

Carolinas Communication Annual

Volume XXXIX

Published by the Carolinas Communication Association

ARTICLES

“I Just Felt Safe and Happy”: Memorable Childhood Stories Revolve Around Attachment Needs

Jennifer Rosier, James Madison University

Sharlene Richards, James Madison University

Reconstitutive and Invitational Reconciliation with ‘The Boys’: Musings on Christian Autoethnographic Apologia in a Post (?)–Trump World

J. Dean Farmer, Campbell University

Hidden Figures to Role Model Figures: Feminism, Intersectional Oppression, and Public Memory in the Film *Hidden Figures*

Dominique Hughes, Towson University

Valerie L. Schrader, Penn State University – Schuylkill

Rewriting Public Memory: Documentary Filmmaking and the Restoration of Rose Hill

Margaret E. Baker, North Carolina State University

Going Viral After the Shut Down: A Collaborative Convergence Case Study of Student Media During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Jeffrey Ranta, Coastal Carolina University

GIFTS INC (GREAT IDEAS FOR TEACHING STUDENTS IN THE CAROLINAS)

Promoting Intercultural Communication Competence and Engaged Listening by Interrogating the Ethics of Accent Modification

Joy L. Kennedy, North Carolina A&T State University

Davi Thornton, North Carolina A&T State University

Silence Communicates: Teaching Nonverbal Communication Through Student Performances

Jing Jiang, Hunan University

“To Your Union and the Hope That You Provide”: Examining the Effectiveness of Special Occasion Speeches

Nancy Bressler, West Virginia Wesleyan College

GIFTS INC: Utilizing Social Media Postings to Teach Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm

Pamela A. Hayward, Augusta University

Simulating Crisis Scenarios: Localizing International Crises to Aid in Crisis Communication Learning

Ahmet Aksoy, Columbia College

Tamara L. Burk, Columbia College

Carolinas Communication Association Officers (2022-2023)

<u>Executive Director</u>	John A. McArthur, Furman University
<u>President</u>	Jason Munsell, University of South Carolina–Aiken
<u>Past President</u>	Peter Gloviczki, Western Illinois University
<u>1st Vice President</u>	Jenni M. Simon, University of North Carolina–Greensboro
<u>2nd Vice President</u>	Camille Lewis, Furman University
<u>Secretary</u>	Michelle Garland, University of South Carolina-Upstate
<u>Treasurer</u>	Carol Leeman, University of North Carolina–Charlotte
<u>Annual Editor</u>	John W. Edwards II, Methodist University
<u>Web Manager</u>	Elena Martínez-Vidal, Midlands Technical College

The Executive Committee of the Carolinas Communication Association extends its gratitude to all CCA members who work to further the scope and scholarship of our discipline.

Carolinas Communication Annual, Volume XXXIX
Editor

John W. Edwards II
Methodist University

2023 Editorial Board

Eugenie Almeida <i>Fayetteville State University</i>	Elena Martinez-Vidal <i>Midlands Technical College</i>
Jason Black <i>University of North Carolina-Charlotte</i>	Mary Mendoza <i>Bob Jones University</i>
Mitch Combs <i>University of South Carolina-Aiken</i>	Kerri Mercer <i>Wake Technical Community College</i>
J. Dean Farmer <i>Campbell University</i>	Jason Munsell <i>University of South Carolina-Aiken</i>
Eric Fife <i>James Madison University</i>	John McArthur <i>Furman University</i>
Michelle Garland <i>University of South Carolina-Upstate</i>	Jody Natalle <i>University North Carolina, Greensboro</i>
Brittany Hochstaetter <i>Wake Technical Community College</i>	Susan K. Opt <i>Wake Forest University</i>
Brandon Inabinet <i>Furman University</i>	Jeff Ranta <i>Coastal Carolina University</i>
Stephen Keating <i>SUNY, Fashion Institute of Technology</i>	Soncery Speas <i>Winston-Salem State University</i>
Rich Leeman <i>University of North Carolina-Charlotte</i>	Davi Thornton <i>North Carolina A&T University</i>
Katherine Lind <i>University of North Carolina-Greensboro</i>	

Carolinas Communication Association Life Members

Debbie Baker
University of North Carolina-Charlotte

Kimberly Kristufek
Wingate University

Jason Edward Black
University of North Carolina-Charlotte

Jamie Litty
University of North Carolina-Pembroke

Deborah Brunson
University of North Carolina-Wilmington

Steven Madden
Coastal Carolina University

Lynn Cherry
College of Charleston

Elena Martínez-Vidal
Midlands Technical College

Kim Cuny
University of North Carolina-Greensboro

John A. McArthur
Furman University

Jean DeHart
Appalachian State University

Jessica McCall
University of North Carolina-Greensboro

Carol Drowota
Charleston Southern University

Nina-Jo Moore
Appalachian State University

Carol Dykers
Salem College

Jason Brian Munsell
University of South Carolina-Aiken

John W. Edwards II
Methodist University

Elizabeth J. Natalle
University of North Carolina-Greensboro

Erin Ellis
University of North Carolina-Greensboro

Andrea Patterson-Masuka
Winston Salem State University

J. Dean Farmer
Campbell University

Sean Patrick O'Rourke
Sewanee: The University of the South

Keith Griffin
Southern Illinois University-Charleston

Kellie Roberts
University of Florida

Brittany Hochstaetter
Wake Technical Community College

Traci Rowe
Wake Technical College

Brandon Inabinet
Furman University

Roy Schwartzman
University of North Carolina-Greensboro

Spoma Jovanovic
University of North Carolina-Greensboro

Jenny Southard
University of North Carolina-Greensboro

Dolores Jones
Charleston Southern University

Nancy Snow
North Carolina State University

Charmaine E. Wilson
University of South Carolina-Aiken

Carolinas Communication Annual

ARTICLES

- “I Just Felt Safe and Happy”: Memorable Childhood Stories
Revolve Around Attachment Needs 1
Jennifer Rosier, James Madison University
Sharlene Richards, James Madison University
- Reconstitutive and Invitational Reconciliation with ‘The Boys’: Musings on
Christian Autoethnographic Apologia in a Post (?)–Trump World 16
J. Dean Farmer, Campbell University
- Hidden Figures to Role Model Figures: Liberal Second Wave Feminism,
Intersectional Oppression, and Public Memory in the Film *Hidden Figures* 31
Dominique Hughes, Penn State Schuylkill
Valerie Lynn Schrader, Penn State Schuylkill
- Rewriting Public Memory: Documentary Film Making and
the Restoration of Rose Hill 43
Margaret E. Baker, North Carolina State University
- Going Viral After the Shut Down: A Collaborative Convergence Case Study
of Student Media During the COVID-19 Pandemic 53
Jeffrey Ranta, Coastal Carolina University

GIFTS INC (GREAT IDEAS FOR TEACHING STUDENTS IN THE CAROLINAS)

- Promoting Intercultural Communication Competence and Engaged Listening
by Interrogating the Ethics of Accent Modification 67
Joy L. Kennedy, North Carolina A&T State University
Davi Thornton, North Carolina A&T State University
- Silence Communicates: Teaching Nonverbal Communication
Through Student Performances 71
Jing Jiang, Hunan University
- “To Your Union and the Hope That You Provide”: Examining the
Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Special Occasion Speeches 76
Nancy Bressler, West Virginia Wesleyan College
- GIFTS INC: Utilizing Social Media Postings to Teach Fisher’s
Narrative Paradigm 79
Pamela A. Hayward, Augusta University
- Simulating Crisis Scenarios: Localizing International Crises to
Aid in Crisis Communication 84
Ahmet Aksoy, Columbia College
Tamara L. Burk, Columbia College

Editorial Policy (2023)

The *Carolinas Communication Annual*, the peer-reviewed, state/regional journal published by the Carolinas Communication Association (representing both North Carolina and South Carolina), accepts the submission of scholarly articles on an ongoing basis. While articles by authors in the Carolinas and about topics relevant to the Carolinas and the surrounding region are particularly relevant for this journal, the call for submissions is open to authors from around the country and open to a wide range of topics from multiple methodologies and perspectives within the larger Communication Studies discipline. The journal is especially interested in submissions of pedagogical ideas and activities for our GIFTS INC (Great Ideas for Teaching Students in the Carolinas) area, which should be modeled after activity essays published in the journal *Communication Teacher*; submissions of multi-author forums of short thematically or methodologically related position papers or critical arguments; and submissions of “Debut” essays, which are papers written by first-time authors publishing their research in a peer-reviewed communication journal.

Critical essays and “debut” essays should generally be no longer than 6000–7000 words in length (including citations) and should follow the latest editions of MLA, APA, or the Chicago Manual of Style, depending on the author’s preference. GIFTS INC essays and activities should generally be no longer than 2000–2500 words and should follow the latest editions of MLA, APA, or the Chicago Manual of Style, depending on the author’s preference.

The call for submissions for the 2024 *Carolinas Communication Annual* will be announced in early spring 2024 and authors should submit their essays electronically (in a Microsoft Word file) to the editor. Submissions should include an author name and institution, author contact information, and an abstract in a separate cover letter to ensure blind review. In the cover letter, authors should also note the history of the submission and indicate, as needed, that the submission meets ethical standards of research (for example, IRB approval if relevant). The editor reserves the right to reject any submission that does not meet the basic standards above or seems to indicate a lack of ethical work. Authors should only submit one work per year to the *Annual* and the submission should not be under review with any other journal.

Editor's Introduction

Dear Readers,

This year's Annual comes together with themes of personal and public reflection. The authors in this issue inspect how we understand ourselves and society – both past and present. We begin with Jennifer Rosier and Sharlene Richards who explore links between stories we remember from our childhood and our attachment needs. The authors discuss ways that attachment needs are central components to memorable childhood stories. Following that, Dean Farmer presents an autoethnography in which he reflects upon the state of communication in evangelical communities and the impact of certain leaders within those communities on Christians. He also suggests rhetorical strategies to restore the community.

From these personal narratives, we move to scholars who examine public communication. Our next two articles, one by Dominique Hughes and Valerie Lynn Schrader, and the other by Margaret Baker, examine public memory from differing rhetorical frames. Hughes and Schrader employ rhetorical analysis to explore how messages concerning liberal second wave feminism and intersectional oppression are conveyed through the movie *Hidden Figures* and also advocate for stories of marginalized communities to be shared in K-12 education. Baker analyzes the documentary "Restoring Rose Hill" to generate dialogue that spotlights injustice in marginalized communities and helps create a more inclusive vision of public memory.

Our final research article is by Jeffrey Ranta. Ranta shares his pandemic experience advising a student-run radio station to change formats to a public-information model during the pandemic shut-down. This case study discusses novel converged media approaches and shared efforts toward integrative learning in a situational crisis environment using trusted messenger/communicator techniques that may prove valuable to the future of student-run media entities.

Our Great Ideas For Teaching Students IN the Carolinas (GIFTS INC) also address inclusion in the classroom. Joy L. Kennedy and Davi Thornton introduce an innovative classroom exercise that encourages students to identify cultural and social factors related to self and others in the context of speech sounds and speech sound disorders. Jing Jiang then provides an instructive lesson in teaching how we communicate nonverbally using silence. Nancy Bressler describes a classroom activity that helps students better understand distinctions between tribute speeches and other types of presentations.

Pamela Hayward offers a relevant lesson to help students learn the importance of coherence and fidelity according to Fisher's Narrative Paradigm. She employs social media posts to help students analyze messages we experience daily. Finally, Ahmet Aksoy and Tamara L. Burke share a simulation exercise that teaches students to employ problem-solving skills and critical thinking in their messaging strategies in simulated crisis scenarios.

I hope you get as much from the work presented here as I have. Enjoy!



John W. Edwards II
Methodist University
Fayetteville, North Carolina
September 2023

“I Just Felt Safe and Happy”: Memorable Childhood Stories Revolve Around Attachment Needs

Jennifer Rosier and Sharlene Richards

This research answers the question, what attachment needs are depicted in favorite and worst childhood memories. Stories that we find to be meaningful and tell about ourselves get incorporated into our narrative identity, which impacts how we see ourselves (Beike & Crone, 2012). Previous research has not yet examined attachment needs in favorite and worst childhood stories. Structured interviews were conducted with a non-random volunteer sample (N= 19). Participants were asked to share two favorite childhood stories and two worst childhood stories, and to assign each story a meaningfulness score. Stories were coded by authors using Brown and Elliott (2016) typology of needs. The favorite childhood memories told by participants highlighted times when attachment needs were met, and the worst childhood memories told highlighted times when attachment needs were not met. All of the stories told were about attachment needs (N= 76). Favorite childhood memories featured three primary attachment needs being met: attunement, expressed delight, and support of best self. The worst childhood memories featured three primary attachment needs not being met: lack of attunement, lack of soothing and reassurance, and lack of safety and protection. Attachment needs are a central feature of meaningful childhood stories.

Keywords: *attachment styles, childhood memories, attachment needs*

As the Disney/Pixar movie *Inside Out* depicts, life experiences that we perceive as more meaningful contribute to our sense of self, influence our personality, and become regular stories we tell in social and intimate interactions. In the film, the main character, Riley, has a set of *core memories* that represent key moments she uses to define her sense of self. These core memories appear visually brighter than other memories in the film and they are used to power Riley’s personality. Narrative identity theory argues that we all have an “internalized and evolving story of the self that [we] construct to make sense and meaning out of [our] life” (McAdams, 2011, p. 99). The life experiences that individuals find meaningful and worth incorporating into their narrative identity determine how they see themselves and their place in the world (Beike & Crone, 2012). As Mandelbaum (2004) explains, “narratives provide ways for interactants to present and negotiate versions of ‘self’ in multiple relationships” (p. 621). Individuals, thus, cultivate a set of stories that represent their sense of self so they can communicate who they are to others (Mandelbaum, 2004).

The majority of previous research has examined how the valence (King & Hicks, 2009; King et al., 2006; Machell et al., 2015; Tov & Lee, 2016) and emotional extremity (Bohanek et al., 2005; Murphy & Bastian, 2020) of memories contribute to them being more memorable. The current study argues that most memorable childhood experiences revolve around whether attachment needs were met or unmet. Early attachment experiences have a significant impact on

Jennifer Rosier and Sharlene Richards are professors at James Madison University School of Communication Studies. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jennifer Rosier, James Madison University, 54 Bluestone Dr., MSC 2106, Harrisonburg, VA 22807, United States. Email: rosierjg@jmu.edu.

our internal working models (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1979); which are life-long brain schemas that guide our perceptions of ourselves, others, and the value and reliability of those relationships (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bowlby, 1973; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000). Attachment is often described as a central aspect of childhood (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1979; for a review, see: Koehn & Kerns, 2018; Rees, 2007), yet narrative identity and memorable life experience research fails to incorporate attachment needs. Thus, the purpose of the current study is to explore the presence of attachment needs in descriptions of memorable childhood experiences by adults.

First this paper discusses relevant literature on meaningful childhood stories and attachment needs. Then, this paper describes the methods used in this research study. Finally, this paper describes the findings of this research study, and the significance of the findings in light of past research.

Review of Literature

Personal storytelling is a fundamental part of the human experience with individuals often communicating meaningful life stories from their pasts in order to express parts of their self-concept to others (Mandelbaum, 2004; Miller, 1995). The stories we choose to disclose are often representative of a core aspect of our *narrative identity*, which according to McAdams (2008) “refers to an individual’s internalized, evolving, and integrative story of the self” (p. 242). Individuals begin to construct their *narrative identity* as teenagers and young adults and then continue to add meaningful experiences to their developing life story throughout adulthood (Birren et al., 1996; Cohler, 1982; Habermas & Bluck, 2000). The meaningful stories we decide to incorporate into our narrative identities, then, foster a connection between our past and present lives while encouraging us to develop plans for the future (McAdams, 2001; McLean et al., 2007; Singer, 2004).

Some researchers have suggested that life experiences are more likely to be viewed as meaningful, and therefore more likely to be incorporated into one’s narrative identity, when they are more positive in nature (e.g., Fivush et al., 2003; King et al., 2006; Machell et al., 2015; Tov & Lee, 2016). When examining daily life events, for example, Machell et al. (2015) discovered that positive events were viewed as more meaningful than negative events. In their interviews with children (5 to 12 years of age), Fivush et al. (2003) found that the children included more details, descriptions, and a larger number of objects and people when they recalled positive life events versus negative life events. Tov and Lee (2016) further discovered that events which elicit more positive affect are generally viewed as more meaningful than events eliciting more negative affect. When individuals are in a positive mood, they are more likely to view a life experience as meaningful (King et al., 2006). Lastly, individuals are more likely to recall positive life events typically about significant life transitions and/or fulfilling social interactions when they are asked to describe extremely meaningful events from their lives (Baum, 1988).

Researchers have conversely argued that negative life experiences have the potential to be viewed as more meaningful (e.g., Fivush et al., 2003; King & Hicks, 2009; Sommer et al., 1998). While Fivush et al. (2003) found some evidence to support the positivity-meaningfulness connection, their interview study with children also revealed that the children’s narrations of negative life events were more coherent and were filled with more information about their thoughts and emotions than their stories of positive life events. This implies that individuals, particularly children, might use more energy working through the stress of negative life events. Sommer et al. (1998) also discovered that individuals are highly motivated, and often search incessantly, to find meaning in traumatic life experiences. King and Hicks (2009) found support for both, with individuals expecting to place more meaning in major life events when they were negative and more meaning in trivial life events when they were positive. While not directly related to perceptions of meaningfulness, Jong et al. (2015) found that negative, traumatic experiences can lead individuals to feel a strong sense of shared social identity. Similarly, Bastian

et al., (2014) found that sharing a painful experience in the lab increased social bonding and cooperative behavior.

Still other scholars have claimed that the emotional extremity of an experience makes it more meaningful (Bohanek et al., 2005; Habermas & Köber, 2015; Murphy & Bastian, 2020). For instance, Habermas and Köber (2015) argued that when asked to narrate memories of extremely upsetting and/or frightening life events, individuals are typically inspired to re-evaluate their life story, implying that these events are meaningful. Bohanek et al. (2005) found that both positive and negative experiences of high emotional intensity are especially vivid and memorable compared to those of mild emotional intensity. Similarly, more recent work has shown that both extremely painful and extremely pleasant events are more meaningful than milder events (Murphy & Bastain, 2020).

The valence or emotional extremity of an event may not be the *only* way that life experiences are viewed as more meaningful and then become part of an individual's narrative identity. The current study adds an additional piece to this literature puzzle by arguing that when specifically recalling *childhood* memories, experiences related to attachment needs being met or unmet will drive perceptions of meaningfulness. Closely related to this line of inquiry, Heine et al. (2006) found that social relatedness and strong connections to others (two common attachment needs) are thought to be key factors in driving feelings of meaning.

Attachment is often described as a central component of human development that impacts humans throughout the lifespan (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1979). Individuals are born with an innate desire to connect in both physical and emotional ways with other human beings. Specifically, humans crave being physically and emotionally close to someone who understands and accepts them how they are, helps them downregulate stress, delights in them, makes them feel safe, and expresses love (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1979). Ideally, this profound connection is established with at least one primary caregiver in early childhood, additional important adults in middle childhood and adolescence, and then found again in a romantic partner and maybe a couple of close friends in adulthood. But unfortunately, many struggle to achieve this goal early on, and it can cause them to avoid closeness and relationships all together or incessantly search (sometimes desperately, sometimes consumed by fear, and sometimes to the detriment of an individual's own needs) for an individual who can fulfill one's instinctive desires for safety, security, acceptance, and connection. It was previously estimated that somewhere between 35% (Mickelson et al., 1997) and 40% (Hazan & Shaver, 1994) of adults had insecure attachment. More recent studies of millennials and generation Z have found that upwards of 60% of adults in these younger generations have insecure attachment (Konrath et al., 2014).

Interestingly, the attachment needs of humans typically shift throughout childhood, yet fundamentally are all centered around similar desires to feel soothed, safe, connected, loved, and lovable. For example, the typical attachment needs of infants and young children (approximately birth- 5 years) include proximity to their caregivers and consistently sensitive responsiveness, especially during times of distress (Schore, 2005; Stern, 1977). As children age, their primary attachment needs shift in middle childhood (approximately 6-12 years) to emotional availability and accessibility (Brumariu, 2015; Kerns & Brumariu, 2016). In adolescence, attachment needs focus on trusting independence, emotional connection, and sensitive responsiveness (Rees, 2005). Brown and Elliott's (2016) typology of five behavioral attachment needs argues that secure attachment is cultivated when the following five needs are met: safety and protection, attunement, soothing and reassurance, expressed delight, and support of best self. These attachment needs, and others, are often met when attachment figures communicate with their children in a variety of ways such as consistent verbal responsiveness (Roberto et al., 2009), caregiver confirmations (Munz & Wilson, 2017), and constructive conflict strategies (Lapierre et al., 2023) to name a few. Individuals of all ages thrive in relationships in which their attachment needs are met and suffer in relationships in which attachment needs are not met (Brown & Elliott, 2016).

The ways in which an attachment figure meets the attachment needs of a child significantly impacts the developing architecture of that child's brain in specific ways (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). It is argued that early attachment experiences create internal working models that guide the development of an individual's internal evaluations of themselves, others, and relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bowlby, 1979; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000). In addition, attachment experiences influence one's internal assessments of their own worthiness and their expectations about others; which then guides future behavior (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bowlby, 1969, 1979).

Previous research has identified valence and extremity as central influences of meaningfulness of stories. Attachment is central to the formation of our internal working models and a central aspect of childhood. Therefore, it is likely that attachment is also a reason that childhood memories become meaningful. This research is important because the stories we find meaningful become incorporated into our narrative identity and impact how we see ourselves. Therefore, this study set out to investigate whether attachment needs are centrally featured in meaningful childhood stories:

RQ1: Does attachment play a central role in meaningful childhood stories?

Methods

Participants

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board prior to data collection. In order to participate in this study, individuals had to be 18 years of age and willing to talk about their childhood in a confidential interview study. Participants were recruited through posts to social media groups, personal contacts, and a bulk email to students, faculty, and staff at a large Mid Atlantic public university. Prior to participating in interviews participants signed informed consent forms. A non-random volunteer sample of 19 individuals was interviewed for this project. In particular, the 19 participants consisted of 15 females (age range: 20-70) and 4 males (age range 21-38). Five of the participants were undergraduate students and 14 were older adults. Data were gathered until theoretical saturation was reached; which according to Charmaz (2006) is determined "when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories" (p. 113).

Procedures

Advertisements for the study were posted online (Facebook & Instagram) and sent out as an email invitation at a large Mid-Atlantic university to all faculty, staff, and students. Interested individuals were prompted to contact the researcher so they could receive the consent form and choose an interview time slot. Once they returned the consent and chose a time for their interview, they were emailed a Zoom link. Interviews were conducted via Zoom with audio only (no video) and recorded by the researcher. After the interview, which took between 40 and 45 minutes, participants were thanked for their time. The interviews were then transcribed. All identifying information was removed from the transcriptions and participants were given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

Interviews

During the interview, individuals participated in structured, in-depth interviews about four memorable childhood experiences. Specifically, participants were asked to describe two of their favorite childhood memories and two of their worst childhood memories in as much detail as they were comfortable. After each story, participants were asked to describe how they felt during that childhood experience and to rate the experience on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being "a completely meaningless experience to them" and 10 being "the most meaningful experience to them." Thus, each participant told four childhood stories, described their feelings about each childhood experience, and rated each experience for meaningfulness.

Analysis

Initially the first study author transcribed each of the interviews verbatim. Each participant in the study shared two favorite childhood stories, and two worst childhood stories, which resulted in a total of 76 stories. Each story was considered a unit of analysis. Both authors, separately, read through the transcripts multiple times, and identified instances of attachment in all 76 of the stories. Only instances of attachment were considered in each of the stories. After meeting to discuss initial thoughts on the data, the authors agreed that Brown and Elliott's (2016) typology of attachment needs was an appropriate framework to utilize in further coding of the data. Following this the data were split in half, with one author coding all of the favorite childhood stories, and the other author coding all of the worst childhood stories. Each author applied Brown and Elliott's (2016) typology to either the favorite or worst childhood stories. Each story was coded with one (or more) of the five attachment needs (e.g., safety and protection, attunement, soothing and reassurance, expressed delight, support of best self). Following the coding of all of the stories, the authors met and discussed their codes in relation to the stories. Further, the authors discussed which of the attachment needs were most prevalent in the stories, and exemplars that were the most representative of each of the attachment needs seen in the stories. Authors reached agreement on coding for each of the stories. Throughout the data analysis process, the authors shared their findings with one another, and reached consensus.

Results

Attachment needs were intricately woven throughout the childhood memories of participants (N= 76 memories). Attachment innately played a lead role in every meaningful story told by participants.

Met Attachment Needs

All five of Brown and Elliott's (2016) attachment needs were present in the favorite childhood memories disclosed by participants. The three most frequently described attachment needs were *attunement*, *expressed delight*, and *support of best self*.

Attuned to Them

Attunement is the ability to be aware of and respond to a child's needs (Siegel, 2010, 2016). In order to develop attunement with a child, an attachment figure should spend significant quality time getting to know the child, pay attention to their feelings and preferences, show interest in the child's life and hobbies, genuinely care about their well-being, take notice of their likes and dislikes, and overall, be motivated to become in-tune with them (Brown & Elliot, 2016). Participants frequently described *attunement* in the telling of their favorite childhood stories. In fact, *attunement* was illustrated in 22 of the 38 favorite childhood stories.

Quinn, a 25-year-old female, spoke about her childhood birthday parties:

My mom always did a great job making our birthdays really fun. I always had a pool party; that was like 'my thing' growing up. I don't like change and so we always had the same birthday party probably until I was like 13.... We just had the same kind of birthday vibe and I never got sick of it.... I think just the effort that was put into them made me feel really loved.

This story shows that Quinn's mom was in tune with her; she spent enough quality time with her to recognize that Quinn had a need for consistency. Quinn's mom made the mindful decision to have the same kind of birthday party each year to help meet this need. Additionally, the party itself was likely an ideal time for further connection with her family and showing interest in her as a person. These birthday parties clearly made an impact in Quinn's life as she rated this story a 7 out of 10 in terms of meaningfulness.

Kaide, a 35-year-old male, told a story about a time when he and his brother, father, and uncle were working on finishing their basement:

[My dad] had a whole slate of his certain [superhero] characters that he would invent and kind of incorporate in some of our imaginary play.... My brothers and I were really into superheroes.... In our second house, we were all working on the basement. We had the framework of a wall established; like, the studs were up. At some point, we realized [my brother] was actually up in the ceiling of this construction. Then, my uncle said something matter-of-fact like, ‘There goes Cody Spider Man!’.... My uncle was someone who was always fun to have around. I think one of the reasons that it was my favorite is because it kind of pulled together a lot of different things: both positive childhood hobbies and interests [and] just feeling that sense of connection with extended family and the excitement of like when they would be visiting.

Here, Kaide is describing the attunement that his father and uncle had with Kaide and his brother. First, framing the basement with them was interesting to the boys, an interest that their father likely picked up on. Second, and more of the focus of this story, Kaide’s uncle joking around with them about superheroes made Kaide feel included, seen, and understood. Kaide’s father and uncle spent enough time with Kaide and his brother to learn about this superhero interest. This simple exchange fulfilled Kaide’s attachment need for attunement and was evaluated by Kaide as an 8 out of 10 in terms of meaningfulness.

A 24-year-old female, Alexa, described a story about how her parents made every Christmas extremely special for her and her sister:

All of our Christmases were so well thought out. [My parents] really brought it home that it was Santa. The amount of work both of my parents put into making this one morning feel special was amazing. Christmas is always my favorite. I’m so appreciative of how much work and thought my parents put in. They worked together to make that beautiful day for their kids.

Alexa’s parents worked really hard to make Christmas a magical time for their daughters. From the traditions that they kept up each year to the routines her parents created for Christmas morning, Alexa’s needs for consistency, wonder, and excitement were being met every holiday. Her parents were attuned to what made their daughters feel seen, known, and special. They genuinely cared about Alexa’s well-being and put forth a lot of recognizable effort. The authentic care and energy that her parents enacted on Christmas compelled Alexa to rate this experience a 10 out of 10 in terms of meaningfulness.

Expressing Delight in Them

Expressed delight is another attachment need. It is the need to feel valued, special, liked, worthy, and enough (Brown & Elliot, 2016). It is an expression of unconditional acceptance for who they are and not necessarily what they do (Brown & Elliot, 2016). Expressed delight promotes secure attachment and is a foundation for healthy self-esteem (Kohut, 1971). Britner et al. (2005) argued that delight represents an integral dimension in describing the attachment relationship. Participants frequently told childhood stories that described their need for *expressed delight* being met. Expressed delight was illustrated in 27 of the 38 participants’ favorite childhood memories.

Forty-four-year-old Lydia told a story about her large family’s annual holiday parties in Wyoming:

[W]e were able to have extended family Christmas parties every year. And I just remember one in particular, I don’t know how old I was; probably 10. And it was snowing and in Wyoming, it blows. And that’s the real problem: not only the snow, but the wind. And so there was a lot of discussion about if we should have the Christmas party; if it was safe.... And so I was so relieved when all the adults decided to risk it....

The snow actually made it magical, you know, like enhanced the whole like Christmas spirit....' Even as a kid, I remember thinking, 'this is so fun. This is so fun.' Everyone was having fun; even the adults. That's one of my best childhood memories.... It was just a happy time of the year; I just felt safe and happy.

Lydia felt enjoyed at these parties. Joking and laughing with her family fulfilled her need for expressed delight. As she said, "Everyone was having fun; even the adults." Lydia felt like everyone in her family was delighted to be there. The genuinely fun, carefree environment that was created (by the adults) that day made Lydia rate the meaningfulness of that experience an 8 out of 10.

Maebel, a 70-year-old woman, spoke about a favorite time when her family went to an outdoor holiday celebration:

So I can remember one of the very special times to me was at Christmas time. [Mom] would walk with us and all the kids that my dad. We would go up to the Palisades, which was the playground there for the Christmas celebration. And we would get the little hard candies in the box and walk around and do all that stuff. But the fact that mom went with us was a very, very big deal to me. And then we would come home and watch 'Heidi' or something like that. It was so important that she was there, because, like I said, she, she didn't go very often, but, you know, I guess a lot, it was the drinking. So that was just really a big deal to me.... I think I felt confident and secure with mom being with us. It made me happy; made me smile. You know, on the way back, we'd skip and talk about it and carry our candy and I was just so happy that she was with us.

Maebel's story is filled with examples of expressed delight. From her mom joining the family for the walk to the holiday celebration to her mom holding her hand to skipping and talking about the day, Maebel felt like her mom enjoyed being there with her. On this day, she felt like her mom made a significant effort to have fun and be with her. Maebel's met attachment need for expressed delight in this story caused her to give it a rating of 8 out of 10 in terms of meaningfulness.

Twenty-two-year-old Jade told a story about the first time she remembers helping her dad wash his car and how much fun they had together:

I remember I was really little and I had an all pink outfit on; a pink raincoat and pink rain boots. There was so much soap. It was so exciting. We were just in my driveway and I was just helping him wash his car and it was so fun. I felt really, like, cool. I felt significant because I was helping him. We kept laughing. It was just so fun.

Washing the car with her dad was enjoyable for Jade. Her pink outfit made her feel special and she relished in the attention her father was giving her. She felt wanted, included, and accepted by him. This wholesome experience filled Jade with feelings of worthiness. Jade's memory of this day was clearly important to her, as she rated it's meaningfulness a 7 out of 10.

Supporting Their Best Self

Support of best self is another common attachment need described in this study. It involves the need to feel unconditionally supported in one's development of self. Children who had this need met felt consistently empowered to follow their dreams, to explore the world independently, to figure out their own strengths and weaknesses, to celebrate their successes, to learn from their failures, and to cultivate their own unique sense of self (Brown & Elliot, 2016). In addition to attunement and expressed delight, participants also frequently told stories about the need for *support of their best self* being met. Support of their best self was expressed in 15 of the 38 favorite childhood memories.

Camden, a 22-year-old female, told a story about her family going to her grandfather's vacation house near the beach:

When I'm maybe eight or nine; kind of in that range. I was trying to relearn how to water ski. And my grandpa wasn't there, but my dad was. It's hard to get up on the skis sometimes because you want to stand up earlier than you should and then you end up face planting. My dad was trying to re-teach me how to [water ski]. At one point, when I was trying to stand back up, I flipped face forward and I didn't let go of the rope. So, I'm being dragged through the water and I still didn't let go. It was hilarious. Then I just got back up. He got me to keep going. I did it over and over until I got it. He was there the whole time. I loved him teaching me how to water ski.

The memories that Camden has about her time at her family's beach house, and especially when she was trying to relearn how to water ski, centered around feelings of support. Her dad encouraged her to keep trying when she failed and gave her confidence to persevere even when it was hard. The time spent learning to water ski with her dad was important to her. In fact, Camden rated this memory a 7 out of 10 for meaningfulness.

Twenty-five-year-old Annabelle talked about a favorite childhood memory about an experience she had on the swim team; which according to Annabelle, was the first sport she played well.

I remember my very first meet. I think I was only like five or six. I remember jumping into the water and afterwards getting a little participation ribbon. My parents were there and that was like such a big deal for my very first race. My parents were at every single swim meet. But of course, it was really special that they were at that first one. I just remember them being really proud. So it's definitely a favorite memory because it again was one that shaped me. I was able to overcome feeling anxious about it and then I did really well in it. I have a lot of pride about swim team.

Annabelle's sense of self was being supported by her parents in this memory. Even though she was anxious about it, her parents empowered her to explore life more independently and to push her own physical limits by joining the swim team. Her time on the swim team, which spanned from age 5 or 6 through high school, allowed her to figure out her own strengths and weaknesses. This experience played a central role in Annabelle's feelings of pride and her sense of self. Annabelle gave this memory a meaningfulness score of 9 out of 10.

Audrey, a 41-year-old female with a twin sister, described a time from high school where she felt very supported by her parents. Audrey said:

In high school, I did competitive speech and debate. And my dual partner and I were the first people from our high school to ever qualify to go to Nationals.... Nationals was in St. Louis that year, which was probably one of the only ways I was allowed to go, was because it was still in the state.... We were just these two farm kids from a super small school in the middle of nowhere, Missouri, and we somehow managed to go. And I actually made it to the top; I think 16 in the country in poetry and prose. Again, I'm not even sure how that happened.... My parents were very proud. It was sort of a big deal.

Audrey's experience at the national speech tournament really propelled her towards thinking about the kind of person she wanted to be, what she wanted to do, and it helped her find her strength and passion in competitive speaking. Her parent's support of this event really meant a lot to her. In fact, Audrey rated this memory a 9 out of 10 in terms of meaningfulness.

Unmet Attachment Needs

All five of Brown and Elliott's (2016) attachment needs were present in the worst childhood memories disclosed by participants. The three most common unmet attachment needs were *attunement*, *soothing and reassurance*, and *safety and protection*.

Lack of Attunement

Attunement is being aware of a child's needs and meeting those needs (Brown & Elliott, 2016). Parents who are attuned can tell what their children are feeling based upon the look on their face and the child's behavior, and then respond appropriately to their child's needs (Brown & Elliot, 2016). Participants frequently described a lack of *attunement* in the telling of their worst childhood stories. Lack of attunement was expressed in 32 out of 38 worst childhood stories.

Camden, a 22-year-old female, shared a story about her sister who had behavioral and emotional issues. She shared that a teacher, who considered himself to be funny, yelled to her in the hallway that he has seen her sister in the principal's office again and made a joke out of it. This disclosure that her sister was a trouble-maker and was in the principal's office outed her to her friends, who did not know that the girl in question was her sister. When she went home and told her mother, she did not help or meet her needs. Camden stated: "And I told my mom and she like flipped out that he said that. Now I understand why. And that embarrassed me further. I was like, no, no, no, like, don't do anything. Please don't do anything." This story shows that the mother was not aware of her child's needs and was not meeting her needs. The mother was aware that there was a need to react to the story, but did not provide the type of support her daughter was hoping for. There was a mismatch in terms of response to her daughter's need for listening and support. In fact, her response caused her daughter further distress. Camden gave this story a meaningfulness score of 7, demonstrating this was a significant childhood story.

Lydia, a 44-year-old female, shared a story about when she first got her period and how her mother called her at school to check on her and did so in front of the male school counselor and other students. Lydia remarked:

Because it was odd that, you know, somebody's mom would call them in the middle of the day and ask if they're okay. And like... so I just remember that feeling of like, embarrassment about this thing that shouldn't have been. And then also, like, as I looked back on it later, I was like, oh, like, she totally forgot.

This story shows that her mother forgot and did not send her period products to school, but also that she embarrassed her daughter by calling her at school. It was unusual to receive phone calls from parents during the day, and having that conversation in front of a male grown-up made it very uncomfortable. Her mother did not accurately sense that this would be a better conversation to have at home, especially about a subject her daughter was embarrassed about. In this story, her mother did not adequately meet her need for a private and confidential conversation, as well as period products. Lydia gave this story a meaningfulness score of 7, demonstrating that this was a significant childhood memory.

Jake, a 38-year-old male, recounts a time when he was on vacation in Mexico. While climbing a temple, he fell, and his mother was walking ahead and did not notice that he fell and was bleeding. Jake shares:

But in my memory, she was like, way in front, like way ahead of me, like leaving me behind. And I had this really bad scrape on my knee. And I remember like, looking down and just like, it was almost like it was yesterday. Like, remember, just like my entire kneecap is just red. And I remember panicking about it, and feeling like helpless and like, Oh, shit. Yeah, this isn't good, you know.

This story shows how Jake's mother was ignoring her son's need for care, especially in a foreign environment. Jake felt ignored here, as though his bleeding was inconsequential to his mother, and felt vulnerable as a result. Jake gave this story a meaningfulness score of 6, demonstrating that this was a significant story.

Failing to be Soothing and Provide Reassurance

Parents who soothe and reassure their children do so in the right ways at the right times. Children of soothing and reassuring parents can count on their parents to help them feel better (Brown & Elliott, 2016). Participants frequently described a lack of *soothing and reassurance* in the telling of their worse childhood stories. Failing to be soothing and provide reassurance was expressed in 21 out of 38 stories of worst childhood memories.

Children count on their parents to comfort them, and when this does not happen, this contributes to a memorable negative childhood story. For example, Taylor, a 35-year-old female, shared that when her parents divorced, her mother was not able to be there for her emotionally. She stated, "it was kind of a dark period for [me], too, because she provided, but she just wasn't really present emotionally as the parent." This lack of soothing and reassurance need being met, led her to feel a loss of trust in her parent. She further stated, "I don't want to say like a losing of trust, but I think looking back on it, it was kind of losing trust in in her as a caregiver." Taylor gave this story a meaningfulness score of 8, demonstrating that this was a significant childhood memory.

A lack of soothing and reassurance can also result from a family not reassuring a child about a loss. For example, Kaide, a 35-year-old male, recounted a story about losing a favorite toy. He stated,

[T]here's this like, troll like thing that I had. And we went on a walk. My grandmother lived in Gettysburg. And so we're walking to the downtown area of Gettysburg. And I remember there was like this area that was like a walking bridge that went over a creek and drain truck. And we're stopping looking at something and I know I had it in my hand and I'm not sure what happened. But I remember like, getting to the other side of this bridge, and then realizing he wasn't there. And so I'm like looking around on the ground and trying to see if I could see him from behind me.... in my memory, it felt like a long, long time that we basically trace back our steps but we couldn't find and get, and it was, it was really sad. I remember crying, like thinking, Oh, I left him somewhere. And who knows what's gonna happen? I remember being really upset about that.

Kaide gave this story a meaningfulness score of 6, demonstrating that this was a significant childhood memory.

A lack of soothing and reassurance can also result from a lack of appropriate reassurance for a difficult situation. For example Maverick, a 28-year-old male shared about a romantic break up and the lack of soothing provided by his mother. He stated, "I remember being in the basement at one point and like, just, you know, crying and being really sad and upset about that. And, you know, my mom trying to console me, but yeah, not really, not really working." Maverick gave this story a meaningfulness score of 8, demonstrating that this was a significant childhood memory.

Not Providing Safety and Protection

Children who feel safe and protected have parents that watch out for them and protect them when they need it. Their parents make them feel safe around them, and when they are with their parents, they feel protected (Brown & Elliott, 2016). Participants frequently described a lack of *safety and protection* in the telling of their worse childhood stories. Not providing safety and protection was expressed in 19 out of 38 worst childhood stories.

Lack of feeling safe and protected can be related to experiences that are unexpected, scary, and difficult to make sense of. For example, Quinn, a 25-year-old female, described a time

when she did not feel safe and woke up to her parents screaming and fighting with one another. She stated,

And I like woke up to this absolute mess of a situation in my parents' room. And I still to this day, like have no idea, you know what happened or what exactly they were fighting about. But I remember it being so triggering and frustrating for me. And in my family. Like, we just didn't talk about problems growing up.

Quinn gave this story a meaningfulness score of 8, demonstrating that this was a significant childhood memory.

A lack of safety or protection can also stem from problematic parent behaviors, such as being physically abusive or problematic drinking. For example, Maebel, a 70-year-old female, reported that she watched her mother physically assault her brother during a problematic drinking episode. She shared, "I was just horrified. So my brother George, the oldest, came running down and went over there, made her stop and separated them. But it was just the most horrible feeling to see that happen." Maebel gave this story a meaningfulness score of 10, demonstrating that this was a significant childhood memory.

Lastly, a lack of safety or protection could stem from constant fighting between parents. For example, Jake, a 38-year-old male, stated, "My mother, again, screaming at my father at the dinner table. And like crying uncontrollably, and calling his parents and telling him that they needed to talk to him.... [M]y parents always fought, like, constantly." Jake gave this story a meaningfulness score of 9, demonstrating that this was a significant childhood memory.

Discussion

Bowlby (1979) proposed that attachment relationships contribute to one's sense of self, perception of others, world outlook, and social development from cradle to grave. Narrative identity theory further argues that individuals form an identity by integrating their life experiences into an internalized, evolving story of the self that provides the individual with a sense of unity and purpose in life (McAdams, 2001). The study findings build off of this research, finding that the stories we find most meaningful, and then choose to integrate into our narrative identities, focus on attachment needs.

The findings from this research further provide even more support for long-standing claims regarding the vital, significantly impactful role that attachment plays in our lives (e.g., Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1979). While there are several typologies about attachment needs, this study used Brown and Elliott's (2016) five main attachment needs (soothing and reassurance, support of best self, expressed delight, safety and protection, and attunement) as an analytical framework. We discovered that attachment needs being met or unmet were inherently present in every story told by participants, all 76 stories. We specifically revealed that the most frequent attachment needs met in participants' favorite childhood memories centered around one's need for attunement, expressed delight, and support of best self. Oppositely, a *lack* of attunement, safety and protection, and soothing and reassurance were the most common unmet attachment needs described in participants' worst childhood stories. We conclude that valence (King & Hicks, 2009; King et al., 2006; Machell et al., 2015; Tov & Lee, 2016) or emotional extremity (Bohanek et al., 2005; Murphy & Bastian, 2020) are not the only reasons that an experience becomes meaningful. Attachment needs being met or unmet, we argue, are a key reason that stories become meaningful.

The findings have the potential to help practitioners develop better intervention programs for mental health and relationship difficulties. Understanding the impact that attachment needs being met or unmet have on narratives that individuals find meaningful can help mental health professionals, for example, develop more nuanced therapy practices for new parents who are developing attachment with their own children or for distressed patients who are attempting to work through attachment injuries from their past.

There are possible limitations to the current study design. First, the interviews were conducted over Zoom, which could have impacted data gathering. Although this was not detected during the interview process, it is possible that interviewees felt constrained and withheld information as a result of the online environment. Second, interviews are limited by the questions that are asked, and if different or additional questions were asked about childhood stories, this may have yielded different data. For example, additional probing questions about why a particular meaningfulness score was assigned, could yield further insights.

To advance this field of inquiry, future research could consider longitudinally investigating the impact of met and unmet attachment needs. Since narrative identity is constantly evolving throughout life, it would be revealing to follow participants over a longer period of time to see if the stories that they find meaningful change over time in terms of attachment needs. Additionally, future analyses of different generations or cultures could examine if there are certain groups that find some attachment needs more meaningful than others.

Conclusion

A child's life revolves around their attachment figures; regardless of the quality of the attachment bonds that have been developed. It is not surprising, then, that all 76 of the memorable childhood stories disclosed in this study (whether they were positive or negative, exceptionally joyful or tragically traumatic) were filled with experiences that either welcomed, satisfied, ignored, or outright rejected attachment needs. Attachment needs being met or unmet are meaningful experiences in our lives that become part of our narrative identities; which guide how we view and talk about ourselves, navigate the world, and interact with others. In the film, *Inside Out*, Riley had five core memories from her childhood that fueled the development of her identity. Each of the core memories centered on an attachment need. Our memorable life experiences, which are fundamentally impacted by our attachment needs being met or not, shape who we are and who we become.

References

- Bartholomew, K. (1990). Avoidance of intimacy: An attachment perspective. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 7, 147–178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407590072001>
- Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four- category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 226-244. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.61.2.226>
- Bastian, B., Jetten, J., & Ferris, L. J. (2014). Pain as a social glue: Shared pain increases cooperation. *Psychological Science*, 25(11), 2079-2085. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976211004119>
- Baum, S. K. (1988). Meaningful life experiences for elderly persons. *Psychological Reports*, 63(2), 427-433. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1988.63.2.427>
- Beike, D. R., & Crone, T. S. (2012). Autobiographical memory and personal meaning: Stable versus flexible meanings of remembered life experiences. In Paul T. P. Wong (Ed.), *The human quest for meaning: Theories, research, and applications* (pp. 315–334). Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group.
- Birren, J. E., Kenyon, G. M., Ruth, J. E., Shroots, J. J. F., & Svendsen, T. (Eds.). (1996). *Aging and biography: Explorations in adult development*. Springer.
- Bochner, A., & Ellis, C. (1992). Personal narrative as a social approach to interpersonal communication. *Communication Theory*, 2, 165-173. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.1992.tb00036.x>
- Bohanek, J. G., Fivush, R., & Walker, E. (2005). Memories of positive and negative emotional events. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 19(1), 51–66. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1064>
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 2. Separation: Anxiety and anger*. Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1979). *The making and breaking of affectional bonds*. Tavistock.

- Britner, P.A., Marvin, R.S., & Pianta, R.C. (2005). Development and preliminary validation of the caregiving behavior system: Association with child attachment classification in the preschool Strange Situation. *Attachment & Human Development*, 7, 83–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616730500039861>
- Brown D. P., & Elliott, D. S. (2016). *Attachment disturbances in adults: Treatment for comprehensive repair*. W. W, Norton & Company.
- Brumariu, L.E. (2015). Parent–child attachment and emotion regulation. In Bosmans G. & Kerns K.A. (Eds.). *Attachment in middle childhood: Theoretical advances and new directions in an emerging field*. Jossey-Bass.
- Cohler, B. J. (1982). Personal narrative and life course. In P. Baltes & O. G. Brim (Eds.), *Life span development and behavior* (Vol. 4, pp. 205– 241). Academic Press.
- Fivush, R., Hazzard, A., Sales, J. M., Sarfati, D., & Brown, T. (2003). Creating coherence out of chaos? Children’s narratives of emotionally positive and negative events. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 17(1), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.854>
- Habermas, T., & Bluck, S. (2000). Getting a life: The emergence of the life story in adolescence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126(5), 748–769. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.126.5.748>
- Habermas, T., & Köber, C. (2015). Autobiographical reasoning in life narratives buffers the effect of biographical disruptions on the sense of self-continuity. *Memory*, 23(5), 664-674. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658211.2014.920885>
- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. R. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 511-524. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.52.3.511>
- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. R. (1994). Attachment as an organizational framework for research on close relationships. *Psychological Inquiry*, 5(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli0501_1
- Heine, S. J., Proulx, T., & Vohs, K. D. (2006). The meaning maintenance model: On the coherence of social motivations. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10(2), 88-110. <https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr100>
- Jong, J., Whitehouse, H., Kavanagh, C., & Lane, J. (2015). Shared negative experiences lead to identity fusion via personal reflection. *Plos One*, 10(12), e0145611. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0145611>
- Kerns, K.A. & Brumariu, L.E. (2016). Attachment in middle childhood. In Cassidy J. & Shaver P. (Eds.), pp. 349–365. *Handbook of Attachment*. Guilford.
- King, L. A., & Hicks, J. A. (2009). Detecting and constructing meaning in life events. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(5), 317–330. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760902992316>
- King, L. A., Hicks, J., Krull, J. L., & Del Gaiso, A. K. (2006). Positive affect and the experience of meaning in life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(1), 179-196. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.90.1.179>
- Koehn, A. J., & Kerns, K. A. (2018). Parent–child attachment: Meta-analysis of associations with parenting behaviors in middle childhood and adolescence. *Attachment and Human Development*, 20, 378-405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2017.1408131>
- Kohut, H. (1971). *The analysis of the self*. International Universities Press.
- Konrath, S. H., Chopik, W. J., Hsing, C. K., & O’Brien, E. (2014). Changes in adult attachment styles in American college students over time: A meta-analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 18(4), 326-348. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868314530516>
- Lapierre, A., Paradis, A., De Sousa, D., Hébert, M., Fortin, A., & Cyr, C. (2023). Context-specific use of conflict management strategies in adolescent dating relationships: A daily study on attachment, hostile attributions, and stress. *Journal of Family Violence*, published online May 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-023-00572-0>

- Machell, K. A., Kashdan, T. B., Short, J. L., & Nezelek, J. B. (2015). Relationships between meaning of life, social and achievement events, and positive and negative affect in daily life. *Journal of Personality*, 83(3), 287-298. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12103>
- Mandelbaum, J. (2004). How to “do things” with narrative: A communication perspective on narrative skill. In John O. Greene and Brant R. Burleson (Eds.), *Handbook of communication and social interaction skills*. (pp. 595-636). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- McAdams, D. P. (2008). Personal narratives and the life story. In O. John, R. Robins, and L. Pervin (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (3rd ed., pp. 241-261). Guilford Press.
- McAdams, D. P. (2001). The psychology of life stories. *Review of General Psychology*, 5(2), 100-122. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.5.2.100>
- McAdams, D. P. (2011). Narrative identity. In S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, & V. L. Vignoles (Eds.), *Handbook of identity theory and research* (pp. 99–115). Springer Science + Business Media.
- McLean, K. C., Pasupathi, M., & Pals, J. L. (2007). Selves creating stories creating selves: A process model of self-development. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 11(3), 262-278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868307301034>
- Mickelson, K.D., Kessler, R.C., & Shaver, P.R. (1997). Adult attachment in a nationally representative sample. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73(5), 1092–1106. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.73.5.1092>
- Miller, P. J. (1995). Personal storytelling in everyday life: Social and cultural perspectives. In R. S. Wyer, Jr. (Ed.), *Knowledge and memory: The real story* (pp. 177–184). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Munz, E. A., & Wilson, S. R. (2017). Caregiver confirmation and children’s attachment security during the transition to kindergarten. *Communication Research*, 44(5), 668-690. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650214534966>
- Murphy, S. C., & Bastian, B. (2020). Emotionally extreme life experiences are more meaningful. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 15(4), 531-542. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1639795>
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004). *Children’s Emotional Development Is Built into the Architecture of Their Brains: Working Paper No. 2*. www.developingchild.harvard.edu.
- Pietromonaco, P. R., & Barrett, F. (2000). The internal working models concept: What do we really know about the self in relation to others? *Review of General Psychology*, 4(2), 155-175. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.4.2.155>
- Rees, C. (2007). Childhood attachment. *British Journal of General Practice*, 57, 920-922. <https://doi.org/10.3399/096016407782317955>
- Roberto, A.J., Carlyle, K.E., Goodall, C.E., & Castle, J.D. (2009). The relationship between parents’ verbal aggressiveness and responsiveness and young adult children’s attachment style and relational satisfaction with parents. *Journal of Family Communication*, 9(2), 90-106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15267430802561659>
- Schore, A.N. (2005). Back to basics. Attachment, affect regulation, and the developing right brain. Linking developmental neuroscience to paediatrics. *Pediatric Review*, 26, 204-217. <https://doi.org/10.1542/pir.26-6-204>
- Siegel, D.J. (2010). *Mindsight: The new science of personal transformation*. Random House Publishing Group.
- Siegel, D. J. (2016). *Mind: A journey to the heart of being human*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Singer, J. A. (2004). Narrative identity and meaning making across the adult lifespan: An introduction. *Journal of Personality*, 72(3), 437–459. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3506.2004.00268.x>

- Sommer, K. L., Baumeister, R. F., & Stillman, T. F. (1998). The construction of meaning from life events: empirical studies of personal narratives. In P.T.P. Wong & P.S. Fry (Eds.) *Handbook of personal meaning: Theory, research, and application* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Earlbaum.
- Stern, D. N. (1977). *The first relationship*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Tov, W., & Lee, H. W. (2016). A closer look at the hedonics of everyday meaning and satisfaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 111(4), 585-609.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000081>

Reconstitutive and Invitational Reconciliation with ‘The Boys’: Musings on Christian Autoethnographic Apologia in a Post (?)-Trump World

J. Dean Farmer

Following a chance encounter, I contemplate the state of communication in evangelical communities. Using concepts from the American Western Myth (Rushing, 1983) and Foucault’s (1990) superior man, I autoethnographically explore the historical docility and ‘correct’ training (Foucault, 1979) of some evangelicals by megalomaniacal leaders. I then suggest tentative directions forward to include invitational (Foss & Griffin, 1995) and reconstitutive (Hammerback, 2001) rhetorical strategies to restore and develop community.

Keywords: *Evangelicalism; American Western Myth; Docile Bodies; Invitational Rhetoric; Reconstitutive Rhetoric*

I was driving one of my daughters to school. Turning left at a stoplight, we pull in behind an older Chevrolet pickup truck, smoke filling the cab as its driver pulls on a cigarette. As I read the bumper stickers thrown in my face, I remain silent so as not to arouse the interest of my 10 year old in the back seat. I’m pretty sure there was some semblance of a cross clinging to the rear window, but my attention and ire are drawn to the step bumper and tailgate. On the bumper, a red white and blue sticker proclaims “Trump 2020 – Fuck Your Feelings.” Nice. Better yet, the magnet above on the tailgate declares “Caution – Driver May Be Jerking Off.” Just eww. From a Christian worldview, is this display what Jesus died for? Are these attitudes the result of cheap grace? Or has the redemptive message of Jesus been forgotten?

Quintessential media critic Janice Hocker Rushing (1983) introduced the centrality of American Western Myth in our culture to the field of communication, drawing heavily on the work of Peter Homans (1977/1961). Homans considered the Western genre a “Puritan morality tale” (Rushing, 1983, p. 20), and elements of the myth continue to explain our society today. The truck driver is certainly one of the ‘the boys’ – the dusty, bearded stock audience of the Western genre. Homans maintained ‘the boys’ were a passive audience, just there to watch an outsider hero save the town. As evidenced above, and unfortunately for evangelical Christianity, the boys have stopped being passive observers. I will argue that a succession of authoritarian, self-appointed by God ‘strong men’ – resembling the “superior man” Foucault (1990) describes – have trained these docile bodies for latent action (Foucault, 1979).¹ I then offer strategies of

J. Dean Farmer, Ph.D. (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1172-1335>) is Associate Professor and Chair of Communication Studies at Campbell University, Buies Creek, North Carolina. A previous version of this article was presented at the 2022 Carolinas Communication Conference in Aiken, South Carolina. He wishes to thank Camille Lewis and anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments and constructive feedback on previous versions of this essay. Correspondence to farmerd@campbell.edu.

Notes

¹ Latent action here refers to directives for the docile bodies who are “subjected, used, transformed, and improved.” (Foucault, 1979, p. 136, emphasis mine) to essentially ‘stand back and stand by’ (Dallas Morning News, 2020). Paige Patterson, one of the self-appointed ‘superior men’, identifies these docile bodies as ‘intuitive conservatives’ who “believe the best about their leaders” (1999, p. 62). For decades, Patterson and other ‘movement conservatives’ [i.e., superior men “who understood . . . the relationship

reconciliation with ‘the boys’ drawn from Foss and Griffin’s (1995) invitational rhetoric and Hammerback’s (2001) reconstitutive rhetoric that attempt to transform this audience.

I still consider myself an evangelical Christian. I recognize this stance carries intellectual and cultural baggage. Intellectually, I understand the suspension of Enlightenment-driven empirical rationality many say this belief system requires (Pinker, 2019, see especially pp. 430–439; Begg, 2019). I know that in my larger discipline of Communication any such pronouncement often has been met with looks of side-eyed trepidation (Conrad, 1983; Crowley, 2007). However, I am prepared for any intellectual derision that might arise. I understand that evangelical belief structures require suspension of modernist enlightenment principles, as do any metaphysical belief (Rushing & Frenz, 1995, p. 180; see also Rushing, 2006). Culturally, I work to right past wrongs undertaken in the name of Christianity – for many of the cultural critiques of evangelicalism certainly have merit. Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas Frenz summarize today’s chief critique: “[E]ventually [evangelical] culture and [the evangelical] God become impediments to what [the evangelical] now sees as freedom” (1995, p. 54). Rogue individualistic “freedom” has substituted for repentant redemption, or as Rushing and Frenz continue, refusing to “let the ego die as the sovereign center of the psyche” (p. 180). ‘The boys’ have become gods of their dominion, securing permission by following one of their leaders’ admonition that he has never done anything worthy of asking forgiveness (Du Mez, 2018). Collectively, we have sold our free grace and hope to the marketplace. As the Eagles’ “Business as Usual” eloquently states: “We’re running time, leaving grace/Still we worship at the marketplace/While common sense is goin’ out of style” (Henley & Smith, 2007) Faith has been co-opted and has become a commodity (Healey, 2008; see also Froese, 2012); bought and sold in cinema (Lundberg, 2009) and tourism (Bloomfield, 2017). I, like fellow southerner Don Henley, must muse, “I thought that I would be above it all by now/In some country garden in the shade”. I am afraid that for many like myself, Henley’s warnings are ominous: “You try to be righteous/You try to do good/But business as usual/Turns your heart into wood” (Henley & Smith, 2007). My Christian charity and benevolence is running low; my ability to love *some* fellow Christians is strained. *Why? In the following, I attempt to rectify a few of the problems that face Christian community, and offer a tentative course of action as how we might communicate our way to a more beneficial existence.*

An Apologia of Differentiation in a Fractured Christian Community

I am a member of a once larger, now smaller, local evangelical church aligned with a large denominational presence in the American south. Many of the cuts in my and other evangelical church congregations have been self-inflicted wounds. Many of these wounds have nothing to do with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, understood broadly. They have nothing to do with the Kingdom of God as understood in Christianity; but much to do with strains of Christendom that have adopted uncritical, uneducated, incongruent acceptance of modernist humanism’s worst utilitarian impulses; systemic racism; and unapologetic adherence to political stances in direct opposition with the teachings of Jesus Christ (Du Mez, 2020). These wounds sometimes originate in organizational polity decisions (Conrad, 1983), but also in the (often) anti-education fueled political stances of individuals and organizations – that in turn, poison any beneficial efforts followers of Jesus might undertake. It is tough being salt and light (cf. Matthew 5:13-16) when the forces of darkness are so close at hand. *So what steps can I take?*

First, an attempt at providing an apologia is in order (Armstrong, et al., 2005; Blyth, 2000; Lessl, 2018; Valenzano & Edwards, 2012; Ware & Linkugel, 1973). Following Kruse (1981), I enter this apologetic discourse in an attempt to repair what I perceive to be the damage done to character, in this case, mine and others’ Christianity – through attacks on our moral nature, motives, or reputation (see Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 274) – not from those outside the

between political process and leadership (p. 62)] have taken it upon themselves to educate these “sweet believers. . . . in the methods available to effect change and the necessity for doing so” (p. 62–63) at an appropriate time.

faith, but manifest in the actions of ‘the boys’ in their pursuit of freedom (cf., Rushing & Frenz, 1995). The closest apologia path to follow would seem to be that of differentiation (McClearey, 1983; see also Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 278), attempting to convince an audience to see some evangelicals (including myself) from an alternative position and not lump us in with those who have diverged from the way, although their divergence in many instances has been that of the proverbial boiled frog, as “they [have] become numbed and . . . did not notice how [they were] changing” (Urban & Orbe, 2007, p. 133). *I, too, must interrogate my positions that place me in the same boiling pot.*

Similarly to how Rushing and Frenz (1999) speak of academia, although much is right with Christianity, something is also profoundly wrong (see Rushing & Frenz, 1999, p. 230). Like Lyncurgus, much of the Christianity we encounter today places too much faith in human progress and reason (Rushing & Frenz, 1999; see also Nussbaum, 1986, p. 77; Begg, 2019), and not enough in the metaphysical faith. Success is valued at any cost because God is guiding (chiefly economic) success (Froese, 2012). Evangelicalism has been coopted to be a “cultural and political movement rather than a community defined by its theology” (Du Mez, 2020, p. 298). *As I read Du Mez’s Jesus and John Wayne: How white evangelicals corrupted a faith and fractured a nation, I was continually, painfully conflicted and convicted that’s not descriptive of me – at least I pray not. At the same time, how in the world did some of us get here?*

Here I return to Urban and Orbe’s (2007) comparison of the boiled frog. For several generations, seekers of power in Christian circles have promoted a vision of an authoritarian God largely of their own making (Dixon, 2017). Self-promoting “leaders” position themselves as divinely appointed representatives of this authoritarian God and caution against not following “God’s appointed man” (Jackson, 1979, as quoted in Dixon, 2017, p. 181). These cautions include prescriptions for the role of women (McMichael, 2018; Shaw, 2008), education (Wittman, 2004), and race (Fisher & Bauder, 2022; Stroud, 2002). Du Mez (2020) locates the roots of these prescriptions in the masculine turn in Christianity beginning with the zeal of Billy Sunday during World War I and Bruce Barton’s characterization of Jesus as “a strong, magnetic man” (Barton, 1925, p. 4, as quoted in Du Mez, 2020, p. 20) which countered Victorian descriptions of Jesus.² These new characterizations certainly reverberate with the American western myth (Rushing, 1983), turning from a communal faith grounded in the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40) to the masculine individualism of Barton’s “business executive Jesus” (Du Mez, 2020, p. 20). *Business executive? Wonder where that could lead us? Hmm.*

The masculine turn arguably culminated in the fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention beginning in 1979. Led by Paige Patterson (Allen, 1982; Morgan, 1993), Patterson’s multiple sexual assault lawsuit-accused associate Paul Pressler (Dellinger, 2021; Downen, 2019a, 2019b; Jackson & Langdon, 2021; Platoff, 2017; Smietana, 2021), and Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority (Conrad, 1983), many were swayed by an attractive call to “turn to the old ways” which were nothing of the sort. The “old ways” offered were power grabs by sectarian, patriarchal, authoritarian “nouveaux Pharisees” (Griffin, 1990, quoted in Morgan, 1993, p. 323). These authoritarians reasoned they had an undeveloped majority ready to accept their restrictive doctrines – ‘intuitive conservatives’ who maintained high levels of biblical illiteracy (Du Mez, 2020). As Patterson himself maintained, the strategy for takeover was one of “educat[ing] the intuitive conservatives in the methods available to effect change and the necessity for doing so” (1999, p. 63). Some locate propensity to take advantage of the undereducated in accusations of

² While Du Mez (2020) references the centrality of Billy Sunday and Bruce Barton in “muscular” Christianity, others argue Dwight Moody’s involvement with the YMCA in the 1850s as the origin (Bezzant, 2021; see also Ladd & Mathisen, 1999). Ted Ownby (1993) similarly describes the often rural southern dialectic of the secular and the sacred in *Subduing Satan: Religion, recreation, and manhood in the rural south, 1865-1920*.

the fundamentalist Christian school movement's (Peshkin, 1985) supposed anti-education sentiment.³ *Simple enough. Simple people manipulated by the power hungry.*

But it's not that simple. I graduated from such a Christian school. Yes, it was at times painfully conservative – even for the painfully conservative, but we adapted ways to live within (and often circumvent) the rules. Maybe we students were oblivious to any 'white academy' lineage (Balmer, 2014). But no, it was never anti-education – at least to some of us. Medical doctors, attorneys, public school teachers, and even a Ph.D. in communication have diplomas from the school. Indeed, it is not that simple. However, maybe the M.D.s, lawyers, teachers, and I aren't the 'intuitive conservatives' that Patterson identified for manipulation. Maybe we don't fit the masculine ideology that was ripe for exploitation. Further, as Jones (1998) stresses, the "educated and fashionable have long held the great unwashed [e.g., the intuitive conservatives] in contempt. It is a temptation that critically minded evangelicals should resist" (p. 18). Maybe we are individuals included among the great unwashed who reject anti-intellectual strains and aren't swayed by the Pattersons of the world and their campaigns.

But there are plenty of folks out there who are ripe for exploitation. While some are dedicated attendees in fundamentalist and evangelical traditions (Du Mez, 2020), some are not dedicated church attendees (Layman, 2016). Trump's evangelical base was, at least initially, made up of those who might identify as Christian but not to the point of regular church attendance (perhaps manifest in the 'fuck your feelings' jerking off truck driver). However, some were regular attendees, as was the college scholarship applicant I interviewed at my church who insouciantly wore a cheap silicone "Let's Go Brandon" bracelet/wristband to his interview.⁴ *Did he know what the bracelet means? Did he wear it because it's cool? I considered objecting to his receiving the scholarship, but came to the conclusion that going to a university might expose him to broader perspectives. Perhaps he and others are the 'intuitive conservatives' of which Patterson, Pressler, and Falwell curried favor – easily persuaded because they "didn't know why" (Patterson, 1999, p. 62).*

Locating Intuitive Conservatives in the American Western Myth⁵

These are the toxic terminal boys (and girls) of pro-Trump Christianity. They certainly resemble Homans' (1977/1961) classic description of 'the boys' in Western myth – "bearded, gritty people who are always 'just there' . . . [Whose] function is that of an audience" (1977, pp. 102–103). However, these individuals have evolved from being the passive audience Homans describes. Rather than being passive, these boys (and some girls) have gathered, but not just to watch as Homans' boys did. They "engage in excessive stereotypically-macho posturing" as if they have watched "too many John Wayne movies" (McGillicuddy, 2020, para. 48). McGillicuddy (2020) characterizes these toxic performances as "Bro-Dude" Christianity, with the "Dudes" striving to be "stoic, misogynistic, strong-willed, sexually-adventurous, and powerful. . .

³ In studies of religious history, many claim evangelical anti-intellectualism predates the Christian school movement (Kostlevy, 1997; Noll, 1994; Wacker, et al., 1995) and place responsibilities in the fading influence of church orthodoxy (Bundy, 1997).

⁴ The phrase "Let's Go Brandon" originated at an October 2021 NASCAR Xfinity Series race in Talladega, Alabama. An NBC reporter tried to mask the crowd shouting "Fuck Joe Biden" in the background during a post-race interview, suggesting the crowd instead was saluting first time race winner Brandon Brown (Long, 2021).

⁵ Rushing (1983) locates American Western Myth in the paradoxical tension of individualism versus community in the frontier experience as portrayed in cinema and performed in society. She argues that the myth often is co-opted and weakened by favoring one side of the paradox over the other. Later, she foreshadows our current world and its need heroes and myths – and for the dialectical reaffirmation of holistic understanding and performance of the myth, stating "we need neither another Donald Trump nor more pseudo "Survivor" shows on TV. Attributes that enabled Americans to overcome their former Western wilderness have greater import for significantly nobler endeavors: such as saving the environment, improving and widening health care, and raising the quality of life for all" (Carpenter, 2006, p. 182).

Manly men” (para. 4, emphasis in the original). Oddly, although they are lumped in as exemplars of the Christian right, they have been described as hating to go to church (Bollinger, 2022), so many churches have pursued them with toxic masculinity strategies (Kennedy, 2022) – including wrestling nights, militaristic celebrations (McGillicuddy, 2020), fight clubs, and gun raffles (Kennedy, 2022). *It’s the boiled frog syndrome – I see more and more appropriations of ‘the boys’ in my interactions – not just in attitudes, but in non-verbal presentations. Lots of large ‘manly’ beards (Oldstone-Moore, 2015). Lots more tattoo ink (“Tattoos”, 1998) intertwining Christianity and nationalism. And, the unfortunate, seemingly unconscious pervasiveness of “Let’s Go Brandon” memes in my social media feeds by people who know full well what it signifies yet conscientiously reject the term “fuck” in their personal verbal interactions.* Appropriately, many of these ‘boys’ still take cues from their authoritarian leader(s); in a grotesque turn (Crosby, 2020), the authoritarian leaders aren’t heroes. Rather than outsiders who ride into town to save it from ‘evil ones’ (Homans, 1977/1961; Rushing, 1983), these are malevolent spreaders of conspiracies such as The Great Replacement Theory or White Genocide Conspiracy Theory (Fisher & Bauder, 2022; Gellman, 2021; Leonard, 2022; Mowatt, 2021; Wilson, 2018). Wilson (2018) characterizes these ‘leaders’ as pseudo-conservatives. Theodore Adorno et al. (1969/1950) describe the ‘pseudo-conservatives’ as those recognizable in their

[S]ubmission to authority, unconscious handling of hostility toward authority by means of displacement and projection onto outgroups. . . . This is not merely a "modern conservatism." It is, rather, a totally new direction: away from individualism and equality of opportunity, and toward a rigidly stratified society in which there is a minimum of economic mobility and in which the "right" groups are in power, the outgroups subordinate (p. 182).

First proposed by Renaud Camus (2018), the argument of White Replacement Theory holds “that white Christian nations are being overrun by masses of black and brown . . . immigrants” and this “‘genocide’ of the white Christian races needs thwarting urgently” (Ramakrishna, 2021, p. 3). Sadly, many of these messages circulate within evangelical circles, as the wicked prey upon ‘intuitive conservative’ boys who have been prepped for swallowing ‘big lies’ (cf. Longwell, 2022) by patriarchal authoritarians they uncritically venerate (Dixon, 2017; McMichael, 2018; Shaw, 2008; Whitman, 2004).

Leonard (2021) adumbrates characteristics of these ‘boys’, including dogmatism that demands doctrinal unity, populist reinterpretations of traditional Christian beliefs, rabid individualism, religious disengagement, and rampant conspiracy mythologies (para. 13). Commenting on the grotesque Q-Anon circus in Dallas, Texas on December 2, 2021, Leonard (2021) describes a scenario that most closely resembles the cataclysmic prophecies of Revelation 13 in history – including elevating deposed President Trump to a Cyrus-like position of the “king of kings.” Unlike (or maybe exactly alike) the people described in Revelation 13, QAnon devotees “worshipped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast? Who is able to wage war against it?’” (Revelation 13:4b, Christian Standard Bible [hereafter CSB]). *Surely, these are daft fringe dwellers. Unfortunately, no.* As MacMillen and Rush (2022) observe, (some) Calvinist-influenced evangelical communities have abandoned reason and tradition and are enchanted by emotionally-driven apocalyptic conspiracies, often mixtures of biblical apocalyptic prophecies and mysticism. These communities (*or, as I maintain, some members of these communities*) are Patterson’s intuitive conservatives. They are Adorno’s (2000/1975; Adorno et al., 1969/1950; see also Reich, 1974) ‘little men’, intuitives under the power of ‘superior man/men’.⁶ Regrettably, QAnon has

⁶ Foucault (1990) identifies the superior man as one who is “capable of exercising strict control over himself” (p. 81), avoiding immoderation associated with femininity. By ignoring Trump’s past indulgences

beguiled adherents in Christian communities, with “some 27% of evangelicals affirm[ing] that Trump’s alleged secret battle against an elite group of child sex traffickers is ‘mostly or completely accurate’” (Leonard, 2021, para. 8). *How could these ‘intuitive conservatives’ be so duped?* Authoritative protectors of “God’s people” – inside (Du Mez, 2020; McKenzie, 2021; Spencer, 2021) and outside (Gellman, 2021; Graham, 2022; Haidt, 2022) the church have instructed them to do so for at least a century and they have been naïve marks. Like Jose Antonio’s disciples in Spain, they have become “bold, uncompromising zealots willing slavishly follow orders from their leaders” (Jensen & Hammerback, 1998, p. 128).

They indeed have been convenient fodder. Billy Sunday called them to be muscular in the aftermath of World War I. Marabel Morgan championed ‘traditional’ gender roles and Harold John Ockenga advocated militaristic versions of Christianity in the 1950s, normalizing hegemonic masculinity (Du Mez, 2020). Rousas John Rushdoony proclaimed the United States a Christian Nation through his writings on Christian Reconstructionism in the 1960s (Shupe, 1989; Worthen, 2008) – surely a forerunner of White Replacement Theory. Though connections might be only through unintentional, unconscious means analogous to organizational osmosis (Gibson & Papa, 2000),⁷ Ockenga and Rushdoony’s work laid a foundation for Paige Patterson, Paul Pressler, W. A. Crisswell, and Jerry Falwell to crusade for a ‘moral majority’ in the 1980s (see Conrad, 1983; Du Mez, 2020). While these leaders probably would never acknowledge a connection to Rushdoony openly, Worthen (2008) maintains his influence was peripheral, but doyennes of the Christian right “were often reading [Rushdoony’s] books” (p. 431). The connections are not overt, but “[R]econstruction has slowly absorbed, congregation by congregation, the conservative Presbyterian Church in America . . . and has heavily influenced others, notably the Southern Baptists” (Sugg, 2005, para. 7). These osmosis-like connections intermingle contradictory visions of pre- and post-millennial interpretations of Christianity.⁸ The leaders of the religious right might never admit connections because of these contradictory elements, but their ‘intuitive conservative’ followers certainly and eagerly took the bait.

In addition, in the early 1980s, Edwin Louis Cole pushed for a greater amount of toxic masculinity, maintaining that “Christlikeness and manhood are synonymous” and this likeness required “a certain ruthlessness” (Du Mez, 2020, p. 125). The new millennium’s toxic masculinity found a new level of debauchery in Mark Driscoll – whose Jesus would be a “prize fighter with a tattoo down his leg, a sword in his hand and the commitment to make someone bleed” (McGillicuddy, 2020, para. 57) *rather than bleeding himself*. Instead of being outward-focused Christians called to care for the ‘least of these’, as narcissistic, individually-focused ego-driven beings, their leader told them they would now have “power. . . . Plenty of power” (McKenzie, 2021, para. 32). *The boys have arrived. Little to nothing in their worldview resembles a suffering savior who atones for the world. How can those of us, who identify with the suffering savior that Driscoll’s minions eschew, salvage evangelicalism as good news for the world? Better communication, of course.*

Concluding Implications and Future Directions for Communicative Praxis

Throughout the centuries, communication scholars have provided designs to assess critically the schlock that persuades unsuspecting masses. True, 21st century social media technology has complicated any solutions (Haidt, 2022), but we must persevere to re-form a

and focusing on his authoritarian law and order posturing, some evangelicals imagine him as a “triumph-deliverer” in line with biblical prophecies (MacMillen & Rush, 2022, p. 993).

⁷ Gibson and Papa (2000) describe organizational osmosis as the “seemingly effortless adoption of ideas, values, and culture of an organization on the basis of preexisting socialization experiences” (p. 68). The growing Calvinist influence among some evangelicals provides the framework for this osmosis.

⁸ Pre-millennialists hold that Christ will return before a theocracy is established on earth (a dispensational view held by large numbers of Protestants since the 1800s) where Christian believers will be removed from the scene (commonly referred to as ‘the rapture’). Rushdoony’s Reconstructionism views hold that the theocracy will occur first, setting the stage for Christ’s return (see Worthen, 2008, p 402).

beloved community (Leonard, 2022). We can forge this community by exposing toxic masculinity, not to emasculate, but to create “a fruitful contact between feminine and masculine—peacefully without hurting anyone” (Rushing, 2006, p. 230). Certainly, this goal is a nuanced undertaking. Technology makes and ridicules easy analysis and simplistic solutions (Campbell, et al., 2018). Campbell et al.’s suggestion of turning to Martin Buber’s (1958) narrow ridge and I-Thou relationships in our virtual-obsessed world has merit. Rather than a solitary, consumerist existence, Buber calls us to dialoguing in “direct, mutual, present, and open” relationships where we can experience “the other side of the relationship so that one can imagine quite concretely what another is feeling, thinking, and knowing” (Lee, 2000, pp. 47, 48).

The Christian community can approach such dialogue by following the prescription offered by Rushing and Frenz (1995). We must engage our faith esoterically – and address the problem of the shadow and be willing to suffer and let old ways die – ways of toxic masculinity, ways of racism that celebrate Lost Cause mythology and fear being ‘replaced’, and ways of narcissism that isolate us from one another. I know that some comfortable in their toxicity will view this as “squirrel and unicorn stuff” (Rushing, 2006, p. 9) or hippie-dippy sacrilege. Yet, the Apostle Paul characterizes Christianity as “the revelation of the mystery kept silent for long ages” (Romans 16:25b, CSB). Earlier in his letter to the Romans, after enumerating and celebrating many co-laborers, Paul advises us

[T]o watch out for those who create divisions and obstacles contrary to the teaching that you learned. Avoid them, because such people do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites. They deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting with smooth talk and flattering words (Romans 16:17-18, CSB).

Sounds suspiciously like Paul champions informed dialogue. *Will the ‘intuitive conservatives’ engage?* I don’t know. They have long been poisoned by ‘superior men’ and beguiled by anti-heroes like Donald Trump that they’ve been goaded into exalting. Nevertheless, not inviting dialogue takes us further down Renaud Camus’ road. The American Western myth continues to be pervasive in society, but as Rushing (1983) maintained, the myth contains a “fragile pattern of dialectical oppositions” of individualism and community. The rugged individualist, ‘intuitive conservative’ ‘boys’ have for too long been isolated from community – an audience “induced to identify with only one” value of the myth (Rushing, 1983, p. 22). As Rushing identified, they have had their individualism handed down to them, rather than achieving it. To restore the communal side of the dialectic in Christendom, let’s talk without resorting to derision. For those who say we must stand firm and jettison ‘the boys’, let us not fall into a trap analogous to the one that beguiles them. Let’s not resort to reciprocated diatribes of the past (Pearce, et al., 1987). For to do so is engage in a ‘zombie mindset’ (Leonard, 2017) and deny hope of any “beloved community” (Leonard, 2022, para. 20). As communicators, we can lead by recalling the foundations of our discipline. The misogynist pathos of Trump and QAnon enchant the intuitive conservative ‘boys’, but elites remain captives of reason and tradition. As is often the case, what is missing is ethos – the pillar of rhetorical proof with a moral dimension (Yoos, 1979). Understandable pathos drives the ‘boys’ to hyper-individualist victimhood (Pargin, 2016; see also Kennedy, 2022) while logos impels the non-violent educated ‘eastern elites’ living in gated communities to discount the emotional standpoint of ‘the boys’ (Homans, 1977/1961; see also Hammerback, 1972; Pargin, 2016). As Aristotle (1990) instructs us, utilizing all three proofs are necessary for persuasion. In deliberative rhetoric, let us not become reliant on one at the expense of the others by “laugh[ing], mock [ing] or jeer[ing]” (p. 163). It is imperative that we neutralize extremes by doing the right thing, not normalize them by holding to our own extremes (Cunningham, 1999, p. 8). In terms

of the Western myth, engaging all three proofs allows us to reaffirm and reclaim the dialectical tension of individual and community (Rushing, 1983). *But what if traditional Aristotelian approaches to persuasion fail?* Rhetorical perspectives that underscore the centrality of ethos could be routes to evangelical reconciliation.

One such approach is reconstitutive rhetoric. Hammerback (2001) maintains rhetors use reconstitutive discourse strategies to reconfigure audiences so that these audiences “discover latent qualities in themselves and alter their identities” (Jensen & Hammerback, 1998, p. 138). The rhetor’s reconstitutive undertaking “combines first persona, second persona, and themes, explanations, and arguments into a reciprocal and synergistic relationship that forms a message capable of reconstitution” (Jensen & Hammerback, 1998, p. 138). Drawing on Antczak (1985), the reconstitutive process has the potential to “establish an extraordinarily potent rhetorical identification with audiences” (Jensen & Hammerback, 1998, p. 128). In political circles, Hammerback (1999) asserts that Barry Goldwater’s legacy is his creation of a conservative audience – whose descendants we can interpret as ‘the boys’ of Western Myth. This audience does not engage with the elitist academic stodginess of William F. Buckley (Hammerback, 1974), but rather these members are an audience in search of “simple and immediate answers to . . . complex and seemingly unanswerable domestic and international problems” and against the “political status quo” (Hammerback, 1972, p. 176–177). The rugged individualist rhetoric of Goldwater (Hammerback, 1972) rang true to these latent conservatives later beguiled by Paige Patterson (1999), Jerry Falwell (Conrad, 1983), and even later by the bombastic rhetoric of Donald Trump (Farmer & Allen, 2023) – all strong ‘superior’ men in the eyes of ‘the boys.’

Although these examples all draw on the “darker side of human nature” (Hammerback, 2001, p. 19), for beneficial evangelical reconciliation, the process remains the same. However, rhetors seeking to engage ‘the boys’ in more positive reconciliation must connect in a manner reminiscent of Robert Parris Moses’ work during the civil rights era (Jensen & Hammerback, 1998). Moses used community organizing strategies that focused on local issues and featured quiet relationship building rather than grandiose speech making. These strategies are in contrast to the community mobilization strategies of Martin Luther King and Stokely Carmichael (Jensen & Hammerback, 2000), which inspired “immense crowds in vast public spaces” (Moses et al., 1989, p. 424 [quoted in Jensen & Hammerback, 2000, p. 2]). Moses deliberately targeted younger community members rather than older established leaders or outside organizers.⁹ *To respond to Leonard’s (2022) call for restoration of a beloved community, reconstituting the evangelical audience can happen following Moses’ template, letting young “local leaders [seize] control”* (Jensen & Hammerback, 1998, p. 132). *As ‘superior man’ Patterson (1999) recognized, the intuitive conservatives aren’t swayed by ‘ivory-tower’ rhetoric. Rather, those of us attempting reconstitution must invigorate the local, the grassroots, on their turf and using their vernacular* (Hess, 2011). Moses’ rhetorical style concentrated on identification and listening carefully to reconstitute his audience to understand their potential as leaders and change agents, a process similar to invitational rhetoric.

Invitational rhetoric, first proposed by Foss and Griffin (1995), is “grounded in the feminist principles of equality, immanent value, and self-determination. . . . [T]o offer an invitation to understanding” (p. 2). Invitational rhetoric offers another constructive route to reconciliation. Although scholars have criticized invitational rhetoric on multiple fronts (Cloud, 2004; Condit, 1997; Fulkerson, 1996; Mathison, 1997; Pollock et al., 1996;

⁹ Moses’ strategies also can be viewed as an early example of how experts position themselves in the positive deviance approach, amplifying previously latent local knowledge and potential (Singhal, 2010; Singhal, & Bjurström, 2015; Singhal & Svenkerud, 2019).

for an overview, see Bone, et al., 2008), its use has illustrated its effectiveness. Bates (2017) details how the O Machismo graffiti project in Brazil serves to encourage resistance to machismo and promote non-patriarchal understandings. Greiner and Singhal (2009) illustrate the value of invitational rhetoric in the design of social change projects, de-centering the role of the outside expert and advocating for asset-based solutions to intractable problems (see also Singhal, 2010). Importantly, Bone and her colleagues (2008) illustrate President Jimmy Carter’s use of invitational rhetoric to engage in absolute listening – refraining from interrupting, comforting, or offering personal perspectives (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 11). Rather than positioning himself as the expert, Carter “remained open to listening to other perspectives on the issue [e.g., the energy crisis of the late 1970s]” (Bone, et al., 2008, p. 450). Carter “took himself out of the discussion for a time to listen fully to the perspectives of others” (Bone, et al., 2008, p. 449). *However, a question remains: Are we [as non-’boy’ evangelicals] doing likewise in attempts to reconcile with ‘the boys’? We would be wise to reaffirm and practice President Carter’s methods. We should not wait on “the other side” to reciprocate and by no means offer only disparagement of its positions with which we disagree. We also must reconstitute our own place as an audience to resist the tendency to view ‘the boys’ as the great unwashed (Jones, 2018). We must be compelled to remember “the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body” (I Corinthians 12:12, CSB).*

In any case (and as Rushing claimed), “America needs myths and heroes” (Carpenter, 2006, p. 182) to continue our creation and re-creation. *As I sit in a local coffee shop writing these words, I think reclaiming the tensions and celebrating myths and heroes still is worth a try in American culture, and these invitations are critical in restoration and reconstitution of community.* While recognizing this paper critiques many less than ideal hero choices, we must work together to identify and exalt worthy ones, reclaiming a diverse yet civil society that revels in the tensions it creates rather than splintering because of them. As Don Henley and Stan Lynch (1994) eloquently stated we’ve been “. . . [L]ike sheep without a shepherd/We don't know how to be alone/So we wander 'round this desert/Wind up following the wrong gods home.” *We’ve experienced enough of that disintegration fueled by allegiance to ‘superior men’ in pursuit of power, and all of us can share the blame for the sins that led to it.* In evangelical Christian circles, maybe we should heed the words of our “right God” – Jesus: “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another” (John 13:34, CSB). Together, we can reconstitute and rebuild communities.

Whether the reclamation occurs through traditional persuasion and rhetorical criticism, reconstitutive rhetoric, or invitational rhetorical means, count me among the purveyors of Rushing’s (2006) “squirrel and unicorn stuff” attempting reaffirmation. Nonetheless, communicative praxis must be at the center of any such attempts at community and cultural reconciliation – in evangelical and countless other communities.

References

- Adorno, T. (2000/1975). *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas’ Radio Addresses*. Stanford University Press.
- Adorno, T. W., Frenkel-Brunswik, E., Levinson, D. J., & Sanford, R. N. (1969/1950). *The authoritarian personality*. Harper.
- Allen, C. W. (1982). Paige Patterson: Contender for Baptist sectarianism. *Review & Expositor*, 79(1), 105–120.
- Antczak, F. J. (1985). *Thought and character: the rhetoric of democratic education*. Iowa State University Press.

- Aristotle. (1990). From *Rhetoric*. In P. Bizzell & B. Herzberg (Eds.), W. R. Roberts (Trans.), & F. Solmsen (Ed.) *The rhetorical tradition: Readings from classical times to the present* (pp. 151–194). Bedford of St. Martin's.
- Armstrong, R. N., Hallmark, J. R., & Williamson, L. K. (2005). Televangelism as institutional apologia: The religious talk show as strategized text. *Journal of Media & Religion*, 4(2), 67–83. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15328415jmr0402_1
- Balmer, R. (2014). The real origins of the religious right. *Politico*. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/religious-right-real-origins-107133/>
- Barton, B. (1925). *The man nobody knows*. Bobbs-Merrill.
- Bates, B. R. (2017). Participatory graffiti as invitational rhetoric: the case of O Machismo. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, 18(1), 64–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17459435.2017.1330276>
- Begg, A. (2019, November 20). *The power and message of the Cross*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SL8mJQ39zjw>
- Bezzant, R. S. (2021). Muscular Christianity: Celebrating and constructing manhood at the end of the nineteenth century. *Fides et Historia*, 53(2), 1–16.
- Bloomfield, E. F. (2017). Ark Encounter as material apocalyptic rhetoric: contemporary creationist strategies on board Noah's Ark. *Southern Communication Journal*, 82(5), 263–277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1041794X.2017.1360384>
- Blyth, D. (2000). Socrates' trial and conviction of the jurors in Plato's Apology. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 33(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1353/par.2000.0002>
- Bone, J., Griffin, C., & Scholz, T. M. L. (2008). Beyond traditional conceptualizations of rhetoric: invitational rhetoric and a move toward civility. *Western Journal of Communication*, 72(4), 434–462. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570310802446098>
- Buber, M. (1958). *I and thou* (2nd rev. ed., R. G. Smith, Trans.). Scribner.
- Bundy, D. (1997). Locating the scandal of the evangelical mind. *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 32(1), 157–160.
- Campbell, H. A., Joiner, L., & Lawrence, S. (2018). Responding to the meme-ing of the religious other. *Journal of Communication & Religion*, 41(2), 27–42.
- Camus, R. (2018). *You will not replace us!* Chez l'auteur.
- Carpenter, R. (2006). Revisiting Janice Rushing about “The Western Myth” (more important now than ever before). *Southern Communication Journal*, 71(2), 179–182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10417940600683539>
- Cloud, D. (2004, November). *Not invited: struggle and social change*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Conference, Chicago, IL.
- Condit, C. M. (1997). In praise of eloquent diversity: gender and rhetoric as public persuasion. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 20(2), 91–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.1997.10162405>
- Conrad, C. (1983). The rhetoric of the moral majority: An analysis of romantic form. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 69(2), 159–170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335638309383644>
- Crosby, R. B. (2020). On the rhetorical grotesque: A mode for strange times. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 50(2), 109–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2020.1723680>
- Crowley, S. (2007). Tolerance and the Christian right. *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies*, 4(1), 102–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420601138427>
- Cunningham, S. B. (1999). Getting it right: Aristotle's 'Golden Mean' as theory deterioration. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 14(1), 5–15. <https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327728JMM140101>
- Dallas Morning News. (2020, October 1). President Trump had an opportunity to reject white supremacy and didn't. *Dallas Morning News (TX)*. Retrieved from <https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/2020/10/01/president-trump-had-an-opportunity-to-reject-white-supremacy-and-didnt/>

- Dellinger, H. (2021, February 27). Appeals court decision allows sex abuse lawsuit against SBC's Paul Pressler to proceed. *Houston Chronicle (TX)*. Retrieved from <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Appeals-court-decision-allows-sex-abuse-lawsuit-15984089.php>
- Dixon, M. A. (2017). The Word as weapon: Sermons as organizational discourse during the 1979 Southern Baptist Convention. *Southern Communication Journal*, 82(3), 175–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1041794X.2017.1315454>
- Downen, R. (2019a, February 6). Lawsuit against ex-judge, Southern Baptist churches drawing to a close. *Houston Chronicle (TX)*. <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Lawsuit-against-ex-judge-Southern-Baptist-13596126.php>
- Downen, R. (2019b, November 7). Sex abuse lawsuit against Southern Baptist leader headed to appeals court. *Houston Chronicle (TX)*. Retrieved from <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Sex-abuse-lawsuit-against-Southern-Baptist-leader-14815626.php>
- Du Mez, K. K. (2018). This ridiculous “spiritual biography” of Trump is no joke. *The Christian Century*. Retrieved from <https://www.christiancentury.org/review/books/ridiculous-spiritual-biography-trump-no-joke>
- Du Mez, K. K. (2020). *Jesus and John Wayne: How white evangelicals corrupted a faith and fractured a nation*. Liveright.
- Farmer, J. D., & Allen, H. G. (2023, April). *Western myth corrupted, or the trickster masquerading as town marshal: Grotesquerie and archetypal criticism in modern America*. Paper presented at the Southern States Communication Association Conference, St. Petersburg, FL.
- Fisher, J. & Bauder, D. (2022, May 16). Explainer: White 'replacement theory' fuels racist attacks. *WRAL.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.wral.com/explainer-theory-of-white-replacement-fuels-racist-attacks/20284113/>
- Foss, S. K., & Griffin, C. L. (1995). Beyond persuasion: a proposal for an invitational rhetoric. *Communication Monographs*, 62(1), 2–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759509376345>
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish*. Vintage.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The use of pleasure: The history of sexuality: Volume 2*. Vintage.
- Froese, P. (2012, June 13). How your view of God shapes your view of the economy. *Religion & Politics*. Retrieved from https://religionandpolitics.org/2012/06/13/how-your-view-of-god-shapes-your-view-of-the-economy/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=how-your-view-of-god-shapes-your-view-of-the-economy
- Fulkerson, R. (1996). Transcending our conception of argument in light of feminist critiques. *Argumentation & Advocacy*, 32(4), 199–218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00028533.1996.11977995>
- Gellman, B. (2021, December 6). Trump’s next coup has already begun. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/01/january-6-insurrection-trump-coup-2024-election/620843/>
- Gibson, M. K., & Papa, M. J. (2000). The mud, the blood, and the beer guys: Organizational osmosis in blue-collar work groups. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 28, 68–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00909880009365554>
- Graham, D. A. (2022, January 26). Coup nation. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/01/coup-nation-trump-january-6/621362/>
- Greiner, K., & Singhal, A. (2009). Communication and invitational social change. *Journal of Development Communication*, 20(2), 31–44.
- Griffin, D. (1990, July 13). *The Bell* (weekly paper of Snyder Memorial Baptist Church, Fayetteville, North Carolina).

- Haidt, J. (2022, April 11). Why the past 10 years of American life have been uniquely stupid. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/05/social-media-democracy-trust-babel/629369/>
- Hammerback, J. C. (1972). Barry Goldwater's rhetoric of rugged individualism. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 58(2), 175–183. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335637209383113>
- Hammerback, J. C. (1974). William F. Buckley, Jr., on *Firing Line*: a case study in confrontational dialogue. *Today's Speech*, 22(3), 23–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463377409369147>
- Hammerback, J. C. (2001). Creating the “new person”: the rhetoric of reconstitutive discourse. *Rhetoric Review*, 20(1–2), 18–22.
- Healey, K. (2008, November). *Prophets in the marketplace: media, religion, and social change in American history*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association, San Diego, CA.
- Henley, D. H., & Lynch, S. [songwriters]. (1994). Learn to be still (song). *Hell Freezes Over*. Eagles Recording Company.
- Henley, D. H., & Smith, S. [songwriters]. (2007). Business as usual (song). *Long Road Out of Eden*. Eagles Recording Company II.
- Hess, A. (2011). Critical-rhetorical ethnography: rethinking the place and process of rhetoric. *Communication Studies*, 62(2), 127–152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2011.529750>
- Homans, P. (1977/1961). Puritanism revisited: An analysis of the contemporary screen-image Western. In W. Hammel (Ed.) *The popular arts in America: A reader* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 97–112). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Jackson, R. (1979). *When God appoints a man*. Sermon delivered at the 1979 Pastor's Conference at Southern Baptist Convention, Dallas, TX.
- Jackson, M., & Langdon, L. (2021, November 12). What is a young man worth: Accusations against a longtime Texas Baptist leader highlight the difficulties of addressing the abuse of men in the church. *World*. Retrieved from https://wng.org/roundups/what-is-a-young-man-worth-1636752514?fbclid=IwAR2GozxRxuntjpkRWjfyUXM-HKq1_8D88KP9mAMAZa-0lYAd0CKarxSLA
- Jensen, R. J., & Hammerback, J. C. (1998). ‘Your tools are really the people’: the rhetoric of Robert Parris Moses. *Communication Monographs*, 65(2), 126–140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759809376441>
- Jensen, R. J., & Hammerback, J. C. (2000). Working in “quiet places”: the community organizing rhetoric of Robert Parris Moses. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 11(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/106461700246689>
- Jones, P. (1998). More scandals of the evangelical mind. *First Things*, 84, 16–18.
- Kennedy, R. (2022, January 19). The roaring comeback of a toxic masculinity of power and victimization. *Baptist News Global*. Retrieved from <https://baptistnews.com/article/the-roaring-comeback-of-a-toxic-masculinity-of-power-and-victimization/#.YnGMKtPMLIU>
- Kostlevy, W. (1997). The Dispensationalists: Embarrassing relatives or prophets without honor: Reflections on Mark Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 32(1), 187–192.
- Kruse, N. W. (1981). The scope of apologetic discourse: Establishing generic parameters. *Southern Speech Communication Journal*, 46, 278–291. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10417948109372495>
- Ladd, T., & Mathisen, J. A. (1999). *Muscular Christianity: Evangelical Protestants and the Development of American Sport*. Baker.
- Layman, G. (2016, March 29). Where is Trump's evangelical base? Not in church. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/29/where-is-trumps-evangelical-base-not-in-church/>

- Lee, G. (2000). Dialogue, narrative, and a lived body in pain. *Florida Communication Journal*, 27(1/2), 43–60.
- Leonard, B. (2017, September 21). Lost Cause religion: A zombie mindset. *Baptist News Global*. Retrieved from <https://baptistnews.com/article/lost-cause-religion-zombie-mindset/#.YoTl3FTMLcs>
- Leonard, B. (2021, November 10). The second coming of JFK Jr. and other unrealities: Signs of our times. *Baptist News Global*. Retrieved from <https://baptistnews.com/article/the-second-coming-of-jfk-jr-and-other-unrealities-signs-of-our-times/?fbclid=IwAR24Rv1hivaqR5ObgraXu6nVuy0dbvJd-4ukN1yDIz3U5py-ATOO39dFP4M#.YY1oUrpOnIW>
- Leonard, B. (2022, May 13). ‘The Religion of the Lost Cause’ is back, and it may be winning. *Baptist News Global*. Retrieved from <https://baptistnews.com/article/the-religion-of-the-lost-cause-is-back-and-it-may-be-winning/#.YoTkVITMLcs>
- Lessl, T. (2018). Apologia Ad Hominem. *Journal of Communication & Religion*, 41(3), 5–13.
- Long, C. (2021, October 30). How ‘Let’s Go Brandon’ became code for insulting Joe Biden. *AP News*. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/article/lets-go-brandon-what-does-it-mean-republicans-joe-biden-ab13db212067928455a3dba07756a160>
- Longwell, S. (2022, April 18). Trump supporters explain why they believe the big lie. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/04/trump-voters-big-lie-stolen-election/629572/>
- Lundberg, C. (2009). Enjoying God’s death: The Passion of the Christ and the practices of an evangelical public. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 95, 387–411. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630903296184>
- MacMillen, S. L., & Rush, T. (2022). QAnon—religious roots, religious responses. *Critical Sociology (Sage Publications, Ltd.)*, 48(6), 989–1004. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205211063565>
- Mathison, M. A. (1997). Complicity as epistemology: reinscribing the historical categories of ‘woman’ through standpoint feminism. *Communication Theory (1050-3293)*, 7(2), 149–161. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.1997.tb00146.x>
- McClearey, K. E. (1983). Audience effects of Apologia. *Communication Quarterly*, 31(1), 12–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463378309369480>
- McKenzie, R. T., (2021, August 17). Populism poses dangers to democracy. It does the same to Christian witness. *Christianity Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/september/mckenzie-populism-poses-dangers-democracy-christian-witness.html>
- McMichael, M. E. (2018). Many voices: The complexity of Baptist women’s history. *Baptist History and Heritage*, 53(2), 68–81.
- Morgan, D. T. (1993). Upheaval in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1979–1990: Crusade for truth or bid for power? *The Journal of Religious History*, 17(3), 321–335.
- Moses, R. P., Kamii, M., Swap, S. M., & Howard, J. (1989). The algebra project: organizing in the spirit of Ella. *Harvard Education Review*, 59, 423–443.
- Mowatt, R. A. (2021). A people’s history of leisure studies: Where the white nationalists are. *Leisure Studies*, 40(1), 13–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2019.1624809>
- Noll, M. A. (1994). *The scandal of the evangelical mind*. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.
- Nussbaum, M. (1986). *The fragility of goodness: Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy*. Cambridge.
- Oldstone-Moore, C. (2015, December 25). The right-wing beard revolution: look out, hipsters, here come the counterculture Christians. *Salon*. Retrieved from https://www.salon.com/2015/12/25/the_right_wing_beard_revolution_look_out_hipsters_here_come_the_counterculture_christians/

- Ownby, T. (1993). *Subduing Satan : Religion, recreation, and manhood in the rural south, 1865-1920*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Pargin, D. (2016, October 12). How half of America lost its f**king mind. *Cracked.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.cracked.com/blog/6-reasons-trumps-rise-that-no-one-talks-about/>. (Written under the pseudonym David Wong).
- Patterson, P. (1999). Anatomy of a reformation: The Southern Baptist Convention 1978-1994. *Faith and Mission*, 16(3), 60–77.
- Pearce, W. B., Littlejohn, S. W., & Alexander, A. (1987). The new Christian right and the humanist response: Reciprocated diatribe. *Communication Quarterly*, 35(2), 171–192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463378709369679>
- Peshkin, A. (1985). God's choice: The total world of a fundamentalist Christian school. *Educational Leadership*, 43(4), 36–41.
- Pinker, S. (2019). *Enlightenment now: The case for reason, science, humanism, and progress*. Penguin Books.
- Platoff, E. (2017, December 12). Paul Pressler, former Texas judge and religious right leader, accused of sexually assaulting teen for years. *Texas Tribune*. Retrieved from <https://www.texastribune.org/2017/12/12/paul-pressler-former-texas-judge-and-religious-right-leader-accused-se/>
- Pollock, M. A., Artz, L., Frey, L. R., Pearce, W. B., & Murphy, B. A. O. (1996). Navigating between Scylla and Charybdis: continuing the dialogue on communication and social justice. *Communication Studies*, 47, 142–151. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510979609368470>
- Ramakrishna, K. (2021). The white supremacist penetration of western security forces: The wider implications. *New England Journal of Public Policy*, 33(2), 1–14.
- Reich, W. (1974). *Listen, Little Man!* Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Rushing, J. H. (1983). The rhetoric of American Western myth. *Communication Monographs*, 50, 14–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758309390151>
- Rushing, J. H. (2006). *Erotic mentoring: Women's transformations in the university*. Left Coast Press.
- Rushing, J. H., & Frenz, T. S. (1995). *Projecting the shadow: The cyborg hero in American film*. University of Chicago Press.
- Rushing, J. H., & Frenz, T. S. (1999). The gods must be crazy: The denial of descent in academic scholarship. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 85, 229–246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335639909384259>
- Shaw, S. M. (2008). Gracious submission: Southern Baptist fundamentalists and women. *NWSA Journal*, 20(1), 51–77.
- Shupe, A. (1989). The Reconstructionist movement on the New Christian Right. *The Christian Century*, 106(28), 880–882.
- Singhal A. (2010). Communicating what works! Applying the positive deviance approach in health communication. *Health Communication*, 25(6/7), 605–606. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2010.496835>
- Singhal, A., & Bjurström, E. (2015). Reframing the practice of social research: Solving complex problems by valuing positive deviations. *International Journal of Communication and Social Research*, 3(1), 1–12.
- Singhal, A., & Svenkerud, P. J. (2019). Flipping the diffusion of innovations paradigm: Embracing the positive deviance approach to social change. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 29(2), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1326365X19857010>
- Smietana, B. (2021, March 1). Appeals court rules in favor of Pressler accuser, says abuse lawsuit can go forward. *Religion News Service*. Retrieved from <https://religionnews.com/2021/03/01/appeals-court-rules-in-favor-of-pressler-accuser-says-abuse-lawsuit-can-go-forward/>

- Spencer, N. (2021, January 7). The rise of Christian populism. *Theosthinktank*. Retrieved from <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2021/01/07/the-rise-of-christian-populism>
- Stroud, S. R. (2002). Religion and hate: fantasy themes within Christian identity rhetoric. *Florida Communication Journal*, 30(1), 34–41.
- Sugg, J. (2005, December). A nation under God. *Mother Jones*. Retrieved from <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2005/12/nation-under-god/>
- Tattoos as evangelical chic. (1998). *The Christian Century*, 115(36), 1240–1241.
- Urban, E., & Orbe, M. P. (2007). “The syndrome of the boiled frog:” exploring international students on us campuses as co-cultural group members. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 36(2), 117–138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475750701478695>
- Valenzano III, J. M., & Edwards, J. A. (2012). The debate confessional: Newt Gingrich, John King and atoning for past sins. *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric*, 2(2), 30–38.
- Wacker, G., Pavlischek, K. J., Charles, J. D., & Wuthnow, R. (1995). The scandal of the evangelical mind. *First Things*, 51, 35–41.
- Ware, B. L., & Linkugel, W. A. (1973). They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 59(3), 273–283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335637309383176>
- Wilson, A. F. (2018). #whitegenocide, the alt-right and conspiracy theory: how secrecy and suspicion contributed to the mainstreaming of hate. *Secrecy and Society* 1(2), 1–47. <https://doi.org/10.31979/2377-6188.2018.010201>
- Wittman, D. E. (2004). Freedom and irresponsibility: Fundamentalism’s effect on academic freedom in Southern Baptist life. *Baptist History and Heritage*, 39(1), 80–96.
- Worthen, M. (2008). The Chalcedon Problem: Rousas John Rushdoony and the origins of Christian Reconstructionism. *Church History*, 77(2), 399–437. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640708000590>
- Yoos, G. E. (1979). A revision of the concept of ethical appeal. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 12(1), 41–58.

Hidden Figures to Role Model Figures: Feminism, Intersectional Oppression, and Public Memory in the Film *Hidden Figures*

Dominique Hughes and Valerie L. Schrader

Using rhetorical analysis as a research method, we analyze the 2016 film Hidden Figures, which is set in the 1960s and centers around a trio of African American women who worked at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and played a vital role in sending John Glenn to space during the space race between the United States and Soviet Union. In this analysis, we explore how messages concerning feminism and intersectional oppression are conveyed through Hidden Figures. We also apply Blair, Dickinson, & Ott's (2010) six assumptions of public memory to the film, specifically focusing on how memories of past events can bring awareness to present day concerns. By watching Hidden Figures, viewers may reflect on the racial and gender discrimination that African American women faced in the 1960s and may be inspired to fight against these same issues of discrimination in the 21st century. Furthermore, Hidden Figures brings to light the lack of African American history stories told in the K-12 history curriculum, and we advocate for the inclusion of stories like those of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, which may inspire the next generation to take a stand against sexism, racism, and intersectional oppression.

Key Words: *Collective memory, public memory, feminism, intersectionality, rhetoric, film*

Hidden Figures, a 20th Century Fox film produced by Theodore Melfi ("Company Credits," n.d., para. 1), tells a true story that has been adapted from Margot Lee Shetterly's book *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race* (Mansoor, 2017, para. 1). *Hidden Figures* is set in Virginia, where Katherine Johnson, portrayed by Taraji P. Henson, and her two friends Dorothy Vaughan, played by Octavia Spencer, and Mary Jackson, portrayed by Janelle Monáe, are NASA employees ("Synopsis," n.d., para. 3). While these three women's contributions to the space program led to successes in the Friendship and Apollo missions, they were not recognized at the time for their contributions due to gender and racial discrimination ("Plot Summary," n.d., para. 1).

The film was successful, both financially and critically. In its opening weekend, *Hidden Figures* made \$515,499 at just 25 theaters ("Grosses," n.d., para. 1). The gross earnings for the film accumulated to \$169,607,287, and the film ranked first in the third week of its release ("Box Office," n.d., para. 2-3). Critics also praised the film. Scott (2016) of *The New York Times* reports that "*Hidden Figures* effectively conveys the poisonous normalcy of white supremacy, and the main characters' determination to pursue their ambitions in spite of it and to live normal lives in its shadow. The racism they face does not depend on the viciousness or virtue of individual white people" (para. 6). Cruz (2017) of *The Atlantic* states, "*Hidden Figures* shines with respect for sisterhood and the communistic spirit, and in casting its spotlight wide, the film imparts a profound appreciation for what was achieved in history's shadows" (para. 14). Henderson (2016) of *Roger Ebert* notes that if he had watched this movie thirty years ago as a young African

Dominique Hughes is a recent honors graduate from Penn State University with a B.A. in Corporate Communication and a minor in Communication Arts and Sciences. She is currently a graduate student at Towson University pursuing a M.S. degree in Marketing Intelligence. Valerie Lynn Schrader (Ph.D., Ohio University) is a Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences at Penn State University's Schuylkill campus.

American man deciding to study math and computer science, he may have been more confident in that decision (para. 9). Henderson (2016) states that he hopes “*Hidden Figures* will inspire women and people of color (and hell, men too) with its gentle assertion that there’s nothing unusual nor odd about people besides White men being good at math” (para. 10).

At the beginning of the movie, Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary are harassed by a racist police officer (“Synopsis,” n.d., para. 3). When the women explain that they work for NASA, the police officer is surprised that NASA hired three women of color. Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary explain that they “work at the West Area Computing division and are segregated from the rest of Langley Research Center” (“Synopsis,” n.d., para. 5). The women who work in this area follow a precise dress code of “skirts below the knee and no jewelry except maybe pearls” (“Synopsis,” n.d., para. 6). Katherine moves to the flight research division, Mary attempts to enter the engineering program, and Dorothy requests a promotion to supervisor (“Synopsis,” n.d., para 6). Each is underestimated by her colleagues, who doubt her capabilities and intelligence. Katherine, as the first woman of color in her new department, is not expected to last long and is told not to speak to the department head, Mr. Harrison, unless spoken to first (Melfi, 2016, 16:08). Tensions build up over time between Katherine and her colleague, Paul Stafford, but she gains his respect after being able to provide the longitude and latitude to where John Glenn’s space shuttle will land (“Synopsis,” n.d. para. 19-20). Mary helps the engineers adjust the space capsule by suggesting trying other fasteners, and this causes the head engineer, Karl Zielinski, to suggest that Mary should be an engineer; however, this is impossible as the schools that provide engineering programs do not accept people of color (“Synopsis,” n.d., para. 7). After a long battle and a court ruling, Mary is granted the right to attend school for engineering but is restricted to night classes (“Synopsis,” n.d., para. 21). Dorothy, stuck computing, finds ways to prove herself to the men in her department, and she gains respect after resolving an issue with the IBM computer (“Synopsis,” n.d., para. 22). Throughout the film, Katherine, Mary, and Dorothy are faced with discriminatory situations such as not receiving the credit they deserve, being restricted to certain restrooms, and being treated harshly by fellow colleagues. Eventually, these women gain credit for their contributions: Mary solves the problem Glenn faces during take-off (“Synopsis,” n.d., para. 28), Dorothy is promoted “to supervisor in the Analysis and Computation Division” (para. 29), and Katherine is awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2015 for her calculations on trajectories for the 1969 Apollo 11 flight to the moon and for Apollo 13 (para. 30).

In this essay, we use rhetorical criticism as a research method to analyze the film *Hidden Figures* for messages related to feminism, the fight for equality in the workplace, and the discrimination faced by women of color. We also explore how the film creates public memory by applying Blair et al.’s (2010) six assumptions of public memory to the film. Through the stories of Mary, Dorothy, and Katherine, *Hidden Figures* brings attention to African American history stories that are not often told in film, television, or in many schools’ K-12 history curricula. *Hidden Figures* encourages viewers to reflect on the racial and gender discrimination in the workplace of the 1960s and to fight against these same issues of discrimination in the 21st century.

Second Wave Feminism and Intersectionality

Hidden Figures is set during the second wave of feminism. Second wave feminism, which rose to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, focused on women’s rights in the workplace, sexuality, and reproductive rights (“Second Wave Feminism,” n.d., para. 2). Second wave feminism encompassed both radical and liberal strains of feminism, and second wave feminists advocated for such issues as “pay equity, the Equal Rights Amendment, stricter sentences for rapists and batterers, and legal abortion” (Bronstein, 2005, p. 785). One of the issues that liberal second wave feminists focused on was ending discrimination of women in the workplace. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan (1963) advocated for the idea of women finding fulfillment outside of the traditional gender roles of housewife and mother (p. 32). The publication of Friedan’s book encouraged women to empower themselves, and many joined the movement,

forming groups like the National Organization for Women and advocating for equal treatment under the law.

A major criticism of second wave feminism is that it focused too much on voices of white, middle-class women, and not enough on voices of women of color, women experiencing poverty, and transwomen (Bronstein, 2005, p. 784). Bell hooks (2003) notes that “it has been difficult for black women and women in exploited and oppressed ethnic groups to give expression to their interest in feminist concerns” due to the “fear of being misunderstood” (p. 55). Women of color experience sexism differently than white women because the sexism they face is intertwined with racism. As the women of the Combahee River Collective (2003) state, it is “difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives, they are most often experienced simultaneously” (p. 166). They note that “many black women have a good understanding of both sexism and racism, but because of the everyday constrictions of their lives cannot risk struggling against them both” (p. 169). Audre Lorde (2003) explains that “when I say I am a Black feminist, I mean I recognize that my power as well as my primary oppressions come as a result of my Blackness as well as my woman-ness, and therefore my struggles on both of these fronts are inseparable” (p. 256). Many feminists of color also experience what Sonja D. Curry-Johnson (2001) describes as “an acute case of multiplicity” due to their racial, feminist, religious, and family identities, which sometimes appear to be in conflict with one another (p. 52).

Sexism is interconnected with racism, homophobia, classism, transphobia, xenophobia, and many other forms of social oppression (Combahee River Collective, 2003; Lorde, 2003; Steinem, 2020). This is referred to as intersectional oppression. In an interview with *Time* magazine, Kimberlé Crenshaw defined intersectionality as “a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other” (Steinmetz, 2020, para. 2). In *Hidden Figures*, Katherine, Mary, and Dorothy experience intersectional oppression, and this depiction enables viewers to reflect on issues related to sexism and racism during the 1960s and apply what they have learned to movements fighting against the same issues today.

Public Memory

Public memory is defined as “beliefs about the past [that] are shared among members of a group, whether a local community or the citizens of a nation state” (Blair, et al., 2010, p. 6), and it is socially constructed through “conversations with others that occur in the contexts of community” (Thelan, 1989, p. 1119). Blair et al. (2010) observe six assumptions about public memory. First, public memory “is activated by present concerns, issues or anxieties” (p. 6). We reflect on past events through present-day challenges. We “select, distill, distort, and transform the past, accommodating things remembered to the needs of the present” (p. 7). Second, public memory “narrates shared identities, constructing senses of communal belonging” (p. 6). Audience members often feel a symbolic connection with a group and unite with members of this group based on their own communal knowledge. Third, public memory “is animated by affect” (p. 6), and it “embraces events, people, objects, and places” that are significant to preserve (p. 7). This connects public memory to *pathos* as this assumption implies an emotional attachment for group members. The fourth assumption of public memory is that it “is partial, partisan, and thus often contested” (p. 6). Public memory cannot possibly encompass everyone’s knowledge about a particular event, person, or issue. Some communities may discuss specific historical events more than others, causing particular details to slip away, and they may speak highly of one person over another individual (p. 7). Because public memory is inherently partial, it is often challenged by communities who have different perspectives of the past (p. 7). Blair et al. (2010) also observe that public memory “relies on material and/or symbolic supports” (p. 6). Material supports include physical items, such as documents, clothing, and photographs. Symbolic supports are rhetorical, such as language and performance. Finally, Blair et al. (2010) note that “memory has a history” (p. 6). Public memory is historically and culturally situated because “cultural practice and intellectual status have changed over time and in different societies” (p. 8).

Furthermore, it is important to note that public memory can differ from documented history (Houdek & Phillips, 2017). While documented history is concerned with impartiality and authenticity (though one may question if impartiality and authenticity are ever truly possible), public memory “is essentially subjective, taking on meaning from the community that shares it” (Schrader, 2021, p. 8). In this essay, we explore how public memory of the careers and contributions of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, which seem to have been forgotten by documented history, is created through the film *Hidden Figures*, as well as the implications the creation of this memory has for current empowerment movements.

Feminism, Race, and Intersectional Oppression in *Hidden Figures*

In the 1960s, women’s career choices were limited. Women often pursued careers in the “nursing, social work, and teaching professions” (Friedan, 1963, p. 17). Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary challenge this social norm by being “computers” for NASA, illustrating their talents at math. At the beginning of the film, Dorothy tells a police officer that “there are quite a few women working in the Space Program” (Melfi, 2016, 05:07), which he finds surprising, as it was considered a place where men worked. *Hidden Figures* begins with Katherine Johnson, a single, widowed mother to three girls. She works a full-time job to support her daughters, who have big dreams for their mother in her career at NASA. Throughout the film, Katherine breaks the 1960s societal norms for working-class women of color. During the 1960s, working-class women of color were often seen working in the service industries whereas middle-class and wealthy white women were often housewives. Women of color had higher participation rates in the labor force which “extended over their lifetimes, even after marriage, while white women were often seen leaving the workforce after marriage” (Banks, 2019, para. 3). In *Hidden Figures*, Katherine pursues a career outside of what was traditionally considered work for women of color – one that she enjoys and utilizes her intellectual skill, which aligns with the second wave feminist concept of finding fulfillment outside of traditional gender roles (Friedan, 1963). Throughout the film, Katherine, Mary, and Dorothy contend with doubts about their abilities from both colleagues and their own husbands. Katherine’s capability in math is doubted by those in her department, as she was told that her work is “more or less a dummy check” for others who already checked the calculations (Melfi, 2016, 40:10). Dorothy’s boss also doubts her capabilities by refusing her the supervisor title even though she essentially is a supervisor for the “colored computers,” women of color who complete math calculations for NASA by hand. Furthermore, Mary’s husband and her colleagues doubt her abilities when they question her intelligence as a woman and suggest that she is incapable of entering the engineering program because she is African American. Mary’s husband tells her there “ain’t no such thing” as her becoming a female engineer because of her race (Melfi, 2016, 33:57). When Mary’s supervisor, Vivian, denies her application for the program, she reminds Mary that “NASA doesn’t commission females for the Engineer Trainin’ Program” (Melfi, 2016, 46:48). The issue of Mary’s intelligence being questioned based on her gender and race illustrates how social identities overlap, creating a compound of discrimination experiences. As the women of the Combahee River Collective (2003) note, the “major systems” of “racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression” are “interlocking” (p. 164). Here, Mary not only faces discrimination based on her gender but also based on her race. Numerous male characters in the film doubt the women’s intelligence by suggesting that they are incapable of using the technology their fellow colleagues utilize, illustrating the intersectional oppression that women of color faced in the workplace in the 1960s. In *Hidden Figures*, Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary face discrimination in and out of the workplace. One example outside of the workplace is when Dorothy visits the library with her sons and is looking for a book in the “white section” because they did not have what she was looking for in the “colored section.” A white woman approaches her and immediately associates violence with Dorothy and her sons and has them escorted from the library. After experiencing this, Dorothy has to explain to her sons that “separate and equal are two different things. Just cause it’s the way, doesn’t make it right” (Melfi,

2016, 50:23). This scene illustrates 1960s segregation and the discrimination African Americans faced outside of the workplace.

In another scene that takes place outside of work, Mary begins her classes for the engineering program, becoming the first woman of color to attend an all-white school (Melfi, 2016, 1:12:10). When Mary first arrives for classes, her professor tells her that the program is “not designed for teaching... a woman” (Melfi, 2016, 1:31:20). Mary responds to this comment by saying, “Well, I imagine it’s the same as teaching a man. I don’t see a colored section. Should I take any seat?” (Melfi, 2016, 1:31:26). The challenge Mary faced regarding entering an engineer program further illustrates how racism and sexism are intertwined.

In the movie, intersectional oppression is most often seen when the women are at work. One example involves the use of the restroom at NASA. Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary faced discrimination in regards to which bathroom they were permitted to use. When Katherine moves to a different department, she is still required to run across the NASA campus and back to the West Computing Group to use the restroom because there were no restrooms for women of color near her department. Katherine takes her work with her to the restroom in order to avoid her colleagues staring in judgment at her as she was the first person of color to join their group. The men in Katherine’s department also judge her when she pours herself a cup of coffee from the same coffee pot they use. Because of the discomfort she feels in her new assignment, Katherine assumes she will “be back with the computers in a week. Or out of a job entirely” (Melfi, 2016, 27:57). Katherine faces intersectional oppression not only because she was the only woman assigned to her department, but also because she was the only person of color in her assigned department. Additionally, the restriction put on Katherine to not speak to her supervisor unless spoken to further illustrates both the racism and sexism that women of color faced in the workplace during the 1960s. This restriction is indicative of the power structures that were used and created to “retain male dominance and supremacy” (Rahman, 2022, para. 20). Throughout the movie, Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary continuously submit work to NASA illustrating their skills and intelligence, but as their work is accepted and appropriated, they are never rewarded or recognized.

The struggles of Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary in the workplace shown in the film connect to problems in current workplaces. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women were more negatively impacted than men, often being laid off or furloughed; this stalled their careers, and it disproportionately impacted women of color (Coury, Huang, Kumar, Krivkovich, Prince, & Yee, 2020, para. 3). Women of color already face barriers to advancement more than most other employees (Coury et al., 2020, para. 3). Coury et al. (2020) state that “since 2015, we’ve seen only modest signs of progress in the representation of women in the corporate pipeline” (para. 7). They note that from “January 2015 [to] January 2020, representation of women in vice-president positions grew from 23% to 28%, and representation in the C-suite grew from 17% to 21%” (Coury et al., 2020, para. 6). Though there has been some increase in women’s representation in the workplace, women remain drastically underrepresented, especially women of color. There have been many changes in workplaces since the 1960s, but there are still structures in place today that prevent many women of color from advancing in the workplace.

The film requires audience members to confront flaws in their own thoughts, rather than encouraging them to feel detached. Racist and sexist characters are abundant throughout the film but are understandable rather than demonized or contextualized within an oppressive system. For example, one antagonist is Paul Stafford, a colleague of Katherine’s and the head engineer of the Space Task Group, who blocks an opportunity for Katherine, causing the request of her name on their joint work to be denied. Paul’s irrational logic behind this decision is based on the statement that “computers don’t author reports” (Melfi, 2016, 1:21:26). He justifies discrimination by blaming Katherine’s job title. While Paul’s ambition is understandable, systemic inequality provides him with a way to utilize his privilege to obtain unfair career advantages. Sadly, systemic inequality still exists in many workplaces today (“Global Issues,” n.d.). The film

illustrates the importance of an intersectional understanding of inequality experienced during the 1960s, as women of color were discriminated against more than white women. In the film, white women working at NASA are aware of how fragile their place is within the center, but they neglect the use of their privilege to bring attention to the value of the women of color they work with because of the racism they see in their community. These women often reflect the communal discrimination against people of color in their workplace as a way to fit in. This is demonstrated in the film between Dorothy and her supervisor Vivian. Vivian is apathetic towards Dorothy's application for a supervisor role and about women of color at NASA. Vivian admits to Dorothy that her career and the careers of other "colored computers" are in jeopardy due to the installation of a mechanical computer. Vivian claims that the "IBM...can do [their] calculations in a fraction of the time" (Melfi, 2016, 42:16). Vivian is seen as an oppressor and her racial biases have allowed her to accept this blatant unfairness in such a way that is soothing for herself. Additionally, Vivian has a hard time comprehending Dorothy's insistence that she will only accept a new assignment if she can protect the women of color she supervises. While jobs were set to be eliminated following John Glenn's launch into space, Dorothy saves the "computers" jobs when she brings them with her to her new assignment (Melfi, 2016, 1:27:42). Vivian is jarred by the idea of Dorothy doing work for someone other than herself, and she doesn't understand the idea of standing up for others who need it.

The character of Vivian illustrates the focus on white middle-class women's experiences for which second wave feminism is often criticized (Bronstein, 2005, p. 784). Audre Lorde (2003), bell hooks (2003), the women of the Combahee River Collective (2003), among many others, have noted that Black women's voices and voices of other women of color have often been left out of the movement. Vivian, as a white woman in a powerful position, does not understand the importance of helping other women, and in particular women of a different race, succeed in the workplace. She is also unaware of her own prejudices. In one scene, Vivian tells Dorothy, "despite what you may think...I have nothin' against y'all," referring to the "colored computers" (Melfi, 2016, 1:35:01). Dorothy responds, "I know. I know you probably believe that" (Melfi, 2016, 1:35:01). Vivian is attempting to show that she, too, can champion the women she works with, but Dorothy recognizes Vivian's inability to see past her own experiences as a white woman in a more powerful position than her Black colleagues. In *Hidden Figures*, Vivian's character exemplifies the disconnect in the second wave feminist movement.

Hidden Figures enables viewers to root for Katherine, Mary, and Dorothy, recognize their struggles, and rejoice in their triumphs, but it is important that viewers do not forget how hard they worked for these triumphs. In order to uproot racism and sexism in the workplace, individuals must advocate for one another, just as Dorothy did for the other computers of color and just as Mary did when she was appointed to the position of Langley's Women's Program Manager, which enabled to her fight "to advance women of all colors" (Melfi, 2016, 1:57:34). *Hidden Figures* inspires viewers to learn from Mary and Dorothy's efforts towards gender and racial equality in the workplace and encourages viewers to recognize that these goals are only achievable if current feminist movements are inclusive of all women.

Public Memory in *Hidden Figures*

Hidden Figures also creates public memory of the professional workforce in the 1960s, particularly for formally educated women of color who struggled against a sexist and racist system and the white men who benefitted from it and perpetuated it. The Civil Rights Movement was well under way during Katherine, Mary, and Dorothy's time at NASA, but segregation was still in effect and discrimination was an everyday occurrence. One example of discrimination in the film is when Dorothy and her two sons see a crowd of men and women peacefully protesting, holding signs, and chanting, "Segregation must go" (Melfi, 2016, 49:15). The crowd is soon surrounded by the police.

For some viewers, this scene may connect to present issues regarding how some white individuals associate violence with people of color, even when they are peacefully protesting for

equality, or how the media frequently portrays men and women of color in a way that implies reckless behavior. This lack of positive media representation of people of color can lead to the public associating violence with race. Hall (1978) speculated that there are fundamental influences in the media that contribute to the preservation of racism in society. This can be seen in the way that news stories are framed and how people of color are depicted in these stories (Hall, 1978). Since we still see evidence of systemic racism in America through media, and because *Hidden Figures* focuses on the issues surrounding racial disparities during the 1960s, viewers are likely to connect these two concerns, thus connecting the past with the present. Kilgo (2021) suggests that “social media networks add immense complexity to the conceptualization of and discourse about racism, from the distribution of racist rhetoric through social media venues to the engagement of audiences with coverage about racism” (p. 191). The intersectionality of sexism and racism also play a role. In her study on several major news networks and their social media accounts, Kilgo (2021) found “posts about racism’s intersections with sexism and women’s issues” (p. 194). This intersectional oppression is also seen in the gender wage gap and racial wage gap. The racial wage gap “led to persistent wage disparities between workers of color and white workers” (Frye, 2019, para. 3). We see this wage gap in *Hidden Figures* through discussion about Dorothy’s supervisor title. When Dorothy asks about her application, Vivian responds “The answer is no. They’re not assigning a permanent supervisor to the colored group” (Melfi, 2016, 12:03). Just as Dorothy would not receive the compensation she deserved, many people, including men of color, women, and LGBTQ+ individuals, are still experiencing this lack of equality. Therefore, the intersectional oppression portrayed in the film can still be observed today.

Blair et al. (2010) note that memory permits individuals to feel a sense of communal belonging (p. 6). Communities are often created this way as people seek out others who share common interests. *Hidden Figures* inspired many to create programs and communities surrounding the idea of making a difference for women in the workplace. A program called #HiddenNoMore, which was inspired by *Hidden Figures*, was designed by the U.S. Department of State and 21st Century Fox for female leaders in STEM (Schleifer, 2018, para. 1). This program brought 50 women from 50 countries together so that they could learn from one another and be inspired by the female leaders they met through the program (Schleifer, 2018). Schleifer (2018) attests that this program, which enabled participants to form a community, “truly changed [her] life” (para. 1), noting that “it was truly special to be in a group of like-minded women that are all having similar struggles. I felt a huge sense of belonging, and I am forever grateful for this experience” (para. 24). These women advocated for one another and supported each other, which is a necessary component in the fight for equality for all.

The third assumption of public memory is that it is animated by affect (Blair et al., 2010, p. 6). The director of *Hidden Figures* continuously evokes emotions from viewers throughout the film. Experiences that would trigger empathetic and sympathetic emotions are strategically placed throughout the film to trigger these emotions in viewers. The film highlights the hardships Katherine, Mary, and Dorothy had to endure through numerous scenes. Emotions are sparked from the inequality portrayed in how Katherine is never treated the same as her white male colleagues, how Mary is prevented from obtaining the education she longs for, and how Dorothy is denied the title of supervisor. Viewers may feel outraged by these injustices, and they may feel sympathy for Mary, Dorothy, and Katherine. These emotions may cause viewers to make connections with current systemic inequality in the workplace and encourage them to work to end these inequalities.

In the fourth assumption of public memory, Blair et al. (2010) explain that memory is “partial and partisan, which means that not all voices are heard within a story” (p. 6). During the 1960s, women of color were often silenced in both the second wave feminist movement and the Civil Rights Movement. Women of color “had been the backbone of the civil rights movement, but their contributions were deemphasized as black men – often emasculated by white society –

felt compelled to adopt patriarchal roles” (Penrice, n.d., para. 1). Women of color would often turn to the feminist movement, where “white women discriminated against them and devoted little attention to class issues that seriously affected [women of color], who tended to also be poor” (Penrice, n.d., para. 1). Through *Hidden Figures*, viewers learn about the difficulties women of color faced during the 1960s through Dorothy, Katherine, and Mary’s work at NASA, thus bringing stories that have not been frequently told to light. While *Hidden Figures* is limited in its scope because it only tells the story of three women, rather than stories of other women working at NASA and the stories of other women of color during the 1960s in other industries, these three stories need to be told. These are stories that viewers are likely unfamiliar with due to the lack of focus on African American history in film, television, and K-12 curricula across the country. These inspiring stories, though partial, need to be told as they are relatively unknown to the general public.

The fifth assumption explains how “memory relies on material and/or symbolic supports” (Blair et al., 2010, p. 6). Through its sets and costumes, *Hidden Figures* enables viewers to reflect on segregation in the 1960s workplace and the strict rules to which the women were required to adhere. In the beginning of the film, it is explained to Katherine that she must wear precise attire for her new task group. She was told, “Skirts must be worn past the knee. Sweaters are preferred to blouses. No jewelry. A simple pearl necklace is the exception” (Melfi, 2016, 15:49). These strict rules, which are reflected in the costumes serving as material supports in the film, further contribute to the film’s intersectional oppression awareness message. Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary’s jobs at NASA were fragile – one misstep in their choice of workwear could have resulted in their termination. Material supports related to segregation are also found throughout the film, including segregated water fountains, bathrooms, lunchrooms, and the entrance at the courthouse. Through these material supports in the form of sets, viewers may be better able to visualize what the 1960s segregated workplace looked like, thus creating public memory of the discriminatory practice of segregation.

The final assumption of public memory is that it has history. Blair et al. (2010) explain that public memory is “historically situated” and changes with time and culture (p. 10). *Hidden Figures* has its own history, as this text was first a book, released just four months prior to the film’s release date of January 6, 2017 (“Release Date,” n.d.). A sense of memory is created as viewers reflect on the novel and film adaptation. Those who have read the book prior to viewing the film have formed a collective memory of Katherine, Mary, and Dorothy based on their portrayal in the book. Due to the popularity of the medium of film, the film was able to convey its message to a greater audience than the book could have reached, creating public memory for more viewers about these important but not widely recognized stories.

Discussion

This rhetorical analysis applied concepts related to feminism and intersectionality as well as Blair et al.’s (2010) six assumptions of public memory to the 2016 film *Hidden Figures*. Through *Hidden Figures*, viewers can reflect on how racism and sexism were intertwined during the 1960s and make connections to how intersectional oppression exists today. Viewers may also note how public memory’s connection to present concerns is illustrated in the film through Dorothy, Katherine, and Mary’s experiences with discrimination in the workplace. This reflects present day issues as women still experience discrimination in the workplace pertaining to pay and sexual harassment. Today, women are still fighting for equality in the workplace, and the gender wage gap is still a problem in many American workplaces (Wilson, 2006, p. 1). According to research from the Institute for Women’s Policy Research (2022), “women still earn 83 cents for every dollar that men earn for full-time work” (Lutz, 2022, para. 1). The film also illustrates the racial discrimination that people of color experienced in the 1960s workplace, and this too connects with present issues, as people of color often struggle to make their way to the top of their profession. Roberts and Washington (2019) suggest that “factors preventing women of color from advancing at work are quite different from those holding white women and even men of

color back” (para. 4). Even in the 21st century, women are still experiencing discrimination and harassment in the workplace, and *Hidden Figures* enables viewers to reflect on the discrimination of the past and how it may connect with current struggles towards equality.

While *Hidden Figures* brings attention to Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson’s stories, because the film’s focus is on these three stories, other stories are left out. One omission is the lack of African American men’s stories; in fact, the only African American men in significant roles in the film are the women’s romantic partners. This choice, though likely made in order to highlight the women’s stories, suggests that African American men did not work at NASA in the 1960s, which is not true (Fletcher, n.d.). One important example is Clyde Foster, who was among the first African Americans to work for NASA when it first opened in 1958 (Fletcher, n.d.). Foster’s accomplishments included demanding training programs for men and women of color, which resulted in more than 100 African American employees taking part in NASA’s “separate-but-equal” trainings (Fletcher, n.d., para. 22). Foster went on to recruit African Americans trained in science and engineering to work for NASA (Fletcher, n.d., para. 24). However, because *Hidden Figures* focuses on the experiences of women of color who work as computers, other stories, such as Clyde Foster’s story, are left out. While this aligns with the assumption that public memory is “partial, partisan, and thus often contested” (Blair et al., 2010, p. 6), the omission of men of color in NASA positions in the film creates a public memory that men of color were not working at NASA in the 1960s. This lack of focus on African American men’s experiences may impact the creation of public memory and how the audience views the discrimination depicted in the film.

It is important to note that as a film designed to entertain, certain artistic liberties were taken in order to highlight particular experiences and to create a heartwarming, uplifting story. Grace Wood (2021) points out some inconsistencies between the film and what Katherine Johnson explained was her real-life experience; for example, Johnson claimed that she used the “whites only” restroom instead of running across campus, and that she was not invited into the control room to watch the Friendship 7 launch (Wood, 2021). These experiences were likely changed for the film in order to highlight the discriminatory segregation policies (in the case of the bathroom scenes) and to create an inspiring storyline (in the case of the shuttle launch). While the public memory created by the film may not align perfectly with documented history, it nevertheless brings attention to important stories and important figures that are often glossed over or completely ignored in documented history.

Hidden Figures turned Dorothy Vaughan, Mary Jackson, and Katherine Johnson from hidden figures to role model figures. This is illustrated by the creation of a program established by 21st Century Fox and the U.S. Department of State that was inspired by the film. This program brought fifty women from fifty countries together to learn from one another and be inspired by female leaders. Viewers may feel inspired by this program and seek to learn more about it.

Viewers who are inspired by these women’s stories may also be interested in learning more about African American history. Natalie Colarossi (2020) of *The Insider* argues that the lack of requirements for including African American history in the K-12 curriculum is further exacerbated by textbooks offering “sanitized” versions of African American history (para. 6). In her article, Colarossi (2020) interviews LaGarrett King, developer of the Carter Center of K-12 Black History Education, who proposes that teachers should be educated about African American history, promote African American perspectives, and maintain the momentum started by the Black Lives Matter movement regarding interest in African American history, all while maintaining an open mind (para. 40). Creating public memory of African American history is especially important in 2023, as education in some states is facing challenges to curricula that involves race and gender. This is perhaps best illustrated by the recent decision by the Florida Department of Education, which rejected an advanced placement course on African American history due to influence from Governor Ron DeSantis (Heyward, 2023); as a result, the College Board “purged the names of many Black writers and scholars associated with critical race theory,

the queer experience and Black feminism...[as well as] some politically fraught topics, like Black Lives Matter, from the formal curriculum” (Hartocollis & Fawcett, 2023, para. 2). The implications of such changes have the potential to silence a community that has consistently had to fight to make their voices heard throughout history. As Becky Pringle, President of the National Education Association, notes, “When we censor classes and whitewash lesson plans, we harm our students and do them a deep disservice” (Heyward, 2023, para. 5). Films such as *Hidden Figures* can contribute to the goal of increasing awareness about African American history and African American stories that are not often told and may be in danger of being silenced in K-12 curricula.

As with all studies, this essay has its limitations. One limitation is that we only focused on the film adaptation of *Hidden Figures*; future research may include studying Margot Lee Shetterly’s book *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Who Helped Win the Space Race*. Future research may study how public memory and concepts related to feminism and intersectional oppression are created through each format of their stories. Future research may also explore how public memory and concepts related to feminism and intersectional oppression are illustrated through other films that focus on African American history stories.

Hidden Figures brings light to the stories of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, who were instrumental in the success of some of NASA’s most successful missions in the 1960s. Unfortunately, until the publication of Shetterly’s book and the film adaptation, few individuals were aware of these inspirational women’s stories. These stories may cause viewers to be more aware of the racial and gender discrimination of the past and may encourage them to reflect on current issues related to racial and gender inequality. Through this film, Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson are no longer “hidden figures” but role model figures who continue to inspire a new generation in the fight for gender and racial equality.

References

- Banks, N. (2019). Black women’s labor market history reveals deep-seated race and gender discrimination. *Economic Policy Institute*. <https://www.epi.org/blog/black-womens-labor-market-history-reveals-deep-seated-race-and-gender-discrimination/>
- Blair, C., Dickinson, G. & Ott, B. L. (2010). Introduction. In G. Dickinson, C. Blair, & B. L. Ott (Eds.), *Places of public memory: The rhetoric of museums and memorials* (pp. 1-54). University of Alabama Press.
- Bronstein, C. (2005). Representing the third wave: mainstream print media framing of a new feminist movement. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 82(4), 783-803.
- Colarossi, N. (2020). The U.S. still does a wretched job of teaching Black history. An expert in African American history education explains how to fix it. *The Insider*. <https://www.insider.com/how-to-improve-how-black-history-is-taught-in-schools-2020-6>.
- Combahee River Collective (2003). A Black feminist statement. In C. R. McCann & S-K. Kim (Eds.), *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (pp. 164-171). Routledge.
- Company Credits. (n.d.). *Hidden Figures* (2016). *IMDb*. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4846340/companycredits>
- Coury, S., Huang, J., Kumar, A., Krivkovich, A., Prince, S., & Yee, L. (2020). Women in the workplace 2020. *McKinsey*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace#>
- Crawford, B. (2007). Toward a Third-Wave Feminist Legal Theory: Young Women, Pornography, and the Praxis of Pleasure. *Pace Law Faculty*, 99, 1-64.
- Cruz, L. (2017). What Sets the Smart Heroines of *Hidden Figures* Apart. *The Atlantic*.

- <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/01/hidden-figures-review/512252/>
- Curry-Johnson, S. D. (2001). Weaving and Identity Tapestry. In B. Findlen (Ed.), *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* (pp. 51-58). Seal Press.
- Fletcher, M. (n.d.). Another Hidden Figure: Clyde Foster Brought Color to NASA. *Public Broadcasting Service*.
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/chasing-moon-another-hidden-figure-clyde-foster-brought-color-nasa/>
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*. Norton.
- Frye, J. (2019). Racism and Sexism Combine to Shortchange Working Black Women. *Center for American Progress*. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/news/2019/08/22/473775/racism-sexism-combine-shortchange-working-black-women/>
- Global Issues: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. (n.d.) *Peace Corps*.
<https://www.peacecorps.gov/educators/resources/global-issues-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment/>
- Grosses. (n.d.). Hidden Figures. *Box Office Mojo*.
<https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/r13749545473/>
- Hall, S. (1978). *Policing the Crisis*. Constable.
- Hartocollis, A. & Fawcett, E. (2023, February 9). The College Board strips down its AP curriculum for African American studies. *New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/01/us/college-board-advanced-placement-african-american-studies.html>
- Henderson, O. (2016). Hidden Figures. *Roger Ebert*. <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/hidden-figures-2016>
- Heyward, G. (2023, January 27). Critics say Florida aims to rewrite history by rejecting African American studies. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2023/01/27/1151725129/florida-advanced-placement-african-american-studies-backlash>
- Hidden Figures (2016). Financial Information. *The Numbers*.
<https://www.the-numbers.com/movie/Hidden-Figures#tab=box-office>
- hooks, b. (2003). Feminism: A movement to end sexist oppression. In C. R. McCann & S-K. Kim (Eds.), *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (pp. 50-56). Routledge.
- Houdek, M. & Phillips, K. R. (2017). Public memory. *Oxford Encyclopedia of Communication*.
<http://communication.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-181#acrefore-9780190228613-e-181-bibItem-0022>
- Kilgo, K. (2021). When is the “Racist” Designation Truly Applicable? News Media’s Contribution to the Debatability of Racism. *Television & New Media*, 22(2), 186-204.
- Lorde, A. (2003). I am your sister: Black women organizing across sexualities. In C. R. McCann & S-K. Kim (Eds.), *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (pp. 255-265). Routledge.
- Lutz, W. (2022). Equal Pay Day 2022: Despite wage gains in recent months, women still earn just 83 percent of what men make across most sectors and occupations. *Institute for Women’s Policy Research*. <https://iwpr.org/media/press-releases/equal-pay-day-2022-despite-wage-gains-in-recent-months-women-still-earn-just-83-percent-of-what-men-make-across-most-sectors-and-occupations/>
- Mansoor, M. (2017, February 27). A Feminist Reading of Hidden Figures. *Feminism in India*.
<https://feminisminindia.com/2017/02/27/feminist-film-review-hidden-figures/>
- Melfi, T. (Director). (2016). *Hidden Figures* [Motion Picture]. Fox Film.
- Penrice, R. (n.d.). Facing Racism and Sexism: Black Women in America.
<https://www.dummies.com/education/history/american-history/facing-racism-and-sexism-black-women-in-america/>

- Plot Summary. (n.d.). Hidden Figures (2016). *IMDb*.
https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4846340/plotsummary/?ref_=tt_stry_pl
- Rahman, H. (2022). The Subordination Of Women: An Analysis Of The History Of Gender Oppression. *Feminism In India*. <https://feminisminindia.com/2022/03/09/the-subordination-of-women-an-analysis-of-the-history-of-gender-oppression/>
- Release Date. (n.d.). Hidden Figures (2016). *IMDb*.
https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4846340/releaseinfo/?ref_=tt_dt_rdat
- Schrader, V. L. (2021). *Public Memory and the Television Series Outlander*. Lexington Books.
- Schleifer, M. (2018). #HiddenNoMore: My Experience of the International Visitor Leadership Program. <https://medium.com/@marion.schleifer/hiddennomore-my-experience-of-the-international-visitor-leadership-program-b524a9ad198f>
- Scott, A. O. (2016, December 22). Review: ‘Hidden Figures’ Honors 3 Black Women Who Helped NASA Soar. *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/22/movies/hidden-figures-review.html>
- Second Wave Feminism: Collections. (n.d.). *Gale*. <https://www.gale.com/primary-sources/womens-studies/collections/second-wave-feminism>
- Steinem, G. (2020). What it would be like if women win. *Time*. <https://time.com/5795657/gloria-steinem-womens-liberation-progress/>
- Steinmetz, K. (2020). She coined the term ‘intersectionality’ over 30 years ago. Here’s what it means to her today. *Time*. <https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/>
- Synopsis. (n.d.) Hidden Figures (2016). *IMDb*.
https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4846340/plotsummary?ref_=tt_stry_pl#synopsis
- Thelan, D. (1989). Memory and American history. *Journal of American History*, 75(4), 1117-1129.
- Wilson, D. C. (2006). When Equal Opportunity Knocks. *GALLUP Management Journal*, 1-4.
- Wood, G. (2021, February 22). Film Review: *Hidden Figures* Tells an Important but Over-Simplified Story. *Pepperdine University Graphic*. <https://pepperdine-graphic.com/film-review-hidden-figures-tells-an-important-but-over-simplified-story/#:~:text=While%20%E2%80%9CHidden%20Figures%E2%80%9D%20makes%20meaningful,%2C%20more%20well%2Drounded%20film.>

Rewriting Public Memory: Documentary Filmmaking and the Restoration of Rose Hill

Margaret E. Baker

*Rose Hill Plantation, located in Union South Carolina, along the banks of the Tyger River, and surrounded by Sumter National Forest, originally served as the home of William Henry Gist, a wealthy upstate South Carolinian and the secession Governor. At its peak, the plantation held 150+ enslaved laborers. This work explores the potential for documentary filmmaking to reshape public memory and challenge dominant narratives surrounding American history. Drawing on the example of *Restoring Rose Hill*, a participatory documentary about the legacy of slavery at this former Confederate plantation, documentary functions as a tool for generating dialogue and communicating alternative histories. Using feminist and participatory video frameworks, the film highlights the complex histories of marginalized groups that have been left out of official memorialization efforts, while also exposing the challenges of negotiating contested and uncomfortable pasts. Ultimately, documentary offers a unique opportunity to address pressing issues of injustice and inequality by using storytelling to create more inclusive visions of collective memory.*

Keywords: *Rose Hill Plantation, Documentary, Public Memory, Alternative Histories, Participatory Filmmaking*

Found in South Carolina's Sumter National Forest, along the Tyger River in Union, is Rose Hill Plantation - the original home of wealthy planter Governor William Henry Gist and the more than 100 enslaved people who lived, worked, and died there. In the 1960s, it was repurposed as a house museum honoring the Confederacy. Recently, Rose Hill is re-defining its narrative to recognize the history and legacies of those who were forced to labor there. *Restoring Rose Hill*, which premiered in August 2023, is a short film that explores the significance of Black history at this memory site. In a 32-minute film, interviews with descendants of the former plantation site, conversations with historians and archaeologists, and footage of the plantation's grounds and its land provide a comprehensive portrait of the site's history, crafting a vivid image of the Black communities who used to live in Rose Hill and the initiatives to recognize their contributions. In this paper, critical reflections are presented on southern memorialization, the making of *Restoring Rose Hill* and how filmmaking functions as a tool for the ethical practice of visual storytelling for communication scholars. The powerful nature of visual storytelling through film deepens our sense of empathy and our ability to comprehend and connect with complex issues of the past and present. Through exploring Rose Hill's fraught history and recognition of the people who once lived, worked, and died there, *Restoring Rose Hill* reminds us that historical sites are always layered with legacies of power and inequality, and that understanding these layers remains crucial for connecting the past to the present to forge more equitable futures.

Margaret E. Baker is an instructor and a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication, Rhetoric & Digital Media at North Carolina State University. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Margaret Baker, Department of Communication, 2301 Hillsborough St, Raleigh, NC 27607. Email: mebaker7@ncsu.edu.

About Rose Hill

Located in the heart of the South Carolina Upstate, Rose Hill State Historic Site, a mere seven miles from the city center of Union, South Carolina, began its life as Rose Hill Plantation. Rose Hill found its roots in the Gist Family, when Francis Fincher Gist settled the family in the upstate and rose to prominence as a landowner in the union district. Typically cited dates for the construction of the primary home on the site date the property to sometime between 1828-1832 (Bell 1983, 24). The land was farmed primarily for cotton, with large swaths of land also devoted to corn, oats, and wheat. As an antebellum plantation, the estate grew to nearly 10,000 acres under Governor William Henry Gist, with 179 enslaved individuals on the property in 1860. Following the end of the Civil War, the property turned to sharecropping as a means of enterprise to keep the plantation functioning, and by the 1930s, the primary house fell into ruin. In 1936, President Roosevelt created the Sumter National Forest, which included the land of the Gist family. Three years later, the U.S. Forest Service acquired the Gist estate, including its dilapidated mansion, as part of their portfolio (Giesen, 2020, pp. 30-31). The Forest Service held little interest in preserving the property; at this time, the Fairforest chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution stepped in and asked local Laurens, SC resident Clyde T. Franks to help oversee and fund the restoration of the property (Allen, 1999, p. 7). The primary restoration of the home took place sometime between 1945-1960. Giesen (2020) recognizes that little is known about the initial remodeling and restoration of Rose Hill; however, the available sources suggest it was specifically designed to commemorate the secession movement and Confederacy (p. 31).

Upon Rose Hill's initial restoration completion, the home was privately opened for tours. To emphasize the mansion's history with slavery, Franks hired Louisa Browning, a black woman, to reside in the house and give tours. Browning, wearing a plaid dress, apron, and head wrap, would welcome visitors like the Abbeville Garden Club (Giesen, 2020, p. 32). Franks invokes a 'mammy' character as the tour guide, reinforcing the stereotypes of Black women as subservient, loyal, and happy to serve. The site remained frozen in a period that conveniently erased the power differential between enslaved peoples and slave owners, presenting the plantation as a romantic symbol of Lost Cause mythology. Locals of Union called for the state of South Carolina to purchase Rose Hill in the 1950s; they hoped this would bring more tourists and fund preservation. Their efforts were successful (p.32). The refurbished home reopened for tours in the state parks hands on December 20, 1960 – 100 years to the day of the secession of South Carolina from the Union. The newspaper article written for the Union Daily Times appeared in the "Special Confederate Section, and Giesen (2020) articulates the scene:

...the Union High School marching band and choir serenaded local politicians, religious leaders, and nearly a thousand visitors, for the official dedication ceremony for Rose Hill State Park. Not to be lost in the crowds were men and women dressed in approximations of antebellum clothing to impersonate Governor Gist, his wife, States Rights Gist, and other legendary Confederate men. "For the Glory of God," began the dedication, "and to the Memory of the Southern Confederacy," the new park was given its charge. (p. 32)

From 1960 onward, the site has been interpreted as a 19th and 20th century restored plantation house museum, featuring exhibits and programs exploring William Henry's Gist's contributions to South Carolina. Now, in the wake of increased cries for social justice and the Black Lives Matter movement, Rose Hill is working towards reclaiming its narrative by acknowledging and honoring the once-forgotten lives and contributions of the many enslaved individuals who lived and worked on its land. In recent years, the South Carolina state park system began to work with community stakeholders in and around Union to develop a comprehensive interpretation plan which will guide interpretation, exhibits, tours and more over the next 5-10 years at Rose Hill, indicating that the site actively seeks a new understanding of what the plantation space means. According to Gallas and DeWolf Perry (2014), community

involvement enables organizations to become stronger and more relevant, while also providing meaningful opportunities for potential visitors (p. 32). This plan enacts the crucial work of transforming memory sites to align with current cultural and social thought, and to create a more complete and inclusive picture of memorialization of Confederate sites.

Public Memory Sites

Rose Hill typifies a movement of reconsideration of memorialization across Confederate sites in the United States. Dickinson, Blair, & Ott (2010) offer “public memory” to specifically call attention to the entanglements between the rhetorical emphasis on the public and a mutual understanding of memory that identifies the collective (or the public) as the audience (p.6), and memories studies exhibit that “beliefs about the past are shared among members of a group, whether a local community or the citizens of a nation-state” (Dickinson et. al, 2010, p.6). Memory carries a legacy – both material (in monuments, buildings, street names, etc.) and in the attitudes, principles, and shared beliefs of groups (Upton, 2016; Margalit, 2004). Public memory, however, is contested ground, especially in the United States, where nearly 400 years of systemic racism have shaped commemoratives practices and spaces, from monuments and memorials to parades and plaques. As Gallagher (2004) notes, the material artifacts that make up the “stuff” of memory in many ways “create, sustain, and reproduce racial ideologies” (p.150). Memorial sites activate tensions between memory and forgetting – selective forgetting that reinforces discriminatory attitudes and practices and/or collective forgetting that can be a transformative step in community healing (Assman & Livingstone, 2005). Racism’s imprint on memory is extensive, reaching deep into the heart of the culture and indelibly stamped onto the landscape of how material artifacts educate, remember, and preserve. As a guest on a recent podcast episode, author and journalist Clint Smith acknowledges how museums, memorials, and monuments serve as intentional sites for the creation and perpetuation of competing memories, explicating and foregrounding expressions of power on buildings, monuments, collections, and even the landscapes of languishing spaces.

We know that symbols, names, and iconography are not just symbols, they are reflective of the stories that people tell. And those stories shape the narratives that communities carry. And those narratives shape public policy. And public policy is what shapes the material conditions of people’s lives. And that’s not to say you just take down a statue of Robert E. Lee and suddenly you’ll erase the racial wealth gap. But I do think it would help us to recognize the sort-of ecosystem of ideas and narrative that help ground our understanding of American history and to understand the way certain communities have been disproportionately and intentionally harmed throughout American history (Muhammad, K.G., & Austen, B., 2023).

Here Smith offers a key insight into why memorial sites are so contentious; they demonstrate the vital role that memory plays in shaping our collective narratives. Understanding and articulating the role memory sites play in furthering the ideologies of the Lost Cause and Neo-Confederate movements must be approached with criticality. Smith (2021) argues in his work, *How The Word is Passed*, that much of the story we tell ourselves about history is one we decide to believe. This story becomes an integral part of our identities without us fully understanding it (p.172). The Lost Cause narrative has entrenched itself in American southern identity, becoming an inescapable truth for some but blinding others to more painful and necessary truths. As public conversations continue to spark around the meaning and impact of Confederate monuments, individuals and institutions - including sites like Rose Hill - must reckon with the power of material memory to evoke, endure, or reconfigure social attitudes. Only by embracing imperatives to recenter overlooked stories, prevent collective forgetting, and seek enhanced understandings of our collective heritage can we hope for a more constructive form of public memory.

Documentary as Intervention

Drawing on the understanding that race and the Lost Cause is a social construction entrenched in American society, documentary film is poised to offer a tool to visually display and amplify disparities between Americans' understandings of history and memory. Documentary film holds the ability to complicate popular memory, to provide an alternative way of seeing and to function as one intervention in public memory that challenges the dominant narrative surrounding key events, cultural figures, and what it means to remember our past into our present.

This documentary engaged in a methodology of participatory filmmaking, combined with a feminist framework, designed to promote an equitable and just method of production. Known as participatory filmmaking, participatory action research, collaborative public ethnography, or feminist collaborative video, this type of work seeks to create a shared environment in which technological rich, content-rich scholarship about communities for communities can be produced. This person-oriented praxis offers practitioners and participants a way forward towards collaboration and space for critique. As Cain (2009) defines it, participatory video is "any video (or film) process dedicated to achieving change through which the subject(s) has been an integral part of the planning and/or production, as well as a primary end-user or target audience" (p.1). Two essentials formulate participatory video: firstly, that film or video be conducted as a tool for social intervention and second, that participation by individuals becomes integral to the production process. Participatory works are ultimately films and video created by communities for communities about their communities, where participatory researchers work collaboratively with research participants to create a space for collective learning, social change, and social justice. Sudbury (2016) suggests that collaboration enables participants to have control over the images that are produced and shared, allowing them to achieve their desired goals (p.216). The collective process of planning, shooting, and editing a video about a community reinforces the idea that communities know best about their experiences, their needs, and the solutions to their problems. It also values the unique perspectives and voices of everyone involved in the project. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of the work ensures that all participants feel a sense of ownership over the project and its final product. It also reduces the potential for exploitation and control by the researcher, as all participants have an equal say in what goes into the final production. Given that this film particularly intersects with underrepresented people whose voices have gone unheard or who have felt powerless at times, this collective process is even more important and more powerful.

One of the limitations of this methodology, however, is that the technology is given primacy. Here feminist documentary theory, criticism, and practice fill the gap to offer extensions towards this intervention of filming. Firstly, feminists continually center issues of power and privilege in the creation process. Juhasz (2003) argues that difference inevitably leads to complicity, pain, and gaps in power relations, which must be addressed by feminist documentary filmmakers responsibly. They must seek to both represent and re-shape terms of power (p. 81). I approach filmmaking as a privileged, White woman who primarily studies and creates about issues of the Black-White race divide. By acknowledging my own positionality and taking a series of systematic ethical decisions throughout the filmmaking process, I am actively working to neutralize or change the balance of power I am afforded by positionality while also trying to amplify the power of the participants with whom I collaborate. This builds not only an ethical practice of filmmaking (and by extension an ethical practice of research and teaching) but also helps to continue to center filming and feeling - never losing humanity throughout the filmmaking process.

Utilizing participatory filmmaking alongside a feminist framework in creating documentaries provides an avenue for presenting detailed experiences to challenge existing historical narratives that sustain inequality. It also aids in challenging viewers to question their understanding of history and encourages fresh perspectives. Additionally, centering the

filmmaking process on issues of power and privilege while engaging in participatory methodologies promotes awareness of the assumptions made in power relations. Collaborative processes allow communities to create knowledge together that can lead to social action and change. As both methods work in harmony, they promote critical thinking of both participants, filmmakers, and viewers, which allows us to explore complex stories of history and amplify voices often excluded from mainstream accounts. Documentary film offers us a chance to see an alternative way of perceiving history and memory. The intention here is to win the communal fight towards a more inclusive and diverse portrayal of space and people. Participatory filmmaking, when coupled with feminist documentary theory, enables even more transformation by cultivated facilitated solutions that are both technologically sound and equitably created.

Restoring Rose Hill

Engaged in this form of filmmaking practice, *Restoring Rose Hill* was created to understand the marginalized histories from those whose voices have long struggled to be heard at Rose Hill State Historic Site (or are perpetually misunderstood.) Documentaries therefore provide an opportunity for critical knowledge-making to happen in a landscape outside of academia, making scholarship public, democratic, and attainable. In this way, documentaries, like all storytelling, serve as tools of advocacy and illumination, expanding our perceptions about the world and illuminating new ways of seeing, listening, and relating to one another.

After my initial visit to the site, I pitched a short documentary to the state parks system to bring to the surface the role the site is taking in amplifying a space for African American history to be seen and experienced in upstate South Carolina, and to create a storytelling space for the Black experience of Rose Hill. The production of this film was a collaborative effort between state officials, filmmakers, scholars, and local community members. Over the course of 36 hours, 9 interviews were completed with key stakeholders in the reinterpretation of Rose Hill Plantation, and the film features a variety of voices and perspective related to Rose Hill. It primarily highlights the experience of the Jeter family and their extended relatives, LaTasha, Elizabeth, George, and Sallie Mae. All four of these individuals are related in various ways to one another. Ms. Sallie Mae Vinson was born at the site when it was a sharecropping property in the early 20th century and remembers growing up and, at times, living in the main house at the property. Her younger sister, Elizabeth (of a separate generation) highlights hearing those experiences from her sister; and LaTasha and George (a third generation of the Jeter family) highlight what the plantation space means for them while they visit the site of a recently excavated property of sharecropping homes, which could have been Sallie Mae's home.

The film also features the expertise of Dr. Tom Crosby, biologist, and professor emeritus of Morgan State University, who has been working with the site to study the impacts of cotton production on the land, and how the enslaved communities used the land to support their own endeavors. Additionally, Nolan Caudell, archeologist for the US Forest Service offers perspective on the recently discovered cemetery of the enslaved discovered less than one mile from the main site, which shows markers for upwards of 70 graves. Rose Hill is working on how to integrate this recently discovered site into its property (as it is not owned by the state park system, the property is owned by the US Forest service and is a part of Sumter National Forest.) Finally, Mayor Harold Thompson offers broader perspective on Union and Union County's reckoning with atrocities such as multiple lynchings committed against the Black community in other eras including Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement. These issues are being tackled by the Union County Community Remembrance Project and are happening in tandem with the changes relative to interpretation at Rose Hill.

Dialogue is essential to understanding one another and, in many ways, film is one of the best mediums to achieve this; film creates space for listening for both participants and viewers, and specifically participants can use it to share their perspectives and experience. One of the most powerful moments during filming was getting to walk the property with Nate, the park manager, and LaTasha, one of the descendants of Rose Hill. LaTasha shared with Nate and the group her

stories of hearing about Rose Hill growing up, and what drew Tasha to connect with the site into adulthood. In fact, this conversation has uncovered new veins of research, including new surnames for descendants of Rose Hill for Nate and Stephanie (Rose Hill's Park Interpreter) to explore. Creating space for conversation is key to reclaiming and changing the narrative of these spaces, and filmmaking as a mode of scholarship offers communication scholars a way to promote that conversation beyond the confines of academia. Sharpe (2016) demonstrates that Black subjugation and its afterlives actively still affect memory studies today: "How do we memorialize an event that is still ongoing?...Because how does one memorialize the everyday? How does one, in the words so often used by such institutions, "come to terms with" (which usually means move past) ongoing and quotidian atrocity" (p.20)?

Memorialization is often held in high regard as a tool to remember, honor, and articulate our past. This is one way to consider memory; however, memory studies also have an opportunity to see and engage in our present situation through memory recovery as a form of resistance in documentary filmmaking praxis. Black individuals have historically been marginalized from institutionalized memory in the form of monuments, memorials, museums, and visible, centralized social structures. However, Black history demonstrates how stories, oral histories, prose, and poetry have always been a key part of Black people's ability to create and preserve their own memories. Rosenweig and Thelen (1998) posit that Americans employ the past to construct and confirm primary connections, with African Americans and American Indians doing the same to strengthen ties to their respective communities (p.149). Trouillot (1995) echoes this sentiment, arguing that universities and university presses are not the only places where historical narratives come to life (p. 20). Storytelling, then, becomes a powerful tool, by which the Black experience has been and continues to be understood.

Additionally, both participants and viewers of the film can absorb the viewpoints of others and potentially gain a deeper understanding and empathy for others. For example, during LaTasha's interview, which took place on what may be the site of her great-aunt's homestead on the property, she got choked up at the power of the location. She said, "Learning the emotional ties are completely draining to the soul...to learn our actual history, that's not taught." In this same moment, I found myself getting choked up. Difficult and complex topics can be explored and shared when material and verbal space is created to tell stories; Blight (1994), writing about W.E.B. DuBois's memory work, offers:

Memories rise and fall from dominance, sometimes through the force of armies and always, it seems, through the use of language....as black writers have understood in America at least since the first slave narratives, the ownership of language—the liberation of words from debasement and control by the masters of plantations or states—can rescue the human spirit from totalitarian control. Words and, indeed, the images and myths they convey are the signposts of memory (p.51-52).

Black people in America have always been subjected to, as DuBois describes it, a "double consciousness", in that they are seen as both human and sub-human. This results in a unique experience of memory, in which the past is always present. In this way then, memory functions as a form of institutionalized resistance through the engagement of ongoing movements and the individual memories of the Black community work in tandem to rewrite, restore, and recreate collective memory. hooks (1997) further notes how Whiteness denies Black people of individuality as a tool for dehumanization and oppression, "relegating them to the invisible" (p.168). Working with participants in a spirit of collaboration, documentary filmmaking carries the ability to hold the tension between the popular and mythic understandings of issues of race, while flipping the narrative to include marginalized voices and to reclaim individuality as a tool for collective memory. With documentary filmmaking in particular, new discoveries and alternative narratives can be brought to light, challenging viewers to question their assumptions

and preconceptions. LaTasha remade the world of this plantation through her interview – a world once made of racist ideologies blossoms through her choked sobs into a world re-born into a place of healing and hope for all, but especially descendants and their communities. This material space created emotional space for LaTasha, and this film offers one stepping-stone on the path to recreating the world of Rose Hill. In this way, documentary filmmaking can serve as a catalyst for change, offering an opportunity for growth and expansion of knowledge and empathy.

Additionally, “new media” offers a tool for changing how collective memory is, created, captured, and shared. Hoskins (2011) argues that in our new memory ecology, memory is connected to, ordered by, and distributed across digital media and technologies. The author too investigates about the prospects of memory being shared, stable, and continuous (assumed to be “collective”) (pp. 23-24). Documentary film presents one tool for navigating this increasingly complex landscape by broadening the ability to reach, to share, and to tell counter stories. Documentary film as counter story can present an alternative view that can reach widely through a variety of digital and physical distributions channels. This extension and intervention through film offers space for marginalized communities to tell their own stories, and to capture their memories as a form of resistance.

During the film, Nolan Caudell, archaeologist for the U.S. Forest Service, highlights the way preservation of the adjacent African American enslaved cemetery can lead to a better understanding of and empathy for the enslaved individuals who are buried there, and as way to honor the violence committed against them during enslavement. He states, “Well, um, you have enslaved persons. Their names and faces have all been lost to time you know...if they were mistreated in life, we still need to remember them in death, you know? Although we'll never know exactly what their names are, but somebody needs to tell their story.” As Sharpe (2016) notes, the personal counters “the violence of abstraction,” and extends understanding of social and historical processes through storytelling (p.8). Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) echo this sentiment offering that individuals’ “turned the discovery, recognition, sharing and reliving of experiences into means of using the past” (p.39). This type of filmmaking offers a space to have an ethical and collective responsibility to those whose humanity has been pushed aside, and as offering a broad reaching counter-narrative to dominant, hegemonic, White structural racism. By telling this story through documentary, the film provides one example of how storytelling can offer space to share marginalized stories and to combat erasure of memory. Through this, documentary filmmaking harnesses storytelling and the power of “counter story” to offer new and alternative ways of re-evaluating the past and representing a more inclusive collective memory.

Furthermore, it is worth reiterating that perceptions of history and public memory are always complicated by various individual factors like ideology, identity, and power. It is likely that some individuals or groups may possess historical consciousness that diverges from or challenges the presentation in the film. Union County, South Carolina is a primarily white (63.8%) and black (31.1%) identifying community in the upstate. Additionally, the primary educational attainment is at the high school or some college level and the mean income adjusted for 2021 inflation of the county constitutes \$54,815. The broader context of Union County, with its diverse racial makeup and rural community backdrop, can impact how individuals perceive and engage with the history presented in the documentary. This reinforces the idea that constructing a shared identity and memory is a site of struggle, shaped by various factors such as ideology, identity, and power. Given the film's overall emphasis on perspectives from the descendants and locals of Union, it captures a specific slice of the broader public memory and history that is constructed and revisited over time. Understanding that a single narrative is not definitive, localizing a narrative in public memory helps the work act as a corrective to monumental Confederate nostalgia. It also means that an engagement with and critique of local groups and biases is essential to shaping the historical beliefs and attachments of members of that community. Although the film does not specifically identify Neo-Confederate groups in Union County, local chapters of the Sons of the Confederate Veterans, the League of the South, United

Daughters of the Confederacy, and others are present. This foregrounds the importance in recognizing the ways that contested history has potent effects on individuals and communities. Explicitly, contemporary responses to documentary's role as narrative intervention exemplifies practices that blur the lines of civil and artistic engagement. Highlighting marginalized experiences has done more than change the culturally constructed idealizations offered in textbook history accounts, also promoting the means necessary for growth into more complete versions of communities themselves. Acknowledging both singular perspectives and all the voices that are invalidated by limited records is essential for reshaping a former narrative in flux.

A Narrative in Flux

Public memory studies offer a way of making sense of the past and constructing a shared identity, but it is also a site of struggle between competing groups with different versions of history. Documentary film can offer a distinctive intervention in reshaping memory as a contested, raced form of history, shaped by dominant narratives and perceptions of those narratives. This work functions as a type of archive which can play a powerful role in shaping public memory by constructing narratives that are remembered and revisited. Smith (2004), meditating on DuBois' photography work, observes that an archive functions as a record of the past and a tool to preserve memory, suggesting that DuBois's archive "resists the erasure of African Americans from the national historical record" and counters the distortions and violence of racist stereotypes (p. 8). Although this film could never singlehandedly accomplish this task, it does try to emulate DuBois. Returning to Assman and Livingstone's (2005) understanding that "our memory only develops through our intercourse with other people," documentaries offer an opportunity to generate dialogue and exchange to facilitate a fuller understanding of what it means to be human.

Rose Hill Plantation is certainly a narrative in flux. A restoration once designed to celebrate the legacy of the Confederacy, this film sought to explicate that narrative in flux, but in that process, the work found itself to be a small part of the rewriting of the story of Rose Hill. Horton (2006) acknowledges, "Our tendency is to turn away from history that is unflattering and uncomfortable, but we cannot afford to ignore the past, even the most upsetting parts of it. We can and must learn from it, even if doing so is painful" (36). The park managers acknowledge up until the last few years, very little historical work has been done looking for how to interpret the lives of the enslaved at Rose Hill. According to Nate and Stephanie, the Confederate flag flew over the property until 2015. Progress has been slow, but progress is being made. Initial archeological surveying in 2019 revealed three tenant farming properties, but little evidence of 19th century properties. Additional archaeological digging has been completed in late 2022 and is scheduled for 2024. Rose Hill Plantation presents an opportunity to the interpreters and community of Union, South Carolina – an opportunity to put into conversation many, many years of important and contested American history, the life of the Gist family, and the lives of the enslaved who lived and worked there. Through the work of this film, the new comprehensive interpretive plan, and other efforts like it, Rose Hill is remaking her legacy.

The Future of Rose Hill

As Rose Hill continues to redefine her narrative, what lies ahead? The next stepping-stone could be to continue to fully acknowledge the atrocities committed against the enslaved individuals who lived and worked there and celebrating the significant contributions they made to Rose Hill, Union and beyond. The park could further incorporate the voices of the descendants of the enslaved community and their perspectives and experiences both into interpretive exhibits and historical programming. It is essential not to gloss over the painful past but to use memory studies and storytelling to honor the humanity of those who suffered and to spark a dialogue on how to reconcile the past and move forward towards a more inclusive vision of the future. Additionally, the state historic site is considering opportunities for interpretation and inclusion of the African American burial ground, located less than one mile from the main property. This land, led by the

voices and desires of the community, could be transformed into a space of remembrance and mourning, and for connecting the local community to their own histories.

Furthermore, interpretation and historic programming related to establishing the historical and sociological contexts for Confederate symbols and monuments could inform at least one interpretation within the site. The awareness of emphasizing marginalized materials should invigorate all interpretative narratives whenever necessary. Ultimately, increasing public knowledge and awareness of the history of slavery on a former plantation like Rose Hill, engaging with descendants' narratives and own pieces of history, offers an opportunity to confront the painful history of the past and create a more balanced, comprehensive understanding of the legacy of the Lost Cause. Across South Carolina, institutions and communities continue to grapple with their own pasts. Groups such as the Echo Project in nearby Laurens, Furman University's public reckoning with the enslaved on their campus, and the restoration of the bowling alley tied to the Orangeburg Massacre bear testament to this ongoing method of confronting painful elements of the past. Rose Hill Plantation serves in this space of tension and awareness, offering a step-by-step recognition of and intentionality to the representation of the formerly forgotten. Storytelling and public history can only be transformative when they enter communities, foster important conversations and collaborations about identity, place, and representation, and support the broader struggle for social justice. With intentional collaboration and partnerships like *Restoring Rose Hill*, the park management at Rose Hill could demonstrate their commitment to shift towards progress, foster connections between descendants and their ancestor's lived experiences, and encourage dialogue on how the past informs the present.

Conclusion

As James Baldwin said, "The story of the Negro in America is the story of America" (Peck, 2016, 1:20:11). Utilizing the framework of participatory video and feminist filmmaking, documentary work offers an opportunity to communication scholars to intervene as a tool for providing alternative ontologies for viewers and as a challenger to the dominant narrative surrounding American history and what it means to remember our past. It creates space for voices that, historically, have been marginalized and silenced. By using film to show the lived experiences and histories of those who have been left out of institutionalized memorialization, documentary filmmakers provide an alternative history that contributes to a more constructive form of public memory. This path ensures that the true, complicated histories of such sites are revealed and help to restore the interconnected narratives that bind all of us. Scholarship like *Restoring Rose Hill* reveals the complexity of our history and strengthens our understanding of our interconnectedness in that history, equipping our societies for communicating cross-culturally and emboldening a more inclusive future for everyone.

References

- Allen, K.M. (1999) *Showplace: the early interpretation of Rose Hill Plantation, 1943-1960* [typescript]; 1999 Dec.
- Assmann, J. & Livingstone, R. (2005). *Introduction: What is "Cultural Memory"?*. In J Assmann & R. Livingstone, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*. (pp. 1-30). University of Chicago Press.
- Bell, Daniel. 1983. "Interpretive Booklets for Local Historic Sites: Rose Hill State Park, Union, South Carolina, as a Model." Master's thesis. University of South Carolina.
- Blight, D. (2006). *If You Don't Tell It Like It Was, It Can Never Be as It Ought to Be*. In Horton, J.O., & Horton, L. E (Eds.), *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*. (pp. 19-34). New York: New Press.
- Cain, J. (2009). *Understanding film and video as tools for change: Applying Participatory Video and Video Advocacy in South Africa* [Doctoral Dissertation, Stellenbosch University] SUNScholar Research Repository.

- Dickinson, G., Blair, C., and Ott, B. (2010). *Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place*. In Dickinson, G., Blair, C., and Ott, B., *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*. (pp. 1-54). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
- Gallagher, V. J. (2004). "Memory as Social Action: Cultural Projection and Generic Form in Civil Rights Memorials," in S. Goldzwig & P. Sullivan, *Communities, Creations, and Contradictions: New Approaches to Rhetoric for the Twenty-first Century*. Sage.
- Gallas, Kristin L. and DeWolf Perry, James. 2014. "Developing a Comprehensive and Conscientious Interpretation of Slavery at Historic Sites and Museums." In *African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites*, edited by Max van Balgooy, 26-37. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Giesen, J. (2020). The View from Rose Hill: Environmental, Architectural, and Cultural Recovery on a Piedmont Landscape. *Buildings & Landscapes*, 27(2), 19–38.
- hooks, b. (1997). Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination. In Frankenberg, R. (ed.), *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Horton, J.A. (2006). "Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable Dialogue." In *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of America*, edited by James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, 35-56. University of North Carolina Press.
- Hoskins, A. (2011). Media, Memory, Metaphor: Remembering and the Connective Turn, *Parallax*, 17(4), 19-3.
- Juhasz, A. (2003). No Woman Is an Object: Realizing the Feminist Collaborative Video. *Camera Obscura*, 18(3:54), 71–97.
- Margalit, A. (2004). *Past Continuous*. In A. Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*. (pp. 48-83). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Muhammad, K.G., & Austen, B. (Hosts). (2023, March 8). How to Write the Past & Future with Clint Smith (No. 32) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Some of My Best Friends Are*. Pushkin Industries.
- Peck, R. (2016). *I Am Not Your Negro* [Motion picture]. USA: Velvet Film.
- Rosenzweig, R., & Thelen, D. P. (1998). *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sharpe, C. (2016). The Wake. In Sharpe, C., *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. (pp. 1-24) Durham: Duke University Press.
- Smith, C. (2021). *How the Word is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America*. New York: Back Bay Books.
- Smith, S. M. (2004). Introduction: Photography on the Color Line. In Smith, S.M., *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture*. (pp. 1-25). Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sudbury, S. (2016). Locating a 'third voice': participatory filmmaking and the everyday in rural India, *Journal of Media Practice*, 17(2-3), 213-231.
- Trouillot, M.R. (1995). *The Power in the Story*. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Upton, D. (2016). What can and can't be said : race, uplift, and monument building in the contemporary South. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2021 inflation-Adjusted Dollars)(Table S1901) [Data set]. U.S. Department of Commerce.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). Educational Attainment. (Table S1501) [Data set]. U.S. Department of Commerce.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). Race. (Table P1) [Data set]. U.S. Department of Commerce.

Going Viral After the Shut Down: A Collaborative Convergence Case Study of Student Media During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Jeffrey Ranta

Can a collaborative converged media approach rescue an integrative learning, student-run agency and radio station during the COVID-19 shutdown crisis? Case study discusses novel converged media approaches and shared efforts toward integrative learning in a situational crisis environment using trusted messenger/communicator techniques. Mixed-method analysis highlights flexibility, disruptive change, collaboration and offers solutions for future student-run media entities.

Keywords: *Student media, converged PR, pandemic, student run-agency, trusted messengers, trusted communicators, social-mediated communication model, situational crisis communication theory, student-run radio, integrative learning*

For faculty, staff, and students at universities in the United States and around the world, the COVID-19 virus was a paradigm shift in teaching/learning technologies. Mandated pandemic precautions brought rapidly changing expectations and forced adaptability upon educator and student. Virtual classes were a hard reset for many integrative learning opportunities no longer made possible.

At the campus of a small liberal arts university, the COVID-19 pandemic forced a convergence of two separate and distinct organizations designed to provide pre-professional experience to mass communication students. Two pre-professional learning environments, a full-service student-run agency (SRA) and a student-run radio station (SRRS) executed a merger for convenience into a combined student-run entity, managed by a single faculty and student team. The new collaboration answered the novel communication demands caused by the COVID-19 shutdown, impacting student-run media and their integrative learning missions.

The forced merger ultimately enhanced both the SRA and SRRS abilities to execute important PR/Communication initiatives for the health, safety, and policy information needs of their disassociated student body and related publics. The partnership also built community lost due to mandated campus evacuations and virtual instruction. This case study illustrates adaptation, ingenuity, and persistence in the face of a crisis while providing an exemplar for future converged student-run media application and public relations instruction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Both the SRAs and the SRRS are examples of Kolb's (1981) experiential learning theory in practice, where students can learn directly from their experiences. When the student engages in radio station operations or completes a project for an agency client, they see the effects of their actions, anticipate next steps, and then apply the new knowledge in future situations. The concept of experiential learning is supported in the pedagogical literature regarding both organizations (Bielmeier, 2021; Swanson 2007; Swanson, 2011).

Jeffrey Ranta is an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies, Strategic Communication and Public Relations concentration at Coastal Carolina University. Contact information: 1306 Gailard Dr., Conway, SC 29526, (843) 349 6662, jranta@coastal.edu. I dedicate this article to the hard-working students, faculty and staff who helped CCU weather the COVID-19 pandemic communication challenges with professionalism, diligence and creativity—emerging stronger and more unified.

The SRA

Student-run agencies (SRAs) incorporate integrative learning (Huber & Hutchings, 2004; Kim, 2015) into a public relations curriculum (Bush, et al. 2017; Ranta, et al. 2019; Swanson, 2017). The SRA is typically a student-run, faculty supervised organization doing real work for real clients. Using an integrative learning model, the SRA mimics real world examples in the professional realm and trains students to solve real problems using communication research, goals, strategies, tactics, evaluation and recommendations (Maben & Whitson, 2014). SRA clients range from not-for-profit, to start-ups, to for-profit entities. Many SRAs, also include NGOs and university publics as clients. (Bush, et al, 2018; Swanson, 2011).

The learning outcomes of an SRA integrative experience are diverse in scope. Student benefits include instruction in soft skills like perseverance, collaboration, teamliness, leadership, management, and flexibility in the face of adversity (Davis, et al. 2020; Bush, et al. 2017; Swanson, 2017, 2019). These skills were much in demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. SRAs also include teaching hard skills like audio and video production, writing, digital content creation and multi-platform competencies. (Davis et al., 2020; Swanson, 2019, 2011; Kim, 2015).

Practical student benefits to SRA involvement include the ability to build a portfolio of actual work for actual clients (Bush, et al. 2018; Kim, 2015). Outcomes compare favorably with internships and other traditional applied learning (Bush, 2009; Swanson, 2011). Student participants also reported faster hiring, post-graduation (Bush, et al. 2017) and a positive professional self-efficacy (Ranta, et al. 2019). SRAs offer various leadership structures and incentives for student participation including paid positions, and opportunities to repeat the course for additional experience and credit (Bush, et al. 2018).

The SRRS

The student-run radio station (SRRS) takes various forms on different college campuses. Some programs include paid staff. (Raymond, 2013; McClung, 2001). SRRS missions are, in large part, driven by available technology. Some stations have terrestrial signals while others exist exclusively as a web-site driven station and some represent both capabilities (McClung, 2001; Raymond, 2013). A critical advantage to an Internet-based, streaming radio station over the traditional terrestrial-only broadcast is the streaming station's programming is available worldwide via the Internet (McClung, 2001).

Specific SRRS programming varies widely, and includes entertainment, news, information, sports, and music. Some SRRS offer simulcast programming in partnership with nonprofits or local commercial signals. According to Raymond (2013), the instructional purpose of college radio stations varies, by college/university. Some are used as a laboratory for classroom instruction, others serve to provide training for professional careers and still others disseminate local community and campus news and information. The SRRS can also serve as a recruitment draw for the host campus. The subject SRRS offered music, news, sports, entertainment, and public information. Professional experience for portfolio content was also offered.

An important impact of the SRRS is its commitment to live audio (and in some cases video) streaming of content. Raymond (2013) reports audio streaming as the most important interactive function for overall visitors to the station. McClung (2001) states the streaming broadcast serves multiple purposes: It provides out-of-area message penetration for disparate audiences; overcomes geographic limitations; serves as an information source and provides opportunities to strengthen ties to the school. Users also find streaming a source of entertainment and permits listeners to feel a connection to the university. This distinction includes stakeholders like parents and family members of students seeking knowledge of campus happenings.

Learning objectives for an SRRS are similar to SRAs in that participants learn hard production skills like radio production and in some stations, audio and video streaming, social media promotion and client service as well. Also, like SRAs, the SRRS participants ultimately learn soft skills like timeliness, management, managing expectations, meeting deadlines,

resilience in the face of adversity, personal responsibility, and strong writing skills (Bielmeier, 2021). SRRS students, like SRA students, are rewarded with portfolio materials which can provide leverage for job placement later.

Convergence as a COVID-19 Solution for Student Media

Convergence, the blending of media channels to impact information and positive change, demonstrates several trends impacting public relations education and professional practice that are like those impacting the news and information industry/infrastructure. Included in those change agents are technology growth (USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2019) and merging of media functions. The Annenberg study emphasized the importance of adopting a converged approach where a collection of 210 CEOs, 1583 PR Practitioners and 378 students in the US discussed the future of PR as an integrated or converged occupation.

Among the Annenberg findings, 51% of all respondents felt PR's relationship with marketing would become more integrated over the next five years. In addition, among respondent CEOs, the concepts of shared and owned media would consist of a combined 74% of the most valuable communication strategies in the future. Similarly, among PR professionals, 25% said that the primary driver for technology use within their agency or department was the integration of communications and marketing. And the channels for delivering those tactics were chosen by the CEOs as shared media and owned media.

In addition, in Grant and Wilkinson (2008, 2019), a definition of media convergence includes sharing content for the functions of informing relevant audiences and publics using a variety of technologies and approaches. According to their results, convergence is the "...integration of previously distinct media components and technology to create new organizational forms and media technologies (p.1)." But convergence is not simply limited to news transmission, but it can also "...refer to journalistic processes, media technology, organizational structure, or audience behavior (p.1)."

An additional study by Weber Shandwick (2014) argued that convergence can include the melding of information communication and marketing and Ranta (2014) pointed out that at least one major sports-centric cable news organization has been encouraging a convergence-centric outlook from its employees since 2013.

In discussing student-run media convergence and its role in integrative professional development, one technology that lends itself to the converged integrative learning experience is the college radio station (McClung, 2001). More specifically, SRRS web sites attached to their respective stations are integral to a converged approach. As a streaming web site in the format of a radio station that is accessible via the Internet and supported by a robust social media presence, the SRRS, and the SRA partnership and accomplishes the goals of the Commission on Public Relations Education, (CPRE 2018) for more professional development and supports an approach for the vision of transformative leadership opportunities in mass communication education (Pavlik, 2013).

Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Because of the crisis nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenge for the subject SRA and SRRS took on very real consequences and required some strategic evaluation. Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) describes methods for evaluating the type, history, and proper responses to crises (Coombs, 2007). SCCT offers, among other things three objectives of a crisis response strategy: shape attributions of the crisis, change perceptions of the organization in the crisis and reduce the negative affect of the crisis. In 2014, Coombs offered some additional best practices for media when managing a crisis. Among the suggestions were: present information clearly, avoid the phrase no comment, offer a one-voice response and ensure all who are responding to crises in a communication capacity are equipped with the latest information and message points. Stakeholders targeted for this SCCT response included faculty, staff, students, and family members of students. The partnership offered a broad utility of capability including traditional and non-traditional media responses. Something recommended by

multiple researchers. Specifically, within a subset of the situational crisis communication theory, researchers also offer a social-mediated crisis communication (SMCC) model (Coombs 2014) which starts to acknowledge the role of social media and explored several crisis management tactics like: the use of web sites, the use of an intranet or enterprise social networking system as one of the channels for reaching internal stakeholders like employees (and in this case students and parents of students). Also mentioned in the study was the use of a mass notification system for reaching employees (and students) and finally using social media for quick, accurate responses with subject matter experts supported (not supplanted) by a crisis team including a public relations department. In terms of communication formats used for this case study, the crisis communication capacity of the SRA/SRRS partnership fulfilled a dual role of communicating using a traditional media format in radio broadcasting but also offered digital media flexibility in the form of streaming content, and social media.

In a related study by Liu et. al, (2011) researchers reviewed student practices of social media during a crisis. The study reinforced the concept of organizations needing to prioritize protecting their publics from harm through providing instruction and adjusting information. It also found that while organizations often support social media as an information source for satisfactory crisis response, there was also a need for traditional media responses as well as third party responses. Utility of these various media for the student respondents included providing emotional support, help in dealing with negative emotions, and reinforcing interpersonal familiarity with the communicators—(trusted messenger/trusted communicators).

Trusted Messenger/Trusted Communicators Best Practices

In terms of health and environmental communication the concept of trusted communicators/trusted messengers channels the interpersonal familiarity with communicators spoken of in the SMCC theory. In Corner et. al (2015) the concept of trusted communicators is described as it impacts climate change engagement with young people. In a similar vein of existential threats, climate change communication issues and COVID-19 communication issues parallel the needs of key stakeholders to be informed with accurate, honest information that requires some action. In addition, Corner (2015) discuss the need for experiential learning when introducing climate change issues. The researchers also cited multiple studies that emphasized experiential learning as a way to engage students through “edutainment” to improve scientific knowledge, increase positive attitudes about hard issues, and encourage increased more frequent discussions with parents and friends. Similarly, peer-to-peer interaction and issue-oriented discussion can take place when learning in a social environment produces solid results. In addition, the role of trusted messengers manifests itself among targeted young people using social media campaigns. Finally the study states messages for engagement should speak to the values and interests of the audience, and messengers in particular should be based on peer-to-peer relationships and teacher/lecturers (Corner 2015).

Similarly, in two studies released after this case study took place, COVID-19 researchers Shen et. al (2023) and Ad Council (2021) profiling recommended efficiency and effectiveness in providing health-related information validated the approach of this case study with statements of finding that the closer a person is to another’s inner circle, the more sender is generally trusted for information and decision making by the receiver. In addition the study found multiple factors impacted decision making in COVID-19 vaccine decisions that included trusted messages and sources involving perceived agency integrity and competence of the messenger as well as level of empathy, point of view, access, safety, and influence. And while this study does not specifically address vaccine issues, but rather quarantine management issues and general health and safety prior to the release of the vaccines, many of these variables were included in the SAR/SRRS collaboration efforts.

The SRA/SRRS Collaborative Convergence Case Study

At least one converged collaboration of SRA and SRRS student media now exists as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In the spring and summer of 2020, this fledgling partnership

formed out of necessity and proved to be a viable solution for COVID-19 related communications challenges for universities to communicate with students scattered across the country and, in some cases, other countries.

The subject SRA was founded in 2018. Like many others, the subject SRA did real work for real clients in an agency setting. Deliverables for the agency included campaign planning, goal setting, communication strategies and tactics, execution of efforts, and evaluation. In the Spring of 2020, the SRA had 12 students enrolled in the three-credit-hour course and no paid staff. It was an active agency, representing 10 plus clients in a variety of organizational models including for-profit, nonprofit and institutional accounts. Heavily leveraged in local hospitality and restaurant venue clients, the SRA possessed competencies for medium to large event planning, social media promotions and limited institutional organization consulting.

The subject SRSS was a streaming-only station with limited, on-demand recording and playback capability. Established in 2010, the SRSS was staffed during 2019-2020 by three, part-time, paid student workers and 20 unpaid students supplying content for the 24/7 station's audio streaming only program feed. Content was also supplemented by students in broadcast classes. Programming consisted of music, sports talk, entertainment and commentary, a morning news program, and other offerings of interest to students. A 2019 pre-COVID-19 technology investment in the SRSS had allowed for the station to offer remote programming and broadcasting.

Support for both of the SRA and SRSS programs was strong. The station and the agency had the backing of the department, the dean and the former dean, (recently promoted to the office of university provost). In terms of pre-COVID-19 collaboration between the SRA and the SRSS there was limited interaction and minor content sharing. However, a fortunate high-profile client for the SRA made some new opportunities for collaboration that would serve both the SRA and the SRSS well and plant the seed for future cooperation.

Pre- Collaboration: Boiled Peanuts—a Hot Opportunity for Convergence

During the summer and fall of 2019 the SRA was tasked with a state-wide, semester-long promotion with a local client -- a packer of multiple brands of canned vegetables from local and regional farms including boiled peanuts. The company engaged the SRA to help create demand for their brand of boiled peanuts among college football sports fans across the state. To fulfill the charge, the SRA partnered with 4 other universities in the state and created/implemented a plan to promote the brand. In conjunction with the other universities and the packer's marketing team, the student teams (including the SRA) assisted with out-of-home, game day and point of purchase promotions.

An important aspect of the promotion was the creation and publication of "peanuttiest fan" photographs. "Peanuttiest fans" came to the games and posed for a photo taken by SRA staff members that included the fan(s) posing with some of the brand's boiled peanut packaging. Branded fan gear was also handed out to those willing to pose to enhance content. Photos were then uploaded to the contest web site and winners were posted weekly on digital billboards across the state. Winners were selected based on the number of votes. At semester's end, the grand prize winner (the photo with the most votes) would have their photo on 1 million cans of boiled peanuts and collect \$1000. SRSS support of the SRA effort consisted of streaming commercials encouraging voting and features of the contest on the station web site.

In addition to yielding student experience, a key benefit to this engagement was service fees paid to the SRA. On-campus samplings, photo services and game day promotional support netted the SRA low five figures in service fees. These monies were held in reserve for student training, future conference/travel fees for students and repurposing some funds for software and technology upgrades to the SRSS. This investment of time, talent, and funds was the first formal attempt at converging the SRA and the SRSS. The investment in SRSS capabilities was largely due to the SRA's need for student-centric media distribution channels (owned media) and the opportunities to deliver a deeper breadth of experience in maintaining communication and

advertising capabilities for SRRS students. For example, in addition to the boiled peanut promotion, several SRA clients wanted to increase student participation with their restaurants and consumer products and the SRRS remote capability looked like an excellent opportunity to do live broadcasts of samplings or giveaways or testimonials from the locations broadcast on the SRRS.

The SRRS also supported some SRA goals including offering musical entertainment for some events scheduled by the SRA including boiled peanut samplings.

Because of the initial collaborative success, the SRA and the SRRS continued their collaborative relationship into Spring 2020, mutually benefiting both organizations. The SRA student account executives found channels for image advertising and positive reinforcement of PR initiatives for client reputation. The clients received discounted rates and editorial content from the SRRS, moving client information forward. For the SRRS, the PR prowess of the SRA gave students an opportunity to practice their craft and raised listenership and recruited station talent.

The exchange also benefitted the integrative learning mission. Students strategized and wrote plans based on client interactions, using radio as a tactic. Similarly, SRRS students produced portfolio-enhancing client spots with evaluative input from actual clients and class credit. It was a mutually beneficial partnership until...

Collaborative Beginnings: The COVID-19 Shutdown, endless Spring Break

For the university, the SARS COVID-19 Pandemic came while students were on spring break. Directed by state government, administration actions shut down the campus to slow the COVID-19 virus spread and save lives. Spring break was extended for a week to help faculty prepare for the transition to asynchronous, online-only classes. The administration shuttered the campus following that two-week hiatus. All classes transitioned to virtual learning. There would be no access to campus, no opportunity to retrieve student resources for the SRA or the SRRS. Shortly after the governor directed the shut-down of the campus, the SRA's external clients were similarly directed to do the same. SRA restaurant clients were forced to close. The SRA's travel agency client's business dried up. Even the online sauce company client went dark because so much of their b2b client base was also closing or cutting back. University organizations served by the SRA/SRRS partnership similarly took a break from publicity, promotion, and events as the future of the semester was uncertain.

Nearly overnight, the SRA was forced to work remotely, without clients. An integrative learning course, the SRA relied on clients and the client experience to accomplish its learning goals.

Similarly, the SRRS, supported by student programming suddenly had no potential for building new organic content. The weekly shows covering university activities had no content. Sports shows were shelved because players were benched. Musical variety shows could no longer be produced with ease and new content in general would be difficult to produce since the building was now off limits.

In addition, many students left the area once dorms and off campus university housing was closed. Very quickly, it became obvious...how could an integrative learning agency award three credit hours with almost no clients? And similarly, how could the SRRS function with no new content?

The Great Pivot to Public Information

Faced with these realities, the SRRS staff and SRA students decided to pivot. The SRA/SRRS primary emphasis of the SRA and its associated SRRS support would shift from a MARCOM mission to public information which included such recommended communication practices as creating communication formats and student-created content for trusted messengers to pass along information by top management being asked questions by students. The SRRS also aided efforts by supporting and promoting other efforts created by the university including an interactive web site and social media events in a social-mediated crisis communication model (SMCC) (Liu, et al. 2011).

The primary public/stakeholders became the dispersed student body. The newly improved SRA/SRRS focus transitioned to a voice for students during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. The SRA and SRRS would buttress their collaboration using new converged technology purchased from the aforementioned peanut promotion. The new collaboration would create a virtual community among students and support administration needs communicating COVID-19 policies to its dispersed audience.

The administration's proactive pandemic precautions, the need for student involvement in the agency class, and the new radio station technology all became very important to the SRA/SRRS collaboration and their associated learning outcomes.

As discussed in the literature review, an advantage to a streaming radio station is it can potentially be heard worldwide. Through Internet streaming, students and parents were reached with ease and in real time. Because of its reach, relative control over the messaging, and ability to store and share specific recordings, the student radio station became an important PR tactic for organizational communication supporting the students.

In addition, the station also captured and repurposed audio from other university administration-produced videos. As many parts of the university were busy producing essential content to communicate with the stakeholders of faculty, staff, students and parents of students, the SRRS/SRA converged collaboration provided for additional channels for those university concerns to disseminate their information. The SRRS became a tool to specifically reach students and their parents. By creating trusted messengers from the SRA/SRRS students, administration policy and informational decisions were heard in the actual voices of leadership in concert with student voices. The uniqueness of the student voices mingled with the provost and other leadership figures created compelling, informative messages delivered in the student-friendly environment of the SRRS.

A Research Opportunity Presents Itself

With the COVID-19 campus closure imminent, and the SRA/SRRS pivot underway, COVID-19 protocols offered unique challenges to study intentionally converged student media and presented a unique circumstance for research about the collaboration. Studying the effort could bring great insights for replicating more collaborations going forward. But the same circumstances that made this situation ripe for research also imposed limitations on the type of research conducted. With so many students in so many locations and faculty divided into essential and non-essential personnel and the campus shuttered, the traditional research project would not be able to take place "in the moment." Research therefore was based purely upon output objectives as an evaluative benchmark. Research questions were formatted with those outcomes in mind.

RQ1. Could the SRRS/SRA converged collaboration support other university pandemic-related communication efforts by successfully providing streaming audio support for student-targeted communication items?

RQ2. Could the SRRS/SRA converged collaboration develop a sense of community, measured by listener-provided content from the university student body by using SRRS/SRA student voices to communicate their COVID-19 experiences during the pandemic?

RQ3. Could the SRRS/SRA converged collaboration help the university client communicate policy decisions and changes affecting students as well as capture the voices of senior leadership at the university?

RQ4. Could the fledgling SRA/SRRS converged collaboration successfully switch from an outward-focused marketing communications entity to an organizational communications information organ useful for fulfilling the PR mission of informing key audiences with critical, COVID-19-related information?

Widening the SRA/SRRS Collaboration

In addition to the challenges associated with the SRA/SRRS pivot, an important concern was where would the effort take place? Deemed non-essential for the COVID-19 online courses

only campus initiative, the building housing the SRRS was to be placed off limits for students, faculty, and staff due to social distancing requirements. The closure decision would put the station out of business until such time as classes resumed. The SRRS would be unable to support the converged collaboration. Then a presented itself.

The answer—set up operations in the radio station student manager’s living room. A “super senior,” and part-time wedding planner and party DJ, JP was well-versed in the station’s technology and had an exceptional depth of experience and drive to see the station succeed.

So, with permission from the department chair, and faculty adviser, the SRRS station manager and faculty adviser packed up the station in two boxes and a carrying case. In a few short hours, and two days before the building was closed, the streaming audio SRRS was back on the Internet, “from JP’s living room” and planning for the rest of the pandemic semester and the first COVID-19 summer commenced.

With the SRRS off campus, and the students off campus and most of the faculty and staff off campus, the novel solution provided unconventional opportunities and abilities to communicate various policy decisions impacting the students, faculty, and staff. To that end, the SRA formed a loose partnership with university office of marketing and communication (university communications) and adopted a proactive communication stance, working to capture and provide guidance, planning and execution of various stories from the university to its stakeholders.

Using the SRRS as its primary communication channel, with additional opportunities available through the university web site and university communications channels, the SRA/SRRS collaboration yielded opportunities for trusted messengers, (university officials and student voices) to communicate directly to stakeholders via the SRRS. One of the most successful initiatives was the multiple provost interview segments where students asked the provost specific questions about university operations impacting them during the COVID-19 shutdown. Because students shared their questions and comments through their own experiences and perceptions, the information provided had a different emphasis than standard policy communications.

The SRA also took lead in managing these communications. Staff meetings/updates were held once a week between senior management of the SRRS, the faculty adviser, the president of the SRA and the university communications office. Story assignments were shared with the SRA and the SRRS from university communications.

Supporting these efforts, SRA account executives and SRRS volunteers quickly transitioned from media relations personnel to media members, arranging interviews and providing commentary for communication initiatives. SRA and SRRS students produced stories for others to enjoy and occasionally became the story, sharing their own experiences along with the content.

In addition, students who formerly served as SRRS on-air talent worked as production assistants creating original content. As music and sfx libraries were online, the station manager, with radio station student help, was also able to record, edit and produce finished packages supporting the SRA student efforts.

Student efforts implementing pandemic communication goals began during the second week of extended spring break. From the beginning, the goal was not to minimize very real health concerns associated with the pandemic, but to add/generate some sense of community through the shared experience of a pandemic quarantine, and address the associated isolation caused by the precautions. This info-tainment/edu-tainment initiative was branded the “Corona-cation.”

In addition to straight news about policy shifts and other official communications streamed by the SRRS, COVID-19 related entertainment products were produced by students and faculty to build community. COVID-19 songs, a dance party, a karaoke contest, a mac and cheese recipe contest, a faculty member’s joke of the day and other lighter informational items were created and streamed on the station. The program theme was always safety first. But in addition to protecting physical health, much of the outreach focused on maintaining positive mental health

among the students, faculty, and staff. Content contributions were solicited via institutional e-mail and encouraged by SRRS programming.

Information produced by the SRRS directed students to the SRRS web site for more information—reinforcing the continuity and convergence aspects of the SRA/SRRS collaboration. In addition, all “Corona-cation” streaming audio productions were teased using the SRRS and SRA social media sites including Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok, YouTube and Facebook. Programming was run multiple times during the broadcast week and links were also provided via social media and in-broadcast programming to engage/invite interested listeners to the SRRS stream, and archived stories. This allowed listeners to engage with content via social media at their leisure.

Once the systems were in place, pieces were uploaded and placed in a shared drive filed by date and topic. This information became a searchable database for programming and some items were repurposed for other media channels. Some SRRS content found its way onto other web sites and information services provided by the university. It was also used for evaluation for this research. See Appendices A for urls of video captures of the story about the station produced by university communications and for a sample of one of the streamed provost interviews.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology for this case study was a mixed method approach and included several qualitative and quantitative data gathering efforts. The key qualitative measurements included interviewing students involved in the SRA/SRRS collaboration. Additional qualitative measures included feedback from faculty and staff in terms of participation in the SRA/SRRS community building, and a review of stories produced by other media that highlighted the SRA/SRRS efforts.

Quantitative measures included a review of recordings of SRSS programming done during the COVID-19 shutdown. Specific data collected included: 1. a count of how many unique programs were provided that represented original, student prepared content. 2. a review of policy stories produced during the COVID-19 shutdown that addressed decisions impacting student policies. 3. a review of listener data that recorded the number of listeners and their geographic location according to data available through the station software. 4. existing information available of collaborations with the SRA/SRRS converged media and other university communication outlets.

Data was collected upon the return of students and the reopening of campus. Students were invited to respond to researchers in focused interviews. In addition, programming captured and archived by the station was reviewed for key messages, that were compared with e-mail releases from university administration to students and faculty. Programming logs were also consulted and finally data capture of listener tracking software was also reviewed to get an estimate of total listenership and registered geographic access to the listeners IP addressed and other available geographic data.

Data was collected over the course of six weeks in the fall of 2020. Totals were recorded independently by the faculty adviser and station manager and compared for agreement.

RESULTS

Upon evaluation of the recordings created during the spring and summer of 2020, it was determined all communication output goals studied for this research were successfully met. All research questions were positively answered.

Variables included frequency of broadcast for each piece of content created and a review of each piece for content quality and categorization as expressed in the following research questions and responses:

RQ1. Could the SRRS/SRA converged collaboration support other university pandemic-related communication efforts by successfully providing streaming audio support for other university-produced, student-targeted communication items?

RQ1A. The SRRS/SRA converged collaboration was perceived positively by university communications as determined by taskings awarded to the SRA/SRRS converged collaboration

by other university entities to assist in information distribution. Two very important collaborations included the university provost office and the university office of marketing communication. Both activities provided the SRA/SRRS partnership with weekly information that they wished to communicate to students. Unique content produced weekly by the university was sent to the radio station for further distribution. In addition, over the Spring and Summer of 2020, 10 pieces created by the SRA/SRRS were shared with university communication and turned into additional social media content by other university concerns. Additional evidence of success in this research question was the 30-day Comeback Countdown to Reopening stories produced by University Communications. These pieces were actively sent to the SRA/SRRS collaboration for transmittal to students. The give and take between the students and university media has been revisited often with a weekly news program product that supports the university communications mission as needed.

RQ2. Could the SRRS/SRA converged collaboration develop a sense of community, measured by listener-provided content from the university student body by using SRRS/SRA student voices to communicate about their COVID-19 experiences during the pandemic?

RQ2A. The student response to the SRA/SRRS converged collaboration effort creating a community was comprehensive and spanned the campus. The content created a shared community through the eyes, ears and voices of their fellow students and was branded the “Corona-cation” among the students. Student-provided content included original songs and creative works and additional faculty and student inputs. More than 50 unique pieces of creative content were produced by a variety of students during the spring and summer of 2020 as the station increased efforts to tell the pandemic story through student experiences.

RQ3. Could the SRRS/SRA converged collaboration help the university client communicate policy decisions and changes affecting students as well as capture the voices of senior leadership at the university?

RQ3A. From a policy communication position, one of the most desired and re-used pieces created through the collaboration the SRA/SRRS collaboration was interviews with the university’s provost. The interviews were 20-40-minute conversations each and featured SRA members posing called-in questions addressing student concerns of the day in their own voices. Each question was introduced by the SRRS station manager and interview host and presented to the provost in their conversation. The interviews received wide circulation and were picked up and retransmitted by other university communications to communicate with other key university publics.

In addition to enhanced visibility and better target audience communication, the SRA/SRRS collaboration, earned the SRRS a designation of “essential media” for the student audience from the university provost. Among the students, many positive comments were provided including one from the station director who said, “It was really fulfilling to get so involved so quickly in driving the university messages home to the students. The whole experience of being off campus but so involved with campus was professionally satisfying.”

RQ4. Could the fledgling SRA/SRRS converged collaboration successfully switch from an outward-focused marketing communications entity to an organizational communications information organ useful for fulfilling the PR mission of informing key audiences with critical, COVID-19-related information?

RQ4A. Going forward, the following results were experienced throughout the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters as the university resumed some degree of an on-campus presence and the SRA started adding back other clients for collaborative work with the SRRS:

1. The SRRS/SRA collaboration continues, communicating multiple policy decisions and changes affecting students in the voices of senior leadership. During the spring of 2021, the university president completed two interviews with SRRS student leadership, by mid-Fall of 2022 he had participated in 7 separate interviews with radio staff discussing policy decisions that impact the university and its student body.

2. The SRRS/SRA collaboration still provides direction on policies like housing, dining halls, parking, etc. using social media and the SRRS as communication vehicles.
3. The SRRS/SRA collaboration is often referred to as “the student voice” of Coastal Carolina by university leadership. The SRRS is a regular stop for student recruiting visits.
4. The SRA promotes SRRS efforts to increase additional listenership for the station.
5. SRA efforts in Spring of 2021 contributed to a rapid growth in SRRS student participation, and a 150 percent rise in listenership among student and parent audiences.
6. In Spring 2021, the SRA returned to handling clients in traditional marketing communications and public relations missions and continues to use the SRRS as a communication vehicle for its communication planning. Similarly, when the SRA client roster is planned every semester, the SRRS is always one of the prominent names on the list.

DISCUSSION

Life is all about managing change. And nowhere was this clearer for academia than during the COVID-19 pandemic. The SRA/SRRS convergence effort met a critical need consistent with recommendations of Situational Crisis Communication Theory, and Convergence Theory, while incorporating best practices of integrative learning, use of trusted messengers/trusted communicators and the social-mediated crisis communication model. The collaboration created an outward-looking organization bolstering internal communications resiliency and flexibility. The exercise developed new capabilities among students, faculty, and staff that needed to serve a socially distant population.

Because of the massive amounts of change in public relations and communication study, adaptation to change is a new normal for educators and student organizations they supervise/advise, but every challenge provides opportunity. This case study could become one of many exemplars for teaching transferability of skills in an integrative learning concept. It might also prompt review of opportunities for joint-program studies or extra-curricular activities. The SRA/SRRS converged collaboration offered students true-to-life opportunities to perform real work for real clients.

As pointed out in the literature review, the SRA/SRRS collaboration is a viable tool for integrative learning. Both student media organizations provide solid “real work for real clients” engagement and offer a strong collaborative platform. They also contributed heavily to helping achieve learning objectives of both the SRA and the SRRS by offering real life experiences. Further investigation is recommended for this type of converged collaboration to take place in other student-run media opportunities on this campus and others. Current expectations are for the SRA/SRRS partnership to foster closer relationships with the university’s student social media team and university communications. The SRA/SRRS has also launched a collaboration with the student newspaper by sharing some reporting resources and physical assets.

The converged SRA/SRRS collaboration between different types of student-run media and the associated integrative learning opportunities are valuable additions to a curriculum and should be considered part of PR pedagogy and/or part of student media collaboration.

Specific benefits identified in the SRA/SRRS partnership included instruction and experience in soft skills like timeliness, resiliency in the face of adversity, organization, communication, planning and management. Similarly, applications of hard skills like converged media production was also quite evident in the SRA/SRRS partnership as illustrated during the COVID-19 shutdown. These demonstrated hard and soft skills corresponded well with the identified demands for soft and hard skills in the literature review. In this instance, the experience, the practice, and mastery of certain capabilities demonstrated how expertise in converged media could enhance future employability and foster a positive professional self-efficacy to respond to opportunities at various media platforms.

Further, as educators all over the world discovered during this destructive pandemic, technology for instruction and education is consistently evolving. It is incumbent for SRA and

SRRS advisers to invest in equipment modernization to ensure work force training competitiveness and to maximize student opportunity with relevant learning experiences. Investments today may yield huge dividends tomorrow in terms of unique student experiences and needed capabilities to handle unexpected challenges.

The forced pivot made by the SRRS/SRA partnership in this study mimics some current changes in communication industries. It remains important to stress that while traditional roles may be in flux, the heavy lifting of communicating on behalf of oneself and advocating for others still requires reactive flexibility when working with real clients in the real world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Media convergence represents a persistent, positive growth trend as media struggle to incorporate new missions, new strategies, and new tactics in response to technological and user-generated changes. In this SRA/SRRS example of a converged collaboration, the strength of the two student media organizations made the end result much greater than either could have produced on its own, given the pandemic's limiting factors. Therefore, it is recommended, when possible, SRAs and SRRSs consider converging with some levels of complementary student-run media to better mimic trends in the industry.

In addition, this type of student media converged collaboration should be explored with future research. As explained, this particular research was conducted on short notice, under stressful conditions, with austere opportunities for support during a generation-changing, historical pandemic. Results are somewhat anecdotal in nature and represent a best effort under difficult circumstances. Further inquiry is recommended to discover how successful converged collaborations could be executed under less dire circumstances or truncated timelines. A solid, mixed methods approach may be a good place to start in defining what the future of converged student media looks like and what it should accomplish.

Finally, more quantitative analysis of SRA and SRRs capabilities could be performed to ascertain future best practices in this area of collaborative integrated learning. While this research does use some qualitative data, a more involved investigation into student, faculty, staff, and client perceptions of this type of collaboration should be investigated.

REFERENCES

- Ad Council .(2022). *Executive Summary: The Trusted Messenger Study*.
<https://www.adcouncil.org/learn-with-us/ad-council-research-institute/2022-trusted-messengers-study>
- Bielmeier, D. (2021). Linking creative practice with audio production education in the music industry classroom. *MEIEA Journal*, 21(1), 45-63. <https://doi.org/10.25101/21.2>
- Bush, L. (2009). Student public relations agencies: A qualitative study of the pedagogical benefits, risks and a framework for success. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 64(1), 27-38.
- Bush, L., Haygood, D., & Vincent, H. (2017). Student-run communication agencies: Providing students with real-world experience that impact their careers. *Journalism and Mass Communications Educator*, 72(4), 410-424.
- Bush, L., Ranta, J., & Vincent, H. (2018). *The student-run agency: transitioning from student to professional*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.
- Coombs, W. T. (2007). Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10, 1-14. <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/ccr/journal/v10/n3/abs/1550049a.html>
- Coombs, W. T. (2012). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Coombs, W. T. (2014). *Crisis management and communications* (Updated September 2014). Retrieved June 24, 2023, from <https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-communications/>

- Commission on Public Relations Education, (CPRE). (2018). *Fast forward: Foundations and future state, educators and practitioners*. New York, NY.
- Corner, A., Roberts, O., Chiari, S., Voller, S., Mayrhuber, E. S., Mandi, S & Monson, K. (2015) How do young people engage with climate change? The role of knowledge, values, message framing and trusted communicators. *WIREs Clime Change 2015*, 6 523-534. Doi: 10.1002/wcc.353.
- Davis, D., Ranta, J. A., McCullough, C., Bush, L., Wilson, H., & Marks, K. S. (2020, January). *Job Ready: Using Student-Run Agencies and Campaigns Courses to Teach Soft Skills*. Virtual Conference conducted by the AEJMC Public Relations Division, United States.
- Grant, A. & Wilkinson J. (2008). *Understanding media convergence: The state of the field*. Oxford, England, Oxford University Press.
- Grant, A. & Wilkinson, J. (2019). *Convergence. The international encyclopedia of journalism studies*. Vos. T. & Folker, H. (Eds.) Hoboken, NJ. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Huber, M. T., & Hutchings, P. (2004). Integrative learning: Mapping the terrain. Washington, DC: *Association of American Colleges and Universities*.
- Kim, C. (2015). Pedagogical approaches to student-run PR firms using service learning: A case study. *Teaching Journalism and Mass Communications*, 5(1), 57-68.
- Kolb, D. A. (1981). Learning styles and disciplinary differences. In A. W. Chickering (Ed.), *The modern American college: Responding to the new realities of diverse students and changing society* (pp. 232-255). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Liu, B. F., Austin, L. & Lin. Y. (2011). How publics respond to crisis communication strategies: The interplay of information form and source. *Public Relations Review* 37(4). 345-353. (<https://instituteforpr.org/how-publics-respond-to-crisis-communication-strategies-the-interplay-form-and-source>)
- Maben, S. & Whitson, K. (2014). Undergraduate transformations: Reported observations from advisers at U.S. student-run public relations firms. *Teaching Journalism and Mass Communication*, 4(1), 1-12.
- McClung, S. (2001). College Radio Station Web Sites: Perception of Value and Use. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator* 56(1) 62-73
- Pavlik, J. V. (2013). A vision for transformative leadership: Rethinking journalism and mass communication education for the twenty-first century. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 68(3), 211-221.
- Ranta, J. (2014). Sports Center: Challenges and Advice for New Communicators from ESPN. *PR Tactics Magazine*. (Oct. 2014 issue)
- Ranta, J. A., Davis, D., & Bergstrom, A. (2019). Career confidence: Fostering professional self-efficacy through student-run agencies and integrative learning. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*. DOI: 10.1177/1077695819884175
- Raymond, R. (2013). Doctoral Dissertation. *Management Practices of Student-run Broadcast Radio Stations: A National Review of Contemporary College Radio*. Indiana, PA. Indiana University of Pennsylvania.
- Shen, A. K., Browne, S., Srivastava, T., Kornides, M. L. & Tan, A. S. L. (2023) Trusted messengers and trusted messages: The role for community-based organizations in promoting COVID-19 and routine immunizations, *Vaccine* 41. 1994-2002.
- Swanson, D. J. (2007). Training future PR practitioners and serving the community through a “learning by doing” undergraduate university curriculum. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 52, 15-20.
- Swanson, D. J. (2011). The student-run public relations firm in an undergraduate program: Reaching learning and professional development goals through “real world” experience. *Public Relations Review*, 37(5), 499-505.
- Swanson, D.J. (2017). *Real world career preparation: A guide to creating a university student-run communications agency*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

- Swanson, D. (2019). Generation Z perceptions of learning in a university student-run agency. *Teaching Journalism and Mass Communication*, 9(1), 12-22. Available at <http://www.ajmc.us/spig/journal>.
- USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations (2019). Global Communications Report: PR Tech: The future of technology in communication. <http://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/2019-global-communications-report.pdf>
- Weber Shandwick (2014). *Convergence ahead: The integration of communications and marketing*. <https://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/convergence-ahead-the-integration-of-communications-and-marketing.pdf>
- Willer, J. R. (2010). Using campus media to mentally position students for the emerging media delivery systems. In J. Al-Obaidi & W. Covington, Jr. (Eds.), *Broadcast, internet, and TV media in the Arab world and small nations: Studies in recent developments* (pp. 43-53). Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press.

Appendix A

URL from university communications media story discussing the moving of the radio station off campus <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clsg5eWCav0>

URL for a you tube video of one of the Provost's interviews with student media discussing COVID-19 issues. Questions provided by SRA students.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDoMIPFeEsI>

Promoting Intercultural Communication Competence and Engaged Listening by Interrogating the Ethics of Accent Modification

Joy L. Kennedy & Davi Thornton

This assignment was developed as an interdisciplinary exercise by instructors in Communication Studies and Speech Language Pathology & Audiology and is designed to contribute to shared learning objectives related to intercultural competence and linguistic diversity. Through an analysis of accent modification, students are specifically encouraged to identify cultural and social factors related to self and others in the context of speech sounds and speech sound disorders.

Key Words: *accent modification; intercultural communication; linguistic discrimination; linguistic diversity; reflexive listening*

Courses: Intercultural Communication; Public Speaking; Health Communication; Communication Ethics; Speech Language Pathology & Audiology; Articulation & Phonological Disorders

Objectives: This exercise is designed to

1. prepare students as culturally-competent communicators;
2. enhance students' capacities as active, engaged listeners; and
3. promote critical reflection on the responsibilities of both listeners and speakers in achieving successful communication

Overview & Rationale

It is well-known that non-native English speakers frequently face linguistic discrimination and/or linguistic stigma due to perceptions of their speaking accents (ASHA, "Accent Modification"). In some cases, individuals might seek out accent modification interventions from speech-language pathologists to assist their speaking competencies. Accent modification is controversial because it is perceived as a potentially coercive effort to ensure that culturally diverse individuals adapt to predominant norms of speech, instead of respecting cultural differences that manifest in linguistic differences (Ovalle and Chakraborty, 2013). Additionally, accent modification programs typically assume that the speaker has the primary if not sole responsibility for adapting their speech patterns to ensure effective communication. Audiences, on the other hand, receive little attention in the context of intercultural communication that involves non-native English speakers' accents (Formanowicz and Suitner, 2020).

Undergraduate college students are generally aware of the challenges posed by accents, particularly in classroom environments. Research shows that students tend to rate professors with foreign accents lower in evaluations and frequently blame their teachers' accents for difficulties mastering course materials (Chow, 2015). Students are rarely trained or encouraged to adapt or modify their own communication skills when faced with challenges related to understanding their non-native English-speaking teachers. Yet, research suggests that when listeners intentionally

Joy L. Kennedy is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University. Davi Thornton is an assistant professor of Communication Studies at North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University and can be contacted at davithornton@gmail.com.

practice empathy, patience, and other skills of engaged listening, many of the challenges associated with accents are ameliorated and everyone benefits from enhanced communication connections and richer appreciation of cultural and linguistic diversity (Mendoza and Peng, 2022). This exercise can also prepare students to more effectively communicate in intercultural contexts by training them to be aware of their audiences (Sweeney and Hua, 2010).

This exercise is designed to aid students in recognizing their own assumptions about intercultural communication and linguistic diversity, and to promote reflexive communication habits, including active listening. Students will also acquire better theoretical understanding of speaker-focused versus listener-focused approaches to communication; intercultural competence; cultural diversity; and ethnocentrism. Instructors can adapt or add to the exercise by relating the topic to recent innovations in AI that further complicate the questions of accent modification, linguistic diversity, and multicultural communication (Lewis, 2022).

Assignment Preparation & Administration

For conventionally scheduled courses that meet 2-3 times each week, this assignment works best when administered across a minimum of two full class periods. The exercise can also be adapted for use in seminar-style courses that meet once per week as well as online courses. In these cases, the exercise can be considered roughly equivalent to one week of content (one full seminar), or a typical learning unit for online courses.

Stage One: Priming Students with Informal Personal Reflection (4-5 minutes)

Students are asked to personally reflect on a communication episode from their own experience when their understanding as a listener was challenged by the speaker's unfamiliar accent or dialect. Instructors can facilitate reflection by providing the example of a situation where students might struggle to understand the material communicated by an instructor who speaks with an unfamiliar accent or dialect. Students should be prompted to focus their reflections on their own experiences as listeners and consider such factors as how the experience made them feel, how they responded to the situation, and how it affected their performance and/or relationships. The assignment will be most effective if the reflection is framed as an opportunity for informal, personal consideration, rather than an assignment that will be turned in or formally evaluated. Students can be encouraged to take notes as they reflect so long as they are assured that the notes are for their personal use and are not required to be turned in or shared with others.

Stage Two: Brainstorming "Solutions" in Small Groups (10-15 minutes)

After students have had ample opportunity to identify and reflect on an experience where they struggled to understand a speaker because of the speaker's unfamiliar accent or dialect, students are asked to form small groups of 3-4 students. The small groups are assigned the task of responding to the prompt, "What are some possible interventions that might improve communication situations where a speaker is difficult to understand due to an unfamiliar accent or dialect?" Students should be encouraged to identify as many interventions as they can in the time allotted. If students have access, instructors can allow students to enhance their brainstorming session by using the Internet to search for possible interventions. In our experience, this portion of the assignment can be accomplished in approximately 8-10 minutes if students are not using the Internet, or approximately 12-15 minutes with use of the Internet. Instructors might choose to allot more time to small group brainstorming if students appear engaged and on task.

Stage Three: Categorizing "Solutions" in Small Groups (5-10 minutes)

After small groups have had an opportunity to brainstorm solutions, they should be asked to review the solutions and determine if the solution primarily intervenes at the level of *the speaker* or *the listener*. For this assignment, speaker-level interventions include solutions that require speakers to adapt their communication behaviors and/or attitudes (for instance, accent modification, speaking more slowly, or moderating volume), as well as solutions that are designed to enhance, augment, or remedy the speaker's communication (for instance, the use of a translator). Listener-level interventions include solutions that require listeners to adapt their communication behaviors and/or attitudes.

Instructors can facilitate this stage of the assignment by asking 2-3 small groups to share an example of a solution that they identified in their brainstorming sessions. The instructor can then lead the class in a brief discussion of whether the example is best categorized as a speaker-level intervention or a listener-level intervention. After working through a few examples as a class, students can work in their small groups to evaluate and categorize the potential solutions that they identified during their brainstorming.

Stage Four: Class Debrief (20 minutes or more)

The instructor should facilitate a class discussion about the activity that focuses students' critical attention on the ethical responsibilities of listening. The following discussion questions are designed to guide this conversation:

1. What are some of the solutions that you identified in your groups, and did you categorize the solution as speaker-level or listener-level?
2. In your small groups, did you mostly identify speaker-oriented solutions or were most of the interventions that you identified categorized as listener-oriented solutions? Did you find that it was easier to identify speaker-oriented solutions, or listener-oriented solutions?
3. Do you think that our dominant cultural approaches to these types of communication challenges tend to favor speaker-level or listener-level solutions? What are some examples that support your perspective, or why do you think this is the case?

Stage Five (Optional): Expanding Our Repertoire of Listener-Level Interventions

In some instances, instructors might create a take-home assignment or use an additional class day to deepen student understanding of the core concepts and skills of this exercise. For instance, students might be asked to identify listener-level interventions that might add with the perceived problems of foreign accents. This extension of the exercise works best when students are provided with resources (readings, podcasts, etc.) that will facilitate their comprehension of listener-oriented perspectives. We have included some recommended resources in the Appendix.

Assignment Outcomes & Discussion

In our initial experience with implementing this assignment, students demonstrated strengths and weaknesses in the overall competencies of the assignment. The first strength included the students' abilities to critically reflect and discuss accent modification as a communication difference in correlation to their preparation as culturally-competent communicators. The students communicated both the positive and negative implications of accent modification with an understanding of linguistic bias based on socioeconomic power relationships.

The second strength involved students making connections between accents, dialects, and code-switching and the potential effects upon one's identity. Generally, students expressed that everyone has an accent and dialect, but that General Standard American English is the preferred accent/dialect in the United States. As a result, the students wholeheartedly agreed that it is important to understand and be able to communicate the pros and cons of accent modification in a variety of communication contexts.

Finally, the students evidenced the most difficulty with identifying interventions and categorizing solutions at the listener level. As the course instructors, we provided scaffolding support in the understanding of techniques that promote active, engaged listening skills in class that also influence our communication skills such as staying focused, asking clarification questions, paraphrasing and/or summarizing the speaker's message, and keeping your brain "quiet" by not planning what to say next. Consequently, we were reminded of the need to actively teach both speaking and listening skills, using an interdisciplinary framework, to our students that will facilitate an ethical examination of accent modification in the advancement of linguistic diversity.

References

- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). *Accent modification*[Practice portal]. Retrieved April 15, 2023 from www.asha.org/Practice-Portal/Professional-Issues/Accent-Modification/
- Kat Chow, "At 'Rate My Professors,' A Foreign Accent Can Hurt a Teacher's Score." NPR Code Switch, March 15, 2015. Accessed February 13, 2023, at <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/03/05/390686619/study-at-rate-my-professor-a-foreign-accent-can-hurt-a-teachers-score>
- Magdalena Formanowicz and Caterina Suitner. "Sounding Strange®: Origins, Consequences, and Boundary Conditions of Sociophonetic Discrimination." *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 2020, 39(1), 4-21.
- Antonio Francisco Lewis, "The Ethical Challenge of AI Accent Neutralization vs. Sonic Diversity." *Adweek*, September 2022, accessed February 23, 2023 at <https://www.adweek.com/partner-articles/the-ethical-challenge-of-ai-accent-neutralization-vs-sonic-diversity/>.
- Jessica Mendoza and Jingnan Peng, "Say That Again: Whose Job Is It Anyway?" Podcast: Why We Wrote This. Accessed April 8, 2023, https://www.csmonitor.com/Podcasts/Why-We-Wrote-This/rtn_ep_46.
- Brynne Ovalle and Rahul Chakraborty. "Accent policy and Accent Modification Enterprises as Potential Indicators of Intercultural Power Relations: A Call for an Updated Research Agenda." *Perspectives on Global Issues in Communication Sciences and Related Disorders*, 3(1), 22-33.
- Emma Sweeney and Zhu Hua, "Accommodating Toward Your Audience: Do Native Speakers of English Know How to Accommodate Their Communication Strategies Toward Nonnative Speakers of English?" *Journal of Business Communication*, 2010, 47(4), 477-504.

Appendix: List of Resources for Facilitating Critical Reflection

- Jessica Mendoza and Jingnan Peng, "Say That Again: Whose Job Is It Anyway?" Podcast: Why We Wrote This. Accessed April 8, 2023, https://www.csmonitor.com/Podcasts/Why-We-Wrote-This/rtn_ep_46.
- Immigrantly. Podcast EP-118, "Accent Bias and the Myth of Comprehensibility." March 16, 2021. Accessed February 12, 2023, <https://immigrantlypod.com/podcasts/ep-118-accent-bias-and-the-myth-of-comprehensibility>.
- Kat Chow, "At 'Rate My Professors,' A Foreign Accent Can Hurt a Teacher's Score." NPR Code Switch, March 15, 2015. Accessed February 13, 2023, at <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/03/05/390686619/study-at-rate-my-professor-a-foreign-accent-can-hurt-a-teachers-score>.
- Walt Wolfram. "Everyone Has an Accent." *Teaching for Tolerance, SPLC Learning for Justice*, 2000. Accessed January 27, 2023 at <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/fall-2000/everyone-has-an-accent>.

Silence Communicates: Teaching Nonverbal Communication Through Student Performances

Jing Jiang

Performance pedagogy is valuable to nonverbal communication education. This single-unit teaching activity asks student volunteers to perform two scenes. The Acting Group reads the scripts and then performs the scripts without verbal communication. Then the Reacting Group, without reading scripts beforehand, repeats the performance utilizing verbal and nonverbal communication based on their interpretation of the Acting Group's performance. Then another two student groups repeat the procedures for the second scene. The remaining students engage with reflections, observations, and discussions. Comparing and contrasting silent and normal performances deepen students' understanding of the functions and limitations of nonverbal communication.

Keywords: *nonverbal communication, pedagogy, performance, silence*

Courses: Foundations of communication, interpersonal communication, small group communication, family communication, and intercultural communication (with topics related to nonverbal cues, perception, and relationships).

Objectives: By completing this 45 min activity, students should be able to:

1. Realize the prevalence of nonverbal communication and its impact on relationships.
2. Identify different types of nonverbal communication.
3. Illustrate characteristics of nonverbal communication.
4. Gain more confidence as a communicator.

Introduction and rationale

Nonverbal communication is ubiquitous and powerful in conveying messages, shaping perceptions, and maintaining relationships (Jolly, 2000). While people communicate nonverbally daily, taking full advantage of nonverbal communication requires additional education. Performance pedagogy is particularly useful in teaching nonverbal communication. It is “a pedagogy based in the principles of performativity, valuing constitution over naturalization, participation over dominance” (Warren, 2003, pp. 87-88). Through performances, students engage with sense-making about identity constitution in communicative acts (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In the process, students gain what Alexander (2006) calls “enfleshed knowledge” (p. 256). Such knowledge is not dumped by the instructor but evoked through students' bodily actions, creating more profound reflections and long-lasting impressions. The benefits of performance pedagogy have been illuminated in teaching activities that address privilege, oppression, and microaggressions (Heuman, 2017; McKenna-Buchanan, 2022; Yep & Lescure, 2019).

Strategically incorporating “silence” will accentuate nonverbal components in student performances. That is, students perform given scripts without verbal enunciations. To express and decode messages, students must fully utilize nonverbal cues, such as body movement, touch, distance, and territoriality. Silent performances are meaningful, as demonstrated by Lunsford's

Jing Jiang (PhD, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) is an Assistant Professor in the School of Journalism and Communication at Hunan University, China. She can be contacted at jingjiang@hnu.edu.cn. ORCID information: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5817-3348>. She thanks the reviewers for their constructive feedback.

(2021) activity, in which masked students acted out emotions only using body language and facial expressions, and the remaining students guessed these emotions.

This activity employs silent performances to teach nonverbal communication extensively. There are two scenes student volunteers perform: Scene One: Saturday Night and Scene Two: The Dress. Each scene will be performed twice by an Acting Group and a Reacting Group. The Acting Group reads the written scripts of Scene One first and then performs the scripts without verbal communication. Then the Reacting Group, without reading scripts beforehand, repeats the performance utilizing verbal and nonverbal communication based on their interpretation of the Acting Group's performance. Finally, another two student groups repeat the procedures for Scene Two. The rest of the class engages with reflections, observations, and discussions. Overall, this activity provides students with opportunities to gain embodied knowledge, improve nonverbal communication, and reflect on identity constitution through purposefully designed performances.

The Activity

Preparation

This activity requires a relaxing and supportive classroom atmosphere that instructors should help promote from day one. The activity works best if enacted after students get familiar with each other in the semester. Before the class, students should read content on nonverbal communication (e.g., Chapter 7 in Adler et al. (2021) or Chapter 7 in Martin and Nakayama (2022)). Instructors can also assign additional readings as needed. Instructors should print handouts beforehand (see appendix for a sample) and bring them to the class. In the class, the instructor first bridges the topic and lectures on basic course contents. Then the instructor overviews the coming activity.

Directions in class

Step 1: Assigning volunteers to Acting and Reacting Groups

The instructor asks for four volunteers from the class and divides them into two pairs, one as the Acting Group and the other as the Reacting Group.

Step 2: Giving prompts to the class

The instructor gives the class some prompts related to reading nonverbal cues to reflect on. For example, the instructors can ask the class to discuss in groups or write down answers to the following questions:

- (1) Are you good at "reading" people's nonverbal cues?
- (2) Have you ever gotten into trouble for incorrectly reading nonverbal cues?
- (3) Has anything positive occurred because you correctly read nonverbal cues?

These prompts allow students to bring their personal experiences to class and engage them while the instructor is away at Step 3.

Step 3: Instructing the Acting Group outside the classroom

While the class is discussing or writing answers to the above prompts, the instructor takes the Acting Group outside the classroom and goes through Scene One: Saturday Night (see Appendix) with them. Scene One features a conversation between a couple at home on Saturday night. The student volunteers each pick the role they would like to play. The scripts are unfinished so that the volunteers can add their scripts. The Acting Group is instructed to perform the scripts without any verbal cues. They can use haptics but should obtain each other's consent and avoid inappropriate touch. Then, the instructor returns to the classroom to observe students' reflexive writing while the Acting Group prepares the performance in the hallway.

Step 4: The Acting Group's silent performance

After a few minutes, the instructor brings the Acting Group back to class and lets them perform Scene One without verbal communication.

Step 5: The Reacting Group's performance

After the Acting Group finishes performing, the instructor gives the class two minutes to discuss what is happening in Scene One among themselves. Then the instructor asks the Reacting Group

to repeat the performance using nonverbal communication and speaking out actual words based on their interpretation of the silent performance.

Step 6: Repeating Steps 1-5 for another scene

Repeat Steps 1-5 above with Scene Two: The Dress, which features shopping for a dress in the mall. In this round, the instructor changes prompts in Step 2 to focus on students' reactions to the performance. For example, the instructor can ask the class to write down answers to the following questions:

- (1) What is your interpretation of Scene One performed by the Acting Group?
- (2) Is your interpretation different from that of the Reacting Group? If so, how?

Debriefing

First-round debriefing

After student performances, the instructor asks students to discuss the following questions in small groups and share their insights with the class.

- (1) What are your interpretations of the scenes (e.g., the setting, roles, goals, and emotions) acted out by the Acting Groups and Reacting Groups?
- (2) What nonverbal cues have you used to justify your interpretations? How do different types of nonverbal communication uniquely contribute to your interpretations?
- (3) What nonverbal cues, if any, do you need clarification? What could you have learned if the Acting Groups had used paralanguage, such as groaning? Did you feel differently between observing the Acting Groups and the Reacting Groups? How have verbal cues shaped your interpretations?

Students' responses to the first question have similarities and differences. Then the instructor asks the Acting Groups to share the given scripts and the contents they added with the class. The Acting Groups are encouraged to explain how they acted out the scenes through nonverbal cues. The second set of questions provokes reflections on the functions of different types of nonverbal communication. For example, kinesics might contribute to students' understanding of anger in Scene One and reluctance in Scene Two, while proxemics and haptics could provide clues to the actors' roles in Scene One. The last set of questions focuses on the limitation of silent performances and the relationship between nonverbal and verbal communication. Students appreciate more clarity brought by additional communicative cues.

Second-round debriefing

The instructor asks students to continue discussing the following questions and share their responses in class.

- (1) What are the differences between Scene One and Scene Two?
- (2) What assumptions or factors have influenced your interpretations?
- (3) What characteristics of nonverbal communication have you identified from the activity?

The second-round debriefing scrutinizes contextual factors in and beyond the performed scenes that shape students' interpretations. Comparing and contrasting the scenes prompt students to consider the environment (e.g., private space vs. public space), the social identities of the communicators (e.g., age, ethnicity, and gender), the relationship between the communicators (e.g., spouse vs. friends), and the nature of messages (e.g., feelings vs. ideas). Then students look inward to examine how their cultural backgrounds and personal experiences lead to diverging interpretations. There are universal nonverbal cues, yet their meanings are culturally and contextually bound. People in different relationships or cultural communities may provide distinct and even contradictory understandings of the same nonverbal cues (Philipsen, 2002).

Last, the instructor pushes the class to think further about how privilege and oppressions move in and through our bodies. For example, the class can discuss who has access to marriage, housing, food, leisure, commodity, and safe public space. As the discussion opens, the instructor can ask students how the scripts could be written differently and how the scene could be set up alternatively.

Appraisal

Students perceive this activity as enjoyable, illuminating, and memorable. Scenes in the sample handout are purposefully designed to feature different relationships and emotions. Scene One presents a heterosexual romantic relationship in a home setting. Typically, male students volunteer to assume the video-playing husband, and females act as the wife. Performers in this scene act out several behaviors (e.g., immersion, expectation, and ignorance) and feelings (e.g., joy, frustration, and anger). By contrast, Scene Two is set up in a mall and does not specify the actors' gender or their relationship, allowing students to make their interpretations. Scene Two also features attitudinal and emotional changes, encompassing disagreement, hesitation, satisfaction, and happiness. Volunteers mobilize a range of nonverbal cues to perform such diverse attitudes and emotions. The rest students activate their practical knowledge and just-learned contents on nonverbal communication to make sense of the performances. The class is intrigued, attentive, and even laughs while observing the performances. An increased number of students participate in debriefings compared to former class sessions.

This activity can be complicated to enrich students' understanding of paralanguage, an important nonverbal cue. Instructors may introduce restricted-speaking groups that use unintelligible speeches between silent Acting Groups and normal Reacting Groups. The performance scripts and prompts can be tailored to different courses. For example, the family communication course can feature other familial dyads (e.g., grandmother-granddaughter and father-son). Instructors of intercultural communication can focus on surfacing cultural assumptions during debriefing, such as what kind of relationships are socially accepted and how cultural identities affect our interpretations of communicative acts. This activity works best in face-to-face classrooms but may be adapted for virtual synchronous classes by modifying the scenes into dyadic video conversations.

References

- Adler, R. B., Rosenfeld, L. B., & Proctor, R. F. (2021). *Interplay: The process of interpersonal communication* (15th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Alexander, B. K. (2006). Performance and pedagogy. In D. S. Madison & J. Hamera (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of performance studies* (pp. 253-260). Sage.
- Berger, T., & Luckmann, P. (1966). *The social construction of reality*. Doubleday.
- Heuman, A. N. (2017). Illuminating everyday performances of privilege and oppression. *Communication Teacher*, 32(1), 30-35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2017.1373836>
- Jolly, S. (2000). Understanding body language: Birdwhistell's theory of kinesics. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 5(3), 133-139. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280010377518>
- Lunsford, K. (2021). Masked emotions: Implications drawn from nonverbal cues to recognize emotion. *Communication Teacher*, 36(3), 175-180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2021.1970787>
- Martin, J. & Nakayama, T. (2022). *Intercultural communication in contexts* (8th ed.). McGraw Hill.
- McKenna-Buchanan, T. (2022). Let's talk about it: Identifying microaggressions and applying supportive communication climates through interpersonal role-plays. *Communication Teacher*, 27(2), 106-112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2022.2085756>
- Philipsen, G. (2002). Cultural communication. In W. Gudykunst & B. Mody (Eds.), *Handbook of international and intercultural communication* (2nd ed.) (pp. 51-67). Sage.
- Warren, J. T. (2003). Performative pedagogy, at-risk students, and the basic course: Fourteen moments in search of possibility. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 15, 84-116. <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca/vol15/iss1/8>
- Yep, G. A., & Lescure, R. (2019). A thick intersectional approach to microaggressions. *Southern Communication Journal*, 84(2), 113-126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1041794X.2018.1511749>

Appendix: Sample handouts

Scene One: Saturday Night

Role X: Young Husband

Role Y: Young Wife

Setting: Home

Time: 6 pm, Saturday

Pre-Action: X is playing computer games in the house and enjoys it very much. Y comes to X and asks X to go out for dinner.

Y: Honey, let's go out to eat. I am hungry.

X: [Continues to play, not hearing]

Y: [Repeat with a bit of impatience] Let's go. I am hungry.

X: [Pays a bit of attention to Y but continues to play]

Y: [Repeat with a bit of anger]

X: [Continues to play]

Y: [Gets angry and unplugs the computer]

X: [Gets angry] What are you doing? Are you crazy?

Y: [Argue back].....

X:

Scene Two: The Dress

Role X: Shopping for a dress

Role Y: Accompanying X and giving suggestions

Setting: Mall

X and Y were walking on the aisle in a mall. X saw her favorite apparel store and went in. Y followed. X and Y looked around and picked several dresses. X went into the fitting room and got changed. Every time X tried on a dress, X went out and asked for Y's opinion.

First round:

Y: No, no. That's too old-fashioned.

Second round:

Y: No.

.....

Last round:

Y: It's fantastic! You look so great!

X: Really?

Y: You definitely should buy it.

X was very happy. They checked out the last one.

“To Your Union and the Hope That You Provide”: Examining the Effectiveness of Special Occasion Speeches

Nancy Bressler

This in-class activity provides students with the opportunity to view a special occasion speech and understand how to design their own tribute speech. A special occasion speech can unite many course ideas including audience analysis, communication competence, organizing and supporting your ideas, and speech delivery, to name a few. Utilizing a tribute speech, which is a type of special occasion speech, this activity helps students understand the distinctions of special occasion speaking. Students examine course concepts through an engagement party toast and analyze in what ways the speaker uses appropriate and effective strategies, as well as in what ways she could have improved her speech. After evaluating the speech, students can then apply what they have learned to their own tribute speech.

Keywords: *Special Occasion Speech, Audience Analysis, Communication Competence*

Recommended Courses: Introduction to Speech; Introduction to Communication; Public or Professional Speaking; Persuasive Speaking

Student Learning Outcomes: By completing this activity, students should be able to:

1. Explain how vital audience analysis is to a special occasion speech.
2. Understand how meeting an audience’s expectations is a crucial difference between special occasion speeches and other types of speeches.
3. Assess how to effectively engage with the situation and context of a special occasion speech.
4. Employ strategies for being appropriate and effective when giving a special occasion speech.

Introduction and Rationale

Because of the real-world applications of a special occasion speech, this activity focuses on the benefits of analyzing and crafting a special occasion speech. Throughout our lifetimes, we are often asked to give a toast, give a eulogy, or even give an acceptance speech. Therefore, it is a vital part of a communication classroom to explore what makes special occasion speeches unique. A special occasion speech can unite many course ideas including audience analysis, communication competence, and speech delivery. As Rothwell (2023) writes, “Audience expectations are critical to the effectiveness of a special occasion speech” (p. 342). This in-class activity provides students with the opportunity to view a special occasion speech example to better understand how to design their own tribute speech. A tribute speech may praise, honor, and/or celebrate an important person (Rothwell, 2016). Thus, it is a great type of special occasion speech for students to explore course concepts because of the necessity to not only analyze the context of the speech environment, but also the audience they will be addressing. Utilizing a scene from the movie *Bridesmaids*, students can observe an example of a special occasion speech and critically analyze the tribute speech for what aspects work and which ones do not. By recognizing these ideas, students can design the most effective message.

In addition, to helping students understand the importance of special occasion speaking, this activity emphasizes the significance of communication competence (being appropriate and

Nancy Bressler, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Communication at West Virginia Wesleyan College. She presented a previous version of this GIFTS activity at the 2022 Eastern Communication Association convention. Dr. Bressler can be reached at bressler.n@wvwc.edu.

effective) during a special occasion speech. “Speakers are competent when they understand the expectations regarding their behavior and are able to behave in a way that fulfills those expectations” (Alberts, Nakayama, & Martin, 2019, p. 20). Students observe an engagement party toast and examine in what ways the speaker uses appropriate and effective strategies, as well as in what ways she could have improved her speech. As Rothwell (2023) remarks, “The occasion sets the expectation for the audience, and your primary goal is to meet your audience’s expectations” (p. 342). Thus, students must analyze the context in which they are giving the speech, as well as the expectations anticipated. As Alberts, Nakayama, and Martin (2019) observe, “A best man offering a wedding toast is expected to be amusing, complimentary, and brief (as well as sober!). Failure to fulfill these expectations not only results in a poor toast, but it often also results in audience members negatively evaluating the speaker” (p. 20). After evaluating a speech example from the movie *Bridesmaids*, students can then apply what they have learned about special occasion speeches and communication techniques to their own tribute speech. Consequently, students can both evaluate the speech example, as well as construct their own improved tribute speech utilizing the techniques that they have learned about special occasion speeches.

Activity Directions

First, students should read a book chapter about special occasion speeches. I recommend chapter 17 of Rothwell’s *Practically speaking, 4th edition*. You will also want to get a clip from the 2011 movie *Bridesmaids*. The clip features Annie Walker, played by Kristen Wiig. Annie’s best friend is getting married and Annie is giving a toast at her friend’s engagement party. She and her best friend have had a friendship since they were little, but her best friend is now spending more time with a new friend. Thus, while Annie is trying to give the toast, she is also feeling really threatened and jealous of the new person in her best friend’s life. For the activity, I recommend using this clip from the movie:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bJulfJkGY&t=1s>.

Once class begins, review the highlights of the chapter. Also consider how special occasion speeches are unique to other types of speeches. For example, a special occasion speech should meet expectations. The class could consider how toasts are briefer speeches; they should also recognize why the audience is there and discuss a memorable moment that reflects the relationship of the people involved. Additionally, special occasion speeches should be modified for the specific audience and the occasion that the audience is gathered. While using personal anecdotes can help the speaker relate with the audience and the occasion, you also need to use appropriate humor. Furthermore, you should not employ clichés. Finally, the speaker of a special occasion speech should be humble. The person you are honoring or introducing and the audience should be the focus of your speech content, not you.

After the review of course content, explain to the class that they are about to meet Annie Walker, played by Kristen Wiig. Explain that she is giving a toast at her best friend’s engagement party. Play the following clip from the movie *Bridesmaids*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bJulfJkGY&t=1s>. If there is time, I would recommend playing the video twice so students can fully experience the special occasion speech that Annie gives.

Once students have watched the example, divide them into small groups of three or four students. Pose the following questions to them:

- 1) Do you perceive that the message of Annie’s speech was clear to her audience? Why or why not?
- 2) Did Annie do an effective job of communicating and supporting her main point? Explain your perception.
- 3) What do you perceive Annie’s audience expected from her speech? Did she meet those expectations? Is there ever a good reason to defy expectations in a speech? Explain your perspective.

- 4) What tone did Annie strike through her word choice, humor, and nonverbals? Was it appropriate for the occasion? Was it effective for the speech? Why or why not?
- 5) What strategies from Annie's speech would you consider adopting? What instances from Annie's speech would you want to avoid? Explain.

After students have viewed the clip and had a chance to discuss for at least 20 minutes, gather everyone back together as a group. Ask the students what aspects of Annie's speech they would consider adopting and which they could improve upon.

Debriefing

To conclude the activity, divide the students back into their pairs/small group. One should embody the role of Annie and the other should embody the role of an audience member. Instruct the students to prepare a new toast, one that is improved from Annie's speech, before the next class meeting. They can include some original aspects from her speech but only those they perceive as effective. Students should consider how they can improve upon Annie's speech with their own engagement party toast based on what they have learned about special occasion speaking. During the next class, divide the groups of four into pairs and allow any groups of three to remain a group of three. Have students present the speech to each other or a small group of three. This smaller audience allows students with speech anxiety to have a more supportive environment and build their confidence before giving a more in-depth speech in front of the entire class. Students can also explore what aspects of special occasion speaking are most effective within a real-world setting.

Appraisal / Assessment

I strongly recommend doing this activity early in the semester so that students can rehearse a smaller speech before giving a more in-depth speech. Since it is more informal in design, this speech allows students to start practicing their audience analysis and speech delivery after their analysis of the movie scene. While piloting this idea in class, students not only discuss the humor surrounding Annie's example, but also how they can apply the example to real speeches. Because of the practical application and hands-on approach of this activity, students can critically think about special occasion speeches and the real-world implications of them. I have received several emails from previous students thanking me for preparing them for giving their own special occasion speeches.

References

- Alberts, J.K., Nakayama, T.K. & Martin, J.N. (2019). *Human communication in society (5th ed.)*. Pearson Education.
- Rothwell, J.D. (2016). *In the company of others: An introduction to communication (5th ed.)*. Oxford University Press.
- Rothwell, J. D. (2023). *Practically speaking, (4th ed.)*. Oxford University Press.

GIFTS INC: Utilizing Social Media Postings to Teach Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm

Pamela A. Hayward

This article addresses a class activity featuring social media postings that can be used to help illuminate Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm for students in the communication theory class. Key elements of the Narrative Paradigm are explained, including the concepts of coherence and fidelity. Teaching the Narrative Paradigm can pose challenges for an instructor as students may find the theory is not easily relatable. The article explains how having students analyze social media postings (narratives) during a class discussion in light of the concepts of coherence and fidelity can help students better understand the Narrative Paradigm. Instructions on how to set up the activity and lead the activity are described. Variations on this activity are also included.

Keywords: *Communication Theory, Walter Fisher, Narrative Paradigm, Coherence, Fidelity, Class Activity*

Course: Communication Theory

Objectives:

1. By reviewing social media postings, students will be able to differentiate between the Narrative Paradigm concepts of coherence and fidelity.
2. In reviewing the postings, students will be able to defend their judgments of the coherency and fidelity of the narratives.

Introduction and rationale

Teaching communication theory can be a rewarding experience. Instructors get to introduce students to a variety of communication concepts and models and that can lead to an increase in critical thinking skills and provide students with new tools they can use to better negotiate their daily lives. As Miller (2005) points out, “Communication theory provides a way of talking about and analyzing key events, processes, and commitments that together form communication. Theory can provide us with “a way to map the world (Miller, 2005).”

Tackling the communication theory course, however, can present challenges. Griffin, Ledbetter, and Sparks (2023) acknowledge that the course has a reputation for being difficult. This can be due to the fact that the term “theory” has a connotative reputation for being intimidating, boring, or impractical (Tipton & Kupritz, 2017). Brunner, Ruiz, and Curran (2022) add that:

While some students may understand the theories that they are taught during lecture, they regularly fail to draw connections between them and application to "real-life" situations.

Pamela A. Hayward (PhD, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2000) is Professor of Communication Studies and Director of Integrated Studies at Augusta University, Augusta, GA. Correspondence can be sent to phayward@augusta.edu.

As such, instructors are tasked with not only teaching difficult theoretical concepts but also working to surmount student's negative preconceived notions about theory (p. 117).

To overcome student reticence toward learning theory, “instructors must tap into their students’ lives and create a sense of how communication theory is relevant to their needs, interests, or goals (Meyers, 2022, p. 153). It is important students learn not just individual concepts but learn how to connect theories to real-life situations (Bennett & Tikkanen, 2020).

Walter Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm is a theory that is frequently highlighted in undergraduate communication theory courses. Although many theories in this type of course are more social scientific and straightforward (Expectancy Violation Theory and Communication Accommodation Theory, for example), the Narrative Paradigm is a more interpretive theory to cover and, at the outset, may seem more esoteric and challenging to understand for students.

According to Fisher (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2018), scholars have assumed people operate within a rational world paradigm where we believe that people are essentially rational and, thus, make decisions based on rational arguments. However, Fisher proposes a paradigmatic shift that posits that people are not essentially rational and, instead, are storytellers. People make decisions based on “good reasons.” As Griffin, Ledbetter, and Sparks (2018) note, good reasons are based on history, biography, culture, and character. They explain that our world is a set of stories from which we choose and constantly re—create our lives.

These narratives can be evaluated in terms of both coherence and fidelity. Coherence is the degree of sense making of a narrative and is influenced by elements such as story structure and the credibility of characters (Communication Theory, n.d.). Fidelity “is the degree in which the narrative matches the receiver’s previous experiences, beliefs, and values (van Batenburg, 2018).”

There are a number of challenges in teaching the Narrative Paradigm. Students often get hung up on the term “storytelling” and think about fiction and movies, for example. However, this concept of storytelling can be seen in almost any “text,” such as our day-to-day informal conversations. Students also think the theory is a way to focus on truths versus lies. However, Fisher’s conception of the Narrative Paradigm is more nuanced.

Given the challenges for students in terms of understanding coherence and fidelity when it comes to the Narrative Paradigm, bringing real-world applications into the classroom is a way to bring the theory to life for students. The activity outlined below provides students with an opportunity to view key concepts of the Narrative Paradigm through the lens of relatable social media postings.

The Activity

Prior to running this Narrative Paradigm activity in class, the instructor should find several social media postings that can be analyzed by the class. Postings of several paragraphs that convey an anecdote work best. However, shorter examples can also work if they have a solid beginning, middle, and end. There are many social media platforms the instructor can use to pull examples. One option is to search the “Ask Reddit” subreddit of the social media platform Reddit. For example, responses to the question “What was a simple gesture from a stranger or acquaintance that made all the difference?” can provide a rich variety of postings to draw from for this activity (AskReddit, 2018). The instructor will want anywhere from three to five postings from different individual posters to feature during the activity.

The activity starts after the key concepts of the Narrative Paradigm are covered in class. The instructor displays the first social media posting via the classroom computer/projection screen. It is requested that a student volunteer read the posting out loud to the rest of the class. The instructor then asks the class to state whether they think this narrative has coherence, the degree of sense making, as described by Fisher. This should be a free-flowing discussion where students may offer differing views of the narrative’s coherence. It is important to press students to defend their choices and highlight examples from the narrative that support their judgment of

coherence. For example, a posting that talks about how a stranger paid for the poster's coffee at a drive-through and compelled the poster to "pay it forward" by treating someone else to coffee once a week, leads to a discussion of story structure and how well students can follow the premise of the narrative.

Students are then asked to assess the fidelity of the same narrative. Does this narrative resonate with students' previous experiences, beliefs and values? Again, students should be asked to elaborate on their judgments pointing out specific phrases from the sample posting to support their decision. For example, a posting that tells a convoluted story of an internship errand gone awry that ultimately has a happy ending, will often lead students to highlight aspects of the story that don't "ring true."

As the class discusses both coherence and fidelity, the instructor should be serving as a devil's advocate and challenge students. For example, in a posting that relays an anecdote where parents are complimented by strangers for how they handled their toddler's meltdown, students might note that the wording of the compliment quoted in the anecdote seems stilted and unnatural. However, the instructor can press students on whether it is plausible that someone might speak in a stilted, overly formal manner.

After the class has thoroughly analyzed the first narrative example, the instructor can put up a new anecdote on the screen and ask for a new student volunteer to read it aloud. The new narrative is then evaluated based on coherence and fidelity. As the class works through several examples, comparisons to the postings can be made. Why do some seem to be more coherent? Why do some seem to have more fidelity?

Debriefing

Once students become comfortable with understanding the difference between coherence and fidelity, the instructor can move this activity into a broader discussion about how we use Fisher's good reasons to evaluate texts. One point that will frequently come up in this activity is that people who post to Reddit do so anonymously. Because the posters are anonymous, we don't have a broader sense of their credibility.

Also, it is typically noted that on a platform like Reddit, a person's post can receive up or down votes (similar to "likes" on other social media platforms). Accumulating more up votes than down votes over time can lead to Reddit "karma" and a higher profile in the Reddit community. Students will often point out that people may embellish or even manufacture narratives to try to earn karma points. This can lead to an even wider discussion of why then do we read social media posts when we may be dubious about their veracity. What purpose does it serve for us to scroll through posts that may not have strong coherence and/or fidelity? Do these individual narratives, when seen as a "package," serve a larger cultural narrative? Even if we find some of the individual examples about simple, kind gestures from strangers lacking in coherence or fidelity, if we let many of them wash over us, do they provide us with good reasons to support a belief that there is kindness in strangers?

Appraisal

The activity above is described as a whole-class discussion. However, as a variation, the class could be broken into smaller groups which each group given a narrative on a handout to parse. The instructor can then have each group report on their analyses, noting how much consensus regarding coherence and fidelity was present in their small group discussion.

Another alternative is to use one of these postings as a prompt for an essay question on an exam or for a short position paper. Students would be asked to explain coherence and fidelity and note whether they thought the prompt anecdote does or does not have coherence and/or fidelity for them. Of course, they would be asked to highlight specific examples from the prompt to support their judgments.

This activity works well to zero in on the concepts of coherence and fidelity in relation to Fisher's Narrative Paradigm. The activity tends to lead to a high level of student participation because they can relate to social media postings. This allows them to feel more comfortable and

thus, more apt to weigh in during the discussion. Also, social media postings tend to be written in more casual, everyday language, which makes them accessible. By featuring a variety of postings, some with a humorous element, it allows students to see exploration of this theory as fun and compelling.

Anecdotal feedback about this activity has been positive in terms of its usefulness in helping students see how they can connect the Narrative Paradigm to their daily lives. For example, a student (M. Hillman, personal communication, July 4, 2023) reported that the activity helped her more clearly understand the Narrative Paradigm and use her knowledge of the theory to better analyze information in her job in retail. She explains:

“I regularly have to discern...coherence and fidelity in certain situations. I always make customer service my goal, but I have to cross-reference customer stories to store truths. For example: Were all of these items on sale even though a sale price is not listed, and what can I do to verify that information?...Since most employee interactions are with customers we don't know, both sides have a hard time acting based on good reasons--we simply don't know each other, so there are more opportunities for stories to be misunderstood. The good thing about working in a face-to-face environment is I actually get the chance to talk with others to understand their side. Talking to customers and co-workers to fill in the gaps leads to a greater sense of good reasons, and I often notice most issues of miscommunication, misperception, or misinterpretation are the culprits of any gaps in coherence or fidelity” (M. Hillman, personal communication, July 4, 2023)

As the example above highlights, finding ways to engage students with key terms of Fisher's Narrative Paradigm can help students better internalize the content and see the value of this theory in their everyday lives. One way to foster that student engagement is to incorporate the analysis of social media postings activity described in this article when covering the Narrative Paradigm in class. The activity can lead to increased student understanding of the theory and set the stage for students to apply the theory to real-life interactions.

References

- Ask Reddit (2018), *Reddit, what was a simple gesture from a stranger or acquaintance that made all the difference?*
https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/9ohvru/serious_reddit_what_was_a_simple_gesture_from_a/
- Bennett, L.K. & Tikkanen, S.A. (2020) Teaching expectancy violations theory and self-disclosure through social media profile building, *Communication Teacher*, 34(3), 185-190. DOI: [10.1080/17404622.2019.1662070](https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2019.1662070)
- Brunner, S.R., Ruiz, J.B. & Curran, M.A. (2022). Dear Solomon, dear Prudence: Using student written advice responses to demonstrate and teach theory application, *Communication Teacher*, 36(2), 117-121, DOI: [10.1080/17404622.2021.1945641](https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2021.1945641)
- Griffin, E., Ledbetter, A., & Sparks, G. (2023). *A First Look at Communication Theory (11th edition)*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Griffin, E., Ledbetter, A., & Sparks, G. (2019). *A First Look at Communication Theory (10th edition)*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Miller, K. (2005). *Communication theories : Perspectives, processes, and contexts* (2nd ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Myers, S.A. (2022) Learning by doing: Student development and evaluation of communication theory, *Communication Teacher*, 36(2),153-159. DOI: [10.1080/17404622.2021.1937667](https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2021.1937667)
- M. Hillman, personal communication, July 4, 2023.
- The Narrative Paradigm (n.d.) *Communication Theory*.
<https://www.communicationtheory.org/the-narrative-paradigm/>

- Tipton, W.L. & Kupritz, V.W. (2017). Using the outdoor scavenger hunt to teach theories of organizational communication, *Communication Teacher*, 31:2, 79-84, DOI: [10.1080/17404622.2017.1285411](https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2017.1285411)
- van Batenberg, A. (2018, January, 10) *What makes us believe in stories? Walter Fisher's Narrative Paradigm*. <https://medium.com/@arnevb/what-makes-us-believe-in-stories-walter-fishers-narrative-paradigm-57c6644a7907>

Simulating Crisis Scenarios: Localizing International Crises to Aid in Crisis Communication Learning

Ahmet Aksoy and Tamara L. Burk

During a crisis situation, communication professionals can realize the difficulties handling effective communication. To emulate this, we propose a class activity that simulates real-life international crises that have occurred. In doing so, students may understand and develop effective actions and problem-solving skills.

Key Words: *crisis communication, strategic communication, active learning, simulations*

Courses: Undergraduate courses in Crisis Communication, Strategic Communication, and Campaigns.

Objectives: In this single class activity, students will (a) apply crisis communication skills to an international crisis that has been localized, (b) develop actions and tasks based on course materials, and (c) problem-solve while navigating “real time” crisis-induced uncertainty between and among stakeholder groups.

Introduction and Rationale

Organizational crises are the outcomes of either intentional or unintentional actions and circumstances, noted as “a specific, unexpected, and nonroutine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and simultaneously present an organization with both opportunities for and threats to its high priority goals” (Ulmer et al., 2022; p. 7). Communication in response to these crises often determines whether a crisis develops into a threat or can be an opportunity for that organization to redefine itself. At the same time, crises reveal to organizations the level of influence and power particular stakeholders have with them. However, many appointed communication professionals do not ground their responses in communication theory (Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2016). To communicate effectively, organizations must have clear goals, active coordination with their stakeholders, and strong leadership within (Delaney & Meister, 2021). To achieve this, active listening, internal and external acknowledgment of uncertainty, and efficacy building must be present (Ulmer et al., 2022). Further, these types of processes must be sustained as crises unfold because as more information becomes available, stakeholders take risk-management actions both within and outside of the organization.

The use of simulations in a college classroom and amongst communication professionals can be extremely beneficial (Delaney & Meister, 2021; Su et al., 2021; Wang, 2017). Crisis simulations promote higher levels of cognitive learning and increase student motivation (Garrard et al., 1998). Students learn how to navigate during a crisis, how to work with stakeholders, and how to construct key messages to address the organization and their audience’s needs (Su et al., 2021). Localizing crises in a simulation better connects students to concepts that may relate to them while exposing them to global issues that occur worldwide. Likewise, having simulations where students play different stakeholder roles positions them to fully embody and understand the

Ahmet Aksoy (Ph.D., Texas Tech University) is an Assistant Professor of Communication in the Division of Business, Leadership, and Communication at Columbia College. Tamara L. Burk (Ph.D., William & Mary) is the Program Chair and an Professor of Communication in the Division of Business, Leadership, and Communication at Columbia College.

role these stakeholders may play during and as the crisis unfolds. Because of this, the class exercise described exposes students to a real-time crisis simulation that has occurred on the international level but has been localized for their understanding and connection.

The Activity

The described crisis simulation was facilitated at the end of the semester in a one-hour-and-fifteen-minute crisis communication course with thirteen students. Our class was taught in a traditional fifteen-week time frame with two class meetings throughout the week. We utilized Ulmer et al.'s (2022) text, *Effective crisis communication: Moving from crisis to opportunity* along with some crisis case studies. Students were unaware of the crisis and the roles they would play to ensure a level of uncertainty prevalent in actual crises (Ulmer et al., 2022).

Prior to the activity, instructors should consider an international crisis that can be localized for their students. We came upon the Kentucky Fried Chicken shortage in the United Kingdom (Phillips, 2018). Instead of Kentucky Fried Chicken, we selected a regional food supplier that resonated more with our students. This is essential to indicate and illustrate the connections and similarities between the local simulation and the international nature of the crisis. Selected crises may be commercial, nonprofit, or government based.

For this activity, the instructor creates groups of three to four students. We recommend an instructor-led approach to group distribution. By doing so, this ensures a variety of perspectives and skill sets will be present amongst each group.

Tables 1-3 include information about each stage of the activity. At the beginning of the activity, teams learn about the roles they play in the crisis simulation (Stage 1). While they learn about their roles, they may also begin to discuss their reactions and behaviors they would take responding. The group that is the organization experiencing the crisis is not informed of the crisis development at this time. To achieve this, the instructor may need access to spaces to separate groups into different rooms. This will ensure that uncertainty within the crisis is maintained and provides students real-life experience on how to grapple with communication ambiguity and stakeholders during a crisis. Ten minutes into the activity, groups begin developing messages to address the crisis based on their assigned role/stakeholder (Stage 2). At this stage, the group representing the organization experiencing the crisis is made aware of the situation and told to act quickly. The instructor may need to go back and forth between groups to share information and the development of the crisis. At the same time, the instructor may question groups on how, who, what, and why they may communicate the way they decide to do. Groups must be given full autonomy in the actions and decisions they wish to make based on what they have learned throughout the semester. However, the instructor may prompt recommendations for actions and behaviors to each group. During Stage 2, groups more likely will be sending representatives to other groups to meet and convey their messages. This will expose students to real life experiences of conducting interviews, communicating with audiences, and making decisions quickly to manage crisis development. This stage can take between 30-40 minutes.

Finally, each group will be informed to prepare for an all-class meeting with all stakeholders of the crisis (Stage 3). This may be staged as a press conference or town hall meeting. Groups will then convene back into one classroom. In the simulated press/town hall conference, groups will present and respond to each other's strategic messages. By placing this simulation into one class setting, students get a sense of the urgency and potential competing stakeholder needs common in the development of an actual crisis.

Table 1. Stage 1: Description Roles and Crisis.

Focus: Groups learn about the roles/stakeholders they are in the crisis.
Course Materials: Ulmer et al. (2022) Ch 1-4; defining crisis; identifying stakeholders; determining goals; effective crisis communication

Group Task: In ten minutes, groups investigate and develop their role in the crisis. They determine the reactions and behaviors they would take to address the role they play in the crisis.

Role/Stakeholder	Prompt
Local Chicken Chain	This group works for the local chicken chain. Currently, this group is unaware of any crisis.
Local News Outlet	This group works for their local news outlet. They have been receiving many inquiries from Carolinians about a shortage in chicken from their local chicken chain.
Customers	This group are customers of their local chicken chain. After a most recent visit, they realize they could not acquire their most desired item of chicken because they have a shortage of chicken.

Table 2. Stage 2: Communication Challenges.

Focus: Groups develop communication messages based on their role/stakeholder in the crisis.

Course Materials: Ulmer et al. (2022) Ch 5-6; managing crisis uncertainty; message construction; managing time during a crisis

Group Task: Develop statements and messages to share with stakeholders regarding the crisis.

Role/Stakeholder	Prompt
Local Chicken Chain	During this stage, this group is made aware of the crisis and must begin addressing the crisis.
Local News Outlet	This group is tasked to construct an article to address this issue. Prompted questions may be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who might you consider contacting? • How might you write this article up? Their editor has informed them they need the article as soon as possible.
Customers	You are customers of your local chicken chain. After a most recent visit, you realize you could not acquire your most desire item of chicken because they have a shortage of chicken.

Table 3. Stage 3: Managing Risk and Communicating with the Stakeholders.

Focus: Groups gain experience asking and addressing real-time crisis inquiries

Course Materials: Ulmer et al. (2022) Ch 9-12; risk communication; crisis ethics; interacting with publics; facilitating renewal

Group Task: Stakeholder groups (Local News Outlet & Customers) will prepare questions for a public/press conference. The crisis organization group will prepare a public statement to release and prepare to respond to their stakeholders.

Debriefing

After the conclusion of the press/town hall conference, the instructor will utilize the remainder of class to debrief and discuss the simulation with students. By debriefing students immediately, the instructor opens opportunities to concretize student learning. In this moment, it is important for the instructor to share the international crisis in which the simulation was based off and how the organization managed it. Additionally, the instructor will pose discussion questions which may include:

- What were some of the challenges you faced in this crisis simulation? (Individually? As a Stakeholder group?)
- In what ways did each group excel?
- What takeaways are there from each stakeholder's decisions and behaviors in this crisis?
- In what ways did the local and national/international crisis compare and contrast?
- In what ways did you or your group act similar or different than the actual crisis stakeholders?
- Identify how your approaches and actions reflected course content and the lessons learned?
- If you had a chance to re-do this application exercise what would you do differently as a group, or as an individual?

During this discussion, we revisit several communication theories and concepts covered in class and discuss how specific content connects to the simulation experience. We close the debriefing reminding students the key takeaways from managing risk, wrestling with uncertainty, navigating a crisis, and the impact that stakeholder messaging.

Appraisal

One of the primary strengths of this activity was modeling a real-time simulation of a crisis and the potential roles stakeholders had in shaping that crisis. According to Veil (2010), students' roles as different stakeholders add to the uncertainty, accountability, and realism of a simulated crisis. Likewise, Olson (2012) argues that crisis simulations deepen students' understanding behind the challenges of effectively navigating and communicating within a crisis.

In our described real-time communication crisis scenario, students had to quickly identify the components of a crisis and collectively develop effective crisis messages in response. In fact, students experienced the role of communication in crisis management at the group, organizational, and public levels simultaneously. Furthermore, the opportunity to immediately debrief promoted engaged and critical thinking as each stakeholder group reflected and received feedback on the challenges experienced navigating their roles as the crisis unfolded.

Finally, through the lens of an actual global/national crisis, students utilized course concepts, practiced relevant communication skills, and considered culturally sensitive approaches in their crisis management decision-making. Informal feedback revealed that students valued the creative and applied aspects of this activity and enjoyed the opportunity to utilize the communication and leadership skills they studied throughout the course (especially while under pressure). One student evaluation said it best, "I absolutely love the surprise crisis scenario, to emulate an actual crisis situation...I love the challenge of constructing press releases for immediate release, and the preparedness I gained from that simulated experience."

References

- Claeys, A. S. & Openhaffen, M. (2016). Why practitioners do (not) apply crisis communication theory in practice. *Journal of Public Relations*, 28(5-6), 232-247.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2016.1261703>.
- Delaney, A. L., & Meister, S. (2021). Crisis simulation scenarios: Applying crisis communication lessons to an app mishap, a public health misstep, and a college athletics

- calamity. *Communication Teacher*, 35(4), 313-319.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2020.1869280>.
- Olson, K. S. (2012). Making it real: Using a collaborative simulation to teach crisis communications. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 23(2), 25–47.
- Garard, D. L., Lippert, L., Hunt, S. K., & Paynton, S. T. (1998). Alternatives to traditional instruction: Using games and simulations to increase student learning and motivation. *Communication Research Reports*, 15(1), 36–44.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08824099809362095>.
- Phillips, K. (2018, February 28). The #KFCCrisis has some Britons so upset that they've called police – and parliament. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/02/19/kfc-restaurants-in-the-u-k-have-a-problem-they-dont-have-chicken/>.
- Su, C., Gilbert, H., & Youngquist, J. (2021). Improving crisis-response simulations: Using local context and incorporating crisis-response professionals. *Communication Teacher*, 35(1), 67-73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2020.1791921>.
- Ulmer, R. R., Sellnow, T. L., & Seeger, M. W. (2022). *Effective crisis communication: Moving from crisis to opportunity* (5th edition). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Veil, S. R. (2010). Using crisis simulations in public relations education. *Communication Teacher*, 24(2), 58–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404621003680906>.
- Wang, M. (2017). Using crisis simulation to enhance crisis management competencies: The role of presence. *Journal of Public Relations Education*, 3(2), 96–107.