclosure reciprocity (RQ_4). Actors' ($b = .125$, $se = .209$, $\beta = .088$, $p > .05$) and partners' ($b = .109$, $se = .134$, $\beta = .117$, $p > .05$) commitment were unrelated to disclosure amount reciprocity. Actors' ($b = .041$, $se = .135$, $\beta = .044$, $p > .05$) and partners' ($b = -.161$, $se = .087$, $\beta = -.264$, $p > .05$) commitment were unrelated to disclosure accuracy reciprocity. Actors' ($b = .179$, $se = .194$, $\beta = .135$, $p > .05$) and partners' ($b = .043$, $se = .125$, $\beta = .050$, $p > .05$) commitment were unrelated to actors' disclosure negativity reciprocity. Thus, RQ_4 was answered with the null: There was no statistically signification association between commitment and disclosure.

Table 2.
Multilevel model results for disclosure dimension as predicted by actor and partner commitment

	b	β	t (df)	Pseudo R^2
Model 4: Disclosure amount				0.051
Intercept	0.009	0.000	0.000 (51)	
Actor perception of conversational realism	0.050	0.051	0.487 (87)	
Partner perception of conversational realism	0.173	0.174	1.674 (87)	
Actor self-reported commitment	0.119	0.095	0.932 (89)	
Partner self-reported commitment	-0.080	-0.064	-0.629 (89)	
Model 5: Disclosure accuracy				0.172**
Intercept	-0.002	-0.000	-0.00 (51)	
Actor perception of conversational realism	0.226	0.285**	3.063 (100)	
Partner perception of conversational realism	0.099	0.125	1.344 (100)	
Actor self-reported commitment	0.165	0.166	1.806 (101)	
Partner self-reported commitment	0.066	0.069	0.725 (101)	
Model 6: Disclosure valence				0.033
Intercept	-0.003	0.000	0.000 (51)	
Actor perception of conversational realism	-0.102	-0.085	-0.853 (101)	
Partner perception of conversational realism	0.119	0.100	1.000 (101)	
Actor self-reported commitment	-0.059	-0.039	-0.398 (102)	
Partner self-reported commitment	-0.191	-0.127	-1.285 (102)	

*Notes. N = 54 dyads; * p < .05, ** p < .01*

Discussion

Because disclosure helps manage stress and contributes to obtaining social support (e.g., Coates & Winston, 1987; Willems et al., 2020), improving our understanding of disclosure in romantic couples' stressor conversations is important. Therefore, this study examined how individuals' disclosures (Derlega et al., 1993; Greene, 2009; Pennebaker 1995) and commitment (Derlega, et al., 1993; Rusbult & VanLange, 2008) affect romantic couples' relational satisfaction after a stressor conversation. Although disclosers and confidants are indistinguishable from one another, results show that *how* romantic couples disclose during stressor conversations does, indeed, matter. While disclosure amount is unrelated to relational satisfaction after a stressor conversation, actors' and partners' disclosure accuracy and accuracy reciprocity (high similarity) are related to higher relational satisfaction, and actors' (but not partners') disclosure negativity is associated with lower relational satisfaction. Finally, commitment is unrelated to

all three dimensions of disclosure and disclosure reciprocity; however, actors' commitment is positively related to relational satisfaction after the stressor conversation. These results are discussed in turn.

Important to our results is the indistinguishability of the individuals in the stressor conversation. Disclosure theories assume disclosers and confidants are unique and identifiable (Derlega et al., 1993; Greene, 2009; Petronio, 2002) and men and women disclose differently (Dindia & Allen, 1992; Petronio, 2002). The lack of empirical distinguishability between disclosers and confidants and between men and women in this study is consistent with research examining how married couples disclose and respond to stressor talk (Pagani et al., 2019). Our results suggest romantic partners disclose and experience stressor conversations similarly. It is possible the topics discussed (e.g., academics, friends) are stressors for both individuals. Thus, although one person selected the stressor and was assigned to be the discloser, both were disclosers and both were confidants. The lack of distinguishability also may be related to the high commitment levels among the dyads, which on average was 7.89 on a 9-point scale. Elevated commitment levels may create a relational context in which the couples have a shared understanding and sense of shared responsibility towards one another, including one another's stress (i.e., a "what's yours is ours" mentality). Both individuals' beliefs about the long-term nature of the relationship may contribute to a sense that they are "in this together" and create a communal orientation towards stressors.

Another reason for the indistinguishability of the romantic partners (i.e., the discloser and confidant being statistically the same in these conversations) is the degree to which the partners identified the stressor as a communal one. A communal versus individual orientation to a stressor is defined by the extent to which a person experiences a stressor's effects and perceives its severity and implications (Basinger, 2017). A communal, as opposed to individual, orientation changes the way couples communicate and respond to it (Afifi et al., 2020; Lyons et al., 1998). Generally, greater support and shared efforts occur for communal stressors compared to individual stressors (Afifi et al., 2006). Although only one person needs to appraise a stressor as shared for relational partners to be implicated in managing it (Basinger, 2017; Lyons et al., 1998), partners may disagree about whether a stressor is communal or individual, which makes managing the stressor more difficult (Afifi et al., 2006). Due to the small sample size (54 dyads), we could not statistically test the extent to which the stressors discussed were listed by both partners on their recent stressor list and, thus, possibly communal stressors for the pair. The extent to which one's family or friends or schoolwork were communal stressors for the pair likely affected the way the couples disclosed and responded to one another. Future research should explore how partners appraise each other's stressors to better account for each persons' roles in the conversation; this may be relevant for related communication processes, such as social support and communal coping, as well as disclosure.

Although disclosers and confidants are indistinguishable in the current study, evidence supports the theoretical contention that *how* individuals disclose explains relational satisfaction (e.g., Greene, 2009; Pennebaker, 1995). Results show that actors' accuracy and valence, partners' accuracy, and dyads' accuracy reciprocity each uniquely contribute to relational satisfaction. Consistent with past research indicating that disclosure quality is important for relational satisfaction (Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000; Greene et al., 2012; Venetis et al., 2018), these findings indicate that when discussing a stressor, how much or how little is disclosed (i.e., amount) is irrelevant; rather, both individuals' disclosure accuracy and valence is vital. In other words, being genuine and earnest as well as positive is relationally satisfying during conversations about stressors. Stressors by definition are situations or experiences a person perceives to be taxing and difficult *and* for which they believe they lack the necessary resources or abilities to manage (Folkman et al., 1986); as such, they can be difficult to disclose because they inherently involve revealing personal weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Being completely forthcoming while also positive during conversations about stressors can be a challenging balancing act. Yet, these results suggest that doing so may be a means of expressing confirmation and support for the relationship and for one another in the face of difficulties, which may be how partners engage in disclosure responsiveness, defined as expressions of understanding, validation, and care (Magsamen-Conrad, 2014).

The current study's results also highlight the importance of dyadic interdependence, with partner and dyadic effects (reciprocity) emerging for disclosure accuracy. Individuals in a romantic relationship

create an interdependent system in which the attributes of one person influence the behaviors or outcomes of the other person (i.e., partner effects; Ackerman et al., 2011; Kenny et al., 2006). These results imply that disclosure accuracy begets disclosure accuracy; the more honest and sincere one person is during a stressor conversation, the more honest and sincere the other will be. Further, the more accurately a romantic partner discloses *and* the more similar a partner's accuracy to one's own disclosure accuracy, the more relationally satisfied one is. This finding is consistent with traditional norms of reciprocity stating that matching a discloser's disclosure is relationally satisfying (e.g., Derlega et al., 1993). However, the partner and dyadic effects only emerged for accuracy – not amount or valence. This suggests accuracy may play an especially important role in romantic couples' disclosures by conveying information about the stressor and one's experiences with it.

Although disclosure accuracy reciprocity is related to relational satisfaction, amount and valence reciprocity are not significant factors explaining relational satisfaction in the current study. This supports the idea that disclosure responses in ongoing relationships prioritize similarity in tone – the degree of vulnerability – through the expression of understanding, validation, and care (Magsamen-Conrad, 2014; Reis & Gable, 2015). Matching disclosure amount or valence may be viewed as changing the subject or disconfirming the other person's experiences. Thus, this pattern of results suggests there may be a felt obligation to match the disclosure's honesty and sincerity but manage disclosure amount and valence depending on the conversational topic and context. Empirically, these results suggest that, when studying multidimensional variables like disclosure, operationalizing each dimension rather than the construct as a whole may provide better insight into the dyadic process. Future research ought to consider identifying the conditions and disclosure characteristics that are best suited for reciprocity.

Prior theory (e.g., investment model, Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) and research (e.g., Givertz et al., 2016; Stafford et al., 2000) indicate commitment is associated with relational satisfaction through how individuals communicate with one another. Results support the direct effect between commitment and relational satisfaction: Actors' (but not partners') commitment prior to a stressor conversation is positively associated with post-conversation relational satisfaction. The actor effect and the absence of a partner effect suggests one's relational commitment is a useful tool for one's own understanding of a relationship but not for the partner's understanding of the relationship. In other words, although dyads' perceptions may be inherently intertwined (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008; Weigel, 2008), as Givertz et al.'s (2009) concluded, commitment is largely relevant for one's *own* thoughts and feelings about the relationship and *not* a partner's thoughts and feelings about the relationship. Further, commitment and relational satisfaction likely have a recursive relationship – one influencing the other in a cyclical manner. In fact, the investment model argues that relational satisfaction is an important factor predicting commitment (e.g., Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Le & Agnew, 2003). Thus, future research ought to continue exploring the directional, and possibly recursive, effects of commitment and relational satisfaction.

Although the direct effect is supported in the current study, the indirect effect is not. Neither actor nor partner effects emerged for commitment's influence on disclosure during stressor conversations; therefore, the influence of commitment may not occur through how individuals' disclosed during stressor conversations. These results are unexpected as past research indicates commitment is positively associated with communication behaviors that benefit the long-term maintenance of the relationship (e.g., Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004; Stafford et al., 2010; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2014). As a global characteristic describing the general nature of a relationship, commitment may not be relevant for specific behaviors in a particular conversation. Instead, it may better explain people's perceptions about how they generally behave and communicate (e.g., Ackerman et al., 2011; Weigel, 2008). Alternatively, commitment, as a motivator for acting in ways that show a vested interest in the relationship and partner (Rusbult et al., 1994), may be more salient when disclosures are used strategically to maintain the relationship compared to when it is used managing stressors (e.g., gaining catharsis, problem-solving, or seeking support).

Limitations

These results must be considered within the study's shortcomings. The sample was small with mostly heterosexual couples. Additionally, they were primarily university students living with their parents. Even though university students provide insight into how processes work (Peterson, 2001), the results reflect unique subsample of college-aged and largely college-enrolled individuals. Although couples indicated their living arrangements, marital status was not measured. Dating and married couples' commitment tends to differ (Givertz & Segrin, 2005). Interestingly, however, the romantic couples in the current study all reported high commitment. One's general sense of commitment may be relative – something evaluated based on previous romantic relationship experiences and age, as the married sample in Givertz and Segrin's (2005) study was about 8 years older than their dating sample and the current study's sample. Finally, we did not ask whether the couples had previously discussed the stressor. This is an important caveat because disclosers may have revealed a great amount about the stressor in a prior conversation, leaving less to disclose in the conversation observed in the current study.

Conclusion

Stressors are ubiquitous, and romantic partners are expected to serve as confidants when disclosing difficult personal information (Baxter et al., 2001; Petronio, 2002). Yet, because of the complexity of stressor conversations, our understanding of disclosure during these conversations is partial. The current study examined romantic dyads' perceptions of their stressor conversations to better understand how they disclosed and its influence on relational satisfaction. As a whole, results indicate that neither the level of commitment nor one's role as discloser or confidant matter when thinking about how to disclose during stressor conversations with a romantic partner; rather, both partners should disclose accurately and positively.

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My Grandmother, My Hero: Storytelling, Resilience, and Intergenerational Solidarity

Kari J. Pink

Storytelling is a means of deepening family connections across generations. Family stories tell of who we are and what we value, and they help us make sense of a family's experiences. Through autoethnography and poetry, I reflexively examine family stories about my grandmother's resilience and overlay them with similar circumstances in my own life. By reflecting on my own stories in counterpoint with those of my grandmother, I examine themes that emerge within our parallel stories. I then hold these themes up to Buzzanell's five processes for constructing resilience and provide amendments to three of the five processes. I argue that family storytelling can encourage intergenerational solidarity and sustain that sense of closeness long after family members have died.

Keywords: family storytelling, older women students, resilience, intergenerational solidarity, autoethnography

Introduction

> *I am 5 years old, and my grandmother has just arrived at our house from the Greyhound bus station in town. She will stay with us for three months, and during that time, she will take care of me while my mother goes to work. We will bake cookies, read books, and every day at 1:00 we will watch "As the World Turns," which my grandmother says is foolish but watches anyway. As we sit in the living room and my parents talk to Grandma about her trip, she reaches into her large vinyl purse and says, "Kari, I have something for you," and she pulls out a Kit Kat bar that is all mine. I feel like Charlie finding a Willy Wonka golden ticket.*

This is the grandmother I remember – the one who wore pantsuits on special occasions, canned peaches in the summer, and had the supper table set every day by 4 p.m. This grandmother is different from the one in my mother's stories. The grandmother I learned about through our family's stories is a woman who possessed incredible fortitude as she grew from a timid housewife to a successful teacher through her pursuit of education later in life. Through these stories, I have developed enormous admiration for my grandmother, and I have drawn on these narratives when facing similar situations in my own life. I, too, entered a career after years of staying home with my children and sought higher education as a nontraditional student to advance my career.

Much research has been done on family storytelling. Family stories tell us who we are and what is important to the families to which we belong (Byers, 1997; Koenig Kellas, 2005; Wyatt & Adams, 2014). "Family stories, or intergenerational narratives, create meaning that goes beyond the individual to provide a sense of self, through time, and in relation to family" (Driessnack, 2017, p. 439). Driessnack stated that this "intergenerational self" provides a context when dealing with life's challenges. Through the communication process of telling stories about events and experiences, families construct their collective history and identity (Huisman, 2014) while they create, express, and maintain small group culture (Langellier & Peterson, 2006). This communicative sensemaking process builds strength among families (Thompson & Schrodt, 2015). "Family stories illuminate the *content* (the details of 'what happened'), the *affect* (the 'how it felt'), as well as the *meaning* (the family's sense of 'why this happened')" (Kiser et al., 2010, p. 243).

Themes that emerge within family stories often focus on traumatic events that a family member endured and spotlight the strength of the person featured in the story (Byers, 1997). Similarly, Huisman (2014) found that family stories often focused on overcoming obstacles and challenges. These tales can

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underscore the values of the "American dream, the protestant work ethic, and bootstrapping" (Langellier & Peterson, 2006, p. 469). Langellier (2002) wrote that hard work was one of the themes that emerged as women remembered and mythologized their Franco American mothers and grandmothers. Indeed, stories that centered around family identity often idealized family members and intergenerational connections (Huisman, 2014).

Williams and Nussbaum (2001) pointed to intergenerational solidarity theory as an explanation for the enduring bond felt among children and their parents and grandparents. Bengtson and Roberts (1991) defined six essential components of intergenerational solidarity:

> (1) association (or contact); (2) affection (or emotional attachment); (3) consensus (or agreement); (4) function (or patterns of instrumental support or resource sharing); and (5) familism (norms or expectations of individual obligations to the family). The sixth element of solidarity, structure, refers to the "opportunity structure" for family interaction; the availability of members for interaction (p. 857).

Silverstein and Bengtson (1997) later narrowed the focus of this theory by boiling down these six components into three metacategories: affinity, or the "emotional closeness and perceived agreement between generations" (p. 433); opportunity structure, or how often generations come in contact; and functional exchange, described as the assistance generations provide each other. In other words, intergenerational solidarity depends on how much the generations like each other, how much time they spend together, and how much help they offer one another. I argue that family storytelling extends this effect beyond the lifetime of the family members. Stories increase one's affinity for previous generations, bring them into the present with each repeated telling of the stories, and serve the function of providing encouragement to younger generations.

Timonen et al. (2013) found that the formation of children had an enduring impact on intergenerational solidarity. The practices of how children are guided and formed are passed down and repeated by subsequent generations. Intergenerational solidarity is strengthened by generational intelligence, defined as "an ability to reflect and act, which draws on an understanding of one's own and others' life-course, family and social history, placed within its social and cultural context" (Biggs & Lowenstein, 2012, p. 2). It is through storytelling that younger generations come to understand the previous generations' life-course and history. Williams and Nussbaum (2001) argued that solidarity, which manifests in feelings of closeness and cohesion, is a communicative process, conducted through stories and everyday talk.

Resilience is a common theme in family stories, and Buzzanell (2010) contended that resilience is a collaborative process brought about through communication.

> Individuals and collectivities literally talk and enact five processes into existence: (a) crafting normalcy, (b) affirming identity anchors, (c) maintaining and using communication networks, (d) putting alternative logics to work, and (e) legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action. I offer these five processes as springboards for theory development and communicative interventions to foster resilience. (Buzzanell, 2010, p. 9)

In this paper, I examine Buzzanell's five processes of resilience as I seek to answer the following research question:

> **RQ:** How can family storytelling about resilience encourage intergenerational solidarity?

Method

To answer this research question, I employ autoethnography as I seek to gain empathic insight into my grandmother's views and experiences that have been related to me by my mother. As Tracy

(2020) stated, "Ethnographers in this tradition pay attention to how and why people talk their culture – their 'webs' into being," (p. 51). I examine this collection of family stories, reflecting on my grandmother's experiences and the context in which they occurred, while being mindful of my mother's role as both storyteller and active participant. I hold these stories up to my own experiences in counterpoint, as I self-reflexively explore how my own past serves as a filter through which I interpret these stories about my grandmother. It is my own experiences that guide my interpretation of the stories my mother shares about my grandmother, and our parallel experiences have given me a deeper sense of closeness to and solidarity with both my grandmother and my mother.

I chose autoethnography as a means of exploring this topic for several reasons, not the least of which was the opportunity to use an aesthetic quality that draws the reader in (Foster, 2014; Wyatt & Adams, 2014). As Ellis and Bochner (2006) put it, "I want to linger in the world of experience," (p. 431). Autoethnography is a way to dive deeply into a topic rather than skim the surface. Through stories that span more than 70 years, I compare my grandmother's experiences with my own. I share pivotal moments, or "epiphanies" as Ellis et al. (2011) called them. "When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 4).

Autoethnography allows me to combine elements of ethnography and autobiography as I reflect on my family stories. Adams and Manning (2015) pointed out that autoethnography is particularly well suited for doing family research for a number of reasons: first, it lets us see details of family situations to which we would not normally have access; second, it reveals everyday experiences; third, it allows the author to challenge misperceptions in previous research; and fourth, the storytelling style provides access to a broader audience. The use of accessible language and storytelling invites readers to step into the stories and compare them with similar experiences in their own lives (Berry & Patti, 2015; Wyatt & Adams, 2014). "Autoethnographic storytelling also often comes from and instigates moments of personal change and insight … Stories well told also create meaning that autoethnographers hope will be used by readers" (Berry & Patti, 2015, p. 266).

The use of poetic inquiry can take autoethnographic storytelling a step further, bridging the gap between art and social science (Faulkner, 2018; Owton, 2017). Poetry invites the reader into an embodied experience filled with description and emotion. Faulkner (2018) claimed that "writing reflective poems helps researchers ask more focused questions, and questions they may not have considered" (p. 214) while Owton (2017) stated that poetry can be part of the healing process as one attempts to let go of the past. In this paper, I have punctuated my stories with poems, knitting together my grandmother's and my similar experiences.

While research about family storytelling is plentiful, autoethnographic work about intergenerational solidarity and its relation to resilience is not. This is an area of opportunity that I willingly step into in order to extend research within the field of family storytelling. By looking at ways that family storytelling about resilience can encourage intergenerational solidarity, I show that family stories can have a profound effect on the recipient of those stories, providing encouragement and deepening connections across generations.

Our Stories

From Homemaker to Breadwinner: A New Identity

We have just finished our traditional Norwegian Christmas dinner, and a few meatballs and pieces of lefse remain. My mother and I linger at the table, and as always, the reenacting of these Christmas traditions stirs nostalgia, prompting her to tell me the story of a significant turning point in her childhood, when her family left the farm and moved to town. "I still remember so clearly the social worker sitting at our kitchen table during the summer of 1952 and saying to my mother, 'Mrs. Moe, there is nothing for you on this farm.' My father had died of a stroke when I was 9 years old. I was playing in

the living room when my dad walked in, and he just stood there with a glazed look on his face. That night was the last time I saw him alive.

"My older brother, Donald, was 18 when our dad died, and immediately the responsibility of running the farm fell to him because my mother couldn't raise five children and run the farm too. My sister Ellie was only 2 years old when our dad died. Curtis was 7, and Rachel was 13. Betty was 20 and was working as a teacher by that point. For four years, Donald milked the cows and harvested the tobacco, and when he got married, his wife, Myrna, lived with us, too. But then Donald and Myrna decided to move to her parents' farm, which was much bigger than ours.

"When Donald left us, it was like the sky had fallen. We had no income and no transportation because my mother didn't drive. She had taught school for a few years before she got married, so when the social worker came to our farm to assess the situation, she said to my mother, 'Mrs. Moe, you should return to teaching. You have some experience, and you could do that again. You would just need to enroll at the teacher's college that's about 30 miles away to get your certification."

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I am 30 years old, and I am standing in the public library, waiting while my two young sons look at picture books. I think about my latest difficult conversation with my husband. "Since you don't have a job, the boys would live with me," he had said the last time we stood at the edge of calling it quits. No, I can't lose the boys. I have spent the last eight years as a full-time homemaker, revolving my life around motherhood and wifedom.

I am just five credits shy of my bachelor's degree in communication. As a newlywed, I quit college to accompany my husband on what would be the first of five interstate moves in seven years. Now we are 800 miles away from that university and our families. Surely, I can find a way to finish my degree and get a job so I can provide for my children.

I see on the library's checkout counter a booklet that reads: "SUNY Brockport Summer Classes." I pick it up and thumb through the pages looking for communication courses. I know I need a public speaking course to finish my degree, plus a couple of other credits. I find "Persuasive Speaking" offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays at a university 40 miles from my home. It is my ticket out.

—

Buzzanell (2010) talked about affirming identity anchors as an important component of constructing resilience. She described an "identity anchor as a relatively enduring cluster of identity discourses upon which individuals and their familial, collegial, and/or community members rely when explaining who they are for themselves and in relation to each other." I contend that in the case of my grandmother and myself, we went beyond affirming identity anchors to *crafting identity anchors* as we strove for resilience. We each went from striving to be an ideal mother (Hampsten, 2019) who was constantly available for our children, to preparing to enter the workforce. Older women students are motivated to seek higher education either for intrinsic interest (they simply want to learn and expand their horizons) or instrumental interest (they need a marketable skill) (Diness, 1981). In my grandmother's and my cases, we both looked to education as a means of supporting ourselves and our families. "The woman's level of economic need, especially the distress of having to assume a family's support, seems to be associated with degree of instrumental interest in the field's career opportunities" (Diness, 1981, p. 209). My grandmother knew a teaching certification would lead to a job in the post-World War II era while I pinned hopes of financial solvency and independence on finishing my bachelor's degree.

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We strike out
Taking a step without knowing if the ground
Will be there when our weight shifts
But the ground behind us is gone
So we step forward

—

Home, Sweet Crappy Apartment: Foregrounding Productive Action

The dishes wait as my mother continues her story. "When I was a freshman in high school, we moved to town so that my mother could go to teacher's college. My sister Rachel had just graduated from high school and left for nurse's training, and Mother, Ellie and I moved into a tiny, one-bedroom apartment about the size of a thimble. We had to share a bathroom down the hall with other tenants, and we had a little two-burner stove in the kitchen. It was an upstairs apartment, and it would get stiflingly hot. I don't think we even had a fan. Mother and Ellie shared the bedroom – Ellie was just 6 at the time – and I slept on the pullout couch."

"What about Curtis?" I asked. "Where did he sleep?"

"There wasn't room for Curtis. He was starting seventh grade that year, and he went to live with Donald and Myrna. The evening after we had moved into that tiny apartment, Mother and Ellie and I were feeling pretty blue because we were missing our family – Donald, Myrna, Rachel, and Curtis – when we heard a knock at the door. We ran down the stairs to see that Donald and Curtis had come to visit us, and we were so happy to see them!"

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It's a cold Saturday in January when I move out of the four-bedroom, 2,500-square-foot spec home my soon-to-be-ex-husband and I had purchased just two years earlier. With his ample income, he can afford the $1,900-a-month mortgage. When I arrive at the two-bedroom townhome I've rented a few miles away, the landlord tells me that he will come back in a few weeks to fix the broken dishwasher and the half of the kitchen sink that drains onto the floor. "Be sure not to use that side, or the dishwasher," he tells me. "And I'll come by pretty soon and fix that burner that doesn't work on the stove."

"How about painting the place?" I ask. He shrugs, pretending not to notice the patches of spackle that hint at a paint job that someone started but never finished. The blue carpet on the stairs looks brown from a constant parade of dirty shoes.

After the landlord and the movers leave, my friends come to help. Jenny has put groceries in the fridge and is baking a pan of brownies, Val is unpacking box after box, and Leigh has dropped off an extra dresser I can use in the boys' room. Marlin cleans the carpet on the stairs, and when he finishes, he says to me, "You know, I think my wife and I looked at this very townhome when we first moved here a few years ago. But afterward she cried and said, 'I just can't live there!'"

The words hang like a bubble over his head as he realizes that he has implied what we all have so carefully avoided saying – my place is a dump. He quickly adds, "But it's much better now." I doubt it, but I am happy and relieved to be in my own space regardless of the condition.

—

According to Buzzanell (2010), another process in constructing resilience "involves the deliberate foregrounding of productive action while simultaneously acknowledging that the circumstances perceived as detrimental could legitimately provoke anger and other potentially negative feelings" (p. 7). For both my grandmother and me, the move from the family home into a cheap apartment required sacrifices we were willing to make to move our lives forward. For my grandmother and mother, this move represented a separation from family members, including 12-year-old Curtis. For me, it meant moving into substandard housing. The negative tradeoffs are clearly acknowledged in both our stories, but missing Curtis or living with a broken kitchen and peeling paint were not the focus of our stories. Instead, we highlighted the fact that these moves brought both of us closer to our goals of completing our education and starting a career.

—

We lay our sacrifices
On the altar of our futures.
What will we trade
For this new life?

—

A Little Bit of Pay: Creative Reframing

"After Mother finished that year of teacher's college, we moved into a bigger apartment, and Curtis came to live with us. Mind you, the apartment wasn't *much* bigger, but at least its one bedroom was big enough to hold two beds – for Mother, Ellie and me, so Curtis could have the hide-a-bed. Mother got a job teaching in a one-room country school. She didn't drive, so she arranged for the town taxi to take her out to the school in the morning and pick her up in the afternoon. I think she split the fare with another teacher or two, so it wasn't very expensive. She couldn't afford much at that time because the country schools paid very little – only about $3,000 a year, which even in 1953 wasn't very much!"

—

I am in the car, driving the 35 miles home from the first job interview I've had since finishing my bachelor's degree. The job is for an assistant editor position at a small publishing company. As I drive, I mentally calculate the pay that the owner offered. Let's see, $350 a week would be about ... $18,000 a year. I gasp. That's nothing! Even with child support, will that be enough for me to raise the boys?
As I drive, I call my friend who is a writer. "They offered me $18,000 a year," I explain. "Is that in the ballpark of what I should expect?" hoping she'll say no.
"Yeah, that's pretty much what you're going to get starting out as a writer. It doesn't pay a lot," she says.
I take the job and start my career.

—

A third process in constructing resilience involves "putting alternative logics or reframings to work" (Buzzanell, 2010, p. 6). By doing this, one can "incorporate seemingly contradictory ways of doing organizational work" (p. 6). I would take this process of constructing resilience a step further by including the process of putting *creative logistics* to work. My grandmother and I each started our careers with low-paying jobs. According to Dollartimes.com, $3,000 in 1953 is the equivalent of $19,550 in 2001, the year I started working at the publishing company. Essentially my grandmother and I were making the same amount of money as we started our careers nearly half a century apart. Even though our pay was low and our commutes were burdensome, we figured out how to make everything work. Arranging a taxi to take her out to a country school was certainly a creative logistic on my grandmother's part. For me, I eventually negotiated a shorter workday (Bowles et al., 2018) on the days my boys were with me and longer days when they were not, so I could be home when they got on and off the bus. These creative logistics were a critical part of our stories of resilience.

—

Bit by bit
The new life comes together
We inch upward
Thankful for the bits we have

—

Facing Fears, Finding Friends: Communication Networks

My mother cuts a leftover piece of lefse in half and nibbles it as we continue to sit at the table while she reminisces. "The country schools didn't pay much, but if a teacher had her bachelor's degree, the district was required to pay her more. So, every summer, Mother would take classes and work toward her degree, little by little. It took her about seven years to finish it, I think."

"Wait, so how old was Grandma when she got her bachelor's degree?" I ask.

"Let's see. That was 1960, so she would have been 57."

"Grandma was 57 when she finished her bachelor's degree?! That's amazing!"

"It wasn't easy for my mother to go back to school; she was so shy. A professor told her she shouldn't speak so apologetically – that she needed to have more confidence. In fact, I remember her telling us that when she had to give her first speech, she stood at the podium in front of the class and cried. She couldn't do it, and she had to sit down. But the young women in her class were very kind to her, and they took her under their wing. She really enjoyed those friendships that she made, and she kept those friends for many years."

—

It is the first day of my first class in the master's in communication program. I have decided that if I ever hope to advance in my career at the university, where I work as the campaign communications manager, I need to pursue an advanced degree. I am 49, and if I take just one class per semester (while working full time), I will graduate when I am 54. At this rate, I will finish the same year my daughter graduates from high school.

I look around the room and realize that most of the other students are younger than both my 26-year-old and 24-year-old sons. I feel so out of place. I am embarrassed by my age, and I am acutely aware of how different I am from the group. There is one other woman who looks like a nontraditional student, and even she is at least 10 years younger than I am.

Each week when I come to class, I remind myself, "Grandma was 57 years old when she finished her bachelor's degree. She was older than I am now. If she can do it, I can do it!"

A year later, as I begin my third graduate-level class, I still feel woefully lacking when I am teamed up with three PhD students for a qualitative research project. I don't know what "coding" means, I have never heard of IRB, and I certainly can't write roundabout sentences filled with academic jargon and five-dollar words. As I sit in the library with my groupmates, I jokingly warn them that I am not as experienced as they are, so they should not expect me to produce the same quality of work that I know they will be doing. Ben turns to me and says, "Kari, you are an intelligent, capable woman, and you need to stop selling yourself short. You can do this!"

A few weeks later, and as my husband and I are leaving a restaurant, I get a text.

"Hey, Kari! It's Ben. Tonight we're having our annual '12 Bars' ... and I'm sure you can assume what that entails but if you're free, you should join us for a drink (or your beverage of choice) and celebrate our work on the paper! Emily and I were talking today and we really think it is such a strong paper and I know that I am personally grateful for everyone's work we have contributed. So thank you for that!"

My husband and I decide to join them. I am 50. I am bar hopping with college students. And I feel included.

—

A fourth process in the construction of resilience is maintaining and using communication networks. Buzzanell (2010) wrote, "The process of building and utilizing social capital is essential to resilience" (p. 6). This network could mean family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers. A study by Orthner et al. (2004) showed that families constructed resilience through their "ability to pull together and

(depend) on each other when problems arose" (p. 165), while Taylor and Conger (2017) found that single mothers who felt supported by relatives felt better psychologically and thought their parenting improved. Communication networks for my grandmother and me included newly made friends as well as family, and the support of these friends was critical to both of us finding our way into our new life.

—

We are out of place
We are both the new kid and the old lady
There is too much new
Too much to know
"You'll be fine," they say
And we start to believe them

—

Achieving Success: New Normalcy

My Uncle Curtis, now 80 years old, has also shared stories of my grandmother's life journey, including her stories of success. As I spoke with him on the phone one winter afternoon, he recalled a favorite story: "I know the retired superintendent of schools where Mother used to teach, and he's up almost into his 90s, and when he sees me, he'll say, 'Your mother was a good schoolteacher.' My mother worked for him when she was in the elementary system here, and he probably doesn't remember that he's told me that a hundred times, but he keeps telling me again, 'Your mother was a good teacher!'" I could hear him chuckling over the phone.

—

I am standing in a banquet hall full of people celebrating our university raising more than $250 million in its multi-year fundraising campaign. It is more than double the last campaign, and for the past four years, I have kept busy writing copy, making videos, and redesigning our website. As I direct the photographer on what photos to capture of the VIPs in the crowd, I am approached by our vice chancellor of communications. "Kari, I want to tell you that my whole team and I are really glad that you were hired for this position," he says. "Everyone on my team says wonderful things about you."
"Thank you, Tom. You have a great group, and I love working with all of them."
"I mean it. You were the exact right person to take on this position because, pardon my French, you have your shit together."
I let the words ring in my ear, savoring the acknowledgment.

—

The last process in the construction of resilience that I will address is crafting normalcy. Buzzanell (2010) wrote of her observations, "New normalcies were literally created through talk and through maintenance of family rituals." I argue that new normalcies are not only important in the immediate aftermath of trauma, but that they continue on as *updated legacies* long after the trauma has passed. My grandmother is not remembered as a timid older student but rather as a competent, influential teacher. Instead of being seen as a former homemaker who came late to her career, I am viewed with respect and affection by my colleagues. As time goes by, these new normalcies turn into revised legacies that eclipse the past. Although I have amended Buzzanell's processes of resilience construction, she and her colleagues admitted that, "As much as there is no right way to tell a story, there is no right way to be resilient" (Betts, Hintz, & Buzzanell, 2021).

—

We have crossed a finish line
We have made it through the latest heat

Gasp for air, wipe our brow
It is our best time yet
For now

—

Discussion

The stories that my mother, aunts, and uncles have shared about my grandmother focus on resilience, the value of education, and the payoffs of persistence. My grandmother and I both experienced significant growth, coming out on the other side of adversity with a greater sense of wellbeing than we had before (Scali et al., 2012). I agree with Buzzanell (2010) that "resilience is developed, sustained, and grown through discourse, interaction, and material considerations." The stories about my grandmother's resilience after the death of her husband, losing her livelihood on the farm, and being separated from her adolescent son have given me a model to develop my own resilience in response to tough situations.

As Buzzanell and Houston (2017) asserted, reactions to trauma and stress can shift from coping and adapting to thriving and transforming. Both my grandmother and I moved beyond simply enduring difficulties. We grew, took on new challenges, and found success. Like the mother-daughter stories in Kranstuber Horstman's (2019) research, my grandmother's and my parallel stories focused on acknowledging the struggle, taking action, seeking silver linings, and finding strength in others (Kranstuber Horstman, 2019).

Our parallel stories of returning to school echo a theme common to so many older women students: lack of confidence (Diness, 1981; Limbart, 1991). "Showing up at college is an act of courage for returning women. When they walk onto a college campus their aspirations are pressing against a strong current of negative images about adult learning and the place of adults in higher education" (Fairchild, 2017, p. 3). Like the women in Fairchild's research, my grandmother and I kept focused on our goals and "gradually claimed (our) right to be part of the college community" (p. 10). This shared experience, although separated by many decades, has bonded my grandmother and me and increased my sense of solidarity with her as well as with my mother and her siblings who shared these stories.

I have heard many, many stories about my grandmother and her incredible life. Some, like the one about her surviving a normally fatal case of tetanus, make her seem superhuman. In a way she is. My grandmother is my hero. Even though she died when I was 18, the stories that my mother and others have shared with me about her in the decades since have made me admire and appreciate her more than I did as a child grateful for my own Kit Kat. For my family and me, storytelling has encouraged intergenerational solidarity.

Limitations and Future Directions

While this autoethnography delved deeply into one family's experience of family storytelling, resilience, and intergenerational solidarity, the field would benefit from more autoethnographic studies in the same vein to determine if others share similar lifelong experiences. Research could also be advanced through a qualitative study of family storytelling and intergenerational solidarity using surveys, interviews, or family focus groups to elicit rich responses from a variety of participants. Although this autoethnography gave an in-depth look at one family, it is limited to a single family's experience. Because many of my family stories were shared with me after my grandmother died, this study did not benefit from direct communication between my grandmother and me. Further research could explore the role that middle generations play in enhancing solidarity between their older and younger counterparts.

In conclusion, this autoethnography has illustrated many specific ways my own bond with my grandmother has been enhanced through storytelling. By comparing our parallel experiences, I have shared specific moments of epiphany in both her life and mine. My mother's willingness to share stories about her younger life and the struggles my grandmother endured has resulted in a stockpile of stories

from which I have drawn encouragement when facing struggles in my own life. My mother not only gave me stories, she gave me a hero.

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Communication Patterns, Host Receptivity, and Psychological Health in the Process of Cross-cultural Adaptation: A Study of Korean and Indonesian Expatriate Workers

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The present study examined the communication patterns and the adaptation experiences of Korean expatriates in Indonesia, and Indonesian expatriates in South Korea. Based on Y. Y. Kim's (1988, 2001, 2005, 2018) Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation, six hypotheses were developed linking four key factors: host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, host receptivity and psychological health. Numeric data was collected in a questionnaire survey among Korean expatriates living in Indonesia and Indonesian expatriates living in South Korea. As predicted, the results indicate that expatriates with higher levels of host communication competence and more active engagements in interpersonal communication with host nationals experience greater psychological health. The results further show the perceived receptivity of the host environment influencing the adaptive experiences of both groups.

Keywords: host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, psychological health, host receptivity, Korean expatriates, Indonesian expatriates

Introduction

The business environment is increasingly global. Because of the strategic importance of global markets and the management of subsidiaries, many companies dispatch their employees across borders. As temporary sojourners, expatriate workers immerse themselves and navigate an unfamiliar cultural environment in order to accomplish an assigned job with the intent of eventual return. The benefits of a successful international assignment include increased international business in the global marketplace as well as individual career progress through developing talent, extending networks, and increasing confidence. The inability to adjust to a foreign cultural environment, rather than a lack of technical competence, has been noted as the major contributing factor for ineffective performance and even premature return (Stroh et al., 2005). When expatriate managers perform poorly but remain in their international assignment, this can have negative ramifications on the organization's performance, reputation, and relationships (Harzing, 1995).

For these reasons, expatriate adjustment has been extensively researched over the past few decades. Numerous studies have identified specific factors that promote expatriate adjustment, including individual job, organizational and situational issues (e.g., Malek et al., 2015), personality traits (e.g., Shaffer et al., 2006), spousal or family adjustment (e.g., Trompetter et al., 2016), culture novelty (e.g., Jenkins & Mockaitis, 2010), cultural intelligence (e.g., Guðmundsdòttir, 2015), previous experience (Takeuchi et al., 2005), and training (e.g., Okpara, 2016).

Along with these factors, Black and his associates proposed a conceptual model to examine the process and mechanisms of expatriate adjustment (Black et al., 1991). The model categorized three types of predictors of expatriate adjustment: individual characteristics (demographic characteristics and prior international experience), the context (spouse or family adjustment and cultural novelty), and job-related

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factors (job role clarity and greater role discretion). The model identifies three distinct dimensions of adjustment: (1) work adjustment: adjustment to job responsibilities and supervision and successful accomplishment of work goals; (2) interaction adjustment: adjustment to socializing and maintaining successful relationships with host nationals in a host country; and (3) general life adjustment: adjustment to the general environment, such as housing and food.

Even though the above-described studies and conceptual model offer useful information on many of the specific issues of practical concern, they are largely descriptive in approach without seeking to explain the sojourner adjustment phenomenon from a systematic theoretical perspective. Thus, the present study seeks to add clarity and depth to the current theoretical understanding of expatriate adjustment. We do so by employing Y. Y. Kim's (1988, 2001, 2005, 2018) Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation. Incorporating macro- and micro-level factors into a single, comprehensive communication framework, Kim's theory offers a multidimensional and multifaceted account of the cross-cultural adaptation phenomenon in which an individual's ability to communicate and engage with local people in the host country is explained as a key factor driving his/her successful adaptation.

Whereas most of the previous studies are on North American and European expatriates, this study investigates the adaptation experiences of two groups of Asian expatriates, South Koreans and Indonesians, residing in each other's home countries. Since the Indonesian-Korean strategic partnership agreement in 2006, Indonesia has emerged as an important economic and diplomatic partner for the Korean government (Indonesia-Korea Partnership, 2017). At the time of this study, approximately 2,000 Korean companies and 9,000 Korean employees were working in Indonesia (KOTRA, 2018), compared to 47,000 Indonesians residing in South Korea. Amongst them, 33,961 are Indonesian migrant workers, 1,524 are students, and the rest are mixed including married, professionals, and others (Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Indonesia, 2018).

Theory and Hypotheses

Grounded in an open systems perspective, Kim's (2001) Integrative Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation brings together and consolidates several previously separate and divergent approaches into a comprehensive conceptual frame to explain cross-cultural adaptation phenomena. By placing adaptation at the intersection of the person and the environment, Kim defines cross-cultural adaptation as "the entirety of the phenomenon of individuals who, upon relocating to an unfamiliar sociocultural environment, strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment" (Kim, 2001, p.31).

Kim's theory offers a multidimensional structural model (See Figure 1) to address the question: 'Why do some settlers adapt faster than others?' or 'Given the same length of time, why do some settlers attain a higher level of adaptation?' The structural model identifies key factors that may facilitate or impede the adaptation process in a culturally different environment. Emphasizing the centrality of communication as the core of cross-cultural adaptation, the theory posits that the individual adapts to the host environment through various communication activities, ranging from intrapersonal (or personal) to social (interpersonal/mass communication), which are identified as the dimension of personal communication, or *host communication competence* (Dimension 1) and *host social communication* (Dimension 2).

Kim (2001) describes *host communication competence* as the overall capacity of the stranger to decode and encode information in accordance with the host communication system. It consists of the cognitive, affective, and operational (or behavioral) capabilities of an individual, which is deemed as the very engine that makes it possible for an individual to move forward along the adaptive path. *Host communication competence* is inseparably linked with *host social communication* (Dimension 2), which is the degree of engagement in the host social communication system through interpersonal and mass communication activities of the host environment. *Ethnic social communication* (Dimension 3) involves interpersonal and mass communication with coethnics in the host society. There are three key conditions to the *host environment* (Dimension 4): *host receptivity, host conformity pressure,* and *ethnic group*

strength. The theory also identifies the individual's *predisposition* (Dimension 5), comprised of three key characteristics prior to their resettlement in the host society: *preparedness* for the new environment, *ethnic proximity* (or distance), and *adaptive personality*.

The theory explains that these five dimensions of factors influence one another and, together, they facilitate or impede *intercultural transformation* (Dimension 6), the overall adaptive change taking place within individuals over time. The three key facets of the overall adaptive change taking place in individuals over time: increased *functional fitness*, *psychological health,* and *intercultural identity*.

Figure 1.

Y. Y. Kim's Structural Model: Factors Influencing Cross-Cultural Adaptation
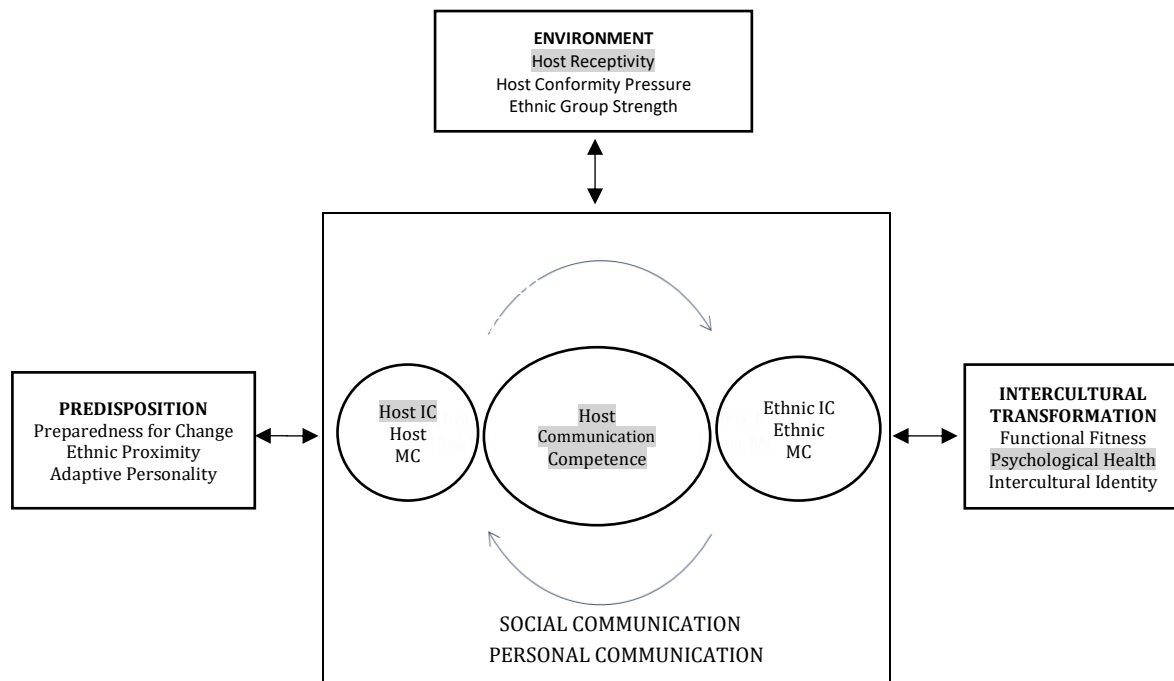
IC: Interpersonal Communication; MC: Mass Communication

 Source: Y. Y. Kim, 2001, p. 87.

The theoretical relationships among key constructs are presented in 21 theorems (See Kim, 2001, pp. 91-92). As highlighted in Figure 1, the present study examines five of these theorems addressing the four factors investigated: host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, host receptivity, and psychological health.

> **Theorem 1:** The greater the host communication competence, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.
> **Theorem 3:** The greater the host communication competence, the greater the intercultural transformation (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity).
> **Theorem 5:** The greater the host interpersonal and mass communication, the greater the intercultural transformation' (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity).
> **Theorem 7:** The greater the host receptivity and host conformity pressure, the greater the host communication competence.

Theorem 8: The greater the host receptivity and host conformity pressure, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.

Based on these five theorems identifying the interrelationships between the four factors examined in this study, the following six research hypotheses were proposed.

H1: The host communication competence of expatriate workers is positively associated with their psychological health.
H2: The host interpersonal communication of expatriate workers is positively associated with their psychological health.
H3: The host communication competence of expatriate workers is positively associated with their host interpersonal communication.
H4: The perceived host receptivity of expatriate workers is positively associated with their host communication competence.
H5: The perceived host receptivity of expatriate workers is positively associated with their host interpersonal communication.
H6: The perceived host receptivity of expatriate workers is positively related to psychological health.

Methods

The six research hypotheses have been tested based on the survey data collected between September and December 2018. A standardized and self-administered questionnaire was developed to collect numerical data from two expatriate groups: Korean expatriates in Indonesia and Indonesian expatriates in South Korea. The questionnaire survey was followed by one-on-one personal phone interviews in order to provide in-depth, qualitative insight into host environmental factors vis-à-vis individual adaptation experiences within the two groups. The theoretically driven observations arising from the structure and standardized survey (outsider's view) were strengthened by the in-depth personal interviews that yielded information on the practical aspects of participatory experience in the field (insider's view). This integrative methodology allows for a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the adaptation process.

The Survey

The targeted number of participants was approximately 100 from each group for the study. To recruit the participants, a combination of the convenience sampling method and the snowball sampling technique was used. Due to the inaccessibility and/or difficulties in obtaining cooperation with eligible respondents as a result of their tight work schedules, this method was a practical alternative to probability-based sampling. While providing incentives might have improved the participation in the current study, due to budget constraints, no incentives were provided. Korean participants were recruited with the assistance of the Korean Expatriate Association and managers of two companies with whom the first author had prior personal contacts. In addition, respondents who completed the survey were asked to name additional potential participants. A total 150 questionnaires were distributed, of which 86 (57.3%) were completed and returned. Ten of the returned questionnaires were removed due to excessive unanswered questions, and the remaining 76 questionnaires were used for the present analysis.

In the absence of a comprehensive list of Indonesian expatriates residing in South Korea, the first author contacted three organizations: The Indonesia Student Association in Korea, The Korea Muslim Federation Busan Branch, and the Asian-Korea Center in Seoul. Questionnaires were distributed in person and via email depending on accessibility to the organizations and the preferences of the participants. In the case that authors were allowed to visit a meeting of organization, the questionnaires were administered and collected in person. If participants preferred email delivery, the questionnaires

were distributed and collected using email. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed, of which 84 (56%) were completed and returned. Of the 84 questionnaires from Indonesians, 3 were excluded due to excessive unanswered questions, and the remaining 81 questionnaires were used for the present analysis.

The Participants

The 76 Korean participants' ages ranged from 25 to 71 ($M = 44.17$, $SD = 11.00$). Most of them (65, 85.5%) were male and 59 (77.6%) of them were married. Most had earned at least one college degree: 61 undergraduate (80.3%), 13 graduate (17.1%), along with 2 high school (2.6%). The Korean participants' lengths of residence in Indonesia ranged from one month to 45 years ($M = 14.09$, $SD = 9.65$). Regarding prior intercultural experience, 18 (28.6%) had lived in a foreign country or countries while 45 (71.4%) had no experience at all. In terms of prior training experience, 25 (39.1%) had received training while 39 (60.9%) had not received any training prior to their international assignment.

The 81 Indonesian participants consisted of 43 expatriates working at companies in Korea and 38 students. All 38 Indonesian students were government workers in Indonesia who were working in agencies and companies in Korea while attending university as part of a government exchange program. This warranted the inclusion of this group of students into the category of expatriates. Their ages ranged from 19 to 40 ($M = 27$, $SD = 4.81$), with 45 (55.5%) male and 55 (67.9%) married. The educational degrees they had earned consisted of 35 undergraduate (43.3%), 16 graduate (19.8%), and 29 high school (35.9%). The lengths of residence in Korea ranged from one month to 12 years and eight months ($M = 2.42$ years, $SD = 2.08$).

Regarding the Indonesian participants' prior intercultural experience, 17 (24.6%) had lived in a foreign country or countries, while 52 (75.4%) had no experience in a foreign country at all. About one-third of them, 20 (30.3%) had received training prior to their assignment in South Korea.

The Questionnaire and Measurement Scales

An original version of the questionnaire was initially developed and pilot-tested between May and August 2018. The wording of the questionnaire was refined based on comments and suggestions from the pilot study participants. For Korean participants, the questionnaire was first written in English and translated into Korean by a Korean-American bilingual interpreter. The Korean questionnaire was then back-translated by the bilingual interpreter. For the Indonesian version, the questionnaire was translated into the Indonesian language ("*Bahasa Indonesia*") by an Indonesian bilingual interpreter. The Indonesian version of questionnaire was also back-translated by the bilingual interpreter. Both English and Korean versions were given to the Korean participants, and they were asked to choose between them. All the participants chose the Korean version. Both English and Indonesian versions were also given to the Indonesian participants, and all the participants chose the Indonesian version.

The four theoretical constructs examined in the present analysis (host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, host receptivity, and psychological health) were mostly operationalized into five-point Likert-type scales.

Host Communication Competence
Kim's theory (2001) identifies three dimensions of this construct: cognitive, affective, and operational. Each of these dimensions was assessed in the present study. To assess the cognitive dimension of host communication competence, respondents were asked to assess their *knowledge of host culture*. A five Likert-type scale was used (1 = not at all; 5 = completely): (1) "I understand Indonesian/Korean) cultural norms"; (2) "I understand Indonesian/Korean cultural values"; (3) "I understand how Indonesians/Koreans communicate nonverbally, such as through facial expression and body language"; (4) "I understand how most Indonesians/Koreans express themselves verbally; and (5) "I understand Indonesian/Korean ways of thinking." A reliability test of the five-item scale yielded a

Cronbach's alpha of .91 for both the Koreans and the Indonesians, suggesting a high level of internal consistency.

The affective dimension of host communication competence was measured with a five-point Likert-type scale of *adaptation motivation* (1= not at all; 5= very much). The five items were: (1) "How interested are you in understanding the way people behave and think?"; (2) "How interested are you in making friends with Indonesian/Korean people?"; (3) "How interested are you in knowing about the current political, economic, and social situations and issues of Indonesian/Korean people?"; (4) "How interested are you in learning Indonesian/Korean language?"; (5) "How interested are you in adapting to Indonesian/ culture?" The combined five-item scale yielded the Cronbach's alpha of .86 for the Koreans and .89 for the Indonesians.

The operational dimension of host communication competence was assessed by the *behavioral competence scale*, comprised of eight five-point Likert-type scale items (1 = totally disagree; 5=totally agree). The scale measured the participants' self-assessments of their effectiveness in communicating with and relating to local people in the host culture: (1) "I am able to avoid misunderstanding with Indonesians/Koreans"; (2) "I am able to achieve what I hope to achieve in my interactions with Indonesians/Koreans"; (3) "My communication usually flows smoothly when interacting with Indonesians/Koreans"; (4) "I can get my point across easily when I communicate with Indonesians/Koreans"; (5) "I am flexible enough to handle any unexpected situations when interacting with Indonesians/Koreans"; (6) "I have difficulty establishing personal relationships with Indonesians/Koreans"; (7) "I feel awkward and unnatural when I communicate with Indonesians/Koreans"; (8) "I find interactions with Indonesians/Koreans challenging." Because the last item did not highly correlate with the rest of the items, this item was dropped from the scale to improve reliability. The reliability tests yielded an alpha of .91 for the Koreans and .71 for the Indonesians.

Interpersonal Communication

Host and ethnic interpersonal communication were measured by the participant's interpersonal ties with host nationals as well as co-ethnics/other groups and the degree of intimacy of their informal and formal social relationships. The participants were asked to indicate the percentages of people with whom they had relationships in each group (e.g., Indonesians, Koreans, and others) and the corresponding levels of closeness (casual acquaintances, casual friends, close friends). The reliability test for *host interpersonal communication* yielded an alpha coefficient of .76 for the Koreans and .90 for the Indonesians. For *Ethnic interpersonal communication,* the alpha coefficients were .74 for the Koreans and .86 for the Indonesians.

Perceived Host Receptivity

The perceived host receptivity was assessed by seven five-point Likert-type scale items (1=totally disagree; 5 = totally agree). The seven items measured respondents' perceptions of the attitude of host nationals toward them. Items were: (1) "Indonesian/Korean people accept me into their society"; (2) "Indonesian/Korean people discriminate against me"; (3) "Indonesian/ Korean people have a positive attitude toward me"; (4) "Indonesian/Korean people see me and my country favorably"; (5) "Indonesian/Korean people are genuinely interested in associating with me"; (6) "Indonesian/Korean people are indifferent to me"; (7) "Indonesian/Korean people are rude to me." The combined seven-item scale has yielded Cronbach's alphas of .88 for the Koreans and .77 for the Indonesians.

Psychological Health

The construct, *psychological health*, was assessed by six items pertaining to the overall sense of well-being (or lack of it) the participants were experiencing in the host environment: (1) "In general, how satisfied are you with your present life in Indonesia/Korea?"; (2) "In general, how comfortable do you feel living in Indonesia/Korea?"; (3) "How rewarding is your life in Indonesia/Korea?"; (4) "How satisfied are you with the attitudes of Indonesian/Korean people toward you?"; (5) "How satisfied are you with your relationships with Indonesian/Korean people?"; (6) "How satisfied are you with your

experiences in Indonesian/Korean culture?" The combined six-item scale has yielded Cronbach's alphas of .87 for the Koreans and .83 for the Indonesians.

The Interviews

The questionnaire survey was followed by in-depth one-on-one interviews with both Korean and Indonesian participants. 15 Koreans and 15 Indonesians were selected from survey respondents based on age and experience. We tried to maximize probability of balancing potential interviewees as best as possible from larger group of people for this study in terms of age distribution and years of experience distribution.

For the Korean group, the age cohorts were divided into three different levels such as low (25-40 years old), middle (41-50 years old), and high (51+ years old). The length of experience was also divided into three levels: low (1 month -10 years), medium (11 years-20 years), and high (21+years). For Indonesian groups, the age was divided into low (19-25 years old), middle (26- 35 years old), and high (36+ years old). We selected 15 interviews from each group so that the chosen interviewees could represent the whole range of ages of each group. Additionally, interviewees were selected to try to represent the range of experience level as best as possible.

All interviews were conducted by the first author in their phone, using an internet phone service. The Korean interviewees were interviewed in Korean. The interviews took approximately 40 minutes to 1 hour each, and they were recorded with interviewees' consent.

In beginning the interview, the first author shared his personal experience of working overseas as an expatriate manager to help build rapport and trust. With a shared understanding of expatriation and a sense of emotional connectedness, the interviewees were willing to openly share their opinions and impressions of Indonesian people and society. Additionally, using the Korean language enabled the interview to run more smoothly and also allowed the respondents to express nuanced and authentic answers.

It is not completely clear whether or not there was an interviewer effect due to the interviewer sharing the same ethnic origin and using the same language (i.e., Korean). The authors believe that overall the interviews ran smoothly, and the interviewees were comfortable answering the questions. Moreover, the interviewer's status as a faculty researcher from the U.S. positioned him as an "outsider," and he had no prior personal relationship with the interviewees. As mentioned previously, the interviews were conducted over the phone which poses fewer negative effects since visual cues, such as race or facial expressions, cannot be observed and so do not affect the response (Groves & Kahn, 1979). Additionally, the interview questions did not address sensitive topics such as opinions on Korean people, racial issues, or politics. These types of questions could have potentially prompted respondents to give socially desirable responses.

Finally, for interview data analysis, multiple coders were used to avoid culturally biased interpretations. Two American faculty members who work in the same department as the first author were invited to code and interpret the interviewees' transcribed verbal responses. As experienced researchers who understand the communication study and have no preconceived opinions on Asian cultures pertaining to this study, they were able to show an impartial and objective attitude towards the data. After their initial analyses, the coders cross-referenced their results with the other coders. If any disagreements arose, they engaged in discussions to resolve the differences. Coders checked for alternative explanations and verified more literature sources to finalize the analysis. For example, coders discussed the need to be cautious around interpreting "lack of multi-tasking skill" and "a slow-paced work style" as incompetence. Another concept that was up for debate was "putting individual business first over company", with the final decision to not code it as a lack of loyalty to the organizations.

The Indonesian interviews, however, were conducted in English. It would have been desirable to recruit an Indonesian interviewer to conduct the interviews, but using English in these interviews was deemed a reasonable alternative, given time and budget constraints as well as the fact that most Indonesian interviewees possessed strong English skills.

The interview questions were originally written in English. Interview questions for the Koreans were translated into Korean and the Korean version was back-translated into English by a bilingual Korean. Open-ended questions were used to solicit the interviewee's thoughts on the topics corresponding with each of the four main research variables: host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, perceived host receptivity, and psychological health.

 Accordingly, the open-ended questions addressed issues pertaining to each variable: (a) observations of differences and difficulty in communicating with local people and coping strategies (host communication competence) (e.g., "Are there any difference between working with Koreans/Indonesians and working with Indonesians/Koreans?"; "Have you ever experienced difficulties in communicating with Korean/Indonesian people in and outside of the work environment?"); (b) experiences of interacting with local people (host interpersonal communication (e.g., ''Of all your daily conversations (at work or outside work), approximately what percentage of them do you have with Koreans/Indonesians? ''What kinds of socializing do you do with Koreans/Indonesians''); (c) perceptions of the host environment such as local people's attitudes and treatment toward the interviewee and toward fellow country men and women (host receptivity) (e.g., "What was one of your first impressions about Korea/Indonesia and Koreans/Indonesians upon arriving in this country?" "What do you think about the attitude of Koreans/Indonesians toward foreigners in general?"); and (d) pleasant and unpleasant life experiences in the host country (psychological health) (e.g., 'What are some of the positive/unpleasant experiences you have had while living in Korea (Indonesia) so far?'' ''Overall, how are you feeling about your present life in Korea (Indonesia) in regard to your experiences interacting with Koreans (Indonesians) in and outside work?'' "If you have another chance to work overseas in the future, would you like to come back to Korea (Indonesia) again?'').

Follow-up questions were extensively used to delve into each topical area such as, "if there are, can you tell us what they are?"; "if no, would you elaborate more on that?"; and "if yes, why do you think so? Please tell me your specific experience."

Results

The numeric data collected from the questionnaire survey was analyzed in two stages: (a) descriptive analysis to examine the distribution of data on the key research variables; and (b) statistical tests of the six research hypotheses. The textual data obtained from the one-on-one interviews were analyzed to provide the expatriates' own narratives that illustrated the theoretical relationships in each of the hypotheses. All questions and responses to open-ended questions of interviews were transcribed in their entirety.

After transcription, the verbatim data was grouped into common categories based on the salient themes emerged when themes or patterns are repeated throughout the transcript. The author organized these themes manually into the categories of communication difficulties, interpersonal contact and communication, and perceptions of host environment. Finally, both authors cross-checked the categories of the themes and verified the interpretation of the results by comparing them to one another. For each group, if around 10 out of 15 cases from interviewees' responses are repeated, we presented them as predominant responses in each relevant theme in the interview results.

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis examined the distribution of data on the key research variables in terms of the means and standard deviations pertaining to the Koreans, the Indonesians, and the overall sample, as well as t-test results comparing the two groups' means.

Host Communication Competence
The three measures of host communication competence include *knowledge of the host culture* ("cognitive dimension"), *adaptation motivation* ("affective dimension"), and *operational competence*

("operational dimension"). The overall means for all participants (both Koreans and Indonesians) are: 3.38 (*SD* = .78) on *knowledge of the host culture*, 3.66 (*SD* = .77) on *adaptation motivation*, and 3.53 (*SD* = .66) on *operational competence*.

When comparing for their respective means, the Koreans show a slightly higher and statistically significant mean score (*M* = 3.59, *SD* = .72) than the Indonesians (*M* = 3.17, *SD* =.77) (*t* =3.48, *df* =151; *p* < .01) in the level of the *knowledge of host culture*. On *adaptation motivation*, the Koreans show a slightly higher and statistically significant mean score (*M* = 3.79, *SD* = .66) than the Indonesians (*M* = 3.53, *SD* =.84) (*t* = 2.14, *df* =153; *p* < .05). On *operational competence*, the Koreans also show a slightly higher and statistically significant mean score (*M* = 3.87, *SD* = .64) than the Indonesians (*M* = 3.22, *SD* =.51) (*t* = 7.04, *df* =153; *p* < .01). These findings suggest that the Korean expatriates are slightly more knowledgeable about and motivated to adapt to Indonesian culture as well as more capable of interacting with Indonesian people than the Indonesian expatriates are with Korean culture and people.

Host Interpersonal Communication

For the combined sample of both Korean and Indonesian participants, the overall means score of *host interpersonal communication* is 25.89 (*SD* =16.65). In comparing respective mean scores, the Korean expatriates are found to be significantly more involved with host nationals than their Indonesian counterparts. The Korean expatriates report 31.25 Indonesian friends (*SD* =15.88) while Indonesian expatriates report an average of 21.24 Korean friends (*SD* =15.98). Each of these mean differences is statistically significant (*t* = 3.76, *df* = 142, *p* < .01).

Ethnic Interpersonal Communication

For the combined sample of both Korean and Indonesian participants, the overall mean score of *ethnic interpersonal communication* is 59.85 (*SD* =19.88). In comparing respective mean scores, the Korean expatriates are more likely to be engaged in relationships with co-ethnics (i.e., other Koreans) than their Indonesian counterparts. The Koreans expatriates report 64.02 Korean friends (*SD* =16.54) while Indonesian expatriates report an average of 56.22 Indonesian friends (*SD* =21.85). Each of these mean differences is statistically significant (*t* = 2.39, *df* = 142, *p* < .05).

Perceived Host Receptivity

For the combined sample of both Korean and Indonesian participants, the overall mean score was 3.61 (*SD* =.64). In comparing respective means scores, the Korean expatriates show a slightly higher and statistically significant mean score (*M* = 3.94, *SD* = .60) than their Indonesian counterparts (*M* =3.33, *SD* =.53) (*t* =6.34, *df* =137; *p* < .01).

Psychological Health

For the entire sample, the mean score of psychological health is 3.40 (*SD* = .69). Although the Korean expatriates' mean score is slightly higher than that of the Indonesians, the difference is statistically insignificant (*M* [Koreans] = 3.45, *SD* =.67; *M* [Indonesians] = 3.36 (*SD* =.71; *t* = .76, *df* = 139; *p* > .05).

Hypothesis Testing

The six hypotheses regarding the culture-general aspect of cross-cultural adaptation were tested first on the entire data set that combined the data collected from both Korean and Indonesian participants. This test was followed by a separate test for each of the two groups.
Three correlation analyses have been conducted to test the hypothesized interrelationships between the four theoretical constructs: host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, perceived host receptivity, and psychological health. The first analysis is based on the entire sample of both Korean and Indonesian participants, and the result of this analysis is summarized in Table 1. Two additional correlation analyses have been carried out by separating the Korean data from the Indonesian

data, as shown in Table 1a and Table 1b.

Table 1

Simple Correlation Coefficients (r) between Research Variables for Entire sample

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Knowledge of host culture	153	3.38	.78	-						
2. Adaptive motivation	155	3.66	.77	.63**	-					
3. Operational competence	155	3.53	.66	.61**	.49**	-				
4. Host interpersonal communication	145	25.89	16.65	.31**	.25**	.44**	-			
5. Ethnic interpersonal communication	145	59.85	19.88	-.12	-.09	-.07	-.58**	-		
6. Psychological health	141	3.40	.69	.31**	.45**	.34**	.25**	-.19**	-	
7. Host receptivity	139	3.61	.64	.30**	.31**	.60**	.28**	.01	.45**	-

*p < .05, **p < .01

Table 1a

Simple Correlation Coefficients (r) between Research Variables for Koreans

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Knowledge of host culture	76	3.59	.72	-						
2. Adaptive motivation	76	3.79	.66	.70**	-					
3. Operational competence	76	3.87	.64	.70**	.58**	-				
4. Host interpersonal communication	67	31.25	15.88	.38**	.34**	.39**	-			
5. Ethnic interpersonal communication	67	64.02	16.54	-.36**	-.31**	-.34**	-.89**	-		
6. Psychological health	65	3.45	.67	.48**	.56**	.33**	.25**	-.31**	-	
7. Host receptivity	65	3.94	.60	.29**	.37**	.55**	.18	-.21*	.52**	-

*p < .05, **p < .01

Table 1b

Simple Correlation Coefficients (r) between Research Variables for Indonesians

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Knowledge of host culture	77	3.17	.77	-						
2. Adaptive motivation	79	3.53	.84	.56**	-					
3. Operational competence	79	3.22	.51	.44**	.41**	-				
4. Host interpersonal communication	78	21.24	15.98	.16	.12	.32**	-			
5. Ethnic interpersonal communication	78	56.22	21.85	-.08	-.03	-.09	-.55**	-		
6. Psychological health	76	3.36	.71	.15	.37**	.40**	.25*	-.14	-	
7. Host receptivity	74	3.33	.53	.16	.22*	.39**	.15	-.01	.45**	-

*p < .05, **p < .01

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis posits that the host communication competence of expatriate workers is positively associated with their psychological health. Consistent with this theoretical prediction, the result of the correlational analysis clearly supports this hypothesis. *Psychological health* is positively related to *knowledge of host culture* (cognitive dimension) ($r = .31, p < .01$), to *adaptation motivation* (affective dimension) ($r = .45, p < .01$), and to *operational competence* (operational dimension) ($r = .34, p < .01$). These culture-general findings suggest that the higher the level of understanding of the host culture's communication systems, norms and values, the more likely expatriate workers are to have a greater level of *psychological health*. It also suggests that expatriates who have strong motivation as well as behavioral skills, such as communicating and relating to local people, tend to experience greater psychological health in their host environment.

Hypothesis 1 is also supported when tested for each group of participants. For Korean expatriates, all three dimensions of host communication competence are found to be positively and significantly associated with psychological health. The correlation coefficient relating to *psychological health* is .48 ($p < .01$) for *knowledge of the host culture*, .56 ($p < .01$) for *adaptation motivation*, and .33 ($p < .01$) for *operational competence*. For Indonesian expatriates, however, only two of the three host communication competence measures, *adaptation motivation* and *operational competence*, are statistically significant in their respective association with *psychological health* (r [adaptation motivation] = .37, $p < .01$; r [operational competence] =.40, $p < .01$). The cognitive measure, *knowledge of the host culture*, is also positively associated with *psychological health*, but less strongly ($r =.15, p > .05$). Compared to their Korean counterparts in Indonesia, Indonesian expatriates in South Korea seem less in need of cognitive knowledge of their host culture in order to facilitate their psychological health.

The interview data provides more specific insights for these statistical results. Almost all interviewees from both groups report that cultural differences in work style and verbal communication behavior are a major factor in influencing their psychological health. One Korean interviewee, for example, comments on the laid-back attitude of Indonesians towards work as a particular challenge: "To achieve a certain goal, Koreans are going to complete our task by the deadline. However, Indonesians just work and if time is up, they go home even though the task is not completed."

Another source of psychological challenge reported by a number of Korean interviewees is cultural differences in communication style. One Korean interviewee describes this difference as follows: "While Koreans communicate in a straightforward manner. . .They [Indonesians] tend to beat around the bush…Indonesians rarely speak out when problems take place." A number of Korean interviewees also point to Indonesian's face saving in the case of being criticized in public. One Korean interviewee reports: "If you correct an Indonesian worker's mistakes, it will embarrass them, hurt their pride and they will lose face badly…So, I am attentive to this issue." The same cultural differences are also seen by Indonesians as an important source of psychological challenge. A number of Indonesian interviewees made comments that Korean workers are very disciplined and fast-paced in their work. One Indonesian interviewee observes: "…Pali-pali [fast] work style of Koreans…they can't see how slow Indonesians are…Koreans cannot stand to look somebody take a rest…they think you should do it now."

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis states that host interpersonal communication is positively associated with expatriate workers' psychological health. As predicted, the results of the correlational analysis clearly support this hypothesis. For both groups, correlational analysis reveals that there is a positive and statistically significant association between *host interpersonal communication* and *psychological health* (r [both groups] = .25, $p < .01$; r [Koreans] = .25, $p < .05$; r [Indonesians] = .25, $p < .05$).

The interview findings clearly reinforce the statistical findings with relation to Hypothesis 2. Inside and outside work, both Korean and Indonesian interviewees have interpersonal ties with host nationals. Most interviewees in both groups report that the relationships they have with host nationals contribute to a comfortable and positive feeling about life. One Korean interviewee describes his experiences of having close relationships with Indonesians as follows: "I go to celebrate Indonesian staff's marriages, house-warming parties and corporate dinners…When talking with Indonesian friends, sharing personal feelings and issues is the same as with Korean friends."

Comparatively, Indonesian interviewees have relatively limited interactions and personal relationships with host nationals. One Indonesian interviewee reports: "I would say only a 5% of my daily interaction outside the work...I don't really hangout any Koreans…I only socialized with the locals when I have like [*sic*] events from work…My children go to nursery…I have relationship with other teachers and parents…not many socializing…only like [*sic*] the group for parents in nursery…" Yet, they still express that these relationships are a positive factor in their life in Korea. One Indonesian interviewee, for example, comments as follows: "We play badminton and play golf…we have dinner every week and lunch with friends….When we are moving…there is a language issue. But…someone always come to help."

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis predicts the positive association between host communication competence and host interpersonal communication. This hypothesis is confirmed by the correlational analysis showing that all three dimensions of host communication competence are positively and significantly correlated to host interpersonal communication with the correlation coefficient, r [*knowledge of culture*] = .31 ($p < .01$), r [*adaptation motivation*] = .25 ($p < .01$), and r [*operational competence*] = .44 ($p < .01$).

These results are generally replicated when the two groups are analyzed separately. For Korean expatriates, all three dimensions of host communication competence is found to be positively and significantly correlated with host interpersonal communication (r [knowledge of culture] =.38, $p < .01$; r [adaptation motivation] = .34, $p < .01$; r [operational competence] = .39, $p < .01$). Likewise, all three dimensions are positively correlated with *host interpersonal communication* for the Indonesians, although only one dimension, operational competence, is found to be statistically significant (r [*knowledge of culture*] = .16, $p > .05$; r [*adaptation motivation*] = .12, $p > .05$; r [*operational competence*] = .32, p < .01).

The above findings are further supported by the interview data. Most interviewees from both groups point to the importance of cultural understanding and strong motivation (host communication

competence) in forming relationships with local people. One Korean interviewee observes such a linkage: "When meeting with Muslims here, it is important to understand and respect Islamic culture….If you understand Islamic culture and are broad-minded, it is a lot easier for you to adapt and build up relationships with local people." Likewise, one Indonesian interviewee also notes…understanding culture is deeper than speaking a host language…open-mindedness and embracing differences will help you communicate effectively, adjust things and build up meaningful relationships with Korean people."

Hypothesis 4

The fourth hypothesis posits a positive interrelationship between perceived host receptivity and host communication competence. The correlational analysis shows that host receptivity is positively and significantly correlated to all three dimensions of host communication competence, *r* [*knowledge of culture*] = .30 ($p < .01$), *r* [*adaptation motivation*] = .31 ($p < .01$), and *r* [*operational competence*] = .60 ($p < .01$).

Hypothesis 4 is also supported when tested for each group separately. For Koreans, perceived host receptivity is positively and significantly correlated to all three dimensions of host communication competence, *r* [*knowledge of culture*] = .29 ($p < .01$), *r* [*adaptation motivation*] = .37 ($p < .01$), and *r* [*operational competence*] = .55 ($p < .01$). For Indonesian expatriates, two dimensions of host communication competence are positively and significantly correlated to perceived host receptivity, with *r* [*adaptation motivation*] = .22 ($p < .01$); *r* [*operational competence*] = .39 ($p < .01$). Knowledge of culture is also positively related to perceived host receptivity (r = .16) although statistically less than significant (p > .05). Comments made by almost all of the interviewees, both Korean and Indonesian, indicate their strong appreciation for local peoples' welcoming attitudes while emphasizing the importance of understanding and being motivated to adapt to host culture. In the words of one Korean interviewee: "Indonesian people are very friendly toward foreigners…We are treated very well here …. you need to… respect culture and….and broaden your understanding about the religion of Islam, which is a necessity to adapt and to be successful." "Likewise, an Indonesian interviewee states: "My work experience in Korea is positive… I am really grateful…To work in Korea, you should learn Korean culture and try to understand it."

Hypothesis 5

The fifth hypothesis predicts the positive association between perceived host receptivity and host interpersonal communication. Results of the correlational analysis tend to support this hypothesis, with positive correlation coefficients for both group, with r = .28 (p < .01). Additionally, the positive correlations between perceived host receptivity and host interpersonal communication are observed when the two groups are tested separately, r [Koreans] = .18, p > .05; r [Indonesians] = .15, p > .05).

The positive theoretical relationship between perceived host receptivity and host interpersonal communication is further evidenced in many open-ended comments made during one-on-one interviews. One Korean interviewee, for example, notes that "Indonesians are very open to foreigners…I have been treated well…They are very interested in Korean people and learning Korean culture." In contrast, some of the comments made by Indonesian interviewees suggest somewhat lower levels of perceived host receptivity and host interpersonal communication from Koreans. One Indonesian interviewee describes his experiences with Koreans in this way: "I really want to build a friendship with some people, but they [Koreans] never see me the same way as Koreans…Some of my friends are very delightful though and really are my friends. So, I am thankful for that."

Hypothesis 6

The sixth hypothesis predicts a positive relationship between perceived host receptivity and psychological health. This hypothesis is confirmed by the positive and significant correlation coefficients obtained from the combined data of all interviewees (*r* = .45, *p* < .01), as well as from the data of Koreans only (*r*=.52, *p* < .01) and Indonesians only (*r* = .45, *p* < .01].

This finding is reinforced and illustrated by the interview data. Many Korean interviewees' comments unambiguously point to the highly welcoming attitudes of Indonesians as contributing to the quality of life they are able to experience in Indonesia. As one Korean interviewee describes it: "People here have *jeong* [warm feeling]. When I go to a town and get lost, local people always approach me and try to help…I feel comfortable living here and this is a very positive factor in my life in Indonesia."

In comparison, the Indonesian interviewees' perceptions of Korean people are more mixed. Many of them also point to the advanced social and technological systems in Korea as contributing to the quality of life they experience while living in Korea. One Indonesian interviewee, for example, expresses his positive view of Korea in terms of its advanced technology as well as the people: "Because of the infrastructure, internet, and transportation system, it makes living in Korea convenient compared to life in Indonesia…Very positive impression toward Korean people…I want to be contributing the relationship between two countries." Conversely, a number of Indonesian interviewees offer somewhat critical comments on what they perceive to be a lack of Korean people's understanding and acceptance of Indonesian culture and religion. The following two statements exemplify such comments: "Korea is a homogeneous society, I think Korean society is very exclusive to outsiders compared to Indonesia"; and "During the summer, wearing *Hijab*...I was waiting for the traffic signal to go across the road…an old man and a lady approached me, saying 'Hey miss, why are you wearing this? This is Korea…It is not good here'."

Discussion

This study has investigated the communication patterns, perceived host receptivity, and psychological health of expatriate workers in their cross-cultural adaptation processes. Whereas most of the previous studies examined Western expatriates sojourning in non-Western countries and vice versa, the present study has focused on two non-Western groups of expatriates in two non-Western countries: Indonesian expatriates in South Korea and their South Korean counterparts in Indonesia. Employing six of the 21 theorems in Kim's Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation, six hypotheses were posed with respect to the interrelationships between host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, perceived host receptivity, and psychological health.

Theoretical Insight

All six hypotheses have been supported in culture-general analyses of the combined data from both Korean expatriates and Indonesian expatriates, as well as in the culture-specific analyses of each group's data set separately. The study thereby has confirmed the six theorems linking the individual expatriates' host communication competence (comprised of their knowledge, motivation, and operational skills with respect to the host language and culture), active engagement in interpersonal communication with members of the host society, and psychological well-being with respect to their life as expatriates. These findings are consistent with the findings from previous studies of a variety of individuals undergoing cross-cultural adaptation, from long-term resettlers including immigrants and refugees (e.g., Cheah et al., 2011), to short-term sojourners such as international students (e.g., Maruyama, 1998; Zimmerman, 1995) and business expatriates (e.g., Johnson et al., 2003; Kim & Kim, 2007).

Specifically, expatriate studies confirmed that cognitive (i.e., cultural knowledge), motivational (i.e., motivation and self-efficacy in functioning in diverse cultural settings), and behavioral (i.e., adoption of appropriate behaviors during cross-cultural interactions) dimensions of cultural intelligence (CQ) are important predictor variables to expatriate work adjustment (e.g., Setti et al., 2020). Expatriates high in cognitive CQ have a greater understanding of cross-cultural differences (Brislin et al., 2006); and are better able to use their cultural knowledge in decision making and strategic thinking to overcome transition problems. This in turn may improve their ability to adjust to the new work environment (Van Dyne et al., 2012). Expatriates high in motivational CQ tends to have confidence in their capabilities and intrinsic motivation to adjust to new workplaces (Palthe, 2004). Expatriates with greater behavioral CQ

can use culturally appropriate expressions in communication, in addition to flexibly adapting their behavior to create comfort zones for the other individuals involved in cross-cultural encounters (Early & Petersen, 2004). This ability facilitates communication with host colleagues and reduces the risk of cross-cultural misunderstandings (Ang et al., 2007), which results in better work adjustment.

Additionally, the network ties with host nationals were found to contribute to expatriate adjustment. Other previous expatriate studies confirmed that building and maintaining relationships with host nationals is a significant predictor of expatriate adjustment (Black et al., 1991; Caligiuri, 2000; Gregersen and Black, 1992). Numerous studies confirmed that the network ties with host nationals tends to provide expatriates with the support and resources they need in order to adjust (e.g., Johnson et al., 2003; Liu & Shaffer, 2005; Wang & Kanungo, 2004). Particularly, the host interpersonal network ties provide expatriates with "information support", the information that assists expatriates' functioning and problem solving in the host country, as well as "emotional support", which are the emotional resources that help expatriates feel better about themselves and their situation when adjustment difficulties become overwhelming (e.g., Johnson et al., 2003).

In addition, unlike most of the previous studies of expatriates, the present study has examined one of the environmental factors in Kim's theory, perceived host receptivity. The results show that perceived host receptivity does play a significant role in facilitating expatriates' experiences in interacting with local people as well as encouraging them to be involved in relationships with them, while also enhancing their psychological well-being and the overall quality of life they experience the host society.

In addition to extending the generalizability of Kim's theory to the two Asian groups of expatriates living and working in each other's home country, the present study provides a set of qualitative insights into the specific experiences and observations provided by the Korean and Indonesian expatriates. Such insights have been made possible through an integrative methodology combining a quantitative structured survey ("etic") with qualitative in-depth personal interviews ("emic").

In fact, expatriate research clearly confirms that cross-cultural adaptation is an immediate determinant of successful job performance for expatriates (e.g., Hasan & Diallo, 2013; Tucker, et al., 2004; Wang & Tran, 2012; Zakaria et al., 2019). For the newly arrived expatriates, unfamiliar environment creates psychological stress and fatigue, which may be aggravated by the expatriate's maladjustment. The increasing pressure from these challenges can result in negative attitudes toward the assignment abroad and the host environment, leading to a feeling of dissatisfaction which negatively impacts the expatriate's relationship with work and impedes their performance (Kraimer et al., 2001; Shih et al., 2010). As Sinangil and Ones (2001) suggested, expatriate adjustment is not an end in itself, but rather a part of a process that allows the expatriate to be able to focus on and carry through the tasks of the job that they have been sent to perform (p. 433). Thus, the more adjusted the expatriate manager is, the more effective they are. As such, multinational organizations should provide support and education for their employees so that they can adjust more smoothly and perform their job functions more effectively.

By offering carefully designed and implemented training programs, multinational organizations can help their employees acquire a sufficient level of host communication competence in all three interrelated dimensions: knowledge about the host culture (cognitive dimension), motivation to adapt to, and engage in, the communication processes of the host society (affective dimension), and the skills to carry out daily communication activities involving members of the host society appropriately and effectively (operational dimension).

Considering the role of host interpersonal ties in expatriates' adjustment, multinational organizations should educate their employees on how to develop meaningful relationships with host nationals as well as foster social interactions with local colleagues.

Considerations for Future Studies

Future investigations of expatriate adjustment need to address the shortcomings in the present study in terms of sampling and measurement scales. With respect to sampling, we used a relatively small

and non-probability sampling due to difficulties in accessing the two groups of research populations. More time and greater efforts would need to be allocated to secure larger and more representative samples selected through a probability sampling method. Researchers also need to be prepared to devote a sufficient amount of time in order to be able to identify and develop personal contacts in various companies. In this way, research team members can distribute and collect survey questionnaires in person, and conduct on-site one-on-one interviews over an extended period of time.

With respect to the quantitative measurement scales assessing the research variables (three categories of host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, perceived host receptivity, and psychological health) have been found satisfactorily reliable, with the alpha coefficients ranging from .71 to .91. Three of these six scales show the alpha coefficients lower than the commonly accepted level, .80: behavioral competence scale for Indonesians (.71), host interpersonal communication scale for Koreans (.76), and perceived host receptivity for Indonesians (.77). Further efforts are needed to improve the reliabilities of these three scales for greater confidence in drawing conclusions about the theoretical relationships involving the three variables (behavioral competence, host interpersonal communication, and perceived host receptivity).

Even though correlations are reported to be statistically significant, some of our correlation coefficients are moderate or relatively low, which is considered to represent a weak or small association making it one of the weaknesses of the present study. As discussed above, after the measurement scale is improved for greater reliability, these low coefficients could be reexamined in future studies. In regard to statistical analysis, other than t-test and correlations, more sophisticated statistical analysis could have been conducted to further analyze the relationships among focal theoretical variables; a relatively small sample size, however, did not make this plausible. Future study based on a larger sample size could warrant this type of analysis.

Conclusion

All in all, the findings of this study highlight the centrality of communication in the adaptation process of expatriates in a foreign land. Communication, indeed, is "the very engine" that drives the process in which each expatriate is able to navigate a new and unfamiliar culture and, thereby, shapes the quality of his or her adaptive efforts (Kim, 2001, p. 97).

For individual expatriates, crossing cultural boundaries can be a significant and even transformative event. Life in a foreign land is filled with eye-opening and often stressful experiences that challenge their existing cultural assumptions and expectations. Yet, through new learning and active interpersonal engagements, most expatriates will gain insights into the new environment with which to carry out their daily tasks as expatriate workers. In so doing, they may also find themselves partaking in a journey of personal development—a psychological movement in the direction of a deepened sense of self-efficacy and an expanded perspective on work, culture, and humanity itself in our globalizing world.

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Social Media Spectacle: Reconceptualizing the Medium and the Message of Online Political Spectacles

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Donald Trump's Twitter spectacles reflect a shift in the traditional political spectacle. As the political spectacle was not developed to address online communication in a secondarily oral society, I argue that we must compare the established theoretical understanding of political spectacle with contemporary media to fully understand how political spectacles disrupt social expectations today. In this essay, I further that conceptualizing social media spectacle benefits critics who analyze political spectacles on new media. Although the social media spectacle's form differs slightly, the difference lies in function. Rather than drawing attention to the message's architect, the social media spectacle may divert attention away from the architect. After examining how Trump employs social media spectacles, I offer implications and future directives for scholars exploring social media rhetoric.

Keywords: Political spectacle, social media, Twitter, Donald Trump, political rhetoric

Introduction

Donald J. Trump was not a traditional presidential candidate during his 2016 campaign, seemingly playing the political joker (Kayam, 2018). Nevertheless, the political underdog achieved victory due, in part, to a support base captivated by his raw and meandering "straight talk" (e.g., Ivie, 2017; Theye & Melling, 2018, p. 323; Wang & Liu, 2018), reminiscent of Ronald Reagan's and George W. Bush's "anti-rhetorical" or "anti-intellectual" choices (see Lim, 2008; Rozell, 1998; Shogan, 2007). While his rivals followed the formal tactics of campaigns past, embodying what Hariman (1995) might call a courtly style, Trump spoke bluntly, divisively, and unapologetically (Blake, 2015; Ritchie et al., 2018; Vasile, 2017). In privileging comprehendible language over presidential decorum, he seemingly united citizens who felt "somewhat suffocated by political correctness and its impact on what they viewed as their right to free speech" (Theye & Melling, 2018, p. 324). Trump's grammar may register below the sixth grade reading level (Liberatore, 2016; Shafer, 2015), but his messages reached those who felt silenced in the political conversation. Through non-traditional rhetorical choices, Trump shared his platform simply and succinctly.

In fact, his marriage of simplistic communication style and social media allowed him to optimize 140-character soundbites to spread his political rhetoric. However, Trump is not the first political figure to incorporate social media into his political rhetoric (see Bimber, 2014; Katz et al., 2015). Twitter has become a key platform for political campaign communication, allowing candidates to reach voters through an interactive medium (Stier et al., 2017). Indeed, research on social media's role in political campaigns is rich, contemplating the unique challenges of translating campaign messages to meet the high-tech expectations of social media users (see Boulianne, 2016; Hoffmann & Suphan, 2017; Jungherr, 2016; Wells et al., 2016). Twitter specifically trends more toward public communication than private interaction (Parmelee, 2014), allowing political candidates to engage with more than those who "like" their profile due to the user pool's sheer size (Bossetta, 2018). While platforms like Facebook allow politicians to maintain their support-base (see Norris, 2003), Twitter lends itself well to interacting with followers and undecided citizens. Social media platforms like Twitter allow political campaigns and administrations to connect with the public, condemn adversaries, and maintain specific identities online.

Twitter amplified Trump's voice and provided free publicity (Kristof, 2016; Patterson, 2016), an ability of which other political figures take advantage. Nevertheless, Trump's distinct communication style allowed him to heavily profit off Twitter. By approaching his tweets like a corporate

communicator—direct, authoritative, and persuasive—Trump captured the attention of the online publics, both supporters and critics alike (Pérez-Curiel & Limón Naharro, 2019; see also Ott, 2017; Wells et al., 2016). Consequently, he could rhetorically sell his ideas with little support; his language was so condensed through parataxis—through the daisy-chaining of phrases—that he could make broad claims without completing his inference or providing evidence (Theye & Melling, 2018). Despite the media scrutiny surrounding his tweets that dubbed him "notoriously impulsive" (i.e., Barbaro, 2015; Keohane, 2016; Kosoff, 2016, para. 2; Patterson, 2016), Trump's discursive Twitter rhetoric granted him political traction and a popular foothold, as well notoriety as a realist-style leader (Hariman, 1995).

Specifically, the *political spectacle* of Trump's tweets contributed to his rising popularity. Political spectacles (re)construct social problems critical to voting decisions, allowing candidates to clearly identify their political stances on key policies (Debord, 1983; Edelman, 1988). However, these spectacles toy with perceptions of reality, allowing candidates and their campaigns to (re)present events to fit their agenda (Debord, 1983). In other words, "Everyday reporting of the political spectacle systematically reinforces the assumption that leaders are critical to the courses of governmental action. News accounts highlight the talk and actions of leaders and of high officials and upon policy differences and agreements" (Edelman, 1988, p. 40). By engaging in political spectacles, political candidates present themselves as crucial stakeholders in policy-making, indirectly reiterating their national leadership potential to mass media channels for public distribution.

Communication scholars have examined Trump's Twitter rhetoric in detail, analyzing his gendered displays of masculinity (Lee & Lim, 2016), socio-political self-branding (Pérez-Curiel & Naharro, 2019), incivility (Lee & Xu, 2018; Ott, 2017; Zompetti, 2019), online diffusion of populist discourse (Baldwin-Philippi, 2019; Gerbaudo, 2018; Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017; Kreis, 2017), celebrity entertainment value (Kanihan & Rim, 2018; Wells et al., 2016), amateurism (Enli, 2017), and dislocative tendencies (Appel, 2018). Nonetheless, little work has pondered Trump's Twitter rhetoric as political spectacle (for the exception, see Fuchs, 2017). Fuchs (2017) declares, "Trump uses Twitter as political spectacle" (p. 53), but whether Trump's rhetoric merely falls into the theoretical construct or reimagines it has yet to be considered in communication scholarship. The theoretical implications for the evolution of political spectacle have the potential to foster deeper understandings of political campaigns in the social media era.

In this essay, I argue that Trump's Twitter rhetoric reveals the emergence of a medium-specific and language-specific political spectacle extension: *social media spectacle*. The key characteristic differentiating social media spectacle from political spectacle and visual spectacle lies in rhetorical intentionality, diverting public attention past the message's architects, not toward them. While Trump's tweet characteristics have been analyzed (i.e., Enli, 2017; Lee & Lim, 2016; Ott, 2017), no scholars have examined Trump's tweet rhetoric as social media spectacle. Therefore, I analyze Trump's tweets to illustrate the emergence of the social media spectacle. After exploring current forms of political spectacle—and the need for social media spectacle as a rhetorical construct—I elucidate how Trump employs social media spectacle to shape contemporary public narratives and evoke identification, dissolution, and distraction from himself. Through this form of political spectacle, Trump attempts to construct and control his own alternate reality, taps into public uncertainty surrounding societal dissidence, and presents himself as a national savior. From this conversation will rise implications for social media spectacle development, online sociopolitical discourse, and community building.

Political Spectacles Today: Why Consider a Contextualized Understanding?

Before we discuss social media spectacles, we must understand why I contextualize political spectacle within a specific medium. *Social media spectacle* warrants consideration as a political spectacle extension because (1) it better reflects the evolution of secondary orality and (2) it speaks to the rhetorically raw online discourse of political figures.

First, the social media spectacle would reposition political spectacle more explicitly within the era of secondary orality, which speaks to societal advancements toward deliberate, direct, and textually

informed oral discourse.[1] Scholars have long noted the visual, emotional, and rhetorical strategies that political spectacle entails (e.g., Bennett, 1992; Cheng, 2006; Debord, 1983; Edelman, 1998; Erickson, 1998; Fjelstad, 2010; Koyama & Bartlett, 2011; Sapiro & Soss, 1999). As political campaigns seek to gain public adherence through television, print, and public appearances, the continued interest in political spectacle is unsurprising. Nevertheless, the development of the political spectacle as a theoretical construct has not matched the continued emergence of social media sites as major political epicenters, especially for campaigns (like those of Obama-Biden 2008/2012, Clinton-Kaine 2016, and Trump-Pence 2016), and as indicators of broader communicative changes in American discourse. Walter Ong (1982/2012) predicted that human communication would eventually transition into a *secondary orality,* which is "a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of printing and print" (p. 133). Unlike cultures grounded in primary orality and uninfluenced by printed language, Ong posits that societies immersed in written language will transition into "a new, self-consciously informal style" of communication (Ong, 1982/2012, p. 133) that—while informed by the printed word—is largely oral in medium. In other words, societies may begin communicating more through auditory and visual means, but written communication is the mean's catalyst. Although Twitter is a platform of primarily typed communication, it functions as a medium that provides artifacts and evidence for oral content creators (i.e., televised news organizations, social media content creators, etc.; see also Dumitrescu & Ross, 2021; O'Boyle & Pardun, 2021). Tweets become talking points for televised interviews among professionals, like mass media personalities and journalists, and for the public, like Tik Tok content creators producing satirical videos around political tweets. In other words, Twitter facilitates the transition between rhetoric typed and rhetoric spoken, functioning within the system of secondary orality. While it could be argued that political spectacle is still appropriate for analyzing political rhetoric on social media, I argue that the hybridized rhetorical concept of social media spectacle more explicitly situates artifacts within the medium's context, while also recognizing the medium's role within the social system of secondary orality.

This brings us to the second reason the social media spectacle warrants consideration. One way that social media spectacles might differ from traditional political spectacles is in their tone and directive. While Debord (1983) and Edelman (1988) argue that political spectacles can build communities, they also note the divisive potential of spectacles. I anticipate that for social media spectacles, this divisiveness is incorporated not only to rhetorically other and heighten group identification, but to direct attention away from the message architect's transgressions. Despite Ong's (1982/2012) prediction that "electronic media [would] not tolerate a show of open antagonism" (p. 135), I argue that social media allows spectacles to be more negative than would a television or radio advertisement due to the direct channel formed between public figure and audience, allowing online rhetoric to be less regulated than traditional television and radio messages (see Bay, 2018; Dykhne, 2018). Social media makes negative campaign messages more accessible to the public.

Negative campaigning is not new, but it continues to darken contemporary campaign messages through smear tactics and critical strategies (Druckman et al., 2010; Lovejoy et al., 2012; Small, 2018). The negativity of online campaigning seems to be greater than that found off-line (Roberts, 2013). In fact, political advertisements posted online may contain more attack themes than televised campaign advertisements (Roberts, 2013). As the public increasingly consumes political information on social media platforms (see Barthel et al., 2016; Gottfried & Shearer, 2016; Shearer & Gottfried, 2017), including more divisive campaign messages than we experienced in the past (Roberts, 2013), we find ourselves facing a saucier spectacle in online spaces. What is it about social media that allows negative political rhetoric to run rampant? Based on the contextual development of campaign media and observations of critical social media rhetorics, I postulate that the political spectacle (re)presented on social media deviates in the rhetorical intention and outcome of political spectacles found in television, print, and embodied performances. No longer is the intention solely to accumulate support for the

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[1] I preface this point by noting that I reference secondary orality for contextual justification of this inquiry rather than as an analytic tool itself.

spectacle's architect. Rather, the spectacle can politically subvert attention away from the architect, a function evident in the online rhetorics of Trump during his early days in office.

Because social media spectacles are better positioned within today's secondary orality and focus on both rhetorically divisive and cohesive messages, they can provide greater insight into how political figures use social media to redirect attention toward and away from themselves. Furthermore, the social media spectacle emphasizes the divisive potential of online political spectacles. While Debord (1983) and Edelman (1988) argue that political spectacles can build communities, they also note the divisive potential of spectacles. As Debord (1983) explains, the political spectacle may not contain internal yearning for group identification, instead deeming its own presence to be achievement enough. This divisive characteristic of political spectacle is apparent in Trump's polarizing Twitter rhetoric, which in turn contributes to the development of the social media spectacle. To fully understand social media spectacle, however, we must understand both political spectacle and visual spectacle.

Political Spectacle

In essence, political spectacles are constructions of realities that frame public issues and gain public attention for political gains. They are deployed with the hope of seeming obvious and natural, for as Debord (1983) posits, "all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles" controlled by dominant power figures who shape the social reality in which the people reside (pp. 1, 4). By controlling perceived reality, political spectacles contribute to the public's accepted ideology. However, that ideology's very existence is co-constructed by the people. As such, power figures simply must ensure that their constructed reality aligns with the people's values. In presenting these self-ordained realities paralleling co-constructed values and public ideology, those in power can control the narrative of everyday life by "philosophiz[ing] reality" (Debord, 1983, p. 5). Reality might appear to be an objective certainty, but it is really a speculative domain in which "totalitarian [government manages] . . . the conditions of existence" (Debord, 1983, p. 8). Political spectacles define reality for citizens.

Admittedly, un-manipulated realities do not exist. The powerful and the public co-construct the ideology and values to which political spectacles appeal. Nevertheless, those in power captain the political spectacle, engaging in "coercion, propaganda, and the portrayal of issues in terms that entertain, distort, and shock . . . [in order to] extract a public response of any kind" (Edelman, 1988, p. 7). After all, the public must agree with the values reflected in political spectacles to reactively accept their representation of reality. This all-encompassing control within the political spectacle reflects the spectacle's roots in representation. Political spectacle poses that "everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation" (Debord, 1983, p. 1). Political spectacle reorganizes the building blocks of our experiences to form a controlled variation of them (Farrell, 1989), crafting a dramatized interpretation. Because political spectacle is built from representations, everything the spectacle presents as truth is actually a production (Debord, 1983, p. 2). It is reality, but an edited version.

Although political spectacles are representations, citizens value them. The constructed reality of the political spectacle is real to its tenants because it is the reality that they know. After all, "reality rises up within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real," a concept that legitimizes the society as it stands, even if built upon representation (Debord, 1983, p. 2). The people trust—or at least abide by—those in power, so the people accept the powerful's concept of reality not as depiction, but as definition. However, citizens are not passive and idle observers in this reality. While political spectacle reflects its architect's dominant ideology, "the conditions of existence" established by the political leader (Debord, 1983, p. 8), citizens engage in that very ideology and contribute to its development. They accept the political spectacle not without question, but rather because it aligns with the ideology they themselves helped create. Political spectacle may be a *constructed* version of reality, but it functions as reality because it "exposes and manifests in its fullness the essence of all ideological systems" (Debord, 1983, p. 112). Representation becomes the people's reality because it aligns with their shared belief system.

Visual Spectacle

Like political spectacle, visual spectacle is a representation of reality. However, while political spectacle often focuses on verbal communication, visual spectacle manifests through visible, non-verbal communication, like non-verbal behaviors, expressions, inanimate objects, and imagery. The goals of visual spectacle are two-fold. The first aim is to meet public expectations by engaging in "the construction of beliefs about events, policies, leaders, problems, and crises that rationalize or challenge existing inequalities" (Edelman, 1988, p. 103). It contributes to citizens' overarching ideology and forms shared meaning. Words can certainly generate beliefs and imagery, as well, but visual spectacle develops ideology by providing citizens a visualization that aligns with their beliefs, such as seeing a leader stand tall while confirming the community's strength. In appealing to these beliefs, the visual spectacle both "immobilizes opposition and mobilizes support" (Edelman, 1988, p. 103). The mobilization helps shape visual spectacle's second goal: the creation of a community. The visual spectacle draws together those who are ideologically similar, for "the spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (Debord, 1983, p. 1). Through translating images and non-verbal behaviors that evoke specific ideological reflection, individuals become part of a community that translates imagery similarly due to common values. As such, visual spectacle creates shared meaning. The people congregate due to similar translations of visual imagery and, in the process, see their expectations of community-building fulfilled in the visual spectacle.

To date, the visual spectacle has been the predominant focus in the political spectacle's evolution. Research extending the political spectacle has examined visual-oral rhetorics, such as photographs, videos, magazine covers, and speech delivery (i.e., Durham, 2007; Erickson, 1998; Glynn, 2009; Kellner, 2006, 2015). Indeed, visual spectacle is particularly evident in public address (i.e., Cheng, 2006; Kellner, 2007). Political speeches can incorporate political spectacle to establish political credibility, repair broken relations, share political information, and present political agendas (Cheng, 2006). Similarly, when these speeches incorporate spectacles, they can counter negative media coverage of political platforms and initiatives (Kellner, 2007). However, these positive, responsive spectacles are "subject to multiple interpretations, [and thus] they generate ambiguous and often unanticipated effects" (Kellner, 2007, p. 638). For example, while U.S. President George Bush may have intended to create a positive spectacle by emerging from a jet with "Mission Accomplished" waving on a banner behind him, this spectacle backfired and made the Bush administration appear uninformed and naïve (Kellner, 2007). In other words, public addresses may incorporate political spectacles, but those spectacles can make or break the proposed political reality. However, while still evident in political campaigns, speeches are no longer the primary channel of political rhetoric and visual spectacles do not directly account for the textual spectacles found on social networking sites. To begin understanding how political spectacles function on social media, we must re-center political spectacles in our secondarily oral society.

Social Media Spectacle

One way to re-center is by combining elements of both political spectacle and visual spectacle into a hybrid, remediated concept that speaks directly to the realities of online communication. Social media sites have become key platforms in disseminating information and advocating for political issues. Although presidential speeches marry oral and textual communication, these speeches and their political spectacles do not address the rise of secondary orality that privileges simplistic communication over complex, rhetorical flourishes. The short tweet is typed rather than spoken, but it still represents the candidate's spoken discourse. It mirrors the values, beliefs, and sentiments the candidate holds dear, but in condensed, direct form. Despite tweets reflecting the communicative progression that Ong (1982/2012) projected, the political spectacle's theoretical development has seemingly paused at the visual. Admittedly, two scholars, Halloran (2001) and Ryazanova-Clarke (2012), have indirectly contributed to the notion of a secondarily oral spectacle. One argues that written text can stimulate a spectacle (Halloran, 2001). The other hints at online spectacle, noting how Russian President Vladimir Putin engages in

"online politics" to interact with the public (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2012, p. 104). However, Halloran (2001) still differentiates text and political spectacle as separate constructs, while Ryazanova-Clarke (2012) focuses on transcripts of initially oral interactions rather than messages written explicitly for textual distribution. While Halloran's and Ryazanova-Clarke's work suggests a progression toward social media spectacle, their analyses do not explicitly address the framework I am proposing. This is not surprising, as the political spectacle arose well before the social media era began. As such, the political spectacle needs reframing so that it may address the rhetorics of secondary orality evident on social media platforms.

In contrast to political and visual spectacles, which prioritize forming cohesion by meeting expectations and creating a communal "us," social media spectacles differ in both form and function. In form, the social media spectacles are constructed through typed language, encompassing textual comments posted on social media sites. While the potential for visual emojis exists in these messages, as well as oral commentary through news coverage, the bulk is devoted to short, typed messages. The space restraints of Twitter prevent long paragraphs from entering the discourse. Thus, the social media spectacle must make its point succinctly, for there is no space for elaboration. However, the deeper difference is that social media spectacles are not primarily devoted to drawing attention to the person who initiated them. Rather, social media spectacles may instead divert attention toward another person or issue to keep the spotlight away from the spectacles' original architects, reflecting more negative strategies than would political and visual spectacles on other media.

The diversion from the spectacle architect reflects the social media spectacle's purpose. While political spectacles and visual spectacles may involve othering, they primarily seek to create a community. Social media spectacles do not necessarily prioritize community-building. Rather, they prioritize the architect instead. This self-centeredness is best explained by Debord (1983) who elaborates that the political spectacle presents two parts of "the world": one part perceives itself as "superior" to the remaining world, which leaves the rest of the world alienated as a result (pp. 9-10). Moreover, the detachment of "superior" world from majority world does not require consistent reasoning and can even offer contradicting logic (Debord, 1983, p. 6). Logic, consistency, and even facts are subjective because the precedence is attention (re)direction. Although Debord's descriptions are of *political spectacle's* potential divisiveness, his words ring true for social media spectacle, too. The difference between the spectacles is not that one *only* divides and one *only* identifies. Rather, the difference is in the primacy, that political and visual spectacles *primarily* reflect identification, while social media spectacles *primarily* reflect (re)direction of attention from the self to the other.

Indeed, the social media spectacle can draw attention to itself just as political spectacles and visual spectacles do. However, the social media spectacle primarily functions by diverting attention away from the architect. This finger-pointing occurs when the architect does not wish to join the conversation. Instead of engaging, the architect diverts, engaging in "the opposite of quotation" (Debord, 1983, p. 208). Rather than participating in the discourse or even remaining silent, the architect points to an alternative subject. The architect engages in "the fluid language of anti-ideology," refraining from co-contributing to public values (Debord, 1983, p. 208). In doing so, the social media spectacle privileges the architect over the community; if the spectacle serves to (re)direct attention elsewhere, the architect need not contribute to the communal ideology. After all, the point of the social media spectacle is not to develop relationships, but to direct people. While this might sound like Boorstin's (1992, 2007) pseudo-event—a premeditated, human-made, news-worthy event designed to attract attention regardless of truths and realities—social media spectacles differ from pseudo-events in their attention diversion function. For example, a pseudo-event—like Trump's tweet claiming he won both the Electoral College and popular vote in 2016 (see Friedersdorf, 2016)—seeks to direct attention *toward* the rhetorical architect (i.e., Trump). In contrast, a social media spectacle would not center the architect within the message. Rather, the spectacle would shift attention to another person or event rather than toward the rhetorical architect. In other words, both constructs share a disregard for reality, but the pseudo-event attracts while the social media spectacle distracts.

Considering the prominence of political and visual spectacles and their ability to create a communal "us," the social media spectacle's shelving of group cohesion as a primary result is surprising.

The public anticipates being the subject of political discourse, the jury that watches lawyers battle for their ideal verdict. However, the architect of the social media spectacle cares less about the jury and more about the architect. This realization is unsettling to the public, as the social media spectacle privileges self-service. While this emerging public uncertainty might bring the public together, this community would form as an indirect appendage of the social media spectacle.

Trump and the Social Media Spectacle

Trump's political rhetoric on Twitter could be examined for the presence of both political and visual spectacles. However, his tweets deviate from traditional political rhetoric, reflecting a need for a new theoretical construct to explain his rhetorical choices. The informality of his rhetoric suggests a departure from current constructs of online political discourse and a need to revisit how we theorize the spectacles arising in secondarily oral societies. Social media spectacle addresses political rhetorics arising online, while also underscoring the focus on rhetorical architects rather than the public audience. This violates citizen expectations, but reflects the rhetorical complexity and clarifies the distinctiveness of political spectacles found on social media.

My close textual analysis of 119 tweets posted between January 20, 2017 and February 28, 2017 reveals trends that reflect the social media spectacle. As social media spectacle is not limited to campaign rhetoric, I examined the tweets Trump posted during his first month in office to witness his use of spectacle during the rhetorical transition from campaigning candidate to elected official. While my initial process resembled the primary and secondary cycle coding of grounded theorists (e.g., Charmaz, 1983; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I ultimately employed close textual analysis (see Browne, 2016) to identify the rhetorical themes used to persuasively craft meaning among public audiences. All tweets in my artifact set met the following criteria: (1) stemmed from Donald Trump's personal Twitter account (@realDonaldTrump), (2) were typed tweets from the account rather than retweets, (3) focused on political content, and (4) reflected rhetorical themes reminiscent of social media spectacle. Of the 224 tweets Trump created between January 20, 2017 and February 28, 2017, I selected 119 tweets most appropriate for this project.

Although his speeches focused on his supporters, as would be expected in political spectacles, Trump's unification efforts seemed limited to his anthem, "Make America Great Again!" Although he spoke to his followers, he did not prioritize the rhetorical construction of community in his tweets. Instead, he focused on directing attention to other people and issues through three techniques: deliberative sales-pitching, implied heroism, and media redirection. These three techniques are not concrete cornerstones of the social media spectacle, but the social media spectacle does emerge through these techniques. The result is akin to that of a flag person; the social media users briefly notice the person with the flashy clothing and sign, but ultimately pay more attention to the traffic situation the flag person points out, following the flag person's directions to another route. After examining each technique, I will explain how the message compares with that of the political spectacle to illustrate how the social media spectacle theoretically contributes and functions.

Deliberative Sales-Pitching

Although the social media spectacle prioritizes (re)directing attention away from the architect, it must first grab attention to direct it. Thus, the spectacle functions like a persuasive pitch attracting customers to direct them to a product that could benefit their future, reflecting the employment of deliberative rhetoric. The social media spectacle accomplishes this direction through (1) soundbites that imply political positions and (2) dramatic capitalization.

Soundbites
Catchy soundbites help political figures imply their political positions online. For instance, Trump's tweet, "We will follow two simple rules: BUY AMERICAN & HIRE AMERICAN!" makes his

position on employment clear. Social media users read between the short line, interpreting his succinct statement as an indicator that Trump supports American business and wants to keep that business within the country's borders. Similarly, when he tweets, "A new radical Islamic terrorist has just attacked the Louvre Museum in Paris. Tourists were locked down. France on edge again. GET SMART U.S.," he does not explicitly condemn radical Islam as the root issue, but with the short sentence "GET SMART U.S.," he gives users a rhetorical wink. He need not state his opinion outright. He merely needs to hint at it and in doing so, he directs the people's attention away from his person and toward the issue at hand (in these cases, employment and terrorism).

These soundbites could be perceived as political spectacle because they provide a perception of reality, one that is fraught with terrorism, but one that could be made safer with secure borders that contain American businesses and jobs safely inside. The soundbites also seem to make a political stance on public issues. Indeed, there is a fine line between political spectacle and social media spectacle in this case. Nevertheless, the slight difference lies in the implication of opinion. Because tweets are confined by characters, there is little space to articulate thoughts. Thus, we might expect that political figures would write directly to make their positions clear. However, when a tweet employs social media spectacle, it may reveal more ambiguous language. Rather than a clear declaration, it may coyly hint that the architect holds an opinion on the issue but direct attention to the issue itself—even solutions—rather than the architect's perspective. Their opinion is present, but subtly interwoven. Trump certainly hints at his opinions regarding employment, business, and terrorism, but rather than stating his opinions outright, he treats them as if they are obvious. As such, he can call for the solution ("BUY AMERICAN & HIRE AMERICAN!") and warn of the alleged problem ("GET SMART U.S.") without directly placing himself in the message. Social media spectacle allows him to treat his presumption as fact and jump ahead to proactive and preventative measures.

Capitalization

One structural feature of these two example tweets is the capitalization of all letters. This technique also feeds into the deliberative sales-pitching of the social media spectacle, but not just because capital letters look loud. They also indicate importance, especially regarding future implications of current actions. By foreshadowing potential responses to issues, capitalization allows social media spectacles to draw attention to the message, but not necessarily the messenger.

Moreover, capitalization underlines the message's importance by foreshadowing potential responses to political issues. Take, for example, the following tweet: "If U.C. Berkeley does not allow free speech . . . NO FEDERAL FUNDS?" This tweet capitalizes for emphasis, but also to highlight what might occur if the university restricts free speech. Similarly, when Trump tweets, "It all begins today! . . . THE MOVEMENT CONTINUES – THE WORK BEGINS!" and "SEE YOU IN COURT, THE SECURITY OF OUR NATION IS AT STAKE!", he underlines that today's actions (e.g., allowing free speech, working for the movement, going to court) affect the future (e.g., funding, the movement's future, national security). Rhetorically, capitalization forecasts future consequences. In doing so, the technique directs attention to how present actions affect the future, rather than on the person pointing out the potential outcomes. By foreshadowing, capitalization helps the social media spectacle direct the public toward the chain reaction from present to future. The point of capitalization is to give the *spectacle* attention.

Even though the intention is to gain attention, the result of social media spectacle is still rhetorical distraction. Certainly, a capitalized phrase draws the eye toward the tweet, but the message within that capitalized phrase is what truly captivates the social media user. Future possibilities spark uncertainty, which pulls the focus away from the message architect. While politicians might incorporate political spectacles to draw attention to themselves, they would incorporate social media spectacle if they wanted to heighten awareness of issues without placing themselves in the conversation. Social media spectacle allows for the sharing of issues and abstract distribution of opinions without *explicitly* associating the architect with a position.

Implied Heroism

Joining social media spectacle's toolbox of deliberative sales-pitching is implied heroism. Social media spectacles can subtly cast political leaders as saviors within contentious contexts, but without explicit declaration of said heroism. This is evident (1) in Trump's rhetorical framing of himself as protagonist and (2) in his assertions about unexpected spaces.

Protagonist Self

The subtle framing of self as protagonist is one way in which social media spectacles emerge. When political figures present themselves as saviors and, more importantly, others as villains, these figures can create dramatic tension and divert attention to the constructed other. Trump establishes himself as the national protagonist to form a narrative of contention between himself and the villainized others, a narrative that draws public attention. In Trump's case, the antagonists are those who he dislikes and those who offer dissenting critiques. He types, "The crackdown on illegal criminals is merely the keeping of my campaign promise. Gang members, drug dealers & others are being removed!" to frame certain demographics as nefarious. When he types, "The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!", he condemns news organizations who disagree with his policies. Similarly, he frames the Democratic Party as the opponent when he declares, "Democrats had to come up with a story as to why they lost the election, and badly (306), so they made up a story – RUSSIA!" Sometimes, the antagonist is even more broadly defined. Trump may not define his enemy when he declares "We must keep 'evil' out of our country!", but he certainly maintains his hero role when making such claims. After all, he "call[s his] own shots, largely based on an accumulation of data, and everyone knows it. Some FAKE NEWS media, in order to marginalize, lies!" Trump makes it clear: *they* are the enemy, not *me*.

In his role as the hero, Trump constructs a dramatic plot within his administration's saga. In his tweets, he identifies and focuses on the dissenting parties. When he declares, "Any negative polls are fake news, just like CNN, ABC, NBC polls in the election. Sorry, people want border security and extreme vetting," he labels critics as untrustworthy while portraying himself as the person who is just trying to do the people's bidding. However, he does not necessarily articulate that he is the hero of the story. Rather, he often remains on the sidelines of his plotline by focusing on his antagonists to create dramatic tension and draw viewer attention, just not toward Trump himself. As the aforementioned tweet notes, he is "sorry, people want border security and extreme vetting." He portrays himself as the messenger and the avenger who serves at the pleasure of the people. Although political spectacles typically strive to positively portray the political figure, they seek to shine the spotlight directly on that figure, the architect. Although social media spectacles are indirectly garnering attention, they do so not by drawing attention to the architect, but rather to the villains. Even though the social media spectacle simultaneously constructs the architect as the hero, the architect is seemingly a hero by default, not by design.

Discussion of Unexpected Spaces

To further direct attention away from the architect and paradoxically position the architect as a de facto hero, the social media spectacle can also indicate indirect heroism by focusing on unexpected spaces. Namely, the social media spectacle can shift political attention from Washington to alternative locations to imply a political figure's problem-solving ability. Trump entered the White House by perceptually centering political power among citizens, declaring "January 20th 2017, will be remembered as the day the people became the rulers of this nation again." He started his presidency under the pretense that the people "are not merely transferring power from one Administration to another, or from one party to another – but we are transferring power from Washington, D.C. and giving it back to you, the American People." While this could be interpreted as a commitment to leaving the citizens be, Trump's future tweeted spectacles reflect that it is a foreshadowing of Trump's emergence in spaces outside of Washington.

The expectation might be for the presidential architect to positively address such spaces. After all, criticizing spaces could reflect negatively on the architect. However, critical statements about spaces

might divert attention more than positive applause because the criticism itself deviates from expectations of political decorum. For instance, when Trump declares, "If Chicago doesn't fix the horrible "carnage" going on, 228 shootings in 2017 with 42 killings (up 24% from 2016), I will send in the Feds!", he draws the public attention to violence in the Windy City. Although he does so by threatening federal intervention, his critiques ultimately point someplace far away from his person. Similarly, he makes sweeping remarks about dangers overseas, like, "Iran is playing with fire – they don't appreciate how 'kind' President Obama was to them. Not me!" and "The threat from radical Islamic terrorism is very real, just look at what is happening in Europe and the Middle-East. Courts must act fast!" In making a spectacle of foreign powers' alleged weaknesses, Trump frames those spaces as problematic areas in need of intervention or avoidance. Even though he inserts himself briefly, insisting he will sternly handle pressure from Iran, the emphasis is on the space and the issue within, not on the person who solves the puzzle. However, the presence of self is not required for the introduction of unexpected spaces to be effective. For example, when Trump declares, "Mexico has taken advantage of the U.S. for long enough. Massive trade deficits and little help on the very weak border must change, NOW!", he does not place himself in the message. Rather, he condemns another country, a surprising choice for a political figure to make on a casual social networking site. Neither international nor domestic spaces are safe. In fact, by calling out recognizable public spaces, like Chicago and—as the aforementioned tweet notes—UC Berkeley, Trump problematizes their existence in public life. Everyday spaces become political battlegrounds. As such, the critiques shock the public, further define in-groups and out-groups, and seemingly disintegrate feelings of community, the latter of which runs counter to the political spectacle's common result. The architect can present a social media spectacle to make the public aware of national and international problems. In doing so, the architect becomes both a source of perceived knowledge and solutions, potentially heightening public faith in the architect's heroic capabilities.

Media Redirection

Through dramatization and hero-villain portrayal, the social media spectacle redirects the attention gathered through deliberative sales-pitching and implied heroism toward, yet past the message's architect. One way the spectacle achieves this is through the media coverage of said messages. Due to the inflammatory divisiveness of tweets framing a villainous figure, such messages may trend on social media. Unsurprisingly, news media may cover said tweets or use them as evidence in their own reports. In "retweeting" the tweets outside of the social media platform, the news media further perpetuate the messages.

Trump employs social media spectacles to redirect the news media by emphasizing content and context and minimizing his participation within them. When Trump tweeted that he would "be asking for a major investigation into VOTER FRAUD, including those registered to vote in two states," news organizations like the *New York Times*, *Associated Press*, and *Los Angeles Times* quickly noted the tweet's hypocrisy (Burke, 2017; Lee, 2017; McCann, 2017), namely that multiple members of Trump's cabinet registered to vote in multiple states, including former political aide Steve Bannon (Anderson, 2017; McCann, 2017), former press secretary Sean Spicer (Gold & Crites, 2017; McCann, 2017), son-in-law Jared Kushner (Gold & Crites, 2017; McCann, 2017), and daughter Tiffany Trump (Kim, 2017; McCann, 2017). Greg Phillips, Trump's authority on voter fraud, registered in three states: Alabama, Texas, and Mississippi (Burke, 2017). Once hooked on the hypocrisy, news channels began discussing the legality of being registered to vote in multiple states (Gold & Crites, 2017; McCann, 2017). As the conversations broadened, Trump and his tweet became the opening narrative. Nevertheless, he received publicity (Domonoske, 2017; Martin, 2017; Newkirk, 2017; Pindell, 2017; Quigley, 2017). The news media may have intended to inform the public and even scold Trump for his divisive discourse, but by commenting, they granted him the attention he desired. Still, his message and the issue it addressed became the story more than he did. By creating messages that would spark the news media's attention, Trump could amplify his stance on the issue while simultaneously redirecting attention from himself to social implications of voter fraud in the American legal system. In this regard, Trump seemingly deploys

a political spectacle as he "offer[s] an appearance of [gaining attention] so long as attention is diverted from the problematic premises" (Edelman, 1988, p. 5). However, rather than diverting attention from the problematic premises of the issue, he diverts attention away from the problematic premises of his character. He becomes secondary to his commentary. As such, Trump simultaneously gains media attention and redirects it away from himself to heighten publicity without having it dwell on his past acts. He keeps the public focused more on what he and others say and less on who he is.

In sum, social media architects draw attention to public issues and divert attention away from themselves. By incorporating soundbites that imply political opinions and capitalization that foreshadows future political actions, the social media spectacle engages a deliberative rhetorical strategy to sell the public on a particular political figure. By suggesting the presence of a protagonist self and villainous others and addressing unexpected spaces to heighten awareness of public issues, the spectacle implies that the figure is a hero by default. Finally, by directing the media toward content and context, the architect directs attention toward issues the architect cares about without drawing attention to the architect's own problems. The architect gains publicity in doing so, but not by placing themselves in the issue. In other words, the architect uses social media to point at problems that do not implicate the architect.

Implications

Social media spectacle highlights how the political architect crafts reality behind the screen. Although the architects of days past have promoted themselves on social media, pointing out the positive attributes they bring to the table, architects today function in a divisive online era. Some architects function in that era by less explicitly aligning themselves with their opinions online. In doing so, political architects attempt to minimize their personal character flaws, while still articulating their own stances.

The implications of social media spectacles should be considered as rhetorical scholars contemplate how politicians incorporate political spectacles in their social media communication. Specifically, we should consider how the anti-politician platform into which the social media spectacle feeds functions as the spectacle itself. We see the emergence of the anti-politician if we return to Trump's tweets. Even though his incorporation of social media spectacle reveals political savviness, Trump's tweets reflect an anti-politician platform and allow him to deviate from expectations. Although his tweets seem like casual afterthoughts due to their informal structure, Trump's social media usage reflects some degree of political strategizing. While he claims not to be a typical politician and has no background in American politics, Trump's incorporation of social media spectacle indicates that this very claim might also be part of the spectacle. In other words, Trump claims political inexperience to distract from his strategized decisions. This does not mean that he possesses the contextual knowledge to run a country, but it does indicate that he understands how to play the game. Therefore, it is vital for the American public to view anti-politician claims as social media spectacles, potential distractions from something politically significant. Scholars should consider how anti-political identities are constructed and maintained through spectacles on social media.

Additionally, political rhetoricians should contemplate the dialectic of division-unification emerging from social media spectacles. Trump's use of social media spectacle reflects that division can be paradoxically initiated to unite a community through shared knowledge rather than splinter it. When diverting attention, Trump continuously underlines political issues that affect significant populations (i.e., terrorism). While highlighting these issues, Trump condemns the villains and binds the non-villains together. This interplay of division and unification is not uncommon in group communication literature and rhetorical studies. Nevertheless, the interactions between online political spectacle and the division-unification dialectic have yet to be fully dissected. Researchers specializing in political communication, computer-mediated communication, and/or mass communication might explore how simultaneous unification and division occur on social media platforms.

Finally, social media spectacle as theoretical extension warrants deeper consideration in communication studies. As previously established, social media spectacle draws similarities to the established political spectacle. However, I have argued that both the form and function of online

communication calls us to revisit how we conceptualize computer-mediated communication in a society that radiates secondary orality. As the political messages online evolve, the theories we use to examine them must also adapt. Still, social media spectacle needs further consideration to complete its development as a metatheoretical concept. The functions I have put forth today are reflective of social media spectacle, but they are not all inclusive. They are based on the rhetorical social media usage of one man alone. Social media spectacle must be explored among the online rhetoric of more political figures. Moreover, questions remain regarding how the spectacle might emerge differently when employed among different demographic groups online. I still question the following: How might social media spectacle manifest differently when the partisan/ideological identities of architect and audience (mis)align on a medium? How might the political rhetoric of Black Twitter challenge my assertions about social media spectacle's privileging of self over community? How do social media spectacles emerge within image repairing attempts in the wake of sexist and racist campaign rhetoric? In short, Trump's tweets reveal techniques that function as social media spectacle, but these are preliminary observations of a construct that still needs to be finessed. Scholars might compare how other political figures tweet to grow the extension to its potential.

Conclusion

Social media spectacles are representations of reality. They are constructed, which should be kept in mind when considering the meaning within online political rhetorics. In fact, it is critical to interpret power figures' proposed *Reality* as a representation of *a reality* instead. To deem a political voice to regurgitate absolute Truth is to ignore the influence of framing, motivation, and context. A power figure's projection is a factor-laden argument, not irrefutable Truth. Social media spectacle reminds citizens of a need to view architects as presenting a viewpoint, but not the only viewpoint available. In doing so, citizens may develop healthy questioning of "absolute truths" presented by power figures and recognize alternative realities. In essence, social media spectacle's explanation of reality representation provides citizens a means to actively check political power rather than passively accept constructed reality.

This essay explored the development of social media spectacle through Trump's online political rhetoric. As his tweets reveal, contemporary politicians may incorporate spectacles that breach citizen expectations, garner attention, and divert the public gaze to public issues rather than to the tweet's architect. By analyzing Trump tweets, this criticism identified similarities and differences between political spectacle and social media spectacle. After evaluating the attention-seeking or diverting tendencies of Trump's signature tweet trends—and their resulting divisiveness—the essay explained why Trump might tweet in such a style and how social media spectacle directs the nation's focus.

Those who contemplate the political rhetoric of social media may find that social media spectacle clarifies how text-based communication functions and what intentions might lie between the lines. This essay sought to demonstrate the scholarly value of social media spectacle in the hope of encouraging its incorporation in the contemporary scholarship of those whose interest lies in the transition to text-based communication in political discourse. Scholars studying social media and political rhetoric might construct insightful questions and discover intriguing implications from texts that intersect human communication of past and present, of oral, textual, *and* technological media.

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Black American Vaccine Hesitancy: Using the Black Public Sphere to Understand How Minority Health Organizations Address the COVID-19 Vaccine on Twitter

Aisha Powell

The unveiling of the COVID-19 vaccines has sparked widespread expressions of apprehension, distrust and fear. Especially among Black Americans, who have had a troubling relationship with Western medicine due to the centuries of medical oppression and racist practices by health practitioners. Researchers have found that culturally competent and ethnic targeted health messaging has worked to improve the health beliefs of Black Americans and to help Black patients adopt pro-social behaviors like vaccine uptake. In addition, online mediums like social media have been used in health communication as the world becomes more technologically connected. This study analyzes the Twitter messaging of three minority-based health organizations – the United States Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, and Black Women's Health Organization – to see how they combat the vaccine hesitancy of Black Americans. As guided by the Black public sphere, a content analysis of the organizations' tweets found that they used communal frames, Black health care professionals and Black voices in their content, which aligned with the best practices for racially attuned messaging and differed from the mainstream presentation of the information. However, the organizations did not sufficiently address the elements or conversations distinct to Black Twitter users, specifically dialogue about the historical precedent of medical malpractice, which impeded their effectiveness in reaching the racial group. Evaluations of the content will be presented as guided by critical health communication recommendations.

Keywords: African Americans, COVID-19, vaccine apprehension, Black public sphere

Introduction

In a joint press release on April 13, 2021, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced the immediate pause of the Johnson and Johnson (J&J) vaccine for COVID-19 (Office of the Commission, 2021). COVID-19 is the novel coronavirus that has since claimed the lives of more than six million people worldwide (Ritchie et al., 2021; The New York Times, 2021). Citing an "abundance of caution," the two organizations state that six out of the 6.8 million people who got the J&J vaccine developed a rare type of blood clot, called cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (Office of the Commission, 2021). The cautionary language and lack of context in the press release fueled the growing anxiety of Americans about the efficacy of all the COVID-19 vaccines (Chow et al., 2021; Cohn, 2021; Linskey et al., 2021; Ruben & Goldberg, 2021).

Since the first FDA announcement of the emergency use of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine in December 2020, Americans have been skeptical about getting any COVID inoculation. In partnership with German biotechnology company BioNTech, the biopharmaceutical company Pfizer used decades worth of scientific research, rapid clinical trials and an all-hands-on-deck approach to formulate the first approved COVID-19 vaccine (Browne, 2020; Pfizer, 2020a; 2020b; 2021). But, according to a December 2020 Pew Research Center survey, 40% of Americans said they would not get the vaccine, with 53% of those stating they would not get the vaccine even if there was more information (Funk & Tyson, 2020). Although vaccine apprehension had decreased more than 12% from the initial reports in May of 2020, Americans still cited personal concerns, distrust in the development process and even partisanship affiliation as reasons why they would not take the vaccine (Funk & Tyson, 2020; Szilagyi et al., 2021).

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Overall vaccine skepticism has been seen amongst all Americans, but Black Americans' hesitancy towards the vaccine is the highest among all other racial groups. In a study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 52% of Black Americans stated they would "wait and see" before signing up for the vaccination, with only 20% committing to getting the vaccine when it was available (Hamel et al., 2021). This rate is lower than both White and Latin/Hispanic respondents in the survey. The majority of Black Americans also said they do not trust the vaccine, with only 14% stating they think it is safe, 18% stating they believe it is effective and 28% who said it was designed with "culturally specific testing and safety" (COVID Collaborative et al., 2020). When accounting for all other demographic information, the disparities amongst Black Americans are even more complex. Nationwide survey data from the U.S. Census found age discrepancies amongst vaccine apprehension. Black adults under the age of 40 were the most likely to state that they will not get the vaccine (Linke & Melgar, 2021) and Black men opting to wait for more vaccines rollout, at 45%, at a slighter higher rate than Black women, at 41% (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2021). The skepticism is combatted with disproportionate rates of Black Americans contracting and dying from the virus. Black Americans represent 14.9% of COVID-19-related deaths and are twice as likely to die from it compared to their White counterparts (APM Research Lab Staff, 2020).

Black American hesitancy toward the vaccine is not new, but a continuous consequence of the history of racist medical practices in American medicine (Cobb, 2020; McLernon, 2021; O'Donnell, 2020; Okorodudu & Okorodudu, 2021). Some of the biggest instances being of the Tuskegee syphilis experiment: the nearly 40-year-long study by the United States Public Health Services on nearly 400 impoverished African American sharecroppers in Alabama, who were injected with latent syphilis to see the effects of the STD when gone untreated (Brandt, 1978; Corbie-Smith, 1999; Reverby, 2013). This resulted in the death of 128 Black Americans. In addition, the Mississippi Appendectomy cases: the 60-year-long state-sponsored involuntary sterilization procedure that sterilized more than 8,000 poor women, 40% being Black, throughout the south (Sacks, 2019; Schully, 2004). These historic instances of maltreatment have set precedent and given credence to Black Americans' apprehension towards medicine as a whole.

Researchers have identified practices in health communication to overcome Black American uncertainty towards vaccines that include targeting local and national campaigns (McLernon, 2021), specific cultural framing for vaccine communication (Privor-Dumm & King, 2021; Quinn et al., 2016), and using social media and technology as a tool to relay health-related messaging (Leader et al., 2020; Puri et al., 2020). Specifically, Twitter has been identified as a viable medium for health messaging toward Black Americans due to the high percentage of Black users, the accessibility of the site and its ability to spark larger conversations (Brock, 2012; McClellan et al., 2016; Xu, 2016).

Purpose and Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study is to understand the current COVID-19 vaccine messaging toward Black Americans to identify three things: if the information is culturally relevant, how it is framed to overcome vaccine apprehension, and how it caters to a Black specific audience. Black Americans' distrust of the COVID-19 vaccination has sparked public discussions in newspapers (Blackstock & Blackstock, 2021; Boodman, 2021; Kum, 2020), medical communities (Quinn et al., 2016; Robeznieks, 2020), and national public health entities like the CDC and the American Public Health Association (Akintobi et al., 2020; Ferdinand, 2021). This means that the issue is well-known amongst the scholarly community, medical practitioners and government-run health organizations. Solutions, recommendations and best practices have also been identified by scholars and members of the health field, and have been made available for widespread use. This study will test if those suggestions are being implemented, and how minority-based health organizations disseminate vaccine information to the most vulnerable and doubtful community: Black Americans.

German philosopher Jürgen Habermas' central concept of a public sphere will be used to guide this study. The idea of a public sphere is the literal and figurative arena where members of society get together to freely discuss issues to reach a common goal (Habermas et al., 1964; Calhoun, 1997; McKee,

2009). Despite its original conception envisioning a physical space for the public discourse, the idea of a public sphere has been used to explore online communities (Dahlberg, 2001; Moe, 2008: Papacharissi, 2002) and digital societies that emerge amongst social media users (Bruns & Highfield, 2015; Kruse et al., 2018; Shirky, 2011). The Black public sphere is specific to the Black diaspora, where members create spaces to connect, discuss issues, and circulate content that reflects the racial, cultural and social components of the group (Black Public Sphere Collective, 1995). Scholars have used the Black public sphere to explore how Black ecosystems are formed on the internet, particularly Twitter (Brock, 2012, 2020), and how they function outside of the mainstream voice (Lewis, 2012; Mahoney, 2021). Black Twitter users have been found to gravitate towards racial hashtags, events correlated with Black history and Black social influencers (Maragh, 2017; Pruitt, 2015; Sharma, 2013). The underpinnings of the public sphere will help in the assessment of the minority-based health organizations that are attempting to infiltrate Black online communities, which historically operate as a counter-public, to spread health information. The goals of this study are to answer these research questions:

> **RQ1** What are the major themes and elements in tweets from minority-based health organizations about the COVID-19 vaccine?
> **RQ2** What are the differences between how mainstream and minority-based health organizations present COVID-19 vaccine information and misinformation?
> **RQ3** Are mainstream and minority-based health organizations specifically addressing vaccination apprehension of Black Americans in their Twitter content?

Literature Review

Racist Medicine and Black Americans

In a deep dive into institutional racism in the medical field, John Hoberman (2012a) gives an overview of how medical racism is perpetuated and sustained throughout healthcare. Hoberman explains how medical texts screws data to privilege White patients, prejudice toward Black patients is reinforced through word-of-mouth anecdotes and the unwillingness of the health field to be self-critical, has created a harmful environment for Black people (Hoberman, 2012c; 2012b). This implicit bias toward Black patients has been seen as early as medical school (Hoberman, 2012b; van Ryn et al., 2015) with continued occurrences in the field (Sabin et al., 2009). Some of these racial biases include physicians stereotyping disease and treatment for African Americans upon seeing their skin color without a proper assessment (Moskowitz et al., 2012); perceiving that Black Americans are less prone to feeling pain when reporting the same or more amounts of pain than their White counterparts (Hoffman et al., 2016; Tait & Chibnall, 2014; Wyatt, 2008); and medical practitioners assuming Black patients' socioeconomic and health status when providing treatment options (Chapman et al., 2013; Greer, 2010; Moskowitz et al., 2012).

In addition, the biases have amassed to tension between White doctors and Black patients fueling a cycle of distrust that has continuously perpetuated standoffish behavior of practitioners while discouraging Black patients from seeking health care (Hoberman, 2012b). Levy (1985) found that regardless of social class, Black patients and White doctors can have a low-quality relationship due to cultural differences that are not alleviated or addressed by the doctors' medical training. Gordon et al. (2006) found that not only were Black patients more passive in inquiring about information regarding lung cancer treatment from their White doctors, but they received less information overall when they did ask. Elliott et al. (2016) even found that White doctors displayed significantly fewer positive and empathetic non-verbal cues towards Black patients compared to White ones. Studies have shown that the lack of communication between Black patients and White doctors has decreased the quality of care and health outcomes for Black Americans (Cooper et al., 2012; Kahn, 1994; Street et al., 2007). However, when Black patients are matched with Black doctors, they report greater satisfaction with the medical care and services (LaVeist & NuruJeter, 2002), which also corresponds to the litany of research documenting

better outcomes of health expectancy when Black patients are paired with doctors who are also Black (Alsan et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2018; Mahase, 2020).

Despite medical racism being well-known, the American medical community has yet to re-access its colorblind ideology (Hoberman, 2012a). In a 2015 systematic review, Hall et al. (2015) found that most healthcare providers had negative attitudes toward people of color, with Black patients facing the most implicit bias, although physicians stated they treat all patients the same. Malat et al. (2010) interviewed 22 White doctors and nurses and found that color-blindness drove their avoidance of acknowledging health disparities in practice when questioned about racist medicine. Clark-Hitt et al. (2010) found that White doctors were more likely to place blame on Black patients for health-related divergences than on their own racial bias. This history of medical racism has created a contentious environment, and especially during heightened times like the COVID-19 pandemic, where hyper-skeptical Black patients have instinctive angst towards western-based medicine and are increasingly difficult to reach.

Social Media and Health Communication

Social media has become a central source in spreading health information. Elements of social media like its cost-effectiveness and ability to reach audiences have made it an effective tool in health communication, which can subsequently affect health-related decisions (Moorhead, 2013; Yeung, 2018). In addition, online-based primary healthcare practices, like Brooklyn-based *Hello Health* and teletherapy organization *Talkspace,* have heavily used social media to promote services that have eschewed health insurance limitations and improved patient-doctor communication (Hawn, 2009; Wiederhold, 2018). Due to its growing popularity, political leaders and major health organizations – like the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Society, and the American Diabetes Association – have used social media to disseminate health information to the public (Marshall, 2019; Park et al.,2015; Powell, 2021).

There have been several studies on the uses of social media during viral disease outbreaks. During the Ebola outbreak in 2014, Fung et al. (2016) found that there was little medical misinformation about the disease on Twitter and users regularly disproved falsehoods when presented. In another study, D'Agostino et al. (2017) discovered that posting helpful health content on Twitter, particularly if locality was indicated, helped the information receive greater acceptability amongst users. During various outbreaks of influenza, researchers have found that some users of social media are more likely to be vaccinated than non-users (Ahmed et al. 2018; Jarrett et al., 2015); discourse about the virus on social networks is more likely to emphasize its harmfulness and encourage the flu shot than in traditional media (Lehmann et al., 2013); and how social media had a positive effect on mitigating the spread of the virus during peak outbreaks (Kumar et al., 2021).

For COVID-19 communication, social media has emerged as one of the most prevalent spaces to get immediate health information. Early research on the pandemic has found that social media influencers can have a positive impact on spreading helpful preventative measures (Khasawneh et al., 2021; Klucarova, 2021)); online platforms can be used as a coping mechanism for groups looking for mental and emotional support (Pagnini et al., 2021); and social media can be used by government leaders to subdue fear, misinformation and divisive sentiments (Limaye et al., 2020; Powell, 2021). This study will build upon the growing body of work on social media use during the age of COVID as a crisis mitigating tool for health organizations.

Social Media and Health Misinformation

While social media has uprooted traditional barriers to obtaining health information, it also comes with its own issues. Pershad et. al (2018) found that the biggest issue with online health communication is the balance between popularity and accuracy, to which the popularity of a person giving the information is the clearest indicator of whether it will be well-received or not. Sylvia Chou et al. (2020) also found that there needs to be health surveillance of information on social media because it can propagate false

information about vaccines and even quasi health remedies that can have widespread effects on health decisions. In addition, some studies have shown that misinformation related to COVID-19 was more likely to circulate on social networking platforms and particularly on Twitter (Bridgman et al., 2020), with bots contributing greatly to COVID-19 conspiracy posts (Himelein-Wachowiak et al., 2020). Adding to the number of studies on social media's detrimental effects during health crises (Chrousos et al., 2020; Larson, 2018; Rubin, 2019), researchers have honed in on harmful uses of the internet, particularly during viral epidemics and pandemics.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an even more divisive environment on social media as misinformation is strongly correlated with the political, geographical and cultural positions of users (Brindha et al., 2020; Leng et al., 2021; Tasnim et al., 2020). Looking at strongly partisan affiliated news institutions, Freiling et al. (2021) showed that a user's primary source of news correlated to their willingness to share false claims about COVID-19 online. Several studies have found that members of the Republican party or self-identified conservatives are more likely to spread false information about the virality, deadly effects and treatment options related to COVID-19 (Calvillo et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2021; Druckman et al., 2021). On more international-based social networking sites, like *WhatsApp* and *Telegram,* research has shown a surge of false claims and vaccine rumors amongst the older and non-Western populace that uses the platforms (Bowles et al., 2020; Malhotra, 2020). Correspondingly, different racial and ethical groups across the world also share a variety of COVID-19 misconceptions across all social media sites (Guntuku et al., 2021; Muric et al., 2021).

Specific to the Black population, health misinformation during pandemics is strongly correlated to the historical mistreatment of Black patients and the solutions that were created to subvert the system (Druckman et al., 2021; Prasad, 2022). Oyeymi et al. (2014) found that more than half of the Twitter posts pulled from Guinea, Nigeria and Liberia during the Ebola outbreak contained misinformation and those tweets had the greatest reach. Some treatment options posted by users contained pseudo-plant-based remedies as cures (Oyeymi et al., 2014) and when local governments would dispute some of the false claims, those posts circulated at a smaller level. Early during the pandemic, notions of Black people's "natural" immunity to the disease caused long-term confusion about susceptibility and apprehension towards treatment, even after being disproven at large by the mass media (Tabong & Segtub, 2021). Misinformation on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to intensify Black American distrust in western medicine, and this study will analyze how health organizations effectively combat it.

Black Americans, Social Media and Effective Health Communication

In addition to the various uses of social media by Black Americans, the group has historically gravitated towards alternative and minority-focused organizations to get informed during their health decision processes (Brodie et al., 2010; Flanders et al., 2017; Mesch et al., 2012; Richardson et al., 2012). Caburnay et. al (2008) found that Black communities rated their local Black newspaper as a more trusted source for health-related news compared to national media and that the information is just as credible as advice from a healthcare provider (Caburnay et al., 2008). In a subsequent study, on the framing of genetic-related news, Caburnay et al. (2014) found that the Black press offered more recommendations for high-risk populations and highlighted individual responsibility to know their family history, whereas the mainstream press did not. The Black press also uses distinct health frames in their messaging emphasizing community-based involvement in treatment and preventive measures (Pickle et al., 2002); giving detailed analyses of healthcare policies and connecting individual choices to health disparities within the community (Rasmussen, 2014); and can subsidize the mainstream news by addressing minority issues and concerns (Brodie et al., 199). Alternative media and minority-focused media are more trusted within the Black community and specifically frame health information in ways that the mainstream media does not. This study builds upon that assumption and will investigate how minority-focused organizations present COVID-19 vaccine information to Black Americans.

Understanding the different cultural, linguistic and historical barriers that Black Americans have had to endure, critical research has been done to guide entities in their health communication with the vulnerable group. Quinn (2017) found that when health care providers recommended a service, like the flu vaccine, African Americans are more likely to see it as important to their health. In addition, she found that discussions with high-risk patients about the benefits of the vaccine and potential complications can improve trust within patients, which correlates to getting the vaccine (Quinn, 2017). In a meta-analysis of flu-related communication, Nowak et al. (2015) found that intergenerational photos of African Americans in influenza public service announcements were an important factor to garner African Americans' attention and increase their influenza vaccine uptake. Pictures of African Americans in health communication can also overcome low literacy barriers among the community (Houts et. al, 2006), increase enrollment in health programs (Goodman et. al, 2017), and improve their overall engagement with health information (Kreuter et al., 2008).

There are also distinctions in how health data is presented. In a focus group, Sanders Thompson et al. (2008) found that specific statistical information about the affected community, as opposed to general stats, increased the attentiveness of the participants and especially if it was paired with information about the signs and symptoms (Sanders Thompson et al., 2008). Furthermore, having statical "ethnic-specific" statements regarding disparity and prevalence was also preferred by African Americans and increased the relevance of the information (Sanders Thompson et al., 2008). Baty et al. (2003) also utilized a focus group of African Americans and discovered that they responded more to "personalized" and "relevant" information about their targeted group, rather than technical detail (Baty et al., 2003). They also note that the most successful strategies were:

> "nontechnical images to explain genetic concepts, clip art images to energize and personalize word slides, vibrant color, identifiably African American figures, and the development of themes relevant to many African Americans." (Baty et al., 2003).

The practices that have been identified to help increase overall attentiveness to health content and preferred communication methods by Black Americans will be used in the present study's analysis of the data. Not only will these strategies help in evaluating the perceived effectiveness of the minority-focused organizations messaging, but they can also help identify where improvements need to be made. With the history of medical mistreatments toward Black Americans, the uncorrected practices that have amplified health disparities, the uses and misuses of social media for health information, and the vital role of cultural competency to effectively reach the Black community – this study's goal will evaluate a modern pandemic and vaccination communication towards Black Americans.

Methodology and Research Design

A content analysis was implemented on tweets from six health organizations to analyze their COVID-19 vaccine messaging. Content analyses are a commonly used qualitative methodological approach to get a deeper understanding of data that is text-based (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Shelley & Krippendorff, 1984) and offer a systematic way to review large sums of text in order to draw trends (Berelson, 1952; Harwood & Garry, 2003; Stemler, 2000). Content analysis has also been extensively used in health communication research to understand messaging of health information to the public (Vargas & De Pyssl, 1999; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Only verified Twitter accounts were chosen for this study, as the verification symbol not only indicates to Twitter users that the account is certifiable real but also means that those accounts are deemed more trustworthy and authentic than unverified accounts (Kabakuş & Şimşek, 2019; Paul et al. 2019). This also confirmed that the Twitter accounts were the actual accounts of the respective organization. Purposeful sampling is an analytic procedure that can be used for qualitative data collection and analysis to assemble the most information-rich records during specific times and particularly when there are limited resources (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2014). For this study, this process was used to gather tweets from specific health organizations that target minorities.

The minority-focused health organizations that were chosen are the United States Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health (@MinorityHealth), the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (@NIMHD), and Black Women's Health Organization (@blkWomensHealth). Two of these organizations are government-run, @MinorityHealth and @NIMHD, and one is a non-profit, @blkWomensHealth. Although Black Women's Health was originally found to address the health and reproductive rights of African American women (Black Women's Health, n.d.), it was chosen because Black women have been found to be the decision-makers for health-related issues of their families (Matoff-Stepp et al., 2014; McCarroll & Frantz, 2015). Thus, analyzing a Black women-specific organization can give insight into information an entire Black family receives. These three organizations were chosen because they are all centered on minority health messaging and have the three largest Twitter presences compared to other minority-based health organizations.

The three mainstream health organizations chosen for this study are the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (@CDCgov), the United States Department of Health & Human Services (@HHSGov), and the American Public Health Association (@PublicHealth). Two of these organizations are government-run, @CDCgov and @HHSGov, and one is a non-profit, @PublicHealth. These organizations were chosen as they too have the largest Twitter following of any U.S.-based mainstream health organization.

An advanced Twitter search was conducted on April 14, 2021, using each organization's "@" name and the word "vaccine" to vet posts that were vaccine-related. Additionally, only tweets from January 1, 2020, were used, to ensure the "vaccine" tweet is related to COVID-19 and no other vaccine information. After the search was conducted, all tweets were manually extrapolated and put into an excel file for each organization. Photos were also pulled from vaccine tweets, for further analysis. Tweets with the term "vaccine" that were not related to the COVID-19 vaccine, were manually removed from the sample.

A thematic analysis was then applied to each of the organizations individually and then redone per the two categories, minority-based and mainstream, to understand individual and collective sentiments. Thematic analysis is often used in conjunction with qualitative methodologies to aid in the formation of themes and highlight "similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights" (King, 2004; Nowell et al., 2017). This will be helpful in the individual and group synthesis, as well as for comparative purposes across minority-based content and mainstream content.

A thematic analysis relies on coding procedures to identify and categorize themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Braun and Clarke (2012) detailed a six-phase process for coding to use with thematic analyses. The first phase is the initial reading of the data; in phase two an early set of codes are formulated; in the third phase codes are combined into primary themes; in phase four the themes are analyzed for how they support the data; in phase five a comprehensive analysis of each theme is conducted; and phase six is the final write up the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This coding process was applied to the data collected in the study.

Findings

A total of 280 tweets across all organizations were vaccine-related content from January 1, 2020, to April 14, 2021. See Table 1 for the breakdown of the followers and number of tweets per health organization. Minority-based health organizations produced 109 vaccine-related tweets, the majority being from government-based health organizations (@MinorityHealth and @NIMHD). Mainstream health organizations produced 171 tweets. The follower ratio of the mainstream to minority-based health organizations was 42:1 and the vaccine tweet ratio was 1:5. Five themes were found in minority-based organizations' vaccine Twitter messaging that were used to answer the research questions.

Table 1

Followers, Vaccine Tweet Count and Focus of Twitter Health Organizations

Account	Followers	Number of Vaccine-Related Tweets	Focus
@MinorityHealth	71,400	51	Minority
@NIMHD	21,100	50	Minority
@blkWomensHealth	31,600	8	Minority
@CDC	3,800,000	69	Mainstream
@HHSGov	1,000,000	45	Mainstream
@PublicHealth	504,000	57	Mainstream

How Do Minority Organizations Present Covid Information on Twitter?

Black Faces and Clinical Trials

There were two main themes that emerged in the ways that minority-based health organizations disseminate vaccine information on Twitter. The first one is the utilization of authoritative Black leaders to speak about vaccine efficacy and effectiveness. Minority-based health organizations only used minorities, apart from Dr. Fauci, when they used a healthcare professional in their post. In one tweet by @MinorityHealth, they insert a quote: *"In addition to the review of data by career FDA scientists, there are multiple additional independent reviews of data for both safety & effectiveness before a COVID vaccine is approved & safety data continues to be collected..."* along with a video of a Black physician and the Minority Health Director, Dr. Felicia Collins, overviewing the research that went into the vaccine. The use of a Black doctor, health care specialist or researcher was seen on all the minority health organizations' tweets and indicated that the information given was coming from a member of the Black community. More examples included using a full Black panelist of doctors to speak about the vaccine development, a virtual health fair run by Black nurses and a virtual conference with people in the Black community called *BlackPeopleLikeMe*.

The second prevalent theme was the emphasis on Black Americans who got the vaccine or volunteered for a clinical trial. @NIMHD had several stories posted about Black healthcare leaders who volunteered themselves and their families for the vaccine trial. @BLKWomensHealth even highlighted the story of the first Black ICU nurse to get the vaccine in New York. These types of content often had a quick synopsis of the speaker and external links provided in the tweet.

Minority organizations also stressed the importance of diversity in the clinical trials for the vaccine. Some of those tweets included:

>*"why diversity in #clinicaltrials is important to ensure vaccines are safe for everyone.*"
>*"NIH-funded clinical trials are underway to develop #COVID19 treatments and vaccines. These trials must include participation of diverse communities across the country. Learn how your participation can make a difference: https://bit.ly/3pJZnuh #ConquerCOVID #NIHCEAL"*

All the government-based minority health organizations frequently made posts about clinical trials and attempted to solicit minorities to sign up for a trial to improve the overall development of the vaccine. These posts tended to have imagery, infographic or collages, of smiling racial minorities and links to sign up for a trial. These posts were also supplemented with community-oriented incentives like this one by @NIMHD:

>*"#DYK that when you get vaccinated, you're protecting yourself, your family, & your community? That's why NIH-funded scientists are working hard to develop #COVID19 vaccines that can help #StopTheSpread. Learn more.*

And these by @MinorityHealth:

>*"You can help science move forward. Clinical trials to find a vaccine for #COVID19 are*

> *taking place in your community. Learn more about participating"*
> *"#DYK that when you get vaccinated, you're protecting yourself, your family and your*
> *community? That's why NIH-funded scientists are working hard to find a #COVID19*

vaccine *to help #stopthespread. Learn more:"*

These types of tweets were also more prone to specifically call out an ethnic or racial
group like this tweet by @NIMHD:

> *"Data show that #COVID19 affects Black, Hispanic/Latino, & Native American populations at*
> *much higher rates. Including these groups in #ClinicalResearch can ensure the resulting vaccines*
> *and treatments will work for the people with greatest need."*

Hashtags and Photos for Vaccine Information

Minority-based health organizations also primarily used visuals and hashtags in their COVID-19
vaccination posts to supplement the content of the tweets. Pictures or videos accompanied almost every
tweet across all three organizations. The majority of the pictures had a photo of a person of color with text
somewhere on the photo. For the two governmental organizations, @NIMHD and @MinortyHealth, most
of the images were watermarked by the CDC or the National Institute of Health and the photos had links
to their websites to get more information. Other types of imagery include text-only photos and those were
more frequently used for tweets that spoke about upcoming panels or news updates.

Only two videos were used on Twitter posts, and both were by @MinorityHealth. The first was a
2-minute clip of Dr. Lashawn McIver, a Black woman who is the Director of the Office of Minority
Health, who was advocating for people to get the vaccine and communicating that it was free for all
people regardless of their insurance or immigration status. In another tweet, the Associate Commissioner
for the Office of Minority Health, a Latina woman named Richardae Araojo, explains that additional
COVID-19 vaccine information is available on their website in a variety of languages.

Hashtags were used in almost every Twitter post from the minority-based health organizations
about the COVID-19 vaccine. These hashtags included #DYK (do you know), #VaccineReady,
#StoptheSpread and #COVID-19. The most comprehensive use was made by @NIMHD that posted
"April is #NationalMinorityHealthMonth and this year's theme is #VaccineReady. Together we can
#StopTheSpread and empower underserved communities to get the facts about #COVID19 vaccines."
The hashtag #ClinicalTrial was solely used by the @NIMHD in tweets regarding the need for minorities
to sign up for vaccine clinical trials. The hashtag #BlackWomensHealth was used solely by
@blkwomenshealth in a post about a Black woman who did coronavirus research and was the only
hashtag to indicate a racial identifier. @MinorityHealth had one-off uses of the hashtags
#HealthCareProfessionals, #Fauci, #MondayMotivation and #WednesdayWisdom.

Differences in Mainstream and Minority Vaccine Information

Mainstream health organizations relayed more information about how vaccines work to prevent
COVID-19 and how getting the vaccine can decrease the spread of the virus. Some of that information
looked like this tweet from @HHSgov: *"COVID-19 vaccines help our bodies develop immunity to the
virus that causes COVID-19 without us having to get the illness. Learn more from the CDC"* and these
tweets from @CDCgov:

> *"mRNA vaccines teach our cells how to make a protein that triggers an immune response to*
> *#COVID19 inside our bodies. The immune response makes antibodies that protect us from*
> *getting infected if the real virus enters our bodies. More:"*
>
> *"Nearly 154 million doses of #COVID19 vaccines have been administered in the U.S. Recent*
> *increases in COVID-19 cases and variants threaten this progress. The race to contain the virus is*
> *underway. Our actions will determine the outcome. Learn more"*

Mainstream health organizations coupled these posts, with additional videos, infographics or links to
outside sources that went into more detail. These organizations made tweets about the side effects of

getting the vaccine – like fever, soreness, flu-like symptoms – and positioned them as normal happenings. They also listed safety precautions that Americans should follow, even after getting the vaccine, like being socially distant and the continuous use of masks.

Minority-based health organizations were less likely to post about the vaccine logistics, side effects or how it works, and almost never had any of that information in their actual tweet. Only one post from the minority-based health organizations addressed the vaccine process and effects explicitly, from the @MinorityHealth:

> *#DYK the #COVID19 vaccines do not contain the live virus that causes the disease? Having symptoms like fever after you get a #vaccine is normal and a sign your immune system is learning to fight the virus. Learn the facts & get #VaccineReady*

Instead, minority-based health organizations indicated that questions about how the vaccine works would be explained in an upcoming panel, video, or is detailed on an external website that was linked in the tweet. The majority of tweets plainly stated the vaccine was effective, but also urged minorities to sign up for clinical trials to confirm the presupposed effectiveness and help their community, like these tweets from @MinorityHealth, @NIMHD and @blkWomensHealth:

> *"Face coverings and quarantining of those infected with coronavirus can help stop the spread. But a safe & effective vaccine is our #BestShot against #COVID19. Learn how enrolling in a clinical trial can help. https://go.usa.gov/xfShb #ConquerCOVID19 #NativeHealthChat"*

> *"A7: DYK? Hispanics/Latinos are 4–5× more likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19. #ClinicalTrials can help determine whether vaccines & treatments are safe & effective. Learn more about clinical trial participation in Spanish. #HealthyLatinos"*

> *"Q6/A6: Pt. 2 - Covid19 vaccine trials further highlight the importance and the need for all black and brown communities."*

Differences in Mainstream and Minority Vaccine Addressing Misinformation

Mainstream health organizations posted a considerable number of tweets debunking vaccine myths and misinformation. This type of messaging was seen among all the mainstream organizations, with the majority coming from @Public Health and @HHSGov. A majority of these tweets demystified questions surrounding the vaccine modifying a person's DNA. Mainstream organizations tended to use videos and infographics with these tweets that reinforced the information.

Minority-based health organizations also addressed misinformation but in a more subtle way that would require more engagement from the Twitter user to get the information. Whereas mainstream health organizations were more prone to answering the hesitancy questions directly in the Twitter post, minority organizations did not. Instead, they would post links to conversations and panels to address concerns and questions about the vaccine.

Vaccine Apprehension of Black Americans

As a collective, neither mainstream nor minority-based health organization did a substantiated job at addressing the vaccine apprehension of Black Americans. Although it was only two tweets, @PublicHealth had the most posts about the lack of trust from African Americans towards the vaccine. Those tweets were:

> *"Trust in a #COVID19 vaccine is low in Black and Hispanic communities, a new survey says. To protect health, we must identify and address misconceptions & concerns around vaccine safety and effectiveness. http://covidcollaborative.us"*

> *"Watch live on Thursday, Feb. 25, at 9AM ET: APHA's Benjamin joins experts to talk about #COVID19 vaccine hesitancy, particularly in the Black community. What steps can we take to build trust? https://facebook.com/events/253348662992277/... #CVSHealthLive"*

While minority-based health organizations had general tweets about where to inquire more information about the COVID-19 vaccine, they never specifically addressed Black American apprehensiveness toward the vaccine. However, both the minority-based and mainstream health organizations had statical information about COVID-19 disproportionately affecting African Americans and used that as a point to push vaccination uptake.

Discussion

This study showed that minority-based health organizations' use of Twitter to inform Black Americans about the COVID-19 vaccine has been acceptable, but they overall fail to incorporate distinct culturally-attuned content. The use of Black people by the minority-based health organizations to speak as authoritative figures is a choice decision to gain the support of Black Americans, who are more prone to listening to health information from someone who looks like them (Alsan et al., 2019; Nowak et al., 2015). This is distinctly different from the mainstream organizations, which showed Black faces as somewhat removed from the content and did not explicitly indicate that the information presented was given by a minority figure in the health field. The use of Black professionals not only provides more credibility to the information, but people within the same community can understand cultural contexts in how they present information.

Partnering the need for diversity within the clinical trials and the collective benefits of getting the vaccine, as the Black press does often (Pickle et al., 2002), was presented to help Black Americans connect their individual decisions to the "greater good" and benefits to their community. Especially when this content is alongside photos of Black people, it works to signal behaviors towards positive collective action for Black Americans. The representations of Black people in health communication photos can increase attentiveness to the information because Black people can racially identify with them.

The use of hashtags was a bit divided because although they connected minority-specific posts to greater conversations about COVID-19, only one hashtag (#BlackWomensHealth) reflected a racial cue to discourse within the Black sphere alone. Using hashtags can help users identify that a post is a part of a bigger conversation. However, the lack of hashtags specific to a niche online community like Black Twitter could work against the minority-based health organizations in their strategies to infiltrate the group. Statistical information pertaining to the targeted community alone was also not used by any of the minority-based health organizations but could have been utilized to invoke vaccination immediacy among Black Americans.

Minority-based health organizations greatly differed from mainstream ones in the frames and content they used regarding the vaccine. Minority-based health organizations framed vaccination as a communal benefit to the Black community and focused on the trials rather than the logistical facts about the vaccine. The literature shows that Black Americans respond better to this community-based approach, but they also have better engagement with information regarding disparity, risk factors and prevalence – all of which were not addressed in the tweets analyzed from the minority-based health organizations. These organizations could improve their health messaging by using disparity and risk framing, which will better target Black audiences and help educate Black communities about the need for vaccines.

The biggest miss from minority-based health organizations was their failure to address the historical factors that have cumulated behind vaccine apprehension. These organizations fell in line with "colorblind medicine" practices, which have been shown to perpetuate health disparities among Black Americans. This replicated the trend in the mainstream health organizations of ignoring racial disparities, which continues to suppress a large bulk of the discourse from Black users online who have concerns about the vaccine. Assuming that audiences have time to watch a 30-minute panel, or wait until a live chat, is a poor judgment from these organizations, especially compared to mainstream organizations that have created infographics and visual posts to address general apprehension. Greater attention needs to be

paid to outwardly acknowledge Black American vaccine hesitancy, addressing the conversations of Black users and fighting misinformation about vaccines on social media.

Utilizing the Black public sphere in health messaging can be used as an addendum with various methodological approaches to better guide the interpretation of health information within a Black-centered community. Currently, the public sphere has been used in some studies on health narratives, health news, health data and other health-related content (Beck et al., 2013; Briggs & Hallin, 2010; Hallin et al., 2013; Holtzhausen, 2016), which has helped provide validity to the use of the public sphere in health communication. However, the utilization of the Black public sphere provides a new opportunity to analyze a vulnerable community and it fills in the gap in the literature that has yet to sufficiently use the ethnic-iteration of the theory in the health field. Critical health communication has identified strategic elements to target minority groups, however, these practices can look different as applied to Black communities in-person or online. Specifically, with Twitter, the explicit verbalization of historic and racial sentiments particularly resonates amongst its Black users and can alter the application of strategic practices. This study showed that "Black" hashtags and historic contexts are missing largely from health communication on Twitter and can hinder the acceptability of vital health information from Black Americans.

Limitations and Conclusion

This study focused on the Twitter posts from three minority-based health organizations, and not the total social media messaging from these organizations. These organizations utilize a plethora of social media platforms— like Instagram, Facebook and YouTube —where they also presumable post public vaccine information. Furthermore, this study only looked at three minority-based health organizations with the highest Twitter presence, among the hundreds of minority-based health organizations that use Twitter. These findings are not generalizable towards the entire Twitter health messaging that is specialized towards Black Americans; however, this study can indicate the trends in messaging due to these organizations having the largest following.

Minority-based health organizations' use of Twitter in educating and informing Black Americans about new health treatments is another instrument to help overcome widespread health disparities. COVID-19 has added to the already growing list of health issues that disproportionately affect marginalized groups and communities. When focusing on a vulnerable group, special attention must be paid to catering information to the group and the supportive materials for that information. Subsequently, entities need to learn the cultural, social habits and cues of the group to effectively enter the community that often operates as a counter-public to the mainstream .

Critical health communication research has identified practices that help reach these communities and overall improve uptake in proactive health decisions. However, this is only half the battle; medical practitioners and health organizations need to be instrumental in applying culturally sensitive practices and teaching anti-racist medicine in order to make a long-lasting impact. As COVID-19 vaccine intake increases, as it becomes more accessible and required by some employers, future studies can be conducted on Black Americans to understand how social media influenced their decision to take it. In addition, studies on the Black followers of minority-based health organizations can also be done to understand how the organization's information directly influences the health-related behaviors of a highly engaged consumer. This study can also be replicated on other minority or marginalized groups, who have a turbulent history with Western medicine. The implications of this kind of research can help bolster and expand the findings in critical health communication and better craft health messaging for vulnerable groups in the future.

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The Ads Must Go On: A Thematic Analysis of COVID-19 in Global Ads

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COVID-19 not only affected the health and caused the deaths of millions of people around the globe, but it was also a contributing factor to the ways businesses, organizations and entire industries operate. One such change was showcased in many brand's advertisements from the onset of the pandemic in most countries in early 2020. This study analyzed a collection of ads from March 2020 and August 2020 that were centered on various components related to the coronavirus pandemic. Ads originated from a variety of brands and from more than a dozen countries. Results from this qualitative thematic analysis revealed three main themes of edutainment, pragmatic consistency, and creative optimism. Additionally, advertising films were framed using metaphors, symbolism, and visual imagery. Results also revealed differences in message framing based on country of origin, brand, and timeframe.

Keywords: Thematic analysis, COVID-19, ads of the world, framing theory

Introduction

The 2019 novel coronavirus disease, commonly referred to as COVID-19, unequivocally disrupted and upended society on a global scale in unpredictable ways. The crisis not only negatively affected the health of citizens in mind, body, and spirit, but it also encumbered a tremendous negative economic impact and severely altered business practices. Current research has examined the media's coverage of COVID-19 revealing the prominent use of language accentuating human interest and fear (Ogbodo et al., 2020).

A common method in which brands promote their messages is through advertising. Brands and organizations most commonly use advertising for informational, entertainment, and persuasion purposes. During the COVID-19 crises, brands still utilized these purposes, but in a new wave of "pandemic advertising" (Beer, 2020, para. 6). Rittenhouse (2020) reports on a survey conducted by the media consulting company, Kantar, where they asked consumers questions about their expectations of brands advertising efforts during the coronavirus pandemic. Results of the survey revealed most survey respondents wanted brands to maintain a sense of normalcy by continuing with advertising, but with messages of help and not of brand promotion.

The study of advertising during a pandemic is not new. Many scholars have explored advertising messages, public service announcements and social marketing campaigns related to the AIDS pandemic (Bush & Boller, 1991; Hofmann, 2009; Terblanche-Smit & Terblanche, 2010a; Terblanche-Smit & Terblanche, 2010b; Terblanche-Smit & Terblanche, 2013); to the bird flu pandemic (Jones et al., 2010); and to influenza (Siu, 2010). Results indicate that how a message is offered to consumers can impact subsequent opinions and behavior.

This study aims to add to the robust history of research by divulging how global brands framed their messages about COVID-19 at two different points in time in 2020. Framing theory posits that

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message construction can impact how people interpret information (Goffman, 1974). The purpose of this study is to illustrate how global advertising was used to help people understand how to navigate living in a world battling a novel pandemic.

Literature Review

Advertising & Crisis

Advertising during a crisis is a common practice and has been analyzed often in past research. Studies have focused on public service advertising promoting influenza vaccinations as well as AIDS and other health crises (Bush & Bowler, 1991; Dahlen & Lange, 2006; Nowak et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2018). Lee et al. (2018) noted the importance of gain versus loss frames as well as the support of visual and textual content when promoting influenza vaccinations. Bush and Bowler (1991) studied CDC sponsored advertising campaigns during 1987-89 focused on the AIDS pandemic. The findings of their rhetorical analysis showed that advertising took a different role each year by emphasizing facts, inducing fear, and finally providing coping strategies aimed at prevention.

Jenyns (2020) discussed advertising during the COVID-19 crisis and emphasized the use of authenticity in brand messaging. Several dimensions of authenticity have been studied by past researchers to identify effective responses (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Beverland, 2006; Leigh et al., 2006). Some of the most relevant dimensions include featuring credibility, heritage, tradition, and motives not driven by commerciality. Using these themes can demonstrate that a brand is paying attention to current conditions and trying to shift their advertising strategy to speak to the needs of the community.

Framing

Framing theory originated through the work of Erving Goffman in his 1974 seminal piece explaining frame analysis (Goffman, 1974). Since that work, framing theory has been a mainstay in media studies specific to political communication, advertising, and health communication studies. Framing is concerned with how messages are constructed which then allows the consumers of those messages to make sense of a certain issue. Issue framing can shape individual focus and opinion formation by emphasizing certain elements and downplaying others when presenting information (Druckman, 2001).

Past research on framing has identified several devices used to package information such as metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images (Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Vivid images that are congruent with message content can increase attention and facilitate promotional message processing (McGill & Anand, 1989; Chang & Lee, 2009). In the Chang and Lee study (2009), the authors investigated framing messages that promote charitable donations. The results of their experimental study indicated that vivid imagery magnified the framing effect, especially when presented with negative messages. In a news context, Pan and Kosicki (1993) discussed framing devices as using syntax, script, and themes. Themes go beyond summation to suggest deeper meaning. The use of metaphors and other linguistic devices are a common approach for identifying and interpreting themes in data (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; D'Andrade, 1995; Strauss & Quinn, 1997; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The use of metaphor and analogy offers the ability to align messages with known exemplars that hold cultural meaning. Multiple visual and verbal tactics can be used to create messages and offer consumers a frame within which to interpret information.

Relevant to this study is one conducted by Brooks et al. (2019) who applied framing theory to ads curated on the Ads of the World website that were focused on the societal issues of gender equality, female empowerment, and climate change. The authors found that most ads analyzed in these collections were centered on climate change and that loss framed messages were most prevalent, regardless of the topic. In addition, rational appeals outweighed emotional appeals, notwithstanding of the social issue under examination.

Concerning the framing of health communication messages, framing was applied to a study by Lee et al. (2018) about how visual and verbal messages were framed concerning flu vaccine messages aimed at young adults. The authors found that images with gain-framed messages and text with loss-framed messages did equally well in terms of a rise in intention, attitude, and confidence level associated with electing to get a flu vaccine.

Past research has also noted that various cultures respond differently to persuasive messages. Highly collective cultures experience more social and familial responsibility and subsequently feel more guilt if they believe they are neglecting these duties (Hofstede, 1980). Congruence of advertising message frames with culture can make content more salient and effective (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Yoon & La Ferle, 2018).

The purpose of this study was the examination of global advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic to identify how messages were framed for viewers as they attempted to make sense of the world during a health crisis. The following research questions were developed to investigate the use of framing themes and techniques:

RQ1: What themes were present in COVID-19 advertisements?
RQ2: How did brands frame their COVID-19 messaging through visuals and verbals?
RQ3: How did COVID-19 advertising messages differ in terms of: a) country of origin; b) brand; and c) timeframe?

Method

A thematic analysis of global COVID-19 ads was conducted to evaluate the research questions. The Ads of the World website is a repository of ads from around the globe. The website is known for its curation of various advertising collections related to numerous topics, events, and social issues, such as COVID-19. More specifically, the authors narrowed down the sample of ads categorized as film as the medium from March 2020 and August 2020. The first timeframe was selected due to the significant impact of the virus infiltrating most countries during March 2020, also known as the first wave of the pandemic. August 2020 was selected as a comparison point in time as various countries had either fully reopened or, at a minimum, lifted some pandemic restrictions. All film ads from March 2020 and August 2020 that were part of the Ads of the World COVID-19 special collections repository were analyzed. The film category was selected to obtain advertisements that included verbal, visual, and auditory framing mechanisms, therefore offering a richer sample for interpretation. The industries represented in these films range from food to pets to hospitality/tourism, among 12 additional industries and 16 countries (See Table 1 & Table 2).

Data collection yielded 48 total video advertisements, with 35 from March 2020 and 13 from August 2020. The 48 ads were selected based on what was available on the Ads of the World website at the time of analysis. The curators of the website determine the ads that viewers have access to, along with country and language of origin of the ads. Two coders viewed the 48 ads and made independent notes. Coders viewed each ad numerous times to fully immerse themselves in the messages and capture details about the content, visuals, and copy used (all written and spoken text was transcribed). For each advertising film the coders independently wrote a detailed description of the overall ad and then broke each ad down even further and described in separate columns every visual and sound that appeared. Following Calasanti's (2007) steps applied to a textual analysis of internet ads, this study implemented a code sheet where recording thick descriptions of each advertising film chosen for the sample occurred by each researcher. Included on the code sheet was an overall description of each advertising film under analysis with separated details including the characters represented and aspects of their ethnicity, gender, and age; the setting of the films; each brand's messaging; the spoken and written words used to develop each ad along with all visuals, verbals, and sounds. Next, the two coders discussed their notes for each advertisement to compare findings. Minor discrepancies were noted and discussed to arrive at a consensus. An example of a minor discrepancy included authors preferences on where a specific

advertising film was categorized within the themes that emerged. Finally, salient themes were developed and refined until both coders agreed that they explained the meaning effectively to answer the research questions.

Results

The following explanations address each research question posed by offering a description of the salient themes and techniques observed during the inductive analysis of advertising during COVID-19 in March and August of 2020.

RQ1: What themes were present in COVID-19 advertisements?

The first research question investigated the themes presented in global advertising surrounding COVID-19. Three dominant themes emerged from the brands under analysis. Edutainment, pragmatic consistency, and creative optimism appeared frequently as driving motivational themes for the advertising during this time.

Edutainment

Brand communication appeared to take efforts to make informative content about COVID-19 as palatable as possible by using entertaining advertising strategies. COVID-19 brought with it new terminology and concepts to initially help 'flatten the curve' regarding the daily rise in cases. Novel behavior change concepts including 'social distancing' and 'quarantining' became common speak. Mask wearing became a hot button accessory so much so that masks often equated to a person's political leaning, especially in the United States. Even hand washing, although not a new concept, took on more importance than ever.

To help push these urgent healthcare practices, many brands used advertising as a method to educate consumers in an attention getting, relatable and creative manner. For example, humor was a popular tactic. One such U.S. brand that spread the message of mask wearing was Organic Doggie Treats. This advertising film series showcased a regal dog standing on a beach sarcastically contemplating why rules of a dog living in society apply to him, but his owner cannot be bothered with the rule of wearing a mask during a pandemic. Hotels.com continued to use their ongoing, dry humorous spokesperson, Captain Obvious, to spread the simple message that "He's going to be social distancing for a while. And you should too". A Croatian beer brand, Karlovacko, utilized an ongoing campaign "Among Your Own" to encourage people to "stay in your crate, among your own". They cleverly portrayed this message through the classic awkward "meeting the boyfriend" scenario. As the new boyfriend reaches out to shake the hand of his girlfriend's father, the patriarch rejects the gesture of goodwill. The message of staying with your own is introduced, again reiterating that now is not the time to mingle with others, but instead only stick to those in your immediate family.

Upbeat and youthful music was also used/or even created to make appeals to younger viewers to follow COVID-19 guidelines. An example of this edutainment strategy was offered by the Government of Quebec. They used four well-known rap artists to freely craft the message of how COVID-19 was affecting Canadians and what can be done to help reduce the spread of the virus. Sample lyrics regarding mask wearing include, "Wear it every day. It's not time to play. Came in like a wave, crashin' in our face." Additionally, song lyrics concerning social distancing played out as such, "What if I say keeping our distance doesn't make us distant? It's like army - you're protecting me, protecting yourself. I'm just trying to keep the homies and the family well. We can gather, we can chill. Just no hugs and kisses. Two meters apart, we can still talk and listen."

Finally, celebrities were also frequently featured in COVID messages to bring a new twist to educating the public about guidelines for protection. Legendary U.S. broadcast network, NBC, adapted their long running "The More You Know" campaign, to reflect five messages about the impact of the virus on specific groups. For example, numerous famous actors who play characters on shows aired on NBC are shown in quick clips talking about different ways to manage depression or loneliness during the

pandemic and while people are quarantining at home. Other clips are similar but give definitions of what it means to be socially distant. The PSAs also describe the more vulnerable populations including older adults. Parental advice is given concerning how to handle being indoors with kids, a not so common practice for working parents. The final message is directly targeted at veterans who have fought for the country. They are encouraged to get tested for the coronavirus if they show any symptoms. Actors speaking these messages are all different ages and range from the Bella twins to Ted Danson to Chrissy Metz.

Perhaps these tactics were used to help ease any defensiveness viewers might exhibit in response to persuasive messaging. However, the importance of the information was not diminished by these efforts.

Pragmatic Consistency

Several brands during this period chose to focus predominantly on tangible solutions that they provided during the lockdown period. This indicated a sense of normalcy or consistency that brands could offer even during a time of great challenge and uncertainty. These were not novel ideas for these brands, but typical operating procedures. However, considering the coronavirus pandemic, these everyday actions took on a whole new meaning and perhaps provided a sense of relief knowing these brands were not going to change.

For example, McDonald's aired a series of advertising films in the U.S. titled, "We'll Be Here", getting across the message that although things were changing daily and rapidly due to the pandemic, McDonald's will serve as a constant in life just as they have been for 65 years. The messages implied that although one cannot dine-in at a McDonald's does not mean one cannot get the McDonald's experience, just in a new form. This can happen by going through the drive-thru, getting the food delivered or imagining one's own house as a McDonald's. The films are framed to empower customers to still have a good time and to eat McDonald's fare regardless of what type of dwelling one is quarantining in. Advertising copy including, "So that when things keep changing, we can still be here to take your order," speaks to the notion of pragmatic consistency.

Similarly, a Domino's Pizza film titled, "Stay Home. We Deliver", which aired in Saudi Arabia, touted the message that although there is emptiness in the streets and sadness in the world, Domino's will help during this trying time by continuing to deliver food just as they have done for years. Although people's awareness of this feature is high, it takes on a new and more important meaning during the pandemic. Domino's uses a call-to-action specific to the pandemic by encouraging people to stay home and do their part in lowering the virus numbers.

Beyond the food industry, retailers including H&M and technology companies such as Italy's Vodafone and Verizon in the U.S. emphasized their brand values of being ready for anything even when the consumer is not. Verizon's film was framed in a very simple tone with a clear message that Verizon is working hard behind the scenes so that everyone who is dealing with the pandemic will not have to worry about their internet service being disrupted. In a world of uncertainty because of the pandemic, what is certain is Verizon's commitment. Vodafone took a similar approach with their messaging, but with more of an energetic, happy-go-lucky tone. The film shows people adapting to life during the pandemic using Vodafone's technology. It is as if the world keeps turning and nothing is amiss because Vodafone is helping people keep their lives together, whether that be work, school, relationship building or extracurricular related. The messaging is relatable because it shows how everyone is facing and handling the important parts of life throughout this unprecedented time and that people can adapt easily with a consistent technology company.

Creative Optimism

Many advertisements under analysis simply focused on the positive aspects that are evident during a crisis. They highlighted the ability to focus on family, enjoying time with pets, developing resilience, gratitude for others, or even hope for the future. This 'glass half full' mentality provided a

refreshing brand tone during the pandemic. Brands even used artistic creative elements such as poetry, song lyrics, and interpretive dance to offer their messages of hope and optimism.

An Ikea film, that was aired in Spain, was presented from a home's point of view. The film showcased various shots of people in their homes relaxing, doing work, and spending time together. IKEA wants consumers to remember and enjoy their homes. The tone is sentimental and showcases how the home will always be there for you. The copy on screen reads, "I'm still the place where your children have grown up, where you have celebrated good news and taken refuge from the bad. I'm the place where you can be yourself. Do you remember when we first met? Come on. Feel me. Smell me. Enjoy me. We can turn everything around. Maybe this is the time to rearrange the furniture or get our heads in order. I am your home and I'll be here for you no matter what." IKEA's call-to-action is for people to stay home during this time of the pandemic because much of life's monumental moments happen inside the home, a versatile place that will not abandon you.

Many brands including Jack Daniels and Buffalo Wild Wings in the U.S. used advertising to feature how friends, family and sports enthusiasts are creatively connecting. Examples include shots showing people interacting through social distance activities like video phone calls, playing games with one person inside and the other outside, makeshift games set up inside homes (kitchen table tennis with kitchen pans used as paddles). Finally, shots of people toasting each other through video phone calls and through other social distancing means are shown with what is presumably Jack Daniels whiskey in the glasses. Similarly, the Buffalo Wild Wings film shows short, curated videos of people, mostly kids and younger adults, playing a variety of sports in their homes or other solo locations. Sometimes they implement unique items from around their homes to accomplish these sports tasks including utilizing a treadmill to play hockey, repurposing a toilet paper roll to play soccer, or using a trash can for a basketball hoop. These films give the viewer a sense of how people were passing the time and keeping their spirits lifted, in creative ways, during the initial phase of the pandemic and the need for social distancing. The overarching theme is that although the world has been physically separated from each other, people can still connect and be social through different means and with some innovative, creative thinking.

The U.S. brand Freshpet framed their COVID messaging in a positive way by featuring how happy and satisfied dogs were due to the mandatory stay in place that their owners had to abide by. As the copy states, "Our dogs don't know why we're home more than usual. They're just happy we're around. Take good care of each other." Through this creative optimistic message, via dogs, Freshpet reminds viewers that being at home for unexpected and longer periods of time does wonders for a pet's psyche.

RQ2: How did brands frame their COVID-19 messaging through visuals and verbals?

Visual and verbal strategies during this time of the coronavirus health crisis used a variety of framing mechanisms. Metaphors, symbolism, and visual imagery were popular techniques for brands to use as a convenient method to get across what the world was facing collectively. This aligns with previous research on framing that has identified several devices used to package information such as metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images (Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

Metaphors

The most common metaphors centered on war or sports. Domino's framed their :45 second film with visuals of a vacant city and its empty roads, businesses, parks and neighborhoods in Saudi Arabia. These visuals were enhanced by a male voiceover reiterating the importance of staying home and reminding viewers how they "carried upon your shoulders the responsibility of protecting your nation like soldiers. You made your country your priority to preserve health and prosperity. We do our part. So, stay home with your loved ones and we will deliver to your doorstep." The visuals then turn to what one could possibly conceive as a lone soldier, a Domino's delivery person, alone on the empty road delivering provisions for the at home soldiers doing their part to help win the battle against COVID-19.

Similarly, Kayzer Ballet, out of Portugal, produced a lengthy film where a ballet dancer tells the story through choreographed dancing of the emotional turmoil many people faced during the onset of the pandemic. Along with the dancing, a male voiceover speaks about the beauty of life before the pandemic and then transitions into how unexpectedly the world turned dark and now, we are at war. The voiceover continues the war metaphor by stating, "The state of emergency was declared. Then a way out, life was shortened. We gathered at home with family. Emotion conquers reason. We are all with the same purpose - to eradicate this monster; to slaughter it; to take away its strength. The same forces it had to take the elderly, the unsuspecting, the fragile. It is the moment of union, of one thought, religion, race, currency, or ideology. It is time to fight this pandemic which came to take away our health. But also damage the economy." The words used to describe the pandemic with the backdrop of a ballet dancer then transitions into a moment of hopefulness when the voiceover speaks of refuge and the ballet dancer emerges from darkness to light as if society is winning the war over the virus by staying home.

The Thailand Board of Investment film, "Dear Crisis," uses the sport of boxing as a metaphor for the numerous times that Thailand has been beaten by crises including financial turmoil, tsunamis, and now COVID-19. However, the boxer, in this case the people of Thailand, always fight back. More specifically related to the coronavirus pandemic, the film showcases the evolution of the COVID crisis in terms of high numbers in Thailand all the way to zero cases based on the fight of Thai people.

Budweiser also framed their message using a sports metaphor. The purpose behind their "One Team" film in the U.S. was to put forth the message that everyone is called upon to face this health crisis head on all as one team. Budweiser has long been a sponsor for professional sports teams and now they are putting their sponsorship money behind helping the American Red Cross repurpose baseball stadiums by turning them into blood drive locations. The advertising copy associated with this film also uses professional sports team names as a metaphor to describe front line workers. The male voiceover states, "This Bud's for the blues, the reds and the warriors. This Bud's for the magic, the athletics, the giants, and the jazz. This Bud's for the trailblazers, the braves, the yankees and the angels. This Bud's for the home team."

Lastly, several brands in the auto industry used car metaphors to express pausing our motion before we resume activities. For example, Nissan aired an advertising film out of the United Arab Emirates, from the point of view of a Nissan who wrote an "Ode to Empty Roads." Within the ode, the Nissan car expresses how the road and the Nissan have been together for so long, but now, using a car metaphor, "The great outdoors must now take the backseat as we bide our time indoors." The ode ends with a hopeful message that one day the road and the Nissan will be together again, in due time.

Symbolism

Symbols of historical heritage were also evident in the ads likely to maximize on the notion of togetherness. Advertising films from India, Morocco and the United States all featured elements from their countries in relation to the pandemic. Ford framed both versions of their "Built for Right Now, Built to Lend a Hand" ads on Ford's dedication to America and their historical commitment to those in need. To emphasize this point, along with the aforementioned wartime metaphor, the copy on the screen reads, "Built Ford Proud since 1903. Built through World Wars and natural disasters. Built for those who build this country. Built for those who protect it. Built for workers, parents, sons, daughters, teachers, caregivers, families, people. Built to lend a hand. Built to do that right now." The film then transitions into information concerning Ford's financial support initiative. In the same vein, U.S. advertising agency, Doner, speaks about the resolve of Detroit during the pandemic in their "When the Motor Stops" film. Throughout the film, empty scenes of Detroit, Michigan are shown with a heavy emphasis on how Detroit was built upon the shoulders of Ford Motor Company. The irony in the film reflects how Detroit as "motor city" has been forced to stop because of the pandemic. Automotive and wartime metaphors and symbolism related to the heritage of Ford Motor Company and hope for the future are spoken about through a female voiceover stating, "It feels unnatural to not be in motion. For the city built on four wheels to stand still. But these vacant streets, empty stadiums are not signs of our retreat, but of our resolve. This is not us sitting out the fight. This is us winning it. Our fist doesn't need to move to have

strength. If he were alive today, even Henry himself would have put it in park. So, take this isolation as a sign of our togetherness. As we take care of ourselves and the ones close. Because although it's time for America's motor to stop, we're coming back with all eight cylinders. Because here, we don't stop in the name of fear. Here, we stop in the name of love."

Haircare brand, Parachute Advanced, framed their advertising film around the need of nurses in relation to the annual Southern India celebration and festival, Onam. There is symbolism in the actions of people getting ready for Onam that are like nurses getting ready to nurse COVID patients back to health. Each shot parallels the actions of Indian culture with the actions of medical professionals. For example, when a man is working with pottery alongside his children and shakes his hands of pottery residue, the very next shot is of a nurse shaking his hands after washing them. The message is that the nurses are sacrificing their lives to get you back to yours. The film then shows shots of several people celebrating Onam with their names and a title that they are COVID-19 survivors.

Moroccan creative agency, Hardlight, produced a film that is formatted as if it is an actual movie of Morocco. The various scenes show clips of how Morocco has overcome challenging times in the past from the Battle of Three Kings in 1578, Independence in 1956, Agadir Earthquake in 1960, The Green March in 1975, among other clips of triumphs and setbacks that Moroccans have faced together. It then transitions into showing clips of people being treated in a hospital due to COVID. There are medical professionals showing symbols of determination to beat the coronavirus by tearing up the phrase COVID-19, through wearing masks and shields, and by smiling confidently. The scenes then transition to lone people of all ages smiling and one person on a mountain top with arms spread. The film is framed with a message of empowerment, hope for the future, and pride for the country. Moroccans grow closer as a country during challenging times. There is also a wartime/battle tone to this film through the visuals and verbals utilized. Various sacrificial elements to the film include when the voiceover states in Arabic that "our country needs us", with the ultimate sacrifice being Moroccans staying at home and relinquishing some of their independence.

Visual Imagery

Visual imagery helped to convey scenes and offer emotional symbolism. Dim lighting was often used to show somber and empty scenes and then changed to colorful bathed in light to show hope for tomorrow. For example, the United Nations film out of China opens with an image of the city at night. White text appears on the screen that says, "When the city is on pause". Scenes then depict empty seats, a playground, church, classrooms, streets, and people at home. The words on the screen encourage taking time to look back, think alone, work with your soul. The film transitions into scenes that take on a more positive spin including a green backyard, people working out, happy couples at home alongside advertising copy that encourages these actions. The final scene is city buildings with the text, "It's time to stay home for him/them/us" and fades to a black screen.

A Motionpoems ad in the U.S. opens with a frame of colorful graphic images of a dripping faucet and then an empty room and streets. The tone gathered from the colors and motion graphics used is very angular and artistic. A man's silhouette is then shown on a balcony. Birds swoop in, the landscape grows darker, and several images of people are featured alone and apart in and around their homes. The scene then pans up into the sky and focuses on stars in the night. The original poem is recited by perhaps the author of the poem, Todd Boss. The poem and the ad's focus is more so on racial injustice rather than the pandemic. The poem seemingly compares the pandemic and racial issues. Stanzas include "But, George Floyd's 8:46 stoked something older on an order more systemic that broke the fever of the pandemic and brought to light a darker and lonelier disease." The author implies through the poem that racial injustice is more of a disease than the pandemic. The film aims to bring light to two major issues from 2020: racial injustice and the pandemic.

Brands including Doner out of the United States and Andra Tutto Bene from Portugal utilized black and white film often to depict heritage. Some ads, including from Renault, Visit Portugal, and the Kayzer Ballet depicted scenes in reverse as if instructing the viewer to stop and think about their actions before they go out in public during a pandemic. Personification was also a common tactic shown in both

the "Dear Crisis" and "Stay Home" films from the Thailand Board of Investment and IKEA, respectively. The choice of scene location also offered visual cues to viewers including at home celebrities for NBC ads and the outdoors like the farm setting for the Croatia Karlovacko film.

RQ3: How did COVID-19 advertising messages differ in terms of: a) country of origin; b) brand; and c) timeframe?

Finally, the global advertisements were scrutinized to look for patterns based on country, brand, and time of airing. Differences were assessed as mechanisms for framing message content.

Country of Origin
Overall, the U.S. had the most ads represented in this sample (23) with Portugal next with five ads. The remaining ads came from a variety of other countries worldwide including from the United Arab Emirates, Canada, Paraguay, Morocco, Croatia, Chile, Saudi Arabia, Italy, Poland, Spain, India, Germany, Thailand, and China (See Table 1).
Although not an equal comparison, due to the unbalanced number of ads analyzed per country, the difference in messaging related to country of origin showed that the films that appeared outside of the U.S. were framed in a collective societal benefit manner meaning that it was for the betterment of the entire country when multiple people worked together to stop the spread of the virus. This aligns with Hofstede's (1980) assessment that highly collective cultures experience more social and familial responsibility and subsequently feel more guilt if they believe they are neglecting these duties.
Examples of this approach were evident in the films that were framed with visuals and copy related to the message of living through the pandemic together as a country and sometimes because of a country's historical heritage which has strengthened its citizens to power through this unprecedented time together. Some countries that presented their ads from this viewpoint originated from Thailand, Chile, Morocco, and Portugal. Conversely, the U.S. typically took a more brand centric and practical solution approach. For example, McDonald's reminded consumers of the practicality of their drive-thru which has been a part of their brand business model for decades. However, the simple and sensible messaging took on an entirely different meaning when viewing it through the lens of battling a pandemic. As a result of the onset of the virus, most Americans were relegated to an extended stay in place in their homes which brought along its own set of challenges. McDonald's hoped to alleviate some of these challenges through their practical drive-thru and delivery options. Humor was also a more popular tone used in the U.S. films.

Brand Category
When reviewing the brand categories, it appears that food was the most popular category (See Table 2). Public interest and agency self-promotion were also frequent categories. The public interest category did align most frequently with the educational or optimism frames and they appeared to focus primarily on the public and the crisis. An example of agency self-promotion comes from Lobby Films and Advertising out of Portugal. The ad is framed in a rainforest type setting with two bats hanging upside down and speaking with each other about the pandemic being their fault. It is a humorous ad by using bats as the butt of the joke because bats were said to be the carrier of the virus. There is also a sense that the bats are in this predicament with humans because they mention their requirement to stay inside their caves. The agency is attempting to capitalize on this time during the pandemic by promoting their services and how filming can still go on with their repository of stock footage. The message implies that some normalcy with life can still happen with the help of this agency.

Timeframe
Of the 48 ads analyzed, 35 were aired in March 2020 at the height of the pandemic for most countries, while 13 of the ads aired in August 2020 when some countries began to reopen. One difference

amongst the films, in terms of timeline, was the number of films produced at the onset of the pandemic as compared to five months later. However, this could be due to the limitations associated with the Ads of the World website regarding the number of ads curated. An additional difference is the ads from August were more focused on COVID-19 guidelines whereas the films from March were more focused on community and cultural efforts related to navigating the pandemic as one. Additionally, the ads from August were more gratitude focused as was showcased in the Parachute Advanced Gold beauty ad from India titled #thankyounurses.

Discussion

The current study looked at global advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic to identify themes and techniques used in framing advertising messages for the public. The purpose of the inquiry was to observe how advertisers attempted to help the public understand and navigate a health crisis. Thematic analysis was used as a process for inductive analysis of the video advertising in the sample. A total of 48 ads from March and August of 2020 were selected from the COVID-19 collection on the Ads of the World website to conduct the research. A variety of themes emerged as well as visual/verbal techniques and differences based on country, brand category, and timeframe.

One dominant theme in the film advertisements during COVID-19 was *edutainment*. Brands recognized the need for public education during a time of great uncertainty. Many of the ads featured specific information about how to navigate the crisis by proper distancing, PPE, and staying home. Offering the public pertinent information during a crisis is common and past research has noted this technique (Bush & Bowler, 1991; Dahlen & Lange, 2006; Nowak et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2018). The advertising during COVID-19 had some similarities to themes noted by Bush and Bowler (1991) who observed advertising emphasizing facts and coping strategies during the AIDS pandemic. Interestingly, the ads also used a variety of tactics that may have served to soften the defenses of those not wishing to abide by the proposed guidelines. Humor, celebrities, and music appeared often in combination with important warnings and recommendations. Perhaps this was aimed at encouraging safe behavior even among those that found the guidelines were infringing on their personal freedom. Future research is needed that explores this type of message framing to determine if it indeed minimizes defensiveness among viewers.

Another dominant theme that appeared was the notion of *pragmatic consistency*. Several brands chose to focus advertising efforts on the tangible solutions that their product or service provided. Food delivery, take-out options, as well as mobile phone technology for connection were popular topics for these brands. This somewhat contradicts past research that suggests that commercially driven motivations are not as well received as they indicate a lack of brand authenticity during crisis (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Beverland, 2006; Leigh et al., 2006). Brands that chose to frame messages with pragmatic solutions may have appeared by some as trying to capitalize on commercial gain during a time of fear and uncertainty. Other viewers may have appreciated the rational approach to provide consistency during uncertain times. Future study should address this contradiction and the effects on perceptions of brand authenticity.

The third theme noted in the current sample of video ads was that of *creative optimism*. Many of the brands during this time chose to highlight the positive aspects and perspective gained during the COVID-19 pandemic. Being home allowed for increased connection with family, quality time with pets, as well as opportunities to notice the emergence of healthcare heroes. Messages with this theme were unique in that they offered a fresh perspective and emphasized hope for the future. Although these ads were refreshing and uplifting, past research notes that framing using a loss appeal (rather than gain appeals) are more prevalent for social issues (Brooks et al., 2019).

The use of visual and verbal techniques was another central focus for the current research. A variety of framing mechanisms were observed in the sample including the use of metaphors, symbolism, and visual imagery. Metaphors of war and athletic prowess allowed viewers to equate the plight of COVID-19 with common cultural exemplars of a battlefield or sports arena in which we fight a common

enemy. This is a common approach in past research (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; D'Andrade, 1995; Strauss & Quinn, 1997; Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Symbolism was apparent in the advertising analyzed and most often emerged with a focus on heritage, tradition, and cultural determination. Many of the brands advertising during the pandemic provided historical context as a way of showcasing their strong heritage and perseverance during struggles. The chronological images of overcoming obstacles and relying on community provided an empowering frame of message likely aimed at instilling confidence in the face of crisis. Past research indicates that heritage and tradition are themes that align with dimensions of brand authenticity (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Beverland, 2006; Leigh et al., 2006; Jenyns, 2020). Authenticity is an important dimension of trust and is vital for brand success.

Visual imagery was a frequent tactic used in the COVID-19 ads to creatively convey emotion. Light and dark as well as shadows signified feelings of struggle, hope, and somber solitude. A few brands even chose to film completely in black and white which played into symbols of heritage as well as feelings of despair and intensity. Modern graphics were even used with angular images depicting characters struggling with the pandemic and racial injustice. The use of vivid imagery has been studied in the past revealing that message content combined with congruent vivid images enhances message processing (McGill & Anand, 1989; Chang & Lee, 2009). This congruency needs further study for possible application to advertising during times of crisis. Interestingly, a few of the videos were shot partially in reverse with scenes that seemed to visually instruct viewers to stop, backtrack, and reconsider their actions and instead opt to stay home.

Differences in advertising themes and techniques were studied with respect to country of origin, brand category, and timeframe. The results indicate a few relevant trends. The most notable finding in this regard was apparent when comparing U.S. advertising with all other countries. The U.S. was more likely to feature brand-centric content maximizing pragmatic consistency and individualism. Ads in collectivist cultures were more likely to feature symbols of heritage, tradition, and community responsibility. These frames show an attempt to match cultural values with advertising content. This is important considering that past research indicates this type of congruent messaging can magnify effectiveness (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Yoon & La Ferle, 2018).

Not surprisingly, the brand category of public interest and agency self-promotion most often aligned with messages that were more informational in nature. These ads were used to promote safety guidelines and a general spirit of compliance. Food brands most often featured the pragmatic consistency theme due to the need for awareness regarding new delivery, curbside, and drive thru options. Pets and alcoholic beverage brand categories were more likely to utilize messages highlighting creative optimism (with a side of humor). All of these seem consistent with traditional advertising strategy.

The final difference studied for the current sample addressed any changes in advertising frames apparent for August compared to March of 2020. The most obvious difference was the sheer amount of advertising featured in the COVID-19 collection on the Ads of the World repository during the two points in time. March had considerably more examples of COVID-19 ads when compared to August. This may be due to website limitations but is more likely attributed to the dramatic surge of attention to the pandemic in March of 2020. This is considered by most to be the first wave of the pandemic and it was during this time that many countries were experiencing lockdown measures and restrictions. Advertisers responded to these initial feelings of panic and uncertainty by speaking directly to consumers with a variety of messages aimed at providing information, hope, and consistency.

Limitations

As with any study, the current research has limitations. The Ads of the World website collections do not contain an exhaustive sample of all advertising during COVID-19. It is a repository of selected advertising featuring examples from global brands. While this is useful in providing a thematic analysis for a wide variety of brands, it does not address all advertising from all countries affected by the pandemic. Future study may wish to dig deeper into the ad strategies of specific countries to offer a more

in-depth analysis. The timeframe could also be extended to better capture the ebb and flow of different framing themes and techniques. The current study provides an illuminating assessment of how advertisers chose to frame messages during a time of crisis and uncertainty. Different approaches likely prompted different responses among viewers. Future study should continue to parse out the frames used as well as subsequent consumer sentiment. Understanding how to effectively speak with consumers in challenging times is essential for maintaining brand relevance and authenticity.

Conclusion

The implications for this research are many. First, this study adds to existing scholarship regarding how advertising is used during crises. Society is educated about issues through a variety of means and advertising is often used as an educational tool to teach consumers, often in a relatable way, about societal challenges. The advertising messages about COVID-19 from well-known brands is one method for which consumers were educated about the nuances related to this novel pandemic. Second, this current study builds upon framing theory especially within the context of health communication. Finally, it is likely that the world will endure pandemics in the future. Thus, the results of this research study contributes to the advertising industry in that practitioners can learn advertising techniques from these global ads and to apply those techniques to brand messages that encourage solidarity and hope during a time of universal crisis.

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Table 1

COVID-19 Global Advertisements by Country of Origin & Timing

Country	March	August	Totals
United States	20	3	23
Portugal	5	0	5
Canada	0	4	4
Chile	1	2	3
UAE	2	0	2
Paraguay	1	0	1
Morocco	1	0	1
Croatia	1	0	1
Saudi Arabia	1	0	1
Italy	1	0	1
Poland	1	0	1
Spain	1	0	1
India	0	1	1
Germany	0	1	1
Thailand	0	1	1
China	0	1	1
Total Ads	13	35	48

Table 2

COVID-19 Global Advertisements by Brand Category & Timing

Category	March	August	Totals
Food	7	2	9
Public Interest, NGO	0	7	7
Agency Self Promotion	6	0	6
Media	5	0	5
Automotive	4	0	4
Pets	1	2	3
Alcoholic Drinks	3	0	3
Hospitality/Tourism	2	0	2
Recreation/Leisure	2	0	2
Electronics/Technology	2	0	2
Retail Services	1	0	1
Finance	1	0	1
House/Garden	1	0	1
Beauty	0	1	1
Fashion	0	1	1
Total Ads	35	13	48

Understanding Communication, Social Presence, and Dialectical Tensions of Pandemic Learning

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Understanding the importance of social presence in the learning process during the pandemic is especially important. Instructors and students had to modify normal classroom interactions and behaviors. This paper discusses the challenges that two professors faced at two different institutions during the pandemic and how classroom dialectical tensions (Prentice & Kramer, 2006) help explain stress and motivation challenges of students during pandemic learning. These tensions are participation vs. remaining silent during class discussions, predictable vs. novel classroom activities, and managing personal time vs. class time. Understanding these dialectical tensions is an important step towards creating effective instructional communication and positive impacts toward student learning.

Keywords: dialectical tensions, pandemic pedagogy, online learning

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic impacted educational systems around the world, which led to changes in the delivery of academic content. Instructors were forced to shift the way they teach and students needed to adapt to different learning environments. Educators realized that many of the solutions for teaching online needed greater engagement. As the virus spread, instructors utilized several learning platforms including apps, websites, and broadcasts to relay content. Online learning is not a new phenomenon, nevertheless, modern education is changing due to technology (Govindarajan & Srivastava, 2020). Although many felt restricted and overwhelmed by "going online," the experience created "a project of pedagogical *poiesis*" (Schwartzman, 2020, p. 514). We can approach challenges as opportunities for new perspectives on the learning experience. In this essay, we examine the challenge of pandemic learning with this approach: a new perspective on dialectical challenges with learning. We provide personal reflections to explicate the dialectical tensions of pandemic learning.

The stress of the pandemic negatively impacted student learning and psychological well-being (Quintiliani et al., 2021). Brunner et al. (2021) explained pandemic-related stress also greatly increased the emotional labor demands on teachers. These demands lead to a conflict between how teachers felt and the surface acting they felt necessary to create effective learning experiences for students. This conflict resulted in feelings of burnout and emotional exhaustion. Feeney and Fitzgerald (2022) noted that the pandemic caused perceived stress concerning possible health concerns and financial losses. They further argued that these stressors impact how people cope and result in overwhelming feelings.

Teaching online during the high-stress experience of the pandemic requires careful management of communication dialectical tensions. Students in online courses may feel that assignments are busy work but at the same time feel overwhelmed with learning that engages critical thinking skills. Online engagement is different from a face-to-face classroom. Hence, how can instructional communication researchers examine the new ways in which the learning experience is changing and how communication can be most effective for teachers and students? Most importantly, how can educators communicate so students feel connected and engaged while managing dialectical tensions of online learning during the pandemic?

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Dialectical Tensions in the Online Experience

Relationships experience the push and pull of competing personal goals. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) proposed dialectical tensions to explain the challenges romantic partners experience. For example, the struggle of wanting to be connected while, at the same time, wanting to maintain some level of autonomy. Dialectical tensions are navigated through communication and received considerable research in several contexts (Baxter & Scharp, 2015). Prentice and Kramer (2006) explored three dialectical tensions that students experience in college classrooms: participation vs. remaining silent during class discussions; predictable vs. novel classroom activities; and managing personal time and class time. Today, these tensions are particularly salient during pandemic learning in online environments.

Online education has been around for decades, yet, the pandemic taught us that many instructors were not familiar with technology and effectively engaging online learning. No one was well versed at teaching during the universal, very high-stress experience of a pandemic. It is common for students to experience high stress, but not collectively. This collective stress and the challenges of online learning likely exacerbates dialectical tensions associated with learning. Specifically, participation vs. remaining silent during class discussions is relevant and observable in students' decisions to have their camera on or off during Zoom lectures.

What meaning does the instructor assign to this choice? When understanding how feedback instructors receive in the classroom is impacted by Zoom Blum (2020) explained that "communicative signs that embodied humans rely on are thinned, flattened, made more effortful or entirely impossible. Yet we interpret them anyway" (para. 11). Blum also stated potential interpretations instructors assign to students turning cameras off including, "to give themselves a rest from scrutiny or to mask their multitasking or even absence" (para. 15). Even when the video is on we are under an illusion that we are looking at each other but we really are not. The situation is complicated by a variety of reasons why students may not be comfortable turning their cameras on during class sessions. Trust (2020) created an infographic that was widely circulated in the summer of 2020 and made available on the National Communication Association's website. It provides a rationale of student privacy, safety, equity, and personal reasons for not sharing their video during class.

Faculty attempted to manage the tension of predictable vs. novel classroom activities by incorporating additional online learning tools such as Flipgrid and EdPuzzel to enhance student learning (Prentice & Kramer, 2006). This was challenging because, on one hand, online Zoom style instruction can seem boring but there is a learning curve to online tools that can result in frustration.

Finally, the tension of managing personal time and class time became increasingly difficult as the online learning environment was often experienced in students' living spaces (Prentice & Kramer, 2006). The physical classroom experience was gone for most students and replaced with dorm rooms, homes, apartments, and coffee shops. Thus, personal space was no longer exclusive to personal time but was now part of class time. This resulted in behaviors that would normally be reserved for personal time being experienced during class time including laying in bed, watching television, and cooking.

Social Presence Theory

Short et al. (1976) proposed social presence theory to explain the extent to which communicators believe receivers are salient during interactions. Social presence has documented impacts on learning. The lesson learned: social presence in the learning process can impact students' cognitive learning, affective learning, and motivation (Rodríguez et al., 1996). The social presence experienced in the in-person classroom is far different when teaching online.

When the pandemic hit, students were challenged to remain engaged with the transition to an online platform. Faculty were forced to adapt quickly to both the challenges associated with achieving the course learning goals as well as students' emotional stress. Engaging student learning in this stressful environment was a major challenge. Teacher presence in online environments is one solution to learning engagement issues. Communication experts could be particularly mindful of social presence to achieve

emotional engagement in learning. Weidlich and Bastiaens (2019) found, when compared to a control group, students who experienced social presence enhancements integrated into their online learning environment had more satisfying learning. Niemi (2020) stated, "when physical distancing is deemed necessary, social and emotional connectedness is even more critical" (p. 1). Hence, it is important to determine how to communicate effectively with students struggling with online learning; especially when students are missing elements related to a face-to-face classroom, such as discussions with other peers and access to instructors.

Reflection

We are research partners from two very different educational environments: a liberal arts university and a R1 university. The following are our reflections on the dialectical tensions and social presence experiences of students' learning on a Zoom platform during the pandemic.

Online Social Presence at an R1

For 20 years, I have taught interpersonal communication in a large lecture face-to-face format with 120-200 students. The pandemic increased the three dialectical learning tensions. First, the tension of whether to participate in class discussions or remain silent (Prentice & Krammer, 2006) was heightened with synchronous online learning because of location challenges. Several students who lived in residence halls or shared living spaces felt restrained, creating challenges to communicate online, especially if they were sharing these spaces with roommates taking classes online. Some students experienced synchronous online learning in locations with noise restrictions including hallways, libraries, and common areas which limited the amount of interaction and the types of discussion for personal reflection. Students weren't always willing to disclose or discuss content because they did express anxiety regarding who might hear their disclosures and what others around them might think, not being privy to the entire conversation.

Second, to help create diverse learning experiences and manage the tension between predictable and novel class activities (Prentice & Krammer, 2006), I used applications such as *Flipgrid, Screencastify, Remind,* and *Kahoot*. Flipgrid allows students to video record their answers and comment on classmates' projects. This app is ideal for virtual debates and allows for discussion. Screencastify is a tool that can help students present their work by adding animation and narration to their PowerPoint slides. Remind is an app that allows teachers to send text messages to the class. Kahoot makes learning fun by adding questions into a trivia-type game platform, where students can compete against each other or in teams. These applications received mixed reviews because they are effective when technology works but can be very frustrating during connection issues or program malfunctions. These applications provide ways for students to interact with the content and with each other. Students reported enjoying using the apps to help them learn. Most importantly, it gave them a voice to express their learning concerns, thereby helping me become a better instructor. Again, these applications were not without challenges. Some students reported frustrations with the expectations to learn several new applications.

Third, challenges emerged during the pandemic for the dialectical tension of students managing personal time and class time (Prentice & Kramer, 2006). While in a Zoom class session, I observed students sleeping, watching television, making meals, and doing household chores. Students noted that they were busy balancing their personal, work, school, and social life. They reported feeling overwhelmed and very stressed with all the responsibilities and inconveniences that occurred due to the pandemic. Students also mentioned that some instructors assigned additional work because of the online format. The workload exceeded their expectations. Students said that they felt disconnected from their instructors and peers in the online format. As an instructor, I can't force students to focus on the class online given so many other distractions. However, I felt I needed to find ways to be more engaging and inclusive online by using these online applications and give them more opportunities to have a voice in our classroom.

Online Social Presence at a Liberal Arts University

During the pandemic, a hybrid format was necessary due to social distancing requirements. Prentice and Kramer's (2006) classroom dialectical tensions help explain challenges brought on by pandemic learning. First, participation vs. remaining silent during class discussions is particularly challenging given the divide in hybrid contexts and the lack of social presence in online learning. In-person classes provide far more social presence and, thus, a learner can discern turn-taking cues more easily during discussion. Students rotated online and in-person learning. Many challenges occurred from hybrid formats, including trying to sustain discussion with students in both formats simultaneously (McMurtrie, 2020). Student engagement fell into two groups: those who participated and those who would not. Approximately half of all students began to attend every class in-person and the other half were online only with cameras turned off. This behavior was incongruent with course requirements, but consistent with the rest of campus. E-mailed explanations for absences included, "I just have a lot going on" and "this is a stressful semester." Others preferred to learn in person. For example, during the fifth week of the semester, a sophomore asked, "Could I please come to class 3 days a week? I can't stand Zoom and find it much harder to pay attention." Conversely, some students decided not to follow the rotation and to remain exclusively online and with their cameras off. For example, a Senior wrote an email to explain his lack of engagement. He wrote,

> This class is my only one that's hybrid, the rest are completely online, so the reason I stay online mostly for this class is because it's tough to go to campus after having an online class at home right before. Senioritis is hitting hard, but I'm grinding harder.

Hybrid and online learning may seem more limiting in terms of enhancing the tension of predictable vs. novel classroom activities. Also, students may feel forced into group learning experiences online when auto-assigned to groups and lack the same degree of instructor guidance in the face-to-face experience.

Finally, the tension of managing personal time and class time was especially strained because of the pandemic and current cultural climate. Students repeatedly expressed difficulty getting and staying motivated "with everything that has been going on" and "the stress of Covid." Several students could not attend classes because of engagement with a social movement and an on-campus protest. Also, students expressed difficulty dealing with stress, and this too has increased the propensity to struggle with managing the divide between class and personal time. I noticed students engaging in behaviors during class never previously observed from the same student including frequent texting, lying in bed, and watching tv. It is likely that, due to pandemic stressors, students were struggling between class and personal time, even during class. Furthermore, the increased rate of students missing assignment deadlines may reflect this tension. The increased collective stress of the pandemic may lead to increased dialectical tensions between competing responsibilities.

Conclusion

The ability for students to focus was compromised during the high stress of the pandemic. The learning solution was not to put more responsibility on students as independent asynchronous learners, but, rather, for instructors to engage learners directly to facilitate communication with their peers and instructor. It is critical to create educational environments that are effective at delivering content as well as create community so students feel connected and motivated to learn together. Student-instructor communication predicts student course satisfaction better than modality (Cole, 2016). Understanding tensions impacting student motivation, and subsequently social presence, is critical to developing effective messaging to improve student learning. Instructors need to discern reasons for the lack of engagement.

The pandemic stress and Zoom classroom challenges uncovered a new tension: zeal vs. dejection. This tension expresses students' eagerness to escape stress and immerse themselves in learning while

being so overwhelmed that they could not focus and commit to the learning process. This tension was demonstrated when students in the Zoom class were multitasking. Students explained that they were thankful to have class as an outlet to escape the pandemic but, at the same time, struggled to stay focused on a Zoom class. Students said they wanted to learn but had trouble focusing. This tension was likely enhanced during the pandemic due to the increases in Prentice and Kramer's (2006) tension of managing personal time and class time.

       Future research should directly explore zeal vs. dejection by utilizing the interview process Prentice and Kramer (2006) employed. Furthermore, communication education scholars should continue to explore immediacy behaviors in online and hybrid environments, especially during times students are experiencing high stress. Immediacy behaviors will likely enhance social presence (Dixson et al., 2017) and, therefore, the connectedness students feel with teachers. Research needs to test the degree to which various forms of immediacy and subsequently social presence directly influence students' cognitive and affective learning. In these investigations, learning should be the dependent variable, as measured through exam scores, performance-based assessments, and student reflection. Based on previous research on student learning and our reflections, it is likely that social presence is critical to successful learning experiences during higher-stress environments.

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It's Time to Move Beyond Empathy: Purposefully Building Compassion into Curriculums

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COVID-19 continues to present teaching and learning challenges. As a result, many students still experience stressors in learning contexts. Calls for teachers to engage in practices that acknowledge and respond to students' challenges and stressors are emerging during the pandemic. This short essay highlights how compassionate pedagogy may be used as a framework to actively alleviate students' stressors by (re)framing our understanding of time. Time is a non-renewable resource that often contributes to students' feelings of uncertainty, stress, and anxiety. I use my personal experiences with implementing rolling deadlines, forecasting a semester schedule, and foregoing timed exams as strategies to enhance students' learning while minimizing teaching fatigue. My experience with moving beyond empathy to engage compassion through course policies and procedures introduces future directions where time may be used to further understand the teaching-learning process

Keywords: Instructional Communication, Compassionate Pedagogy, Stressors, Time

Introduction

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, instructors continue making adjustments to teaching and students continue to adjust their approach to learning. One important outcome of teaching and learning during the pandemic is the call for compassionate pedagogy (see Meluch & Hannah, 2021). As teachers continue to work with students who may struggle with their learning and coursework because of COVID-19, one strategy to consider is (re)framing our understanding of time using compassionate pedagogy as a framework. By using my teaching experience(s), I outline three time-oriented strategies to communicate compassion to students through course policies and procedures while introducing implications for both teacher and students.

Compassionate Pedagogy: Putting Empathy into Action

Compassionate pedagogy adopts the central tenants of compassion and transfers them into classroom contexts (see Wright-Mair, 2020). Meluch and Hannah (2021) define compassionate pedagogy as "a pedagogical framework through which instructors cultivate a classroom culture whereby they identify student struggles and respond to those struggles in ways that seek to ease them" (p. 6). Contemporary scholars have built upon the traditional understanding of compassion to include action (Gibbs, 2017). For example, Hao (2011) connects compassionate pedagogy to action by outlining concepts like "feeling towards students' needs," (p. 94) understanding our own and our students' needs, and "develop[ing] open communication with students" (p. 96).

Considering compassion can be communicated and approaches to communicating compassion affect student populations (see Jazaieri, 2018), how instructors use communication is important to student well-being. By adopting compassionate pedagogy practices and tethering it to course policies and procedures, instructors and students may have the opportunity to mutually benefit from compassion.

Two Different Semesters, Same Intention

Instructors who attempt to alleviate student stress on a regular basis may risk experiencing compassion fatigue. Specifically, instructors may begin to feel the effects of burnout (Kaufman & Schipper, 2018). This may result in feelings of stress by attempting to alleviate the stress of students.

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During the 2020-2021 academic year I was an instructor of record for two undergraduate, introductory-level, interpersonal courses. I was encouraged to use compassionate pedagogy by my course director during the pandemic. Most students enrolled in these courses were traditional first- and second-year students at a mid-sized, 4-year, public university in Appalachia. Most students were enrolled full-time. Students were typically employed, and some students were university athletes. No students disclosed any parenting responsibilities during the pandemic and one student reported full-time legal guardianship of two elderly grandparents.

The first semester (Fall 2020) was mostly successful, but I was experiencing difficulties keeping up with the need for compassion given the many unique and demanding situations students were experiencing. As such, I brainstormed strategies for the following semester to alleviate my students' stress while also creating moments of grace for myself through self-compassion. I discovered the most efficient and effective way to achieve goals was to rework my understanding of time and how to use it compassionately.

At the beginning of the pandemic, I approached this course with a rigorous structure intending to minimize students' uncertainty. This idea came in the form of hard deadlines that reflected a pattern over the course of the semester (e.g., quizzes always due on Mondays and reflections on Fridays). Many students struggled to meet deadlines and turn in quality work. At the beginning of the spring semester in 2021, I taught the same course with a more flexible approach and allowed students to feel certainty and control by emphasizing autonomy. Students frequently met deadlines and turned in meaningful, quality, work. Although time was an element of consideration during the fall and spring semesters of 2020-2021, an important consideration for instructors is how to use time to a student's advantage.

Students experienced a variety of stressors at the outbreak of COVID-19. By individually helping each of these students with individual circumstances, I experienced fatigues of all types and found I was more stressed by attempting to make individual and unique accommodations. Moving forward, I chose to communicate compassion by adjusting course-wide policies and procedures to anticipate students' needs during the pandemic.

Strategies for Communicating Compassion

The first strategic consideration is to use rolling deadlines which allows "students to manage their course production" (Withington & Schroeder, 2017, p. 3) and communicates acknowledgement for and understanding of students' schedules and responsibilities outside of the classroom. In this interpersonal course, I chose to introduce rolling deadlines through two relevant analogies.

First, I likened rolling deadlines to paying bills. We generally have a certain number of days to pay a bill and we can choose when to remit payment if we meet the deadline. I applied that same level of flexibility to assignments. Students have different "time budgets" and how they budget that time is entirely up to them. Next, our courses were treated like a traditional Monday through Friday job. Assignments are intended and designed to be due on Friday to avoid doing work over the weekend. Students were encouraged to budget their time, but they could make submission choices without repercussion or judgement. A rolling deadline policy actively alleviates stress by giving students more autonomy and time that they otherwise would not have had. Rolling deadlines are compassionate as they are a response to time-induced stressors experienced by students.

Another consideration is to include a forecast of the upcoming course schedule. I chose to publish a VoiceThread every Monday morning outlining detail of the upcoming two weeks. The forecast outlined three main segments: (1) "where we have been" (e.g., the past); (2) "where we are" (e.g., the present); and (3) "where we are going" (e.g., the future). This served as a training tool to teach students to "plan their work and work their plan" (e.g., strategize time management). Given that students are usually in several classes at once, this alleviated confusion caused by the many ways other courses were facilitated. Students anticipated the forecast every week and this actively alleviated uncertainty concerning course expectations and timelines.

Finally, facilitating untimed exams and quizzes is an example of communicating compassion. Students may experience frequent disruptions due to varying living situations. For some students, this resulted in the inability to complete an exam in a certain amount of time or in one sitting. When I was told that my student who worked three jobs was trying to complete exams at work during dinner breaks, I considered that learning was potentially disrupted because of students' working environments. Moving forward, exams were administered using rolling deadlines and released on Monday morning via the learning management system. Students used an instructor generated password to enter and exit the exam as needed.

Implications for Students

Recent research shows that students value flexibility in times of crisis (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic) (Tatum & Frey, 2021). Past research demonstrates that students benefit from instructors who communicate support (see Thompson & Mazer, 2009). In this case, considering students' time and purposefully implementing course wide policies that actively alleviate time-oriented stressors communicate flexibility and support to students.

I note two major changes between Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 concerning rolling deadlines and untimed exams. First, students in the Spring 2021 semester who took exams and quizzes untimed had a higher completion rate than students in Fall 2020 who took timed exams. Second, students in the 2021 semester had a higher completion rate for assignments when allowed extra time through rolling deadlines than students in Fall 2020.

I speculate that students were more likely to enjoy the course and its material when they were given flexible time to engage with concepts and assignments. When students were exposed to new living and working situations due to COVID-19, their schedules undoubtedly shifted. For some, their ability to use time effectively was drastically impacted. When students knew they had extra time, they communicated feeling less stressed than if they were racing the clock during a pandemic. In some situations, students moved home and had less autonomy and agency in their living spaces, which could cause time constraints that were not anticipated.

Implications for Instructors

These insights may be helpful and meaningful to others considering the long-term impact of COVID-19 in learning contexts. Three implications resulted from my experience: (1) diminished compassion fatigue; (2) less grading fatigue; and (3) lower levels of burnout.

When students were individually communicating the need for extensions through email and in virtual meetings, I noticed a lot of emotion that triggered an immediate and strong empathetic response from myself. Therefore, I engaged in a lot of emotional labor while combating compassion fatigue. Implementing course-wide changes was a practical response to students' needs that did not require as much emotional labor as did my repetitive participation in emotional meetings with students.

Additionally, I experienced less grading fatigue and burnout because of my ability to protect my time. I felt less overwhelmed and overworked because of a decrease in late submissions. Instead, students submitted work in a timely and flexible manner. I was able to plan and organize my time more efficiently. This gave me greater perceptions of control over my working life. My course director's support and encouragement to implement compassionate pedagogy gave me clear job expectations. This increased my autonomy and authority to make decisions that would have otherwise felt difficult to make considering traditional understandings of pedagogy tend to value inflexible structure. Overall, I felt greater job and teaching satisfaction.

Lessons Learned

My foremost lesson learned is that communicating compassion to students during difficult times is most achievable and effective when also engaging in self-compassion. Like the aircraft oxygen mask instructions state, we should secure our own mask before attempting to help others. I encourage instructors to show self-compassion (put on your oxygen mask first) before attempting to show compassion to others (assist the other person). Self-compassion is likely to look and feel different given the diversity of instructors and courses in higher education. However, do not be afraid to benefit from compassion as your students do.

The classroom dynamic may be impacted when compassion is cast as a wide net rather than on an individual basis. Some students may not feel comfortable disclosing stressors or coming to an instructor for help. Implementing compassion through course policies and procedures allows students the opportunity to benefit equitably without feeling the pressure to engage in disclosure or "prove" their need(s). Although less individualized compassion likely has drawbacks, this is a way to create a compassionate classroom culture. I believe this approach is a building block to creating compassionate classrooms where both students and instructors can benefit from and show compassion for themselves, peers, and instructors.

Additionally, I learned that applying compassionate pedagogy did not diminish our course rigor. Being compassionate did not mean I placated my students during the pandemic. Rather, I was more intentional with the way I facilitated learning and designed assignments. For example, I revisited reflection questions and shifted from weekly to bi-weekly reflections. Students were more thorough and thoughtful when they were answering thorough and thoughtful questions. Granting more time to answer meaningful questions was a compassionate form of rigor. I now understand rigor as an outcome of the quality of students' critically approached work, not an outcome of more work. Rigor is implemented compassionately when instructors (re)consider that rigor does not necessarily have to mediate the teaching-learning process. Instead, I reflected on rigor as an outcome of my teaching.

The last lesson learned is that time matters. I intend on minimizing stigma associated with undergraduate students' time in that there is an assumption that school (or even one course in particular) is all the students should focus on (and are focusing on). COVID-19 lends new insights into time-related demands undergraduates feel in a new age of higher education. The author encourages instructors to conceptualize time as a resource that they could give when using compassion strategically in their course.

Future Directions

Future directions include additional reflection on time in learning contexts, especially from an instructional communication lens. Time may be a useful variable to consider when exploring students' experiences in classrooms and learning outcomes. Another avenue for future research may be how instructors experience time in their role as course facilitator. Time may also be a unique variable to explore topics such as instructor burnout, emotional labor, and communication behaviors (e.g., misbehaviors). Lastly, students may understand the concept of a resource from diverse perspectives. The diverse understanding of and use of time may introduce new and valuable insights into the teaching-learning process. Given the diversity of student populations and course offerings in respective departments, instructors should consider how approaches to rolling deadlines might differ depending on the course and assignment. These differences may develop a greater understanding of how approaches to rolling deadlines influence students' experiences.

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It's About Relationship (Yes, Even Online)

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, the student-instructor relationship became an even more vital tool to both learning and student engagement. In the online environment, the student-instructor relationship plays a critical role in learning outcomes. Personal experiences, instructor evaluations, students' verbal and written comments, and student evaluations give insight into practical teaching tools and practices during COVID-19. Self-disclosures highlight a positive approach to enhancing the student-instructor relationship explained through the privacy management theory (Petronio, 2002). Furthermore, these self-disclosures lead to improving student engagement. Using written reports as a tool for both non-verbal relationship building and assessing non-verbal student participation allows for alternative methods to accommodate a diversity of students.

Keywords: privacy management theory, pandemic pedagogy, student-instructor relationship, self-disclosure, online pedagogy, non-verbal participation

Online in the Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the student-instructor relationship became essential to both learning and instructor engagement. Self-disclosures played a crucial role in relational development. Often instructors might believe that sharing information about themselves is discouraged. We may have received such advice from well-meaning mentors, and under the desire not to show bias, we try to be careful with personal information, and there is wisdom in this (Lannutti & Strauman, 2006; Rasmussen & Mishna, 2008). However, much of the literature spoke to the benefits of revealing some information about yourself to your students (Hernandez, 2015; Lannutti & Strauman, 2006; Song et al., 2016). Some instructors have realized this fact and used it to enhance their instructions and learning outcomes in their face-to-face (FtF) classrooms; online, however this seems more difficult (Mick & Middlebrook, 2015).

When instructors self-disclose in positive ways, student engagement increases (Cayanus et al., 2009). Self-disclosures link to relational communication (Cayanus & Martin, 2004), yet as instructors, what do we know about this relationship between the two and how do we leverage it in the classroom? More importantly, at this time in history, how do we practice self-disclosure and relational communication with our students while being flexible to the myriad of methods of instructional delivery rapidly thrust upon us by the COVID-19 pandemic? Exploring these questions informs our pandemic pedagogies.

Supervisor and student evaluation responses from my time teaching during the pandemic restrictions, offered insight into practical teaching tools and practices that support self-disclosures and enhance student relational communication. Evaluating these tools in response to the feedback showed comments highlighting increased student engagement. Drawing from experiential examples, I will explore how using communication privacy management theory (CPM) can guide self-disclosures to facilitate student-instructor relationships (Petronio, 2002). Self-disclosures that build positive student instructor relationship can increase student engagement, though not necessarily increase student verbal output. Engagement and participation do not always have to take the form of verbal participation, and

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engagement is a multidimensional concept (Frymier & Houser, 2016). Disclosures can enhance the student/instructor relationship and facilitate participation and engagement.

Using disclosures in the classroom can be guided by communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 2002). CPM theory focuses on how people manage their private information and how they negotiate rules for their disclosures. Applying CPM to the student-teacher relationship shows that the ways instructors use disclosures can create relationships and engage students in course material (Hosek & Thompson, 2009). For instance, using examples from your own life to illustrate class concepts can generate more interest and connection in the course materials. Student engagement and outcomes improve with positive disclosures and increased student-instructor relationships (Sorensen, 1989). When making disclosures in the classroom the content of those disclosures matter for positive student outcomes (Sorensen, 1989). Disclosures of course relevant, non-negative examples facilitate the student-instructor relationship and affect learning outcomes for students (Hosek & Thompson, 2009).Though much of the research on disclosures in learning comes from a FtF environment, much can be applied to online contexts as well.

Online learning has the reputation of being very impersonal, and connections with students seem more challenging. Rapanta et al. (2020) noted that many opportunities in FtF connections for students might disappear when moving online. Mick and Middlebrook (2015), in a discussion of asynchronous versus synchronous learning, pointed out that with asynchronous learning, there is a loss of social presence and immediacy. With these online channels contributing to a loss of relational tools like social presence and immediacy, it becomes critical to capitalize on practical tools to increase student connection.

Personal Experience Drives Practical Application

As the educational response to the COVID-19 restrictions began to unfold, I was in the position of being at a large university embracing all three methods of instruction (synchronous, asynchronous, and in-person.) In the fall and spring of the 2020-2021 school year, my teaching assignments included FtF (or mask-to-mask, as many began to coin it), asynchronous, and synchronous online classrooms. Many of these were considered "hybrid," meaning they were using FtF and online elements (Hall et al., 2020). Our FtF classrooms were "de-densified," meaning fewer students in each classroom, the desks were six feet apart and my students had only one class meeting a week instead of three. Online courses were done either over Zoom for the synchronous and hybrid options or handled over our e-learning platform (D2L) in discussion boards, announcements, written assignments, and posted instructor materials, as well as email and Zoom personal contacts.

I found the both the online and offline students eager to meet, talk, and share; they were craving the contact, and honestly, I probably was too. Students came to class early, talked often, and did not balk at group work; absences were few and far between. In synchronous Zoom classes, I employed several strategies to increase opportunities for engagement and found that students were eager to speak and participate. As I arrived for our online class a few minutes early, many students often joined early and easily shared something about their day.

During the class, I focused on engagement and interaction in several ways. My discussion questions focused on some personal elements. I often asked students to give examples in their life that applied to a theory we were discussing. These life examples allowed students to get to know each other better through classroom discussion and helped them find commonalities. Using the break-out room feature of Zoom, I split the class into smaller groups and allowed for smaller group discussions. I added two things that led to more engagement and relationships in these groups.

First, in break-out groups, I added the expectation that students must play a role in the discussion. They would decide among themselves on a leader/facilitator and a reporter. This decision gave at least two individuals focused roles and increased their ownership and self-direction of the activity. The leader would guide the small group discussion, and the reporter would represent the group, in the main session, sharing a point of their conversation. While this expectation highlighted a role in the discussion, it allowed that role to be non-verbal through a written report.

The second element implemented was a report that the student needed to upload after their break-out room experience, which allowed them to get participation points and connect with me. It consisted of a paragraph where the student shared the online role they played and the participation grade they felt they deserved, and why they earned that grade. I encouraged students to develop other "roles" and give specifics of how they contributed. Several times students would mention non-verbal activities they did in the breakout like "make connections" or "thought out conflicting opinions." One student noted they felt their participation did not warrant a high grade because their English was poor, and they lacked understanding of the conversation. This admission allowed me to dialogue with the student and made me an aware of a problem that I otherwise might not have known about. This written assessment allowed other forms of participation to be reflected on and acknowledged. Using a written tool can be a way to support a student who may have cultural or personality differences in the way they participate.

Many students also used this report to correspond with me. Students would often give me more details about something they mentioned about their life, make comments, and offer encouragement on something I had said in class, and even send me photos of pets or travels in their report. In the written reports, students would often self-disclose in response to my self-disclosure, as predicted by CPM theory (Hosek & Thompson, 2009). For example, when I mentioned deadlines I had coming up for some projects, some students wished me luck or shared that they too had a busy week ahead. These correspondences created a connection and a positive student-instructor relationship.

Synchronous and non-synchronous class relationships were created in primarily three ways. The first way was through weekly video announcements. By posting a weekly video announcement, students could see and get to know me. This allowed students to see things about me that they otherwise would not know. I would say things about where I was recording and mention things like my cat walking by. These videos showed a real life, not perfect or polished. They gave reminders and instruction for the coming week's assignments and encouragement or recap of feedback on past assignments while allowing the students a glimpse of me. This glimpse allowed them to make personal connections and find commonalities (Sorenson, 1989).

Secondly, I offered a weekly time to "be there" for them. Though only a few students took advantage of this, it gave those who wanted to connect a time and place to count on interacting with me in live Zoom office hours. When students did come, I not only answered their questions but conversed with them about where they were, life in general, and how the course was going for them. It only took me a few minutes, and it made a difference for those who showed up. I received verbal, email, and survey feedback about how helpful this was for them.

Feedback is helpful for all students and is the third way I created connections and relationships. Especially on the first assignment, my feedback was detailed, used the students' names, and pointed out one connection we had. Usually, this first assignment is an introduction of some kind, where the student introduces themselves and connects or elaborates on the experiences they bring to the classroom. Sometimes I might comment that I too loved cooking or traveling and hoped to visit their country someday. In some way, I endeavored to make a personal comment to that student. Again, this created reciprocal disclosures enhancing learning (DiVerniero & Hosek, 2011). These connections, I believe, created an expectation for a more open, personal, and responsive synchronous class.

Critical Outcomes from Relationships and Disclosures

Evidence from student and evaluator comments showed that these techniques achieved positive results. During this time, I had an evaluation from our course director, and she commented that she was surprised by the amount of student engagement I had in class; it was some of the best she had seen. The evidence of relationship came back in student comments at the end of the term with, "she really cares about the students," "she was genuinely excited to see each of us," or "always friendly and energetic, which makes getting engaged much easier." Students often told me I was the only instructor that asked how they were doing. These attempts to connect with students formed relationships.

Though Hernandez (2015) focuses on FtF relationships, his Real Talk pedagogy concept can be employed online. The idea as an instructor is to tell your story in a way, or with a theme, the student can relate to. CPM theory explains that what you disclose makes a difference in how effective the disclosure will be in creating positive connections with students (Hosek & Thompson, 2009; Sorenson, 1989). When facing a societal crisis, we have a built-in theme we are all sharing. This theme might be uncertainty, sickness, or loss of social life. During the fall term of 2020, I contracted the COVID-19 virus. After consideration, I chose to disclose this to my class, which I previously would not have done. Because I was absent for two weeks, I decided to offer my personal information rather than being cryptic about it and leaving the students to make assumptions. This admission led to many disclosing their time having COVID-19 and how they coped. My disclosures led to reciprocal disclosures which is explained by CPM theory (Hosek & Thompson, 2009). One student even offered a tea recipe that helped her get over the illness. Hernandez (2015) notes that these connections through shared experiences, allow you to develop trust, by making you relatable.

These personal disclosures and connections might be even more critical for successful online student connections than in FtF classrooms. Song et al. (2016) found that compared to FtF, self-disclosures online create better perceptions of student satisfaction and learning satisfaction. This phenomenon could be due to the reduced cues environment that an online, especially asynchronous environment, can create (Walther,1992, 1996). Typical FtF cues of your ethnicity, sex, clothing choices, speaking style, and more no longer exist in an asynchronous environment. Some of the things we disclose just by being present are no longer available to give our students a relatable cue. Therefore, using weekly videos to enhance your students' cues can be crucial for connection in online platforms. These experiences and practical ideas are a good first step.

Final Thoughts

Future studies could further enhance the lessons learned as elaborated in this paper. Connections from this COVID time could extend the literature and expand the ways CPM is used in times of crisis. Do the rules for managing information change or flex in some directions due to the common theme society is sharing? Perhaps privacy is not deemed as necessary as health information is widely shared. Research should examine how times of crisis that impair established relationships impact the value of the student/instructor relationship. Written communication between instructor and student should be examined and measured to test the effects on the student-instructor relationship and, ultimately, student outcomes.

At the time of writing, this winter looks to be similar in some ways to the last. Whether COVID-19 is waning, no one can say, but the probability that online teaching will continue seems fixed no matter the tenacity of the virus. Before COVID-19 online learning already earned its place as an educational option, and the pandemic has only increased, or some would say accelerated the desire and need for the option. As educators, we would do well to hone our skills and be prepared for whatever assignment might come in the future, FtF, synchronous, asynchronous, hybrid, or maybe even something we have not yet developed.

So, if you desire for your students to be engaged, connected, have better learning outcomes, and even give more positive feedback on your evaluations, consider doing things to build instructor-student relationships, especially in challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic. Take advantage of self-disclosure to make yourself relatable and find things that you and other students can relate to with each other. Use technology affordances like chat boxes and break-out rooms as tools to foster engagement and ownership. Use videos to build instructor immediacy and give cues to who you are in ways that show your style, environment, and even the qualities of your voice. Have fun connecting with your students, put yourself out there a little to reap rich rewards that will satisfy you as an instructor, and build those relationships with your students that will lead to better learning outcomes for them.

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Teaching Online During COVID-19: Lessons Learned About Creating Connection Through Trauma-Informed Teaching and Communicating Social Presence

Paul R. Raptis

As the COVID-19 pandemic lingers, it is likely that educators will continue to encounter students experiencing trauma. How can we reach out to our students who appear outwardly to be doing fine? This essay considers three major lessons learned from teaching online during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. First, by implementing the principles of trauma-informed teaching, instructors can enhance students' online learning experience by creating environments encouraging safety, autonomy, and motivation. Next, educators can also create cultures of support and understanding when teaching online classes by regularly engaging in social presence to intentionally connect with students. Finally, instructors can commit to continued growth and professional development to enhance the efficacy of their online teaching practices.

Keywords: online instruction, trauma-informed teaching, social presence, COVID-19

Introduction

In March 2020, I was teaching four face-to-face undergraduate communication classes. Due to the increasing severity of COVID-19, my institution, like so many others, shifted the delivery of classes to totally asynchronous online formats. Luckily, I had experience taking and teaching online classes, so the shift to online instruction was not difficult for me. I quickly discovered there was much I still had to learn, however. While I tried to stay connected to all my students through email, invitations to video conferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom and Teams), and through our learning management system (LMS), I spent more time checking in with my introductory and junior-level students than my seniors. I rationalized that because of their level of experience, the seniors needed less direction and interaction with me. My assumption was very wrong. When I read my course evaluations for the Spring 2020 semester, I realized my senior-level students needed just as much connection and support. In their evaluations, my senior students indicated I could have spent more time providing support and staying connected once the university went fully online.

As I write this essay, increasingly transmissible variants such as Delta and Omicron mean we are continuing to struggle with the ongoing effects of COVID-19. Educators continue to encounter students who are experiencing trauma and will need to maintain their support of students in the upcoming years by engaging in trauma-informed teaching practices. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines individual trauma as:

> an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being (2021, para. 2).

As Mersky et al. (2019) explain, an experience is traumatic when it produces psychological distress or harm. Furthermore, Harper and Neubauer (2021) point out understanding trauma means considering the nature of an event, how people experience an event, and the adverse effects of an event. Since each of us experiences and processes trauma differently, how can educators reach out to students who appear outwardly to be doing fine? In this essay, I will share three major ideas I learned about online teaching during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. I will examine the following: first, how we

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as educators can better support our students who may be experiencing trauma; next, the need for educators to create a sense of instructor social presence in our online classes; and, finally, how we can further develop our online teaching effectiveness.

Trauma-Informed Teaching

Do you recall how unsettling and traumatic the sudden onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic was to students and faculty? Our world and our assumptions changed quickly. Many students were experiencing trauma in their personal and academic lives due to the sudden loss of connections with friends and families. Some students experienced tremendous trauma from the deaths of friends and family members. To make matters worse, they could not grieve at funerals. The normal rites of passage such as commencement were cancelled, postponed, or drastically modified. Our students were unable to celebrate their achievements as they had hoped, and they felt isolation and uncertainty resulting from social distancing requirements (Hafetz-Mirman et al., 2022; Sirrine et al., 2021).

The first step is to realize the impact of traumatic events on our students. Some of our students are resilient and will recover from the adverse effects of the pandemic lockdown. Other students will be honest about their struggles. Still others may mask their feelings or not fully be aware of the degree to which they are suffering. As educators we cannot assume all of our students are fine. According to Carello and Butler (2015), being trauma-informed means understanding how "traumatic experiences may have impacted the lives of the individuals involved and [applying] that understanding to the design of systems and provision of services so they accommodate trauma survivors needs and are consonant with healing and recovery" (p. 264). Therefore, minimizing the risk of inadvertent retraumatization is a fundamental tenet of trauma-informed practice.

When implementing trauma-informed teaching principles, Carello and Butler (2015) emphasize ensuring students' emotional and physical safety is fundamental to creating a learning-conducive atmosphere. A key assumption of trauma-informed teaching practice is the importance of developing a safe learning environment. An awareness of safety issues in the online as well as face-to-face classroom means considering such factors as *student characteristics* (recognize students may bring individual experiences and trauma histories impacting their learning), *content and presentation processing* (consider how course content can potentially affect students based on their experiences and histories), *assignment requirements and policies* (implement practices and policies to avoid shaming, disturbing, or triggering students), *instructor behavior* (avoid dismissiveness, threats, ridicule, and displays of impatience and disappointment to students), *student behavior* (address disruptive and disrespectful behavior from students), and *classroom characteristics* (seek out student feedback and suggestions for creating a safe learning space).

Crosby et al. (2020) argue trauma-informed practice is not a "one-size-fits-all program or intervention—it is dynamic and must change according to the needs of those in the impacted system" (p. 2). Furthermore, as educators strive to meet the needs of students during the COVID-19 pandemic, they can apply trauma-informed practices to their online instructional methods. To foster a sense of safety and normalcy online, instructors can establish consistency in their expectations and instructions about student coursework. For example, Cavanaugh (2016) contends students who have experienced trauma "may need additional supports to ensure consistency in their environment including advanced warnings for transitions, reminders, or specific information about changes in the routine" (p. 42). Since COVID-19 has resulted in the world feeling much more precarious and inconsistent, clear and consistent online communication between instructors and students can help reduce uncertainty, establish familiar routines, and enhance students' sense of autonomy in navigating chaotic life events.

Instructors should also design assignments in their online classes intended to inspire student creativity, self-reflection, experiential learning, and critical thinking (Bates, 2014). For instance, group work, discussions, internships, service-learning, and case-based learning can encourage students to actively engage with their classmates, work collaboratively at problem-solving, share ideas, provide and receive feedback, improve time-management, and enhance cultural awareness and perspective-taking. In

addition, increases in student motivation (Ruzek et al., 2016), engagement (Roman, 2020), and self-efficacy (Hitchcock et al., 2021) can occur when instructors establish student-centered learning environments where empathy, emotional support, mutuality, recognition of diversity, and feelings of safety exist. Likewise, instructors can nurture greater connection and engagement with students by creating and maintaining a sense of social presence in their online classes.

Communicating Instructor Social Presence Online

According to Morreale et al. (2021), communication research has generated several variables considered to be essential components of instructional communication competence, including immediacy, affinity, relational power, credibility, clarity, and humor. Of particular interest to online instructional communication scholars is teacher immediacy, also known as instructor presence. Bialowas and Steimel (2019) discuss the concept of "connection" in learning environments as being explained by teacher immediacy and social presence and frame social presence as a subset of immediacy. Infante et al. (2010) define immediacy behaviors as "messages (both verbal and nonverbal) that signal feelings of warmth, closeness, and involvement with another person" (p. 235). Teacher immediacy behaviors communicate closeness and reduce perceptions of distance between teachers and students (Anderson, 1979). Teacher verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors have been associated with students' increased affective and cognitive learning, motivation, and satisfaction (Schutt et al., 2009).

Hazel et al. (2014) describe social presence perspectives as emphasizing "the importance of positive interactions (e.g., immediacy and intimacy) between communicators, which can be positively or negatively affected by the communication medium" (p. 314). Baker (2010) illustrates the positive outcomes teacher immediacy and instructor presence have on student affective learning, perceived cognitive learning, and motivation in online teaching and learning contexts. By engaging in immediacy and establishing social presence in their online classes, instructors can implement trauma-informed teaching practices increasing student perceptions of connection, emotional support, and safety (Rawle, 2021).

Darby and Lang (2019) discuss the advantages of instructors creating a sense of community online and making it part of their course planning and facilitation. Based on Vygotsky's (1978) research on the zone of proximal development, learning can be enhanced when students work collaboratively with their peers and instructors. The implications for interaction and collaboration between students and instructors highlights the benefits of creating communities of inquiry in online learning environments. Moreover, instructors can build community and establish social presence in their online classes by showing up regularly and setting the tone for communication expectations. Instructors should make their presence known by frequently and supportively responding to student questions and discussion posts in a timely manner. To communicate immediacy, warmth, and liking, instructors can use student names to personalize their feedback, express gratitude for student contributions, and provide personal examples illustrating their own experiences on the topic.

Another way instructors can establish and maintain online social presence is by posting frequent text or video announcements (Bialowas & Steimel, 2019). Garrison et al. (1999) describe the communication function of social presence as related to "the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as 'real' people (i.e., their full personality), through the medium of communication being used" (p. 94). Instructor announcements can build a sense of community online by keeping students focused and updated on course goals, providing clarification, establishing consistency and routine, reducing uncertainty, addressing misunderstandings, summarizing outcomes, making observations, and highlighting class achievements. The first weeks of lockdown were so profoundly isolating that my students, regardless of age or class standing, needed social connection and support. Checking in with students on a regular basis can provide reassurance, reinforce a sense of structure, enhance motivation, and satisfy needs for community and connection during times of trauma.

In order to develop community and reduce the potential for feelings of distance to occur in our online classes, Thacker (2021) emphasizes the significance of instructors engaging with empathy. Some

suggestions for increasing empathy online include intentional efforts such as learning about students as people, creating opportunities for informal interactions over Zoom, checking in through email and discussions regularly, using mid-term course evaluations to obtain student feedback, and treating student disclosures with care and confidentiality. Our students are real people with hopes, aspirations, pressures, and lives outside of class. Designing online classes to include empathy means taking into consideration the perspectives, experiences, and challenges students bring with them to the learning situation (Vann, 2017). By taking the time to listen and connect with our students, we can cultivate a culture of support and understanding in our online classes. Showing support means reaching out to students, actively listening to their concerns, and exercising flexibility when necessary to help them build resilience, persist and succeed.

Developing Online Teaching Effectiveness

It is one thing to say we need to create social presence in our online classes and design instruction that includes trauma-informed practices. Yet, what we do in our online instruction must also be *effective*. Darby and Lang (2019) discuss several professional development strategies for improving our online teaching effectiveness. One strategy is to actually take an online class to experience what it feels like to be an online student, learn more about online teaching, and discover instructional techniques to possibly implement into our own classes. Another strategy is to intentionally seek out experts and adopt their approaches. This involves engaging in online professional development opportunities, attending online conferences, webinars, and workshops, and participating in learning communities to encourage collaboration with colleagues. Similarly, we can also improve our instructional practices by obtaining certification for our online courses based on a quality rubric, such as Quality Matters (QM). Moreover, we can integrate learner-centered approaches into the design of our online courses by incorporating trauma-informed teaching practices that benefit students by removing barriers to learning and engagement (Carello & Butler, 2015; Crosby, 2015; Hitchcock et al., 2021; Sanders, 2021). In addition, we as educators may also be experiencing trauma of our own due to the ongoing pandemic. As Harper and Neubauer (2021) explain, "COVID-19 is unique in that we are all experiencing the trauma of living, working, and learning during a pandemic, and thus those who are responsible for delivering trauma-informed educational activities are experiencing the same or similar COVID-specific stressors" (p. 17). Thus, it becomes essential for all of us to recognize how we are affected by trauma and practice self-care by "understanding that our own health and well-being impacts how we care for our students and how our students engage in the classroom" (Crosby et al., 2020, p. 4). Regardless of the personal and professional development strategies we follow, improving our efficacy as online instructors, especially during times of trauma, is an intentional ongoing process requiring time and effort to develop.

Conclusions

Considering how the pandemic has shaped what we consider the "new normal" for technology enhanced teaching and learning, Schapiro (2021) describes several positive outcomes of online instruction students find especially beneficial to their learning. Overall, students expressed their appreciation of listening to recorded lectures, interacting with guest speakers over Zoom, getting to know their instructors as real people, and likewise having their instructors show genuine interest in them. The lessons to be learned from teaching online during the time of COVID-19 suggest online teaching and learning can result in positive learning outcomes for students.

Morreale et al. (2021) argue online education is now a given and "students of today and tomorrow have moved beyond the face-to-face experience, which many faculty prefer, to all sorts of mediated communication." (p. 118). As such, they make a case for the communication discipline to take the lead in studying how we can improve our instructional communication competence in online teaching and learning contexts. As I have suggested in this essay, by implementing principles of trauma-informed teaching, we can enhance our students' online learning experience by creating an environment

encouraging safety, autonomy, and motivation. We can also create cultures of support and understanding in our online classes by regularly engaging in immediacy and social presence to intentionally connect with students. Moreover, we can commit to continued growth and professional development to enhance the efficacy of our online teaching practices.

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Mental Health Matters! - A Pedagogical Essay About The Practice of Compassion for Online University Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic

James L. Cartee, III

From an online instructor perspective, this paper examines and explains lessons professionally absorbed during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. These many lessons specifically include the practice of compassion, which remains applicable to many higher education practitioners in any situation, including but not limited to times of crisis. This pedagogical reflection addresses the importance of mental health among college students during the pandemic in a virtual class format. The text mentions commentary on the sudden transition to online learning from in-person classes when colleges closed across the world. Statistics, relevant facts, and prevalent research demonstrate the negative impact on students and their mental health, often experienced in isolation. With an applied explanation, the concept of compassion is discussed as it relates to students in remote learning environments and mental health concerns. While not only applicable to university students, faculty members were also affected in many of the same-mentioned scenarios and hardships. These instructors virtually experienced a shared trauma with colleagues, students, and other staff. A call to action mentions future applications that faculty members and universities could implement to better manage future public health crisis events, including a summary of best practices personally learned by the author.

Keywords: mental health, pedagogy, college students, compassion, virtual learning

For close to twelve years now, I have taught college courses in Communication in an online format. During this time, I have heard many personal and professional excuses that students give in requests to make up missing work, including why their assignments were late. On one occasion, a student emailed me that the family dog had eaten her homework. I then replied, "How does a dog eat a digital file submission?" The student then responded in another message with photos of a damaged laptop attached, which appeared to have multiple teeth marks from an animal engrained into the machine. The dog was a puppy and enjoyed chewing on everything in the house. While I felt sorry for the student, I could not help but smile.

In addition to catching COVID-19, mental health challenges appeared frequent among college students and faculty, especially for individuals in long-term isolation periods. While the media focused on the physical impact of the virus itself, those same news outlets often overlooked other adverse effects for the individuals who caught COVID-19, such as mental health concerns and lack of community (Su et al., 2021). Rather than college students taking part in usual spring activities and enjoying collegiate sports, most higher education institutions quickly shifted to online learning formats, some in just a matter of a few weeks. College campuses became ghost towns as students moved out of dorms and other major buildings closed permanently. At the time, the spread of the coronavirus was rampant, and information about COVID-19 and how to contain it remained limited. Even now, many traditional universities continue to conduct many of their courses through an online platform. Terms like "social distancing," "quarantine," and "self-isolation" have become part of everyday conversations. The purpose of this essay is to introduce the practice of compassion in a virtual learning environment during times of crisis. To address compassion in this context, relevant research and narratives illustrate the definition of compassion, a shared trauma between those involved, and examples of how kindness was extended during the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of professional application with the overall content of this essay, the text closes with personal reflective suggestions and best practices on how to utilize compassion in the online classroom.

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In addition to the present circumstances with COVID-19, I have personally experienced several crisis events with online learners, including a student with a terminal illness, the loss of loved ones, hurricanes, mental disorders, and even domestic violence. During the peak of the pandemic and even in some cases now, college students encountered lost employment, financial instability, college campus closures, transitioning to remote work locations, long isolation periods, and children staying home during the day (daycares and schools closed). This list only mentions a few of the many complications the pandemic created (Panchel et al., 2021). Concerning first-year university students, in the transition to virtual learning after expecting a traditional in-person college experience in the spring semester of 2020, Fruehwirth et al. (2021) state that the "rates of moderate-severe anxiety increased 39.8 percent and rates of moderate-severe depression increased 47.9 percent from before to mid-pandemic" (p. 11). While learning primarily in online formats, loneliness, mixed feelings of future uncertainties, apprehension about academic performance, and a sense of hopelessness were among many of the factors that influenced reported depression with undergraduate students (Son et al., 2020). During the pandemic, young adults who experienced depressive feelings and severe anxiety reported percentages as high as 56%. When measured up to the general adult population, young adults were already more likely to experience situations of concern with substance abuse (25% compared to 13%) and suicidal thoughts (26% compared to 11%) (Panchel et al., 2021).

The tipping point of acute anxiety, clinical depression, suicidal ideation, and other mental health considerations escalated when most college campuses across the country closed (Lee et al, 2021). The underlying factors that affected all university online learners, including those in transition from traditional campuses and those who started in a virtual environment, remain vast and complicated beyond simple variables. While only a few mental health figures and details listed here demonstrate the dramatic effect that COVID-19 has had on college students and their mental health in these unprecedented times, the active presence and practice of compassion in the online classroom offer one of the best solutions on how to manage a virtual learning environment amidst a crisis event.

Understanding Compassion in Times of Crisis

Many research publications comment on the idea and notion of compassion in both a traditional classroom and online environment. Jazaieri (2017) elaborates with the most comprehensive definition and the context of compassion in college instruction:

> First, compassion involves an awareness of suffering (cognitive component). Second, compassion involves a sympathetic concern related to being emotionally moved by suffering (affective component). Third, compassion includes a wish to see the relief of that suffering (intentional component). Finally, compassion includes a responsiveness or readiness to help relieve that suffering (motivational component) (p. 23).

In this description, compassion becomes the active intention of a faculty member to recognize, assess, and alleviate the hardship and anguish of a college student, especially in an emergency shift to online learning. The noticeable observation of suffering for another individual elicits a response of care that acts on a motivated need. Rather than just needlessly being aware that suffering occurs, a specific action becomes the follow-up and agent for change to help another person. Misfortune did not just occur through physical illness with COVID-19. Instructors and university leadership recognized the suffering of college students, especially with mental health hardships. These same psychological struggles impacted all university stakeholders, not just students, but also faculty and staff. Compassion was therefore extended for both physical and mental ailments on campus and in remote settings.

Amidst an abrupt transition from a campus classroom setting to an online platform, both college faculty and students felt relationally distanced from each other, without the ability to communicate in person. However, as learned by all higher education professionals and students during the COVID-19 pandemic, an approach of compassion and caring for others does not necessarily need to be experienced

face-to-face with live interactions (Christopher et al., 2020). In other words, compassion can be expressed and experienced in several different ways in many various distinct situations, including a remote learning environment.

Student Mental Health Considerations in An Online Setting

Relating to the mental well-being of university students, Huckins et al. (2020) confirmed that sedentary times increased among students, lacking physical activity like exercise, thus negatively impacting symptoms of depression and anxiety. Typically, during long breaks away from college, students partake in exercise and other aerobic activities, therefore combatting depressive elements. Instead, students utilized their phones more frequently and traveled to fewer places while remaining sedentary. Kecojevic et al. (2020) proposed that academic challenges, including declining grades and being strategic about studying habits in isolation, were linked to higher measures of emotional stress, anxiety, and even clinical depression. The loss of employment and lower wages associated with increased levels of depression and other forms of emotional distress. Kecojevic et al. state that "Struggling academically with online courses may further exacerbate mental health distress among students" (p. 12). Virtual learning requires students to sit in front of computers for prolonged periods in solitude, cut off from the rest of a campus community. If alone in isolation, without the ability to leave the occupied grounds or take breaks from sitting in a small space for any reason, the mental health of an individual potentially dwindles. Abnormal levels of depression, anxiety, and other mental illness concerns are bound to occur in these described scenarios, especially with college students.

In another study concerning the academic performance and the mental stability of university students, Awadalla et al. (2020) suggested that severe depression potentially caused negative effects on grades and the lack of genuine interest for students to learn relevant class materials. Increasing health awareness potentially reduces these described scenarios with students who might seek needed mental healthcare services. Wyatt et al. (2017) further elaborate on how stress, anxiety, and depression also cause adverse outcomes on academic achievement and the ability to focus, especially with students past the first year of their undergraduate studies. This analysis demonstrated that upperclassmen struggle more with depression, anxiety, high stress, and self-injury than first-year students. Perhaps later years in college with upperclassmen entail a more rigorous curriculum in higher-level major classes. The first-year experience provides a unique opportunity to educate and reach college students in terms of health literacy and initiatives for mental health services available to them, especially through faculty relationships. After interviewing college students diagnosed with clinical depression, Martin and Atkinson (2020) mentioned that these individuals slowly became disengaged before experiencing severe depression. Physical health challenges also soon resulted from the influence of depression on these students. Many of the students felt disappointed and stranded from the systems in place at the academic institutions where they resided. Social inclusion through community encouraged depressed students in relationships with people who supported their well-being. In fact, isolation only worsened the depression for the emotions of some students, causing more volatility for potential nervous breakdowns.

Concerning another study on mental health in remote learning, Elmer et al. (2020) reported that the students struggled with severe stress, depression, anxiety, loneliness, and other negative measures of similar psychological feelings. These cognitive misfortunes were worse during and after the pandemic began as opposed to before. These burdened emotions evolved from concerns about health, social relationships, family well-being, and potential future successes, like graduation possibilities and job availability. When remote learning transforms into the most common form of delivery for college instruction during times of crisis, mental health struggles become more commonplace for university students in isolation, separated from community, close-knit relationships, and memorable in-person experiences. In these despondent situations, compassion then serves as the best response to assist college students, faculty, and staff in their joint ability to persevere through turbulent times.

A Shared Trauma with College Faculty and Student Experiences

Along with the students, the same adversities previously detailed were also shared by university faculty and staff, where many individuals were virtually working from home. During the pandemic, instructors and students experienced a shared trauma, also known as a shared traumatic reality. This concept is defined as circumstances simultaneously lived by these individuals together in unison, sometimes in moments of distress (Tosone, 2016). This common exposure to these events became a linking partnership in empathy, extended between all parties in an online instructional environment. While extensions of kindness often concerned the mental health of students, self-care becomes just as important for faculty to practice with themselves, such as positive self-talk, adequately resting, and regularly exercising (Crosby et al., 2020). Instructors must remain intentional in separating employment and personal responsibilities, such as spending time with family and enjoying hobbies outside of work (Wells & Davis, 2021). Inspiring narratives of student perseverance, including kind gestures received from their professors, also spurred faculty members to assist other instructors within the same department or college, including those with severe mental health downturns (Garcia, 2021). For example, when campuses closed, the sudden overnight transition to remote learning troubled many faculty unfamiliar with online learning management systems and programs. Students were specifically requested to be patient with each other and their professors when technical difficulties emerged. The joint traumatic experience involved learning together so that all parties could make the most of daunting circumstances, including empathy shown to one another from all directions.

Lessons on Practicing Mental Health Compassion in Online University Classrooms

How a practitioner utilizes compassion in a virtual learning setting varies among professional personalities. Even personal belief systems influence how one teaches effectively when you cannot always see the faces of students in person. When meeting college students face-to-face, an instructor can read nonverbal communication cues, such as facial expressions and other body gestures. Therefore, one can often gauge an individual student's mental health struggles as a result if present. These observations especially become more ambiguous through online formats. As the COVID-19 pandemic heightened, students approached me as their instructor with a myriad of tragic circumstances, such as the death of loved ones, sick children, lost jobs, financial challenges, lack of in-person communication, and of course, severe mental health struggles. Students appeared saddened, frustrated, disappointed, and perhaps even angry with their initial lockdown situations. Firsthand, I learned what it truly meant to actively listen to student narratives and affirm their feelings through statements of support and affirmation. While I cannot always assist a student in delayed timelines, I can certainly lend an open ear to hardships. Therefore, I made extra efforts and attempts to be available for students whenever serious situations seemed tense and grievous. If a student requested a one-on-one session, I would make appointments to address their concerns via the phone or a Zoom session, and sometimes these students just wanted someone to listen to their narratives. When the course calendar allowed for extensions in severe circumstances, I would give students an additional seven to ten extra days to complete major assignments.

Secondly, in the transition of continual change (sometimes almost daily), I learned to become adaptable in the face of unpredictable adversities, even within my own life. This sense of adaptability further developed as a professional skill when I witnessed the tragic experiences of students I deeply cared about, which included expressed concerns about their mental well-being and successful learning outcomes. Without previous experience with certain technologies and computer programs, I became a quick learner of new virtual communication delivery methods, realizing the need to adapt and pick up fresh skills quickly so that students could learn in the most effective means possible. In one online class specifically, at the peak of the pandemic, I allowed every student to submit all the class assignments up to the very last day of class without late penalties; therefore, relevant complications were eased if emergencies happened unexpectedly. Focusing on the safety and wellness of one's family could then take precedence over everything else.

Thirdly, I learned that adaptability also necessitates an attitude of positivity in a media world often most focused on negativity, fear, doom, and gloom in constant depictions of calamity and misfortune. Even though often depressed and saddened by the loss of precious blessings, my students needed a voice of positivity to rejuvenate their desires to learn and accomplish the goal of receiving a quality education and eventually earning a college diploma. For instance, in some live lectures, we would have "dance-it-out-sessions" on Zoom as I played edited 90's hip hop music blaring in the background of my home office. Students were welcome to turn their computer cameras off or on, however they often laughed hysterically at my visible, silly dance moves. The positive experience served as a welcome distraction, taking the students' attention off tragedies from the pandemic. And, just so you know, I did not record these segments because I am not all that great of a dancer, hence why these incidents were funny.

Fourth, in unparalleled times never encountered by my generation, I promptly realized those constantly changing circumstances required flexibility to succeed in any higher education learning environment with a time of crisis, such as COVID-19. For the mental health of my students with all the universities I worked for and represented, in terms of extended acts of compassion, we granted more incompletes for classes than what would be considered normal. The time for unconventional flexibility suitable for a pandemic made virtual learning doable for almost every college student, including adult learners, such as single parents with children at home because of closed daycares or public schools who switched to a completely online platform. As mentioned before, these working parents with children at home, without other caretakers, were given incompletes with an additional two weeks to finish the class after it officially ended. In more serious cases, if documented through university services, several students with diagnosed mental illnesses were given up to an extra semester to finish classwork with an official incomplete, possibly even taking a break from school to rest and recuperate. I sought to give students the time needed to spend with family and manage unforeseen predicted pandemic adversities outside of their university studies. Flexibility through compassion became my new norm, rather than sternness to teach students about real-world deadlines and business communication practices. I found that the quality of the students' work was just the same as a normal semester with these flexible deadlines and, in many cases, even improved in comparison to assignments previously completed.

Moving Forward into The Future

On a final note, please keep in mind that faculty members were also very much affected in many of the same ways as college students. Kindness goes both ways in a teacher-student relationship. While compassion was and is certainly extended to students, it also needs to be received from students for faculty as well. The shared trauma in the crisis created a closeness collectively among students (peer-to-peer) and faculty-student relationships (faculty to student and student to faculty). All these lessons provided me with the ability to become more compassionate for the students I mentored and whose lives I changed simply by caring for them as both students and people. One could describe chaotic events of this nature as a wake-up call to treat others as we, too, also hope to be treated. Suddenly, through awareness of priorities, human connection and community become paramount in the support they provide.

Student and faculty support services, including counseling and other forms of mental health assistance, should take priority in terms of accessibility and what these outlets offer to these parties (Lederer et al., 2021). Rather than making the transition from in-person formats to complete online learning tedious, lengthy, and difficult, colleges can implement necessary infrastructures sooner rather than later. In case a national emergency of this magnitude happens again, these future plans would instantly apply the necessary resources, including but not limited to mental health programming, computer networks, technology training, and virtual support staff (Mudiwa et al., 2021).

From my own experiences, moving into the future, faculty members (and students in some cases) can practice the following: actively listen to each other, remain adaptable to changing circumstances, maintain a positive outlook, and employ flexibility in these crisis moments. It is not a matter of if another pandemic will occur moving forward. It is simply a matter of when. As the world stands now, amidst

personal, professional, and societal turmoil, many individuals could benefit from acts of compassion and kindness, especially with mental health hardships. These actions in higher education will make future worldwide emergencies manageable and maybe even still hopeful, especially in an online college instruction environment.

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Examining Communication Between Couples Suffering From Cancer

Evaleigh Noel

Given the emotional-nature that cancer-related topics are, it has become important to analyze how a cancer diagnosis can affect a relationship. The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate how couples can maintain healthy relationships when one person is dealing with cancer, specifically why certain topics are avoided by couples and how this avoidance can damage the relationship. Using pre-existing interviews from the website Cancer Dudes, four interviews were analyzed to identify certain themes among the interviews. Using thematic coding analysis, multiple themes were found, in addition to categories within these themes. Given the various data collected, the study exposes several implications of the data and emphasizes the need for future research regarding the topics.

Keywords: cancer, cancer communication, avoidant communication

Introduction

Cancer is certainly a difficult and emotional topic to discuss, but it is even harder to discuss with romantic partners. Researchers have been trying to understand how cancer influences romantic relationships in various contexts, such as communication, coping, stress, etc. (Boehmer and Clark, 2001; Manne et al., 2005). With an abundance of topics related to communication, there seems to be a need for more investigation into the relationship between communication and cancer. Research in these areas can provide cancer patients and their partners the proper tools they need to maintain a healthy relationship, despite going through a cancer diagnosis (Manne et al., 2010; Yu & Sherman, 2015).

Specifically, the area of topic avoidance is important regarding couples suffering from cancer. Topic avoidance can occur in any romantic relationship but is significant within the context of couples suffering from cancer due to the implications it can have on the relationship (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Manne et al., 2014; Porter et al., 2005). Additionally, research regarding couples suffering from cancer is needed given how involved spouses can be with cancer treatment process, and how beneficial social support from a spouse can be during this process (Figueiredo et al., 2004; Zhang & Siminoff, 2003).The goal of this study is to investigate how couples can maintain healthy relationships when one person is dealing with cancer, specifically why certain topics are avoided by couples and how this avoidance can damage the relationship.

Literature Review

The stigma surrounding cancer communication does not just occur within a singular type of relationship but has been observed in multiple contexts, making some aspects of cancer difficult to discuss (Ernst et al., 2017; Ettridge et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2016; Wood et al., 2018). The current literature review will expand upon what some of these avoided cancer-related topics are, as well as the implications topic avoidance has, within the realm of romantic relationships.

Topic Avoidance

While topic avoidance can occur within any type of relationship, it is especially concerning within cancer patient-spousal dyads. Topic avoidance occurs within numerous populations, and does not discriminate against gender, relationship status, nor cancer-type (Badr & Taylor, 2006; Boehmer & Clark, 2001; Yu & Sherman, 2015). Several studies have investigated what topics are avoided within couples suffering from cancer. Both husbands and wives have reported avoiding strong emotions related to cancer

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diagnosis/treatment (Boehmer & Clark, 2001). Specifically, male cancer patients reported avoiding topics surrounding the physical changes caused by prostate cancer, including changes in sex life, due to embarrassment and shame (Boehmer & Clark, 2001). Other reasons for avoiding cancer-related topics were general feelings of uncomfortableness, protection of their spouse, and self-protection (Boehmer & Clark, 2001). Female breast cancer patients also reported avoiding changes in sex lives as one of the mostly commonly avoided topics within their relationships, as well as cancer-related feelings (Yu & Sherman, 2015). The patients' spouses reported avoiding topics concerning death and disease progression the most; however, no reasoning was given as to why these topics were avoided by patients and spouses (Yu & Sherman, 2015). Other studies that have found death, sex, prognosis, and life post-death as avoided topics among samples of various cancer patients and their partners, indicating that there are similar avoided topics among cancer patients and their spouses (Badr & Taylor, 2006; Garos et al., 2007; Goldsmith & Miller, 2014; Reblin et al., 2019). Reblin et al. (2019) even observed no cancer-related discussions at all within cancer patients-spousal dyads in a naturalistic study – if cancer-related discussions occurred, it mainly revolved around objective facts or managing care, not feelings nor emotions. However, participants did not explain why little discourse occurred around feelings nor emotions.

While studies have found some commonly avoided topics among cancer patient-spousal dyads, there is still relatively little data on the rationale behind topic avoidance within this vulnerable population (Boehmer & Clark, 2001; Yu & Sherman, 2015). This lack of data is cause for concern considering that some similar avoided topics have been found among various population samples suffering from different types of cancer and of different genders, but little is known as to why. Topic avoidance has been found to impact all types of romantic relationships, not only cancer patient-spousal dyads. However, supportive communication has been found as an incredibly important part to coping with cancer (Lepore & Revenson, 2007). More research is needed to further understand why topics are avoided by cancer patients and their spouses. This will allow researchers to understand the impact topic avoidance has on this dyad and the impact it has on the cancer-coping process. In the next section, the known implications of topic avoidance are discussed.

Implications

Topic avoidance is damaging to all relationships but has been found to be especially harming to couples suffering from cancer. For one, intimacy levels have been shown to be associated with topic-avoidance by cancer patient-spousal dyads, either by the patient, their partner, or both (Manne et al., 2010; Manne et al., 2014; Porter et al., 2005). Additionally, the presence of topic avoidance does not have to be entirely overt for couples suffering from cancer to be impacted by it. Patients who purposefully engaged in avoidant communication did so due to their *perceived* avoidance within their partners (Manne et al., 2005; Manne et al., 2014; Porter et al., 2005). Perceived or not, topic avoidance is also positively associated with psychological distress, physical well-being, and quality of life within cancer patient-spousal dyads (Kershaw et al., 2008; Porter et al., 2005; Yu & Sherman, 2015). Both patients and their wives from Boehmer and Clark's (2010) study also reported feelings of uncertainty about their partners' feelings because of topic avoidance.

While these studies demonstrate the implications of avoidant communication for the relationships of couples suffering from cancer, more research is needed regarding the topic. The lowered use of avoidant communication by cancer patient-spousal dyads has been associated with higher quality of life for both individuals – however, this is not the story for all relationships (Kershaw et al., 2008). Further research into this topic would allow for better understanding of how avoidant communication impacts the relationships of cancer patients and their partners. This, in turn, would be of use for other researchers, therapists, and other health care professionals, to better advise cancer patient-spousal dyads on how to manage their relationships.

The goal of this study is to examine why certain topics are avoided by couples when having cancer-related discussions. Numerous studies show that there is a lack of communication between a

variety of couples regarding a variety of certain topics, such as sex, death, disease progression, and general fears/emotions (Badr & Taylor, 2006; Boehmer & Clark, 2001; Manne et al., 2005; Reblin et al., 2019; Yu & Sherman, 2015). Other studies have demonstrated what this avoidance can do to a relationship (Kershaw et al., 2008; Porter et al., 2005; Yu & Sherman, 2015). These studies emphasize the need for there to be further research as to why these topics are avoided by couples and what further implications avoidant communication may have on couples if they continue to avoid talking about such topics.

Summary

Previous literature has demonstrated that cancer patients' and their spouses avoid certain cancer-related topics, including changes in sex life, cancer progression, and fears surrounding cancer diagnosis/treatment (Badr & Taylor, 2006; Boehmer & Clark, 2001; Garos et al., 2007; Goldsmith & Miller, 2014; Reblin et al., 2019; Yu & Sherman, 2015). However, further research into why certain topics are avoided is necessary given the associations between avoidant communication and psychological distress, intimacy, quality of life, and physical well-being (Kershaw et al., 2008; Manne et al., 2005; Manne et al., 2010; Manne et al., 2014; Porter et al., 2005; Yu & Sherman, 2015). The main goal of this study was to build upon previous research and investigate avoided topics to de-stigmatize cancer discussions and improve communication between couples. Thus, the following research questions reflected the goal of this study by inquiring about why cancer-related topics are avoided and how avoidant communication impact a romantic relationship.

RQ1: Why are some cancer-related topics avoided by couples?
RQ2: How does avoidant communication impact a couple's relationship?

Method

To examine the questions, pre-existing video interviews with various male cancer patients and cancer survivors were used to collect data. The interviews were not conducted by the researcher of this study. The interviews were chosen from a public website, Cancerdudes.com. This website is a public resource for anyone going through cancer diagnosis/treatment, directly or indirectly, but caters to men specifically. Men provide their personal experiences regarding cancer and certain topics, such as family, romance, coping, etc., via pre-recorded videos. The extensive amount of detailed information provided by the men on this website was the motivation behind extracting data from this website.

Participants

The interviews chosen to be analyzed were done so based on the content they contained – all chosen interviews described details about participants/ struggles with communication issues within their romantic relationships, and the implications this had on their relationships. All participants were male and were in some form of heterosexual romantic relationship (i.e., married, boyfriend/girlfriend) during their cancer treatment.

The first interview that was analyzed is by Greg (names changed for confidentiality). Greg discussed what topics he refrained from talking about with his loved ones, specifically his wife. His wife was very supportive of him during his cancer treatment, yet he still found himself eluding certain topics. He then explains why he felt he had to avoid these topics and the impacts it had on his relationships.

The second interview was with Lenard who describes how cancer can bring about closeness or distance in a relationship. He uses examples from his personal relationships that demonstrate this concept, including a previous relationship that ended due to the responsibilities required of him by his cancer treatment.

The third interview covered how gender roles impact disclosure levels among male cancer patients. Peter recalls experiences involving other males and vulnerability, and how these experiences shaped his perceptions of emotional vulnerability as a male.

The fourth interview is with Joel, where he discusses how his transition out of the military, along with lack of communication about his cancer treatment, ultimately lead to a divorce.

Thematic Analysis

From the video interviews, thematic coding analysis was conducted to extract various themes found. Thematic coding consists of becoming familiar with a data set and identifying distinct and reoccurring characteristics in the set. From these reoccurring characteristics, a theme is extracted, and labeled in a way that best exemplifies what the characteristics portray (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Scharp & Sanders, 2018). Thematic coding analysis was chosen as the method for data analysis for this study because of its flexible nature – it allows for key, distinct features of qualitative data to be featured and reserves space for differences within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Scharp & Sanders, 2018). In this study, the video interviews were watched numerous times and prominent themes were noted. Notes from all the videos were compared and similarities and differences between them were acknowledged. Videos were to expand on these themes and organize data into categories.

Emergent Themes

From these interviews, two themes were identified. One of these themes, titled Rationale, is related to the first research question of why couples choose to avoid certain cancer-related topics. Within this theme, the data was organized into three categories: personal feelings, control of the external environment, and past experiences. This theme, and its categories, were extracted due to participants providing some examples of topics that were avoided within their romantic relationships, in addition to an explanation as why this occurred.

The second theme observed was the impact that conversations about cancer (or lack thereof) had on romantic relationships. This theme was titled Implications. The findings and the data collected from the interviews were used to organize this theme into two categories of mental health impact and relationship impact. The data within this theme described ways in which their experiences with avoidant communication and cancer impacted their mental health, either by impacting their relationship directly or by impacting their mental health.

Results

RQ1

In Greg's interview, he mentions several reasons why he chooses not to speak about certain topics with his wife. When describing how cancer effected his mental health, Greg says, "I didn't really share was just how much I was struggling with everything. . . and I could see with my wife, that [cancer] was impacting her in a very deep way, and it was unfair," and "My mistake was not telling [my wife] the depths of my depression and how hard it was to wake up every day. . .". Greg also recounts the feelings of guilt he felt when asking his wife for help – "I always feel so weird, I don't want to be so self-centered. . . there's a certain level of guilt, like I can never repay that," "even if I ever did [accept help], I felt guilty," and "[regarding] the depths of my despair and depression, I definitely wasn't as open. . . I feel personally that it's almost harder on the people that don't have it around you because they don't have anything tangible, they can do nothing else to help you." Greg gives revealing testimony that suggests his motivations for avoiding certain cancer-related topics stem from personal feelings of guilt and external control over the environment. It seems that he avoided certain topics because he felt guilty asking for help and wanted to protect his family from his depression.

In Peter's interview, he discusses why men do not talk about their emotions; he also refers to his childhood experiences of not having a male figure that was able to talk about his feelings. He gives the example of his grandfather who, "He was too tough, and he didn't want to tell anybody he was feeling anything," and his father who "felt nothing. . . for a guy like him to try any kind of therapy was not going to happen." Peter's interview accounts for how past experiences can impact avoidant communication. It suggests that family traditions, social norms, and gender expectations also play a role in avoidant communication.

RQ2

The second research question, "How does avoidant communication impact a couple's relationship." The interviews suggested brief answers to this question, but not much detail was provided. Lenard describes his previous relationship in his interview. The relationship ended due to conflicting wants/needs caused by cancer – "[My girlfriend] was really supportive, incredible, but that's just not what I needed at the time. . . I felt like she felt like I was pushing her away, when I was trying to focus on myself. . . so that obviously didn't last." From Lenard's interview, I gathered that the demands that cancer put onto Lenard caused him to be avoidant, which then hurt the relationship.
Joel also describes how cancer treatment and his transition out of the military caused a divorce. He says,
"I did not have anyone to talk to. I think had I been more effective at the communication piece than maybe that wouldn't have had happen. . . I wish I would have included her in more conversations." I interpreted Joel's statements as cancer impacting the relationship and mental health– it seems that Joel felt abandoned, implying that maybe the relationship was not strong, but also felt lonely going through the process.
In Greg's interview, he stated that "he [regretted] not telling [his wife] the depths of [his] depression," in addition to "I didn't really share was just how much I was struggling with everything. . . and I could see with my wife, that [cancer] was impacting her in a very deep way, and it was unfair." From these quotes, it implies that while Greg's cancer did impact his mental health, him and his wife were still able to work through it.

Emergent Themes

One theme that emerged from the data was why men avoided discussing with their partners about cancer-related topics. This theme was present within the first two interviews with Greg and Peter. Within this theme, there were three categories. The first category was personal feelings and was shown by Greg when he discusses he own personal feelings of guilt and depression. For example, "even if I ever did [accept help], I felt guilty," and "[regarding] the depths of my despair and depression, I definitely wasn't as open. . . I feel personally that it's almost harder on the people that don't have it around you because they don't have anything tangible, they can do nothing else to help you."
The second category was control of external environment. The meaning of this category is the interviewee attempted to control what others felt regarding cancer, which Greg shows when he discusses wanting to not impact his wife with his cancer diagnosis and not wanting to see her struggle -- "I didn't really share was just how much I was struggling with everything. . . and I could see with my wife, that [cancer] was impacting her in a very deep way, and it was unfair."
Lenard also indicated that he avoided communicating with his girlfriend at the time due to wanting to focus on himself; "She felt like I was trying to push her away when I was just trying to focus on myself. . . I wanted to focus on myself and what I was going through, instead of a relationship. . . I think she felt like I couldn't put in the time and effort to keep that relationship alive."
The last category is past experiences. Peter demonstrates this when he discusses the experiences with his grandfather and father, and how their lack of communication taught him not to communicate — "[My father] felt nothing. . . for a guy like him to try any kind of therapy was not going to happen. .

.There were days where I didn't want visitors, it wasn't her, it wasn't family, I just wanted to be alone. . . and I think she felt like I was pushing her away."

Within their video interviews, participants gave personal examples that explain their reasoning behind avoiding certain topics that were related to their cancer diagnosis/treatment experience. Using these examples, the theme Rational was derived, along with its three subcategories.

Implications

The other theme seen within the data was how the martial relationship was impacted by cancer. Within this theme there were two categories of mental health impact and relationship impact. Lenard's interview suggested that cancer took away the time needed to maintain a relationship, suggesting that this was a major cause of the breakup; "I felt like she felt like I was pushing her away, when I was trying to focus on myself. . . so that obviously didn't last."

Greg also described how his avoidance towards discussing his depression impacted his wife; "The other thing I really didn't share was how much I was struggling with everything because I didn't want everyone to be worried about me, and I could see with my wife that it was really impacting her in a very deep way. . . there is still lasting impact with her with [my depression]. It was a very heavy experience. It was not easy."

Joel also discusses how lack of communication, in combination with a transition out of the military, also ended a relationship. Based on the interpretation of Joel's statements, it was believed that cancer impacted his mental health and the relationship itself. This was best shown by this statement from Joel: "I did not have anyone to talk to. I think had I been more effective at the communication piece than maybe that wouldn't have had happen. . . I wish I would have included her in more conversations."

Discussion

The data gathered from the interviews is consistent with previous findings regarding topic avoidance and implications it has on a romantic relationship. The rationale given by the participants for their topic avoidance included personal feelings, external control, and past experiences. Boehmer and Clark (2001) found that shame and guilt were reasons why their male participants did not communicate about topics such as emotions and sex, which resembled the testimony given by Greg. Boehmer and Clark (2001) also observed that self-protection, and the protection of a spouse, were reasons why cancer-related topics were avoided, which mirrors the data extracted from Greg's and Lenard's interviews. As for the last subcategory of the Rationale theme, past experiences, no findings were found in the context of cancer patient-spousal dyads. However, Peter's testimony regarding avoidant communication and past experiences is consistent with previous research regarding men, social support, and mental health (McKenzie et al., 2018; Vogel et al., 2014).

The findings concerning implications of topic avoidance were also consistent with previous findings. Topic avoidance impacted both Lenard and Greg's relationships with their partners, which was also demonstrated with previous studies regarding intimacy and relationship maintenance (Manne et al., 2010; Manne et al., 2014; Porter et al., 2005). Topic avoidance has also been associated with other health implications, such as psychological distress, quality of life, and physical well-being, which was also shown by Joel and Greg's testimony (Kershaw et al., 2008; Porter et al., 2005; Yu & Sherman, 2015).

The main goal of this study was to build upon previous research and investigate avoided topics to de-stigmatize cancer discussions and improve communication between couples. Given the data that was extracted from the interviews, this study was successful in doing so. The findings do build upon the limited previous research as to why some cancer-related topics are avoided by couples suffering from cancer. One strength of this study was its access to detailed, personal interviews regarding topic avoidance and implications that it has on a relationship. Similar to Boehmer and Clark's (2001) study, which utilized in-person interviews, the participants were able to give more context regarding the nature

of their answers, which allowed for a broader range of interpretation. The broader interpretations of that data aided in the answering of both research questions.

Limitations and Future Directions

The most significant limitation to this study was the limited number of interviews analyzed. A total of four interviews were analyzed, totaling to ten-minutes in length. If more interviews are analyzed or the interviews were longer, more data pertaining to the research questions could have been analyzed, which would have contributed to the emergent themes and their subcategories or presented additional themes altogether. Additionally, the sample was strictly male cancer survivors, and their partners were not interviewed. If both patient and partners were interviewed, more data pertaining to *perceived* topic avoidance may have been gathered, which has shown to also impact a relationship (Manne et al., 2014; Porter et al., 2005). However, the findings of this study will still be valuable for future research. This study was successful in building upon the limited previous research as to why some cancer-related topics are avoided by couples suffering from cancer. The emergent themes and their subcategories can provide future research an idea of what cancer-related topics are avoided, why they are avoided, and how this impacted a romantic relationship, specifically for male cancer patients. Future research concerning these topics are still needed, however. Cancer is certainty a stressor to romantic relationships by itself, but the added stress of avoidant communication contributes to this stress even more (Kershaw et al., 2008; Porter et al., 2005; Yu & Sherman, 2015). Additionally, this study urges for more research within the realm of marital relationships, given how involved spouses can be in the cancer treatment process (Figueiredo et al., 2004; Zhang & Siminoff, 2003).

Conclusion

This study used pre-recorded interviews to determine why certain cancer-related topics are avoided and what implications it has on romantic relationships. From the data two emergent themes are noted, Rationale and Implications. These themes also contained subcategories that aided in the categorization of the data. One of the most significant takeaways from this study was that future research in needed within this area, and future research can build upon these findings to understand why cancer patient-spousal dyads partake in topic avoidance, and what this can potentially mean for their romantic relationships.

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