Discourse:
The Journal of the Speech Communication Association of South Dakota

Volume 3
Fall 2016

From the Editor
Message from the Editor

Invited Article
Should a Dropped Argument Always be Treated as a Conceded Argument?

Research Articles and Theoretical Perspectives
Weight-Based Stigma and Self-Esteem:
A Test and Extension of the Stigma Communication Model

Listening to Unheard Voices: Nurses’ Communication Experiences with the NRS Pain Scale

An Examination of the Narratives of Lottery-Scholarship Legislation

Enemies of the State:
The Symbolic Annihilation of White-Zimbabwean Identity in the Twenty-First Century

G.I.F.T.S. (Great Ideas For Teaching Students)
Blending Theory and Application: Student-Authored Organizational Case Studies

Closing the Assessment Loop in the Basic Communication Course

Men’s Rights Activists and the Ray Rice Domestic-Violence Case:
Using Critical Communication Pedagogy to Counter Hegemonic Masculinity

Developing a Supportive Communication Climate for Virtual Task Groups

The American Pickers Demonstrates Communication Skills
# Table of Contents

## From the Editor

*Message from the Editor*
Anthony M. Wachs.................................................................9

## Invited Articles

*Should a Dropped Argument Always be Treated as a Conceded Argument?*
Ryan K. Clark...........................................................................10

## Research Articles and Theoretical Perspectives

*Weight-Based Stigma and Self-Esteem: A Test and Extension of the Stigma Communication Model*
Andie Malterud and Jenn Anderson...........................................16

*Listening to Unheard Voices: Nurses’ Communication Experiences with the NRS Pain Scale*
Matthew H. Barton and Kevin A. Stein.........................................39

*An Examination of the Narratives of Lottery-Scholarship Legislation*
Kristopher Copeland..................................................................51

*Enemies of the State: The Symbolic Annihilation of White-Zimbabwean Identity in the Twenty-First Century*
Rick Malleus...............................................................................63

## G.I.F.T.S. (Great Ideas for Teaching Students)

*Blending Theory and Application: Student Authored Organizational Case Studies*
Colleen Arendt...........................................................................80

*Closing the Assessment Loop in the Basic Communication Course*
Claire H. Procopio.......................................................................85

*Men’s Rights Activists and the Ray Rice Domestic-Violence Case: Using Critical Communication Pedagogy to Counter Hegemonic Masculinity*
David H. Kahl, Jr........................................................................96

*Developing a Supportive Communication Climate for Virtual Task Groups*
Brent Kice..................................................................................103

*The American Pickers Demonstrates Communication Skills*
Jeffrey Brand.............................................................................110
DISCOURSE MISSION STATEMENT

Discourse: The Journal of the Speech Communication Association of South Dakota publishes original articles from academics and professionals of all levels in communication, rhetoric, forensics, theatre and other speech-related or theatre-related activities. As such, the journal embraces the interdisciplinary nature of the field of speech communication. The journal accepts articles with the diverse range of concerns of the theoretical to the applied, from the humanities to the social sciences, and from the scholarly to the pedagogical. The journal’s primary audience is constituted of teachers and scholars in communication, theater, and English; and coaches of speech, debate, and theatre performance activities.

A part of the vision of this journal is the education of all people involved in the journal experience: the reader, the author, the reviewers, and even those involved the editorial process. Works considered for publication will be of high quality and contribute to the knowledge and practices of the SCASD community. While manuscripts should be written with clear, efficient, and readable prose, our educational philosophy for the journal underpins our requesting constructive critique for all reviews. Reviewers should strive to provide professional, productive, and civil feedback to the editor and author. For insight into the review process, we request that all of our reviewers please consult the following article on peer review: http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/sep/27/peer-review-10-tips-research-paper.
CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS VOLUME 4, FALL 2017

Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD is seeking original manuscripts for Volume 4, to be published Fall 2017. The journal is generalist in scope and nature. As such, we seek theoretical, applied, and pedagogical (Great Ideas for Teaching—GIFT) articles from the various interest areas of the fields of communication, rhetoric, and theatre. Submissions are welcome from either in-state or out-of-state scholars. Manuscripts are accepted from academics and professionals of all levels in communication, rhetoric, forensics, theatre and other speech-related or theatre-related activities. Please indicate whether the manuscript is being submitted to either (1) the theory and research or (2) the GIFT section of the journal. Research or GIFTs grounded in communication or theatre theory are encouraged.

All submissions will undergo a review process, and select manuscripts will be shortlisted for blind review by at least two peer scholars. Shortlisted authors must commit to a timeline for revision, resubmission and potential publication.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

All manuscripts should be double-spaced Word documents, using 10-12-point font (Times, Courier, or Calibri type). Manuscripts must be submitted following the current APA or MLA style guidelines, however, if accepted for publication, a manuscript submitted in MLA must be converted to APA style during the author’s revision process. Theory or research submissions should be no more than 7000 words in length. GIFT submissions must be 2000 words or less if they report on a one-time class activity, and may be up to 2500 words if they are about a semester-long project. Manuscripts should contain no material that identifies the author (Remove all identifiers in the properties of the document (go File | Properties | Summary and delete your name and affiliation. Then re-save the document prior to submitting).

- Authors should submit a separate title page that includes an abstract of no more than 125 words, author’s name/s, job title/s, institutional affiliation/s, educational affiliation/s, and the physical mail address, telephone number and e-mail address of the main contact for the submission.
- A separate cover letter must also accompany the submission. The cover letter must contain the following information: (1) the title of the manuscript; (2) the author’s name/s and institutional affiliation/s; (2) the first author’s/contact person’s mailing address, e-mail address, and telephone number and (3) A statement attesting to the author’s adherence to ethical guidelines, as they apply to the submitted work.
- These guidelines include those set forth by the National Communication Association Code of Professional Ethics for Authors (See NCA website or write NCA, 1765 N Street NW, Washington, DC 20036), which are as follows:

1. The manuscript is original work and proper publication credit is accorded to all authors.
2. Simultaneous editorial consideration of the manuscript at another publication venue is prohibited.
3. Any publication history of the manuscript is disclosed, indicating in particular whether the manuscript or another version of it has been presented at a conference, or published electronically, or whether portions of the manuscript have been published previously.
4. Duplicate publication of data is avoided; or if parts of the data have already been reported, then that fact is acknowledged.
5. All legal, institutional, and professional obligations for obtaining informed consent from research participants and for limiting their risk are honored.
6. The scholarship reported is authentic.

Manuscripts submitted to Discourse must conform to these guidelines and include language that is inclusive and non-defamatory.

**DEADLINE**

The deadline for all submissions for Volume 4 of Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD (published in Fall 2017) is April 1st, 2017, by midnight. All submissions are to be E-mailed to Shane Semmler, Upcoming Editor, *Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD*, at sdspeechcomm@gmail.com

For more information or assistance with the submission process, contact the editor by telephone at 605.677.9302, or through the above email address.
SCASD Outstanding Young Speech Teacher………………………….. Rebecca Kuehl

Community Service Award……………………………………………… Greg LaFollette

Forensic Award Winners…………………………………………………...Roger McCafferty
                                                                        Scott Walker
                                                                        Kris Hayes

South Dakota Forensics Coaches
Distinguished Service Award…………………………………………… Bob Stevens

South Dakota Forensics Coaches
Hall of Fame Award……………………………………………………… Lovila Roberts
FROM THE EDITOR

Message from the Editor
By Anthony M. Wachs

I am happy to report that Discourse is both healthy and growing. We have built upon the educational vision of our previous editor, Karla Hunter, and the fruits of this should be evident in the quality of articles published in this volume. Though I am saddened to announce that my tenure as editor will be cut short because I have taken a position at Duquesne University, I am pleased to announce that Shane Semmler will be taking over as editor for volume 4. He has been a great help over this last year, and will continue to make this journal great again after its 20-year hiatus that ended in 2014.

Given the large number of debate coaches that are members of the Speech Communication Association of South Dakota, I have invited Ryan K. Clark to write on a debate topic of his choice. Ryan has done a great deal to reinvigorate the state of intercollegiate debate in South Dakota. This last year, his excellence of coaching lead his team to success at the Pi Kappa Delta National tournament. His student, Megan Wattenhofer, won the novice Individual Parliamentary Debate, and his students, Broc Hall and Nick Montieth, advanced to octafinals in novice National Parliamentary Debate.

This year’s volume includes four research articles. The first, by Andie Malterud and Jenn Anderson, analyzes the relationship between self-esteem and the witnessing of weight-based stigmas in communication. The second, by Matthew H. Barton and Kevin A. Stein, examines the communication of pain to nurses. The third, by Kristopher Copeland, utilizes the narrative paradigm show how a lottery campaign in Arkansas influenced the policy-making process. The fourth article, by Rick Malleus explores the eradication of white-Zimbabwean identity by the government through newspapers.

Our section of Great Ideas For Teaching Students (GIFTS) has five articles. The first, by Colleen Arendt, discusses the use of case-studies and case-study writing in the organizational communication classroom. The second, by Claire H. Procopio, discusses assessment in the basic speech course. Next, David H. Kahl, Jr. provides an example of critical communication pedagogy to undermine hegemonic male rights activism. The fourth article, by Brent Kice, offers an activity to promote healthy virtual team work. The final article, by Jeffrey Brand, provides an activity to show how reality-based television can function as a communication learning-platform.

I would like to end by thanking all those that contributed to this volume, for it would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of the scholars and teachers of South Dakota. I will sincerely miss this community of educators.
Invited Article

Should a Dropped Argument Always be Treated as a Conceded Argument?

Ryan K. Clark, PhD
Associate Professor
Black Hills State University
Ryan.Clark@bhsu.edu

In this brief essay, I shall argue that the answer to this question is “No.” The notion that “dropped equals conceded” reflects a well-intentioned norm against intervention which is embodied in the tabula rasa metaphor of adjudication. However, accepted as an absolute rule, it favors quantity over quality (i.e., speed), reduces debate to “ink on the flow” instead of arguments weighed in the mind, and distorts our understanding of what actually happens in debates. In its place, I propose a norm which proceeds from an alternative formulation of adjudication. It is only when an uncontested argument passes prima facie tests that it should be considered conceded. The new norm I propose extends McGee's (1998) stance of “least intervention” into the terrain of prima facie intervention.

To establish prima facie intervention, this essay proceeds in four sections. First, “silence is consent” is positioned as a well-intentioned but problematic norm. Second, this norm is connected to the tabula rasa metaphor of adjudication. Third, Brian McGee’s “least intervention” is considered as an improvement over tabula rasa. Fourth, prima facie intervention is suggested as a new metaparadigm allowing for the overturning of the present unfortunate convention regarding dropped arguments.

The Norm

Our question is not, “Is a dropped argument a conceded argument?” because we are not speaking of a matter of logical necessity or official fiat rules of debate organizations. The seeming unquestionability of the notion that “dropped equals conceded” loses its air of apparent axiomatic authority when it is recognized for what it is, a norm. The official rules of debating organizations are sparse and make no pronouncements on such matters. Outside the debating chamber there are many contexts where this norm has no force. In most substantive debates, judges of an argument will not simply accede to it merely because it was unopposed by the opposition. An argument must be sound to command assent, regardless of opposition.

Although the educational commitments of North American academic debate are longstanding, it is difficult to state with any precision when a strong norm regarding dropped arguments surfaced in the collective consciousness of the debate community. On face, failing to
address arguments made by the opposition is not good practice, but it is not clear when this obvious truism reduced to a bumper-sticker-style normative equation (e.g., “dropped equals conceded,” “silence means consent”). There is certainly talk of dropped arguments in the 1960s. The third edition of Freeley’s (1971) *Argumentation and Debate*, for example, features a final round transcript of a debate on the 1967 NDT proposition in which the debaters frequently refer to arguments dropped by the other team:

Secondly, we say it fails to integrate them into our economy. The gentlemen dropped the argument. Finally, in terms of efficiency, we told you we were comparing in kind with cash. The gentlemen dropped that argument as well. The important point is they never discussed that.

(p. 485)

Move forward in time and one finds characterizations of dropped arguments to be more along the lines of a rule. The twelfth edition of *Argumentation and Debate* offers a transcript of the 1995 CEDA final round where it is apparent that arguments about dropped arguments now fall under the “silence mean consent” convention:

The NMFS is part of the executive branch and I read the specific link evidence in the 2NC that says that executive [ONE AND A HALF] branch rule-making empirically has angered Congress. He doesn’t answer this. Also, the whole story about the current compromise on executive rule-making is dropped. Conceded. The 2AR can’t talk about it.

(Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, p. 436)

The strong norm about dropped arguments, of course, entered the picture before the 1995 final CEDA round. Leef (2008) claims that the convention emerged in the late 1970s, which would be roughly the same time as the rise of the tabula rasa paradigm, to which we now turn.

### Tabula Rasa

Between the longstanding goal of education and the more recent norm of “dropped is conceded” stands an image which connects the two, the judge as a blank slate waiting to be written upon. The judge under this ideal image does not bring in any personal prejudice, beliefs, or knowledge into the round. Imagined as a purely passive entity, the judge is merely there to report who won the debate, to bear witness to self-evident events.

About a half-century ago, Drum (1968) invoked another metaphor to complain that the expectation that a judge must dutifully take notes of all the proceedings of a round was dehumanizing:

The American debater is trained to look upon the debate judge as a machine, a machine which copies down every bit of evidence and then, much in the manner of Eniac or Univac, ticks forth a deductive decision. And be it noted that, like the mechanical computer, the judge is supposed to have no emotions, no biases, no feelings, on the matter, and, in fact, no memory. (pp. 348-349)

Under the tabula rasa metaphor, however, matters are worse than that of judge-as-computer; *slates do not even perform computations*. The tabula rasa metaphor is not computational, implying arguments somehow sort themselves out interpretively and evaluatively in the process of being inscribed.

Indeed, given the idealized passivity of the judge in this metaphor, it is more appropriate to describe the debate as happening on “the flow.” The “blank slate” is really the legal pad or computer screen. Anything in the judge’s head is out-of-bounds and the judge should compliantly
mediate translating speech into writing. The judge is not a person to be persuaded, but merely a planchette or stenographer.

Although many textbooks refer to tabula rasa as a ground-level paradigm on all fours alongside other paradigms such as “policy-maker” and “hypothesis testing” (e.g., Freeley & Steinberg, 2009; Hanes, 2015), I agree with Berube, Snider, and Pray that “tabula rasa” is properly classified at a higher level of abstraction. Berube, Snider, and Pray (1994) position tabula rasa and judge intervention as two foundationally opposed metaparadigms which are compatible with various paradigmatic metaphors of judging. One can, for example, claim to be both tabula rasan and a hypothesis tester. This conceptual distinction is supported by Dudzak and Day’s (1990) empirical study of judging paradigms which found that tabula rasa “merged with all other paradigms except Stock Issues on five of seven discriminants” (p. 22).

This finding is not surprising, given the widespread rejection of intervention. West’s (2007) textbook on parliamentary debate, for example, offers a familiar denunciation: “The debaters have to debate each other; they should not have to debate their judge” (p. 14). Berube, Snider, and Pray’s conceptualization of tabula rasa and intervention as metaparadigms offers a stark either/or choice, making tabula rasa appear to be the only respectable choice.

The rub is that while tabula rasa offers as a simple idealization of the judge, it is quite impossible to achieve in actual practice. Champions of the tabula rasa perspective (e.g., Urlich, 1992; West, 2007) acknowledge that it is an unachievable ideal, but still advocate for it as a goal, in much the same way that journalists are supposed to strive for objectivity: “Obviously, it is not always possible to keep one’s beliefs separate from a decision, but judges have an obligation to debaters to try” (West, 2007, p. 14). McGee (1998) remarks, “In one way or another, tabula rasa proponents always have reverted to defending less rather than more intervention in the decision-making process, rather than defending some unattainable state of absolute non-intervention” (p. 47).

Even so, a blank slate is still more appealing than the image of the interventionist judge. If the blank slate is the unreachable asymptote of adjudicator virtue, intervention would seem to the bottomless abyss of adjudicator tyranny. Arguing for intervention would seem to be like arguing for cancer or heart disease. A similar trouble besets the study of ethics. Given the choice between moral relativism or unyielding absolutism, it seems better to be a relativist. If, however, objectivism is seen as a choice lying between the two, one can pass through the horns of the dilemma.

**Least Intervention**

It is along these lines, that McGee would argue that we should let go of the metaphor of the blank slate and commit to a middle position he describes as “least intervention.” In his essay, McGee (1998) builds off of prior criticism of the tabula rasa paradigm, notably by Bunch (1994), and articulates three varieties of judge intervention. Sense-making intervention is that of the judge using outside beliefs and information to give meaning to utterances made by debaters: “Judges must make sense of the debates in which they participate, and their attempts to do so are a kind of ‘intervention’ into the debate” (McGee, 1998, p. 43). Evaluative intervention is that of assessing the quality of arguments in terms of the judge’s understanding of argument theory, even if quality of argument is not raised by the competitors. Where evaluative intervention is formal, content-based intervention is substantive. Curiously, McGee (1998) contends that this not only involves the judge’s position on evidence in the round, but also their “skepticism about
specific argument types” (p. 46).

Simply put, McGee’s position is what it sounds like; the judge should only intervene as much as is necessary to make adjudication of the round possible. Sense-making intervention is acceptable, but evaluative and content-based intervention are only allowable in the rarest of circumstances. In articulating a middle-ground position between fictional erasure of the critic and the total imposition of the judge into the round “least intervention” was an important step forward.

There are, however, limitations to the position. First, the notion that there is a clear delineation between sense-making and evaluation is unrealistic. The interpretive process is also an evaluative one. The interpretive “Principle of Charity,” for example, involves reading speakers’ statements in a way that makes them rational and puts them in the strongest possible light. Doing this requires the evaluation of better and worse, stronger and weaker. As much as tabula rasa is an unrealistic metaphor of adjudication, so too is the notion that judges might intervene only to make sense of arguments. In truth, we’re always “intervening” in making sense out of and assessing the world we find around us.

More importantly, I contend that least intervention attempts to limit the role of the judge too much. McGee flinches in approaching the middle ground for fear of sliding down a slippery slope. In a footnote answering a reviewer’s question regarding intervention to reject hate speech McGee (1998) attempts to reassure his reader that least intervention, “places a heavy presumption against evaluative and content-based intervention” and does not “open the door” for activist judges (p. 51). Unfortunately, least intervention, as McGee articulates it, allows for student competitors to game normative predispositions against intervention with bad arguments that must stand as good unless and until the other side addresses them. If the judge still has to pretend to be a fool with no good judgment in the face of bad arguments, they effectively are still handcuffed to the tabula rasa metaparadigm.

**Prima Facie**

I propose extending least intervention to more realistically reflect what actually happens in debate rounds and to free debate rounds from the ridiculous convention that silence on any argument in a debate is a concession of that argument. What I am calling for amounts to using the same standard we apply to the affirmative case to individual arguments in the round. Specifically, uncontested arguments should be subjected to a minimal prima facie test read under the principle of charitable reading to determine if that argument should be included in adjudication. If the argument is included after passing the prima facie test, the judge should then refrain, as much as possible, from further intervention on that issue.

Consider that the requirement that the affirmative offer a prima facie case already requires judge intervention by longstanding convention. Kruger (1960) a clear and typical reading of the prima facie requirement:

> In debate, failure by the affirmative to prove the debate resolution (to be probably true) obliges a judge to vote for the negative. Because of the initial presumption favoring the negative, the affirmative must initially present what is known as a prima facie case, that is, a case which on the face of it proves, or appears to prove, the resolution (to be probably true). The negative then has the obligation of showing, by one means or another, that the affirmative has failed to prove the resolution (to be probably true). (p. 127)

The requirement that the resolution be proved “on the face of it” requires a preliminary
evaluation by the critic before the negative even speaks. Moreover, a case is made up of individual arguments, which means that the critic must evaluate the constituent arguments of the case before the negative offers their advocacy. If all of this is already acceptable, then so too should be the notion that judges would engage in an initial evaluative intervention of an argument to determine if it would stand without refutation.

Prima facie intervention does not replace least intervention, so much as it redefines it. I offer no call here for either reckless intrusion into the round or pious denial of judge’s actual participation in the event. If an argument passes the prima facie test, then like the prima facie case, it becomes the responsibility of the opposition to refute it. The judge properly has no further stake in the matter.

Moreover, uncontested arguments should be read under the principle of charity. Judges should actively interpret the argument so as to render it as rational and persuasive. The enthymematic nature of argument makes this charity complicated. Should a judge assume a suppressed or implied warrant if one is not explicitly mentioned? If someone says, for example, “I had a look outside and you should take your umbrella” it seems natural to assume precipitation is likely or occurring and that taking the umbrella is being encouraged as protection against the elements. This might be wrong. There might be an umbrella collector paying top dollar. We should note in this example the assumed supplemental information springs naturally to mind and requires no strain. A competent user of the English language under normal circumstances and no additional information would arrive at the same conclusion. So too should it go for uncontested arguments. Judges should inferring suppressed premises when reasonable. There is no simple mechanistic rule for how to do this, which is precisely why we turn to human judges in the first place.

Perhaps this is where I flinch, erring on the side of caution and allowing the occasional bad argument to stand because of an over-charitable reading. Prima facie intervention is, however, more realistic and more of a corrective than least intervention. It stands within preexisting conventional parameters of prima facie requirements, so it is less radical than it might initially sound. It allows us to acknowledge the educational goals of debate without cashing out for impossible metaphors of emptiness, but also provides a mean by which we may transcend the thudding convention that “silence means consent.”

References


**RESEARCH ARTICLES**

**Weight-Based Stigma and Self-Esteem:**
*A Test and Extension of the Stigma Communication Model*

**Andie Malterud, BS**  
Graduate Teaching Assistant  
South Dakota State University  
Andrea.Malterud@sdstate.edu

**Jenn Anderson, PhD**  
Assistant Professor  
South Dakota State University  
Jennifer.Anderson@sdstate.edu

**Abstract**
Personal experience with weight-based stigma is negatively associated with self-esteem (Myers & Rosen, 1999). Our study examines how self-esteem is affected by exposure to weight-based stigma communication that is directed at another person. Using Smith’s (2007) stigma communication framework, we created a 2 (Stigma level: high, low) x 2 (Gender of stigmatized person: male, female) x 2 (Body of stigmatized person: large, small) posttest-only experiment. Participants’ self-esteem was highest after seeing a small body subjected to intense stigma and lowest after seeing a large body subjected to intense stigma. Additionally, we observed three-way interactions affecting the perceptions of two stigma-communication message features: marking and linking to social peril. Our results suggest that perceptions about stigma communication vary by the stigma level and the stigma target’s attributes. Implications are discussed.

**Introduction**

In 2008, 33.8% of adults were considered obese (Flegal, Carroll, Ogden, & Curtin, 2010). Even with growing efforts to combat obesity (Bowen, Bryant, Hess, McCarty, & Ivey, 2014), the rates have remained consistent, around 34.9%, for several years (Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2014). Alongside the efforts to combat obesity are social norms and media portrayals that promote a thin ideal (Balcetis, Cole, Chelberg, & Alicke, 2013). These two extremes make for an unhealthy society and contribute to stigmatizing messages toward individuals who do not have an “ideal” body type (Balcetis et al., 2013; Pearl, Dovidio, Puhl, & Brownell, 2015). Stigma refers to being “marked” with a “spoiled identity” (Goffman, 1963, p. 62). Victims of weight-based stigma often experience negative physical and psychological outcomes, such as lowered self-esteem (Brockmeyer et al., 2013; Schvey, Puhl, & Brownell, 2011; Shentow-Bewsh, 2015).
Keatine & Mills, 2015). Previous research has established that being a victim of stigma is associated with lowered self-esteem (Crocker, 1999; Crocker & Major, 1989). However, less is known about the stigmatization’s effects on an observer, i.e., not the victim or perpetrator. For example, how might observing the stigmatization of another person affect the observer’s self-esteem?

Smith’s (2007) work on stigma communication provides a framework to better understand stigmatizing messages and their effects. Smith (2007) suggests that messages must meet four criteria to be considered stigmatizing and must evoke a reaction directed toward the stigmatized group. Smith’s model explores how the stigmatizing message affects the audience’s perception of the stigmatized person, but not how exposure to such messaging affects the non-stigmatized audience member. In the current study, we explore the effects of weight-based stigma messages on non-stigmatized audience members in terms of the audience’s perceptions of the stigmatizing message’s components and how exposure to the message affects the audience’s self-esteem.

**Stigma Communication**

Goffman (1963) defined stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (p. 3). When an individual is stigmatized, he or she “becomes discredited in the eyes of others due to a particular condition or state” (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). Stigma may be both seen and unseen (Goffman, 1963), meaning that others may be able to observe the condition that marks the person with a spoiled identity (seen stigma) or that the condition may be hidden (unseen stigma). Mental illness and HIV/AIDS are common examples of unseen stigmatized conditions. In contrast, body size is difficult to conceal. Therefore, non-ideal weight is a visible mark of spoiled identity that leads to seen stigma. This visible mark of weight may partially explain the prevalence of weight-based stigma, and research findings that indicate that weight-based stigma increases as a person’s weight increases (Friedman et al., 2005; Myers & Rosen, 1999).

Stigma arises from social interactions and is constituted through communication (Smith, 2007). Smith (2007) offers the concept of “stigma communication” as a way of understanding how stigmatizing ideas are created and shared. Smith (2007) defines stigma communication as “messages spread through communities to teach their members to recognize the disgraced and to react accordingly” (p. 464). Such stigmatizing messages (a) distinguish, or mark, people; (b) label people; (c) assign personal responsibility to people; and (d) link people to social peril (Smith, 2007). In addition to specifying the content of stigmatizing messages, Smith (2007) predicts that exposure to these messages generates cognitive and emotional reactions that are directed toward the stigmatized group of people. However, this framework does not suggest how an observer’s psychological state may be affected by exposure to stigmatization directed toward another person.

Stigmatizing messages circulate through interpersonal and mass-mediated communication. Media messages can profoundly influence social norms and attitudes toward stigmatized groups, essentially teaching members of society what groups should be stigmatized and how to react to those groups (Brochu, Pearl, Puhl, & Brownell, 2014; Greenleaf, Petrie, & Martin, 2014). Smith (2007) explains, “one reason why stigma messages are so powerful is that the features of stigma messages make attitudes accessible, encourage attitude formation, and automatically predispose certain behavioral reactions” (p. 468). Exposure to media messages encourages audiences to see these stigmatizing messages as normal and acceptable. However,
these effects can lead to long-term, negative implications for the stigmatized group (Brochu et al., 2014; Brockmeyer et al., 2013).

In addition to considering the source of the stigmatizing messages, previous research about stigma focuses on the effects of these messages. Much of the recent research on this aspect of stigma has focused on the experiences of people living with HIV/AIDS. That body of research consistently demonstrates the key elements of stigma communication and the experience of being a victim of stigma. For example, people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHA) are often blamed for their condition and then experience social isolation as others avoid them (Beaulieu, Adrien, Potvin, & Dassa, 2014; Phillips, Moneyham, & Tavakoli, 2011). This experience of stigma and social isolation then negatively impacts PLHAs’ mental, social, and spiritual health, as well as their quality of life and life satisfaction (Phillips et al., 2011).

Weight-Based Stigma and Self-Esteem

A major aspect of weight-based stigma is the idea that an individual’s weight is controllable through responsibility and willpower (Maddox, Back, & Liederman, 1968; Myers & Rosen, 1999). Children think negatively about overweight persons and believe that obesity is controllable; these negative beliefs strengthen as they age (Cramer & Steinwart, 1998; Puhl & Brownell, 2006; Tiggemann & Anesbury, 2000). These findings are consistent with Smith’s (2007) argument that stigmatizing communication assigns personal responsibility for the stigmatized condition to the stigmatized person. “Blaming the victim” is one of many negative stigmas surrounding people who are overweight and obese. Overweight and obese individuals are described as weak-willed, emotionally impaired, unlikable, lacking in self-discipline, and less attractive than persons of average weight (Crandall, 1994; Lewis, Cash, Jacobi, & Bubb-Lewis, 1997).

People with non-ideal weight, typically individuals who would be considered overweight, often report stigmatizing experiences based on their weight. Previous research indicates that overweight people report feeling stigmatized for their weight in situations where people (a) have low expectations of them because of their weight, (b) make negative assumptions about them due to weight, or (c) socially reject them because of their weight (Friedman et al., 2005; Puhl & Brownell, 2006). Overweight individuals are disparaged by employers, parents, health-care workers, peers, romantic partners, children, and even themselves (Crandall, 1994; Puhl & Brownell, 2006). For overweight and obese individuals, the experience of weight-based stigma is common (Freidman et al., 2005; Myers & Rosen, 1999; Puhl & Brownell, 2006). However, weight-based stigma is also directed toward thin-bodied or extremely muscular-bodied men and women (Anderson & Bresnahan, 2013).

In addition to interpersonal weight-based stigma communication, media messages also contribute to this stigma by consistently portraying thin bodies as ideal and equating thinness with success in many aspects of life (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Franzoi & Shields, 1984). When audiences view these images and feel social pressure to be thin, they may have a heightened awareness about how their body does not conform to the ideal (Shentow-Bewsh et al., 2015) and subsequently experience body dissatisfaction (Puhl & Brownell, 2006; Shentow-Bewsh et al., 2015). This research suggests that observing weight-based stigma via the media’s promotion of the thin ideal can affect the audience’s psychological health. However, these studies do not directly manipulate the messages to portray weight-based stigma toward a person...
so it is still not clear how exposure to that type of message might affect the observer’s self-esteem.

Self-esteem refers to global feelings of self-worth, self-regard, or self-acceptance (Rosenberg, 1979). Self-esteem is influenced by many factors (Greenleaf et al., 2014). One factor that affects self-esteem is the experience of being stigmatized (Molina & Ramirez-Valles, 2013; Puhl & Brownell, 2006; Shentow-Bewsh et al., 2015; Wright, Gronfein, & Owens, 2000). Weight-based stigmatization is often associated with negative psychological health indicators, such as lowered self-esteem (Brockmeyer et al., 2013 Friedman et al., 2005; Myers & Rosen, 1999; Pearl et al., 2015; Puhl & Brownell, 2006; Shentow-Bewsh et al., 2015). It is unclear, however, whether weight-based stigma leads to psychological distress or if individuals who experience psychological distress report greater levels of stigma (Friedman et al., 2005; Myers & Rosen, 1999). Often, the personal experience of stigma is negatively associated with self-esteem. The lowered self-esteem that results from weight-based stigmatization is associated with additional negative outcomes, such as depression and body-image disturbance (Friedman et al., 2005). Other research suggests that psychological distress, including lowered self-esteem, caused by weight-based stigmatization is associated with binge-eating behavior (Ashmore, Friedman, Reichmann, & Musante, 2008). However, it is unknown how exposure to stigmatization of another person might affect one’s self-esteem.

Study Rationale

Previous research (Anderson & Bresnahan, 2013 Smith, 2007, 2012a) indicates that stigmatizing messages contain four crucial elements: marking, labeling, linking to social peril, and assigning personal responsibility. Additionally, research indicates that exposure to stigma directed toward a person someone is negatively related to that person’s self-esteem (Brockmeyer et al., 2013; Friedman et al., 2005; Molina & Ramirez-Valles, 2013; Myers & Rosen, 1999) and that viewing media messages promoting a thin ideal is negatively associated with body satisfaction (Puhl & Brownell, 2006; Shentow-Bewsh et al., 2015). However, it remains unclear how an observer’s self-esteem is affected by exposure to weight-based stigmatization messages containing with all four elements of stigma communication identified by Smith (2007), that is directed toward another person. Furthermore, it is unclear the extent to which a lay audience will recognize the four characteristics of stigma messages and perceive these messages as stigmatizing.

In addition to testing the psychological effects of observing stigma toward another person, this study also examines how variations in those messages might affect perceptions of the message elements. The messages are told from the point of view of a patient who has an interaction with a physician which focuses on the patient’s weight. Three variables are manipulated in these messages: (a) the intensity of the language used to stigmatize the patient (high v. low stigma), (b) the patient’s gender (male v. female), and (c) the patient’s body size (large v. small). Gender and body size were manipulated, because men and women with very large and very small body sizes experience weight-based stigma (Anderson & Bresnahan, 2013; Puhl & Brownell, 2006). These manipulations create 12 message conditions, which can produce main effects (for stigma intensity, patient gender, and patient body size), as well as 2- and 3-way interaction effects, on the five dependent variables. The dependent variables include the participant’s self-esteem and the participant’s perceptions of the four stigma communication message characteristics (marking, labeling, personal responsibility, and social peril).
Research Questions

The research questions are organized by dependent variable: (a) self-esteem, (b) perception of marking, (c) perception of labeling, (d) perception of personal responsibility, and (e) perception of social peril; the questions ask how these variables are affected by the manipulated features of the messages (stigma intensity, patient gender, and patient body size). Main effects are considered first, followed by interaction effects.

RQ1a: Will there be main effects for stigma intensity, patient gender, and/or patient body size on participants’ self-esteem?

RQ1b: Will there be two-way interaction effects (stigma intensity x patient gender, stigma intensity x patient body size, patient gender x patient body size) on participants’ self-esteem?

RQ1c: Will there be a three-way interaction effect (stigma intensity x patient gender x patient body size) on participants’ self-esteem?

RQ2a: Will there be main effects for stigma intensity, patient gender, and/or patient body size on participants’ perceptions of marking?

RQ2b: Will there be two-way interaction effects (stigma intensity x patient gender, stigma intensity x patient body size, patient gender x patient body size) on participants’ perceptions of marking?

RQ2c: Will there be a three-way interaction effect (stigma intensity x patient gender x patient body size) on participants’ perceptions of marking?

RQ3a: Will there be main effects for stigma intensity, patient gender, and/or patient body size on participants’ perceptions of labeling?

RQ3b: Will there be two-way interaction effects (stigma intensity x patient gender, stigma intensity x patient body size, patient gender x patient body size) on participants’ perceptions of labeling?

RQ3c: Will there be a three-way interaction effect (stigma intensity x patient gender x patient body size) on participants’ perceptions of labeling?

RQ4a: Will there be main effects for stigma intensity, patient gender, and/or patient body size on participants’ perceptions of personal responsibility?

RQ4b: Will there be two-way interaction effects (stigma intensity x patient gender, stigma intensity x patient body size, patient gender x patient body size) on participants’ perceptions of personal responsibility?
RQ4c: Will there be a three-way interaction effect \((\text{stigma intensity} \times \text{patient gender} \times \text{patient body size})\) on participants’ perceptions of personal responsibility?

RQ5a: Will there be main effects for \(\text{stigma intensity}, \text{patient gender}, \text{and/or patient body size}\) on participants’ perceptions of social peril?

RQ5b: Will there be two-way interaction effects \((\text{stigma intensity} \times \text{patient gender}, \text{stigma intensity} \times \text{patient body size}, \text{patient gender} \times \text{patient body size})\) on participants’ perceptions of social peril?

RQ5c: Will there be a three-way interaction effect \((\text{stigma intensity} \times \text{patient gender} \times \text{patient body size})\) on participants’ perceptions of social peril?

Method

Sample

Participants were \(N = 354\) undergraduate students at a medium-sized, Midwestern public university. Participants were recruited through an online pool used by multiple university departments and received course credit for their participation. The sample was predominantly female (66.3%). The participants’ average age was 19.13 years \((SD = 1.19\) years). The average Body Mass Index (BMI) was 23.85 \((SD = 4.38)\), which is in the “normal” (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2015) weight range; 61.2% of the participants were in the “normal” weight category. The second-most common category was “overweight” (23.1%), then “underweight” (7.4%), “obese class I” (5.8%), and “obese class II” (2.6%).

Design

All study materials and procedures were approved by the institutional review board. All participants provided their consent for completing the study prior to their exposure to study materials. The study followed a posttest-only, 2 (Stigma level: high, low) x 2 (Gender: male, female) x 2 (Body size: large, small) between-subjects experimental design. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions. In each condition, participants viewed one page that contained a picture of a person; a brief, fictitious message that was attributed to the person in the picture; and a series of measures related to stigma and self-esteem. Four different pictures were used in order to cross the gender and body size variables, e.g., large male, large female, small male, and small female. Pictures were obtained from general, internet image searches; then, the pictures were edited to black and white, and cropped to show from the neck to just below the hips. The people in the pictures were not wearing shirts; the women were wearing bras. See Figure 1 for a copy of all four images.

The messages were written from the point of view of a fictitious patient (i.e., the person pictured) who anonymously posted the story online. See Table 1 for the full message content. The messages began with the patient recalling how the physician began their interaction with a remark about the patient’s weight status (mark), placed the person in a specific BMI category (label), explained that the patient was responsible for his/her weight status (personal responsibility), and then mentioned to another care provider—when the patient was believed to
be out of earshot—that health care costs are rising due to weight-related health issues (social peril).

The messages described an interaction with a physician that focused on the patient’s weight. We included a physician because doctors are often the source of stigmatizing messages about weight (Friedman et al., 2005; Puhl & Brownell, 2006), despite the fact that stigmatization has routinely been denounced as an ineffective and unethical approach to motivate weight loss or any other health-behavior change. (See Puhl and Heuer [2010] for an extensive review.) The physician in the fictional encounter addressed the fictional patient with a message that contained language corresponding to the four elements of a stigmatizing message (Smith, 2007): mark, label, personal responsibility, and social peril. The intensity of each of these elements was either high or low, which created messages that were either high stigma (all four elements were high in stigma intensity) or low stigma (all four elements were low in stigma intensity). Following other studies that manipulated the intensity of stigma across stigma message features (Smith, 2012a, 2012b), we developed the language for these messages based on definitions of the message features (Smith, 2007), rather than drawing from a pre-established source for the exact language.

In addition to stigma intensity, the language of the messages varied based on the patient’s body size, such that different terminology was used for the large body (e.g., obese) than the small body (e.g., underweight). The physician’s message was gender neutral and did not vary based on the patient’s gender. Thus, there were four messages: high stigma for a large body, low stigma for a large body, high stigma for a small body, and low stigma for a small body.

Instrumentation

After viewing the message, participants rated the interaction in terms of its rudeness, truthfulness, and helpfulness. Then, they rated the attractiveness of the person in the picture. Next, they completed scales measuring their perception of the presence of each element of stigma (mark, label, personal responsibility, and social peril). Finally, participants completed the Rosenberg (1965) measure of self-esteem.

Covariates. In addition to participant demographic covariates (age, participant gender, and participant BMI), we also measured the participants’ perceptions of the fictitious patient and the manipulated message as a whole. A single item measured participants’ perceptions of the fictitious patient’s attractiveness (from the picture). The item used a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = very unattractive to 7 = very attractive. Participants then rated the extent to which the interaction in the manipulated messages was rude, truthful, and helpful, with single-item measures that used a 5-point Likert-type response scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Dependent variables. After covariates were measured, we measured the following dependent variables: perception of marking, labeling, assigning personal responsibility, linking to social peril, and participant self-esteem. The researchers created 4-item scales to measure the presence of each stigma component in the interaction. Each scale began with the stem “Did it seem like the doctor . . .” followed by statements that corresponded to that stigmatizing component. Participants used 5-point, Likert-type response scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores indicate a greater presence of the stigmatizing component. Perceptions of the extent to which the physician marked the patient were measured with items such as “Did it seem like the doctor brought too much attention to the person’s weight?” This scale was reliable, α = .89. Perceptions of the extent to which the physician “labeled” the patient
were measured with items such as “Did it seem like the doctor used this person’s weight to categorize them?” This 4-item scale was reliable, $\alpha = .90$. Perceptions of the extent to which the doctor placed personal responsibility on the patient for the stigmatized condition were measured with items such as “Did it seem like the doctor made the person personally responsible for their weight?” This scale was reliable, $\alpha = .92$. Perceptions of the extent to which the doctor linked the patient with social peril were measured with items such as “Did it seem like the doctor thought the person’s weight would cause some negative effects?” This scale was reliable, $\alpha = .89$.

Rosenberg’s (1965) self-esteem scale was used to measure self-esteem. This 10-item scale uses a 4-point, Likert-type response scale (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree), where higher scores indicate greater self-esteem. The scale includes items such as “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” or “At times, I think I am no good at all” (reverse-coded). This scale was reliable, $\alpha = .85$.

Analysis

Prior to conducting hypothesis tests, the data were examined for potential covariates. Following Tabachnick and Fidell’s (1996) guidelines, we included a variable as a covariate in the analysis if we observed a significant, linear relationship between a continuous variable and an outcome variable or if a categorical variable produced significant differences in the outcome variable. Based on these criteria, participant gender was used as a covariate for mark and personal responsibility message components, as well as for self-esteem. Participant BMI was included as a covariate for self-esteem. Participant age did not have a linear relationship with any outcome variables. Participants’ perceptions of patient attractiveness were used as a covariate for general stigma, mark, and social peril. Finally, in terms of message perceptions, perceived message rudeness was used as a covariate in all analyses; perceived message helpfulness was used as a covariate for general stigma, mark, label, and personal responsibility; and truthfulness was used as a covariate for general stigma, mark, label, social peril, and personal responsibility.

One-way analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) were used to test the hypothesis and to answer the research questions. The full-factorial model (2 [Stigma level: high, low] x 2 [Gender: male, female] x 2 [Body size: large, small]) was used in each test to observe main and interaction effects. The significance level was set at $p = .05$.

Results

The first group of research questions asked about the effects of each condition on participants’ self-esteem. After controlling for gender, BMI, and perceived message rudeness, there was a significant two-way interaction for Stigma Level x Body Size on self-esteem, $F(1, 305) = 5.79, p = .017$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. There was a complete crossover effect for this interaction (Figure 2). In the large body conditions, participant self-esteem was higher in the low stigma conditions ($M = 2.94$, SE = .04) than in the high stigma conditions ($M = 2.82$, SE = .41). This effect was reversed for the small body conditions, where participant self-esteem was lower in the low stigma conditions ($M = 2.87$, SE = .05) compared to the high stigma conditions ($M = 2.97$, SE = .05). In the low stigma conditions, participant self-esteem was higher for the large body conditions than the small body conditions. This effect was reversed for the high stigma conditions, where participant self-esteem was higher for the small body conditions than the large body conditions.
The second group of research questions asked about the effects of each condition on participant perceptions of marking the stigmatized patient. After controlling for gender, participants’ perception of patient attractiveness, and message helpfulness, rudeness, and truthfulness, there was a main effect for stigma level on participants’ perceptions of the patient being marked, $F(1, 298) = 4.31, p = .039$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$, such that this perception was higher in the high stigma ($M = 4.12, SD = .72$) condition than the low stigma ($M = 3.64, SD = .92$) condition.

This main effect was subsumed by three significant interaction effects for marking. After controlling for gender, perception of patient attractiveness, and message helpfulness, rudeness, and truthfulness, the two-way Stigma Level x Gender interaction was significant, $F(1, 298) = 7.30, p = .007$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. The two-way Gender x Size interaction was also significant: $F(1, 298) = 5.62, p = .018$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. Finally, the three-way Stigma Level x Gender x Size interaction was also significant, $F(1, 298) = 11.72, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$.

First, the patient’s gender seems to moderate the effect of stigma level on participants’ perceptions of marking. In the low stigma conditions, the participants perceived the female patient ($M = 3.79, SD = .93$) to be more marked than the male patient ($M = 3.49, SD = .88$); whereas in the high stigma conditions, the participants perceived the male patient ($M = 4.24, SD = .74$) to be more marked than the female patient ($M = 4.00, SD = .69$).

Second, there was a complete crossover effect for the Gender x Size interaction on marking. In the small body conditions, participants perceived the male patient ($M = 4.03, SD = .61$) to be more marked than the female patient ($M = 3.77, SD = .79$), whereas in the large body conditions, this effect was reversed (male: $M = 3.65, SD = 1.08$; female: $M = 3.97, SD = .86$). Similarly, participants perceived that female patients with large bodies ($M = 3.97, SD = .86$) were more marked than female patients with small bodies ($M = 3.77, SD = .79$); this effect was reversed for male patients, such that small-bodied men ($M = 4.03, SD = .61$) appeared more marked than large-bodied men ($M = 3.65, SD = 1.08$).

Third, in the three-way interaction effect, the nature of the Gender x Body Size interaction effect for marking differed based on the Stigma Level. In the low stigma conditions, there was a complete crossover effect for the Gender x Size interaction, such that participants perceived that male patients with small bodies ($M = 3.84, SE = .11$) were more marked than male patients with large bodies ($M = 3.45, SE = .12$). The reverse was true for conditions with female patients, where participants perceived that large-bodied female patients ($M = 4.16, SE = .10$) were more marked than small-bodied female patients ($M = 3.60, SE = .12$). In the high stigma conditions, body size moderated the magnitude of the effect of gender on perceptions of marking. Participants perceived that male patients were more marked than female patients and that large-bodied male patients ($M = 4.16, SE = .12$) were more marked than small-bodied male patients ($M = 3.94, SE = .13$). Similarly, participants perceived that large-bodied female patients ($M = 3.88, SE = .11$) were more marked than small-bodied female patients ($M = 3.81, SE = .11$), but this effect was not as pronounced as that observed for Body size in the high stigma, male patient conditions (Figure 3). In other words, patient body size increases the magnitude of difference in participants’ perceptions of marking based on the patient’s gender. Participants perceived greater differences in the physician’s marking of male v. female patients when those patients had large bodies than when the patients had small bodies.

The third group of research questions asked about the effect of each condition on perceptions of labeling the stigmatized patient. After controlling for perception of message helpfulness, rudeness, and truthfulness, there was a main effect for stigma level on participants’
perceptions of labeling, $F(1, 323) = 9.89, p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, such that participants’ perceptions of labeling were greater in the high stigma conditions ($M = 4.27, SD = .67$) than in the low stigma condition ($M = 3.80, SD = .73$).

This main effect was subsumed by a significant two-way interaction effect for Stigma Level x Body Size, $F(1, 323) = 5.91, p = .016$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. There was a complete crossover effect such that in the low stigma conditions, participants perceived greater labeling of the small-bodied patients ($M = 3.90, SD = .66$) than large-bodied patients ($M = 3.69, SD = .79$). This effect was reversed for the high stigma conditions, where participants perceived greater labeling of large-bodied patients ($M = 4.33, SD = .71$) than small-bodied patients ($M = 4.19, SD = .60$).

The fourth group of research questions asked about the effects of each condition on perceptions that the message attributed personal responsibility for the stigmatized condition to the patient. After controlling for gender and perceived message rudeness, helpfulness, and truthfulness, there was a main effect for stigma level, $F(1, 301) = 13.45, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$, such that participants perceived that the message placed greater responsibility on the patient for the stigmatized condition, i.e., body weight, in the high-stigma conditions ($M = 4.26, SD = .73$) compared to low-stigma conditions ($M = 3.74, SD = .73$).

The fifth group of research questions asked about the effects of each condition on perceptions that the message linked the patient to social peril. After controlling for patient attractiveness and perceived message rudeness and truthfulness, there was a main effect for body size, $F(1, 322) = 8.87, p = .003$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, such that participants perceived that large-bodied patients ($M = 4.33, SD = .60$) were linked to more social peril than small-bodied patients ($M = 4.00, SD = .61$).

This main effect was subsumed by an interaction effect. A three-way interaction for Stigma Level x Gender x Body Size was observed, $F(1, 322) = 4.86, p = .028$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. In the low-stigma conditions with small-bodied patients, participants perceived a greater link to social peril for the male patient ($M = 4.10, SE = .10$) than the female patient ($M = 3.99, SE = .08$). This effect was reversed for large-bodied patients in the low stigma conditions, where participants perceived a greater link to social peril for the female patient ($M = 4.34, SE = .09$) than the male patient ($M = 4.18, SE = .11$). In the high stigma conditions with small-bodied patients, participants perceived a greater link to social peril for the female patient ($M = 4.17, SE = .11$) than the male patient ($M = 3.94, SE = .11$). This effect was reversed for large-bodied patients in the high stigma conditions, where participants perceived a greater link to social peril for the male patient ($M = 4.38, SE = .11$) than the female patient ($M = 4.27, SE = .09$). See Figure 4.

**Post-Hoc Analyses**

We also examined differences, by condition, in participants’ perceptions of the attractiveness of the fictitious patient, and participants’ perceptions of the rudeness, truthfulness, and helpfulness of the fictitious physician’s message.

There were main and interaction effects for patient attractiveness. First, there were main effects based on Stigma Level, Gender, and Body Size, after controlling for participants’ gender. Participants rated the patients as more attractive in the high stigma conditions ($M = 3.41, SD = 1.54$) compared to the low stigma conditions ($M = 3.18, SD = 1.56$), $F(1, 322) = 5.09, p = .025$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. Participants also rated the female patients ($M = 3.47, SD = 1.52$) more attractive than the male patients ($M = 3.09, SD = 1.56$), $F(1, 322) = 8.58, p = .0045$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. 
Additionally, participants rated small-bodied patients \((M = 4.13, SD = 1.27)\) as more attractive than large-bodied patients \((M = 2.61, SD = 1.42)\), \(F(1, 322) = 118.67, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .27\). Second, there was a two-way interaction of Gender \times Body Size on perceived patient attractiveness, \(F(1, 322) = 9.26, p = .003, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .03\), again controlling for participant gender. This interaction produced differences in perceived attractiveness for large bodies, based on patient gender, such that for large-bodied patients, participants rated female patients \((M = 2.99, SD = 1.47)\) as more attractive than male patients \((M = 2.13, SD = 1.18)\). In the small body conditions, there was no significant difference in attractiveness by gender.

There was a main effect for Stigma Level on message rudeness, after controlling for participant gender, \(F(1, 321) = 38.93, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .11\). Participants rated high stigma messages \((M = 3.52, SD = 1.09)\) ruder than low stigma messages \((M = 3.54, SD = 1.10)\). There were two main effects for message truthfulness: Stigma Level and Body Size. Participants found the low stigma messages \((M = 3.59, SD = .87)\) more truthful than the high stigma messages \((M = 3.07, SD = 1.01)\), \(F(1, 332) = 31.36, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01\). Participants also found the messages directed toward large-bodied patients \((M = 3.61, SD = .94)\) to be more truthful than the ones directed toward small-bodied patients \((M = 3.12, SD = .93)\), \(F(1, 332) = 31.66, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .09\).

There was a main effect for Stigma Level on message helpfulness; \(F(1, 295) = 38.07, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .12\), after controlling for participant BMI. Participants found the low stigma messages \((M = 2.98, SD = 1.08)\) to be more helpful than the high stigma messages \((M = 2.19, SD = 1.11)\).

**Discussion**

The current study investigated the effects of weight-based stigma messages on the self-esteem of non-stigmatized audience members, and investigated their perceptions of the stigmatizing message components using Smith’s (2007) stigma communication model. The findings have implications for stigma, weight-based stigma, and stigma communication. Specifically, this study draws attention to an under-studied aspect of the stigma experience: its individual-level effects on a third-party observer, i.e., someone other than the stigma’s perpetrator or victim. Previous research typically focused on the effects of stigma on stigmatized people (Puhl & Brownell, 2006; Puhl & Heuer, 2010) or suggested ways that the stigmatization of groups can affect observers’ attitudes and emotions toward the stigmatized people both at the collective and individual levels (Link & Phelan, 2001; Smith, 2007). For example, collectively, stigma can influence social norms or structures that isolate or otherwise denigrate stigmatized individuals or groups (Link & Phelan, 2001; Smith, 2007). On an individual level, exposure to stigmatizing messages can generate negative (Smith, 2012a) or positive (Smith, 2014) emotions and cognitions toward the stigmatized person. The current study also focused on the effects of observing stigmatization toward another person, but instead of considering the emotional or cognitive reactions directed toward the stigmatized person, it found that observing the stigmatization of another person affects the observer’s self-esteem.

**Self-Esteem and Weight-Based Stigma Communication**

Previous research has firmly established a negative association between self-esteem and the personal experience of stigma (Brockmeyer et al., 201 Friedman et al., 2005; Myers &
Rosen, 1999; Pearl et al., 2015; Puhl & Brownell, 2006; Shentow-Bewsh et al., 2015). However, little is known about how exposure to the stigmatization of another person will affect one’s self-esteem. In the context of a physician communicating weight-based stigma to a fictional patient, we observed that the intensity of the stigma communication and the stigmatized patient’s body size interacted to affect the audience’s self-esteem. Specifically, participants’ self-esteem was higher when they observed a lower-intensity stigma toward a large-bodied patient or a higher-intensity stigma toward a small-bodied patient when compared to a low-intensity stigma toward a small-bodied patient or a high-intensity stigma toward a large-bodied patient. This effect was observed after controlling for the participants’ gender and BMI, as well as their perceptions of message rudeness. We expected that self-esteem would be higher after exposure to low-intensity stigma as compared to high-intensity stigma, because previous research on stigma and self-esteem generally observes this relationship when stigma experiences are quite intense (Myers & Rosen, 1999). However, we did not anticipate that, for the small body conditions, a highly stigmatizing interaction would produce higher levels of self-esteem than the less-intense stigmatizing interaction.

A potential explanation for observing higher self-esteem after exposure to highly stigmatizing communication toward a small body, compared to less-intense stigma, may come from the concept of “stigma power” (Link & Phelan, 2015, p. 24). Stigma power refers to the processes of stigma that allow a stigmatizer to keep another person down, in, or away from the non-stigmatized person or group. Link and Phelan (2015) argue that cultural beliefs about standards for human behavior or appearance motivate people to stigmatize others in order to keep them down (i.e., without sociocultural power), keep them in (i.e., conform to societal norms), or keep them away (i.e., excluded from social relationships). Stigma power may operate with weight-based stigma, because cultural beliefs about acceptable weight and appearance abound (Murakami & Latner, 2015). Finally, stigma power often operates covertly or indirectly, sometimes through structural forms of discrimination (Link & Phelan, 2015). Previous research suggests that overweight and obese people experience many forms of structural discrimination, often at the hands of medical caregivers (Friedman et al., 2005; Puhl & Heuer, 2009).

In the current study, participants experienced indirect stigma when they observed a physician’s stigmatization within the social structure of health care. Again note that, although the research clearly indicates that healthcare providers’ stigmatization of health issues is an inappropriate and ineffective approach to motivate behavior change (Puhl & Heuer, 2010, physicians remain a common source of weight-based stigma (Puhl & Brownell, 2006). This experience is consistent with the indirect ways that stigma power operates, but Link and Phelan (2015) do not comment on how the experience of stigmatizing another person may affect one’s self-esteem. However, they do suggest that the process of keeping another person or group down, in, or out could elevate one’s social status compared to the stigmatized person or group (Link & Phelan, 2015). Thus, it may be that, whereas the experience of being stigmatized is related to lower levels of self-esteem (Crocker, 1999), the experience of exerting stigma power through the indirect stigmatization of another person could positively impact self-esteem. Future studies about stigma power in the context of weight-based stigma could modify Link and Phelan’s (2015) stigma-power measures to observe the extent to which stigma power operates in this context and how it relates to self-esteem.
Perceptions of Stigma Communication Message Features

Participants’ perceptions of the features of stigma communication messages varied based on the level of stigma, the stigmatized patient’s gender, and the stigmatized patient’s body size. In general, this study’s results suggest that the features of stigma communication messages are perceived differently based on the target of the stigma message and the intensity of the stigmatizing language. In particular, gender seemed to consistently affect perceptions of message features, despite the fact that the message content varied only by body size and stigma level. That perceptions of message features varied based on the intensity of stigmatizing language is consistent with previous research (Smith, 2012a, 2012b). Our study contributes to the literature about stigma communication by suggesting that—at least in the context of weight-based stigma—attributes of the stigmatized person (namely body size and gender) also affect these perceptions.

First, there was a three-way interaction (Stigma Level x Body Size x Gender) for participants’ perceptions of the message marking the stigmatized person. The effect of this interaction was most striking for the large-bodied male patient. Participants perceived this patient to be the most marked patient (compared to a small male, small female, and large male) in the high stigma condition and the least marked patient in the low stigma condition. This finding speaks to and complicates the gendered nature of weight bias (Anderson & Bresnahan, 2013; Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012). Anderson and Bresnahan (2013) found that large, male bodies received the most stigmatizing descriptions, compared with all other body types across genders. In contrast, Fikkan and Rothblum (2012) reviewed literature on weight-based stigma and concluded that “fat women fare worse than thinner women and worse than men, whether the men are fat or thin” (p. 575). Clearly, both genders experience weight-based stigma, albeit with different frequency, but scholars are only beginning to explore how stigma communication varies by the stigmatized person’s gender.

Our findings are consistent with Anderson and Bresnahan (2013) because our findings suggest that the male patients were perceived to be more marked by weight-based stigma communication than female patients. However, due to women more commonly experiencing weight-based stigma in their lives (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012) and via media messages (Shentow-Bewsh et al., 2015), the stigmatization of a male patient may have been particularly salient to participants due to its uncommonness. Clearly, the stigmatized person’s gender affects the perception of stigmatization based on weight. Future research should investigate this phenomenon and expand to investigate whether and how the stigma target’s gender affects perceptions of stigmatization in other contexts, such as mental illness or HIV/AIDS.

Perceptions of labeling, the second feature of stigma communication messages, were affected by an interaction between the intensity of the stigma (high, low) and the stigma target’s body size (large, small). In this case, the high stigma conditions, again, produced results that were consistent with previous literature: large bodies were perceived to be more labeled than small bodies (Anderson & Bresnahan, 2013). However, in the low stigma conditions, the effect was reversed, so that participants perceived the small bodies to be more labeled than the large bodies. To manipulate labeling in the low stigma conditions, the message read, “According to the BMI chart, your weight is in the [obese/underweight] category.” It is unclear why “underweight” appears to be a stronger label than “obese.” This effect may be due to desensitization to the term “obesity,” because it has been termed an epidemic in popular media discourse (Gard & Wright, 2005). This example, again, speaks to the cultural expectations for physical appearance that
motivate stigma in the first place (Link & Phelan, 2015) as well as the ways that those expectations affect perceptions about weight-based stigma. Once again, the current study’s findings demonstrated how the intersection of stigma intensity (Smith, 2012a, 2012b) and cultural expectations for appearance (Link & Phelan, 2015) affects the perceptions of stigma—communication features, such as labeling. Future research should investigate how stigma intensity interacts with other attributes of stigma targets, such as race, age, or sexual orientation, and how those elements impact perceptions of various types of stigma.

Perceptions of the patient’s personal responsibility for his/her stigmatized condition varied based only on the intensity of the stigma communication message. Participants perceived that the highly stigmatizing message placed more personal responsibility on the patient than the less-stigmatizing message. To establish personal responsibility in the less-stigmatizing conditions, across genders and body sizes, the fictitious physician asked, “How is your weight maintenance going?” Then, the physician stated, “You should be concerned about your health.” Even these somewhat innocuous statements communicate stigma by linking to personal responsibility. While every person could be admonished with “you should be concerned about your health,” such a phrase has healthist (Cheek, 2008; Crawford, 1980) undertones, at worst, and, at best, clearly establishes personal responsibility for the health condition. In cases where the health condition is stigmatized, this link to personal responsibility necessarily communicates stigma. Indeed, the participants’ ratings of perceptions of personal responsibility were significantly above the scale’s midpoint, even in these less-stigmatizing conditions.

Participants recognized that the patient was held personally responsible for his/her weight, even in the low stigma condition. This finding speaks to the difficulty of communicating about weight in a medical setting (Friedman et al., 2005; Puhl & Heuer, 2010). Physicians need to communicate clearly about potential health concerns and their etiology (Bray, 2004). In the case of weight, it may be impossible to speak about that topic in a health setting without evoking stigma, which may explain earlier studies that reported the ubiquity of weight-based stigma in medical settings (Crandall, 1994; Friedman et al., 2005, Puhl & Heuer, 2010). Future studies could manipulate the phrasing of weight-based conversations in medical settings to determine whether it is possible to avoid evoking weight-based stigma when communicating about weight.

Finally, participants’ perceptions of linking the stigmatized person to social peril varied by Stigma Level, Gender, and Body Size (of the stigma target). In general, participants perceived that large bodies were linked to more social peril than small bodies. This finding is consistent with the various health issues associated with being overweight or obese (Schwimmer, Burwinkle, & Varni, 2003), as well as the media coverage of these issues (Gard & Wright, 2005). In addition, participants’ ratings of linking the stigmatized person to social peril were well above the scale’s mid-point. This result indicates that these messages—whether intensely or moderately stigmatizing—all linked the individual to social peril due to his or her weight status. This finding reinforces the claims of some scholars (Anderson, 2012; Gard & Wright, 2005) that the rhetoric surrounding obesity has moral undertones that go beyond describing or predicting individual health risks to suggesting societal problems related to weight. In more specific and practical terms, much like the discussion above about personal responsibility as a mechanism of stigma, we suggest that healthcare providers and others who communicate publicly about health carefully consider how they talk about weight. Although it is unclear in all cases whether the threat of social peril is what causes a health condition to be stigmatized (Smith, 2007) or whether threats to social peril are emphasized or heightened for conditions that are stigmatized (Gard &
Wright, 2005), it is clear that social peril is clearly communicated when a health care provider speaks about a person’s weight.

Our findings further suggest that the link to social peril for each body size also varies by stigma level and gender. Our results indicate that, for large bodies, in the high stigma conditions, participants perceived more social peril linked to male patients compared to female patients, whereas in the low stigma conditions, participants perceived female patients to be more linked to social peril than male patients. For small bodies, in the high stigma conditions, participants perceived more social peril linked to female patients compared to male patients; whereas in the high stigma conditions, participants perceived male patients to be more linked to social peril than female patients.

The three-way interaction affecting perceptions of social peril is more complicated than the three-way interaction observed for perceptions of marking because no patterns emerged across the conditions. Each unique combination of factors (stigma level, gender, and body size) produced different perceptions of linking the stigmatized person to social peril. The underlying mechanisms driving these differences in perception remain unclear. However, this finding speaks to the power of the stigmatized person’s gender to affect perceptions of stigmatizing communication (Anderson & Bresnahan, 2013; Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012), particularly in the context of weight. In addition, this finding demonstrates that the intensity of stigmatizing communication affects perceptions of stigma (Smith 2012a, 2012b), but these effects vary based on the stigma target’s attributes, in this case body size and gender. Future studies could gather qualitative data from participants regarding their perceptions of the stigmatized individual and why they felt that the stigmatized person was responsible for the stigmatized condition.

Limitations

The main limitation for this study is the photos used. We did not measure how realistic the participants felt the pictures were in relation to how the physician characterized the patient’s weight, which could have affected participants’ perceptions of the messages. Another limitation was that the photos of the fictitious patients did not show the person’s face, which may have affected the photos’ realism for the participants. The decision to crop the images was made to create similarity among all the patients and was seen as necessary to control for facial expression differences that may have influenced responses.

In addition, the interaction between the fictitious patient and physician focused primarily on the BMI as an indicator of health or, at the very least, fat. As Anderson (2012) argued, the BMI is an imperfect instrument—even when used properly—and should never be used as a way to determine a person’s overall health. The BMI was used here specifically for that reason: it diminishes a very complex issue, such as overall health, into a rigid system that creates labels and, therefore, easily stigmatizes individuals based on their weight. However, it remains to be seen whether using different tools to assess, for example, an individual’s adipose tissue in relation to other health indicators might also serve to stigmatize patients with respect to their body size. Future studies should examine differences in perceived stigmatization due to the healthcare provider’s method of making claims about the patient’s health based on weight, i.e., using the BMI or another method.
Conclusion

The results of this study generally support Smith’s (2007) stigma communication model. Our study expanded the model’s reach to suggest that exposure to the stigmatization of another person can affect one’s self-esteem; we also demonstrated that this effect varies based on the intensity of the stigma and attributes of the stigma target (in this case, body size). Additionally, our results suggest that participants’ perceptions of most features of stigma communication messages (marking, labeling, and linking to social peril) are affected by not only the intensity of the stigma messages, but also the stigma target’s attributes, i.e., gender and body size. Future studies about stigma communication should account for the influence of the stigma target’s attributes (e.g., gender, race, body size, etc.) on perceptions of and responses to stigma.

References


Appendix

Table 1. *Stigma Messages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stigma Level</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>I went to the doctor today, and the first thing Dr. Jones said to me was: “How did you get that [mark: fat/emaciated]? You should be ashamed of yourself (<a href="#"><strong>personal responsibility</strong></a>).” Then the doctor proceeds to tell me, “You’re what we would call [<strong>label</strong>: ‘morbidly obese’/ ‘underweight’]. Because you are [<strong>label</strong>: morbidly obese/underweight], we’ll have to test you for [<strong>social peril</strong>: Type II diabetes/malnutrition] and who knows what else. Plus, it wouldn’t kill you to [<strong>personal responsibility</strong>: exercise a little self-control/eat a little more].” Then, as I was leaving, I heard Dr. Jones say to another doctor, “This patient is why our health care costs are so high (<a href="#"><strong>social peril</strong></a>).” And I bet Dr. Jones was talking about me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>I went to the doctor today, and the first thing Dr. Jones said to me was: “How is your weight maintenance (<a href="#"><strong>mark</strong></a>) going? You should be concerned about your health. (<a href="#"><strong>personal responsibility</strong></a>)” Then the doctor proceeds to tell me, “According to the Body Mass Index (BMI) chart, your weight in is the [<strong>label</strong>: obese/underweight] category. Because you’re obese, I’m recommending we test for [<strong>social peril</strong>: Type II diabetes/malnutrition] and other weight-related health issues. Plus, adding [<strong>personal responsibility</strong>: exercise/high-calorie foods] to your [routine/diet] could be helpful.” Then, as I was leaving, I heard Dr. Jones say to another doctor, “Weight-related health problems are really driving up the cost of health care (<a href="#"><strong>social peril</strong></a>).” And I bet Dr. Jones was talking about me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: These messages were identical for both the male and female patients. The brackets present the alternate text for the large- and small-bodied patients, respectively. The message features were listed in bold; these message features did not appear in the messages that the participants viewed.
Figure 1. *Images of patient bodies used in the message manipulations*
Figure 2. *Two-way interaction (Body Size x Stigma Level) on Self-Esteem*

![Graph showing Participant Self-Esteem by Condition](image)

Figure 3. *Three-way interaction (Body Size x Gender x Stigma Level) on Perceptions of Marking*

![Graph showing Perceptions of Marking in Low Stigma Condition](image)
Figure 4. *Three-way interaction (Body Size x Gender x Stigma Level) on Perceptions of Social Peril*
Perceptions of Marking in High Stigma Condition

- **Small Bodies**
  - Male Patient: 3.94
  - Female Patient: 4.17

- **Large Bodies**
  - Male Patient: 4.38
  - Female Patient: 4.27

Legend:
- **Male Patient**
- **Female Patient**
Listening to Unheard Voices: 
Nurses’ Communication Experiences with the NRS Pain Scale

Matthew H. Barton, PhD
Professor & Graduate Director
Southern Utah University
bartonm@suu.edu

Kevin A. Stein, PhD
Associate Professor
Southern Utah University
stein@suu.edu

Abstract
This study examines nurses’ experiences with the Numeric Rating Scale (NRS). These responses characterize the communication trials that nurses face with pain diagnosis, pain management, and overall patient care. Interviews with 20 nurses reveal three themes: subject dissatisfaction, feeling limited, and subjective satisfaction. An analysis of these themes reveals the need for renewed discussion about the way pain is communicated and the challenging expectations nurses must regularly confront. Implications for listening to important, but often quiet, even silent, voices in pain management and clinical practice are discussed.

Keywords: Nurses, pain scale, health communication, interviews, grounded theory

Introduction
In 2004, the National Coalition on Health Care (NCHC) declared that the U.S. health care system is under crisis “riddled with inefficiencies, excessive administrative expenses, inflated process, poor management and inappropriate care…” (NCHC, 2004). These concerns have escalated in the years since as health-care costs continue to rise annually. As the public debate about solutions continues, an additional problem is surfacing: a critical shortage of nurses. In fact, estimates suggest the U.S. nursing shortage will swell to “260,000 registered nurses by 2025. A shortage of this magnitude would be twice as large as any nursing shortage experienced in this country since the mid-1960s” (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2010). These shortages are also predicted to undermine quality medical care as nurses are stretched to their professional limits.

Matthew H. Barton (PhD – University of Nebraska-Lincoln) is Professor in the Communication Department at Southern Utah University. He has published research in Communication Education, Communication Teacher, The Basic Communication Course Annual, and several edited book volumes. He has been honored with his institutions’ highest awards in teaching including: Outstanding Educator and Faculty Fellow in Service Learning. In addition to health communication his other research interests are in rhetoric, apologia, and image repair.

Kevin A. Stein (PhD – University of Missouri-Columbia) is an Associate Professor in the Communication Department at Southern Utah University. His primary research interests include persuasive attack (kategoria), persuasive defense (apologia), and persuasive response to image repair (antapologia). His work has been published in Communication Studies, Relevant Rhetoric, Argumentation & Advocacy, and several edited book volumes. He recently spent a year at Hunan Normal University in Changsha, China establishing an American Studies Center on behalf of Southern Utah University.
Nurses are a vital part of health care, providing many services, including diagnosing and treating acute and chronic health problems; conducting prenatal, well-child, well-woman, and adult check-ups; managing and diagnosing minor trauma; and educating patients about health promotion and disease prevention (Canadian Nurses Association, 2002). Nurses’ roles today not only include traditional bedside care, but also other duties, including team leaders, administrators, and supervisors. In fact, nurses are often on the front lines of the changes in their work roles, job responsibilities, and professional relationships. “These role additions come at a time when nurses are pressured to do more in less time, but without additional training, higher wages, or institutional support” (Apker, 2005, p. 245). These overwhelming pressures on nurses, ultimately, affect patient care, including the challenging area of managing patients’ pain.

Now considered the fifth vital sign, pain must be assessed every four hours, whenever temperature, pulse, respiration, and blood pressure are measured (Terry, 2004). Some experts have observed, “The precise measurement of pain intensity represents one of the most frequent challenges that healthcare professionals have to face” (Larroy, 2002, p. 2). The mandate to communicate with patients about pain more frequently falls primarily on nurses’ shoulders, adding to their already lengthy responsibilities (Terry, 2004).

Assessing pain by utilizing the Numeric Rating Scale (NRS) is particularly common. Despite mixed conclusions about the NRS’ reliability and validity, it is acknowledged as a useful, subjective instrument. Manias, Bucknell, and Bottie (2004) argue that pain cannot be measured directly because of its subjective nature, but is determined by patients’ manifested behaviors and self-reported pain. Thus, at its core, pain management is, in fact, a communication issue. As Campbell (2000) notes, the primary problem in treating pain “is that it eludes exact measurement,” speaking directly to the need for effective communication between nurses and patients (p. 17A). Every patient perceives pain differently; one patient may rate the pain as a two while another patient with similar symptoms may rate the pain as a seven. As a collective group, nurses are competent, but some research shows that they consistently underestimate patients’ pain levels (Sloman, Rosen, Ram, & Shir, 2005). The problem is a complex burden among the pain-scale instrument, perception, and communication between patients and nurses.

Although frustrations have been expressed regarding the NRS, research about nurses’ valuable opinions and feelings toward this instrument is noticeably thin, especially considering the nurses’ central role with pain assessment. This exploratory study examines nurses’ experiences with the NRS and contributes to a renewed dialogue that is aimed at improving the diagnosis, treatment, and overall health-care quality by paying attention to the specific communication responses that nurses offer as they help patients accurately describe the perceptions of pain while simultaneously standing as gatekeepers between doctors and patients.

**Literature Review**

Notwithstanding its universality, pain is a slippery concept to understand (Montes-Sandoval, 1999). Researchers have sought to comprehend and define the feeling of pain since the time of Aristotle (Criste, 2002). More recently, pain has been defined as an “unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage and described in terms of such damage” (Ong & Seymour, 2004, p. 15). The physiological effects of pain can negatively alter nearly every body system. Pain can affect sympathetic nervous-system stimulation; pain can also cause decreased lung volume, hyperglycemia, immune dysfunction,
altered coagulation, psychological distress, gastrointestinal ileus, and urinary retention (Criste, 2002; Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association [HPNA], 2004).

The subjective nature of pain makes it difficult to conceptualize another person’s pain. Specific pain experiences are not simple, one-time occurrences, but components of past pain experience, that are influenced by socio-cultural factors and legitimized through language (Montes-Sandoval, 1999). Because pain symptoms are often described in a vague, ambiguous, or arbitrary manner, confusion can become a significant concern, thus clear communication channels are essential (Montes-Sandoval, 1999). Unrelieved pain can cause sleep disturbances, hopelessness, a loss of control, and impaired social interactions. The physiological stress and decreased mobility caused by pain may even hasten death (HPNA, 2004).

**Pain Scales**

Wood (2004) argued that nurses have “a moral, ethical, humanitarian and professional responsibility to provide an adequate standard of pain assessment” (p. 42). To meet this obligation, different assessment instruments have been developed and are used in a variety of nursing environments (Holdgate, Asha, Craig, & Thompson, 2003).

The two most frequently used instruments are the NRS and the visual analogue scale (VAS; Mawdsley, Moran, and Conniff, 2002). Although the VAS is considered to be the “gold standard” for pain assessment (Aubrun, Paqueron, Langeren, Coriat, & Riou, 2003; Ong & Seymour, 2004), an extensive study by Aubrun et al. (2003) found that nurses preferred the NRS, citing it as more rapid and easier to use. When comparing the two most commonly used tools, the VAS and NRS, Holdgate et al. (2003) found that both scales perform equally well for assessing changes in pain; the researchers also concluded that, by measuring the two scales together, the agreement may be overestimated. The inconsistent findings for pain assessment point to the conclusion that different tools may address various pain components (Coll, Ameen, & Mead, 2004). Another challenge comes from the fact there is no universally accepted pain-assessment tool, and clinicians and researchers lack a common language to discuss and compare the outcomes of pain assessment and management (National Cancer Institute, 2006). It is no wonder that Manias et al. (2004) reported that, despite the variety of pain-assessment methods available, 43.7% of the time no assessment activities were used by nurses as they conducted pain-related activities; simple questioning occurred 45.3% of the time.

**Nurses**

According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2010), registered nurses made up the largest portion of all health-care occupations, holding over 2.5 million positions in 2009, a much larger number compared to physicians, including specialists, for the same time period. Reflecting these reports, Ballard (2003) argued that the main commodity provided in most health-care settings is not health care, but nursing care.

The nurses’ role in overall health care cannot be underestimated. In addition to patient treatment, nurses develop and implement nursing care plans, maintain medical records, advise patients about health maintenance and disease prevention, educate patients and their families, and administer diagnostic tests as well as analyzing the results (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010).
Nurses provide the majority of inpatient care (Rothschild et al., 2006), and patients clearly recognize that nurses are key players in that care. In a compelling story aired by the BBC (2002), it was reported that a review of 34 studies revealed that not only were nurses viewed as “front-line” health-care workers, usually the first point of contact and the personnel who made initial assessments, but also patients were generally more satisfied with nursing care than with the care provided by general practitioners. A similar review of 16 studies came to the same conclusions; nurses spent more time with patients, provided more information, and received higher patient-satisfaction ratings than physicians (Lourant, 2005). Moreover, researchers studying medical mistakes found that, in 69% of cases involving errors, nurses recognized and corrected the problem before it reached the patient (Rothschild et al., 2006). In short, nurses’ communication ability and the information that they are able to glean from patient interactions ought to be of greater concern to practitioners, communication scholars, and researchers.

Nurses have been studied in a variety of ways, including how they communicate to manage role tension (Apker, Propp, & Ford, 2005), their coping behaviors in stressful situations (Sheldon, Barrett, & Ellington, 2006; Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-Butterfield, 2005), their pain assessments compared to patients’ pain assessments (Sloman et al., 2005), and their response to patients’ pain descriptions. In a literature review of nurse-patient interactions, Shattell (2004) reported that most of the research done on nurse patient-interactions focused on nurses’ communication. Despite the importance of Shattell’s focus on nurse-patient interaction, patient perceptions about the interactions, and patient care-seeking communication, two of these concerns are patient focused. Notably absent in this, and other research, is nurses’ perceptions about their interactions with patients. While there is a large body of research available on nurses and pain assessment (e.g., McDonald, LaPorta, & Meadows-Oliver, 2007), there is little to be found on nurses’ communication regarding pain assessment, despite the fact that it is primarily their responsibility to assess patient pain (“A Nursing Approach,” 2005). Coyne et al. (1999) observed, “The general public assumes, and patients hope, that nurses and physicians . . . possess a comprehensive knowledge of pain management that is readily translated into clinical practice” (p. 154). While Coyne and her colleagues concluded that nurses should be educated about pain assessment and treatment, the research stops short of uncovering or evaluating nurses’ experiences with pain assessment.

While there are entire books devoted to understanding patient perspectives and experiences (Charon, 2006; Harter, Japp, & Beck, 2005), there is little research examining nurses’ communicative reflections about a central part of their duties: managing patients’ pain. This obvious gap in the literature leaves unanswered questions about what nurses would reveal regarding their critical role in assessing patients’ pain. Accordingly, the following research question is posed:

RQ: How do nurses communicate about and reconcile their experiences with patients while using the NRS Pain Scale as required by health-care organizations?

Method

The researchers began by contacting the public relations (PR) director at a small, regional hospital in the southwestern United States to discuss the possibility of interviewing nurses for the study. Upon his recommendation, the researchers were connected with the hospital’s nursing manager for a brief conversation about the study’s purposes/goals. Her positive response led the researchers to secure appropriate documentation from the university’s institutional review board,
which was presented to each participant and to the hospital PR director. The hospital agreed to post a flyer at the nurses’ station, and from that point, the researchers were able to secure initial participants. Despite hospital approval, participants were primarily chosen by using a snowball sampling method where each respondent assists the researchers with finding the next subject until there are a sufficient number of people to answer the research question (Offredy, 2000).

Because of shift work and nurses’ family and personal responsibilities, it was difficult to secure participants due to the focused and time-sensitive nature of the interviews; additionally, some nurses did not want to be bothered by participating in the study.

As with previous investigations using the snowball method, steps were taken to reduce sample bias. Such procedures included (a) choosing subjects from varying fields of the nursing profession (e.g., Nurses had worked in a regular hospital, emergency room, home health, and hospice.) and (b) finding a range of experience levels. Participants were 20 nurses (16 females, 4 males; all Caucasian) from a broad spectrum of fields, including the emergency room, surgical procedures, regular hospital, and home health and hospice care. Their collective experience fell between one and 30 years, with an average of at least 9 years as a full-time nurse. Each participant was familiar with different pain-management scales, the NRS in particular, due to popularity and the health facility’s preference.

Each participant was interviewed using a semi-structured question format. Interviews were conducted over the phone and in person, depending on the participant’s schedule and individual comfort level (e.g., Most people were more comfortable on the phone.). Each interview began by asking participants to explain their pain-assessment protocol and procedures when working with a patient to establish how the nurses orient a patient toward the NRS. In most cases, participants gave a prompt such as “With 10 being the worst pain you could experience and 1 being almost no pain, how would you rate your pain right now?” Depending on the treatment’s duration, participants reported similar variations of patient follow up by asking “How is your pain now, and what number would you give it based on the pain scale we used earlier?”

Next, participants described their protocol for when they felt a patient’s reported pain level and their perception of the patient’s pain status were incongruent. Other questions were specifically aimed at eliciting nurses’ feelings about the NRS and whether they would prefer this tool to another one, such as the VAS. They also explained their perceptions about how satisfied they believed other nurses are with the pain scale. Such questioning included the challenge of helping patients translate their pain into a number as well as how satisfied the patients seemed to be. The participants were encouraged to share a brief example that characterized their experiences and satisfaction level.

The interview transcripts generated 22 single-spaced pages of data. Creswell (2013) recommended establishing reliability for the data analysis by seeking agreement among the designated coders. For our study, three coders analyzed the data independently; then, they convened to assess intercoder agreement. Although qualitative research does not generally utilize statistical tests to determine intercoder reliability, a general understanding about three themes emerged among the coders. These dominant themes were identified, and differences were reconciled using a specific method of grounded theory called constant comparison in order to ensure thorough and systematic discovery (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). According to Creswell (2013), grounded theory provides a procedure for developing information categories, interconnecting those categories, building a story that connects the categories, and ending with a discursive set of theoretical propositions. Grounded theory is utilized when there is inadequate
theory to explain a given communication phenomenon. In these cases, the researcher allows the theory to emerge organically from the text. When using grounded theory, there are three phases of coding: open, axial, and selective. During the open-coding process, the researcher examines the text, looking for broad information categories that are supported by the text. The researcher analyzes these categories until he or she reaches a point of theoretical saturation, meaning that there is a reasonable expectation that continuing the open-coding process would not yield any additional categories. Open coding reduces the text to a set of overall themes that represent the text’s key characteristics (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Creswell (2013) advises researchers to utilize at least two verification procedures when validating the findings. This study used a negative case analysis to determine if there were any discordant themes. Finding none, the other verification procedure was peer review, where we sought feedback from a colleague who advised us to use our first two interviews as a pilot test for conducting the interviews and analyzing the data.

In the axial-coding process, the researcher attempts to put the categories together much like a puzzle, determining how the different categories generated with the open-coding process relate to each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Within this coding process, information is organized into a theoretical model where a theory is built or generated. From there, the researcher generates hypotheses that connect the categories in the coding process, which is known as the final process, selective coding. Within selective coding, a diagram called a conditional matrix is created to help the researcher visualize the consequences and conditions related to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013).

Results

This analysis identified three important themes related to the way nurses communicate about and utilize the NRS Pain Scale in their various clinical capacities. Each response underscores the cognitive/affective ebb and flow that nurses experience when using the existing tools, such as the NRS, noting the simultaneous dialectical tensions that nurses feel between satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the instruments. Specifically, the themes were subjective dissatisfaction, feeling limited, and subjective satisfaction. In the next sections, these themes are examined as they relate to the research question guiding this study.

Subjective Dissatisfaction

In spite of the widespread use of the NRS, nurses expressed dissatisfaction with the instrument which was often reported as a conflicted dialectical story of satisfaction-dissatisfaction. Participant #17 stated, “I think . . . it’s an imperfect system, and I think nurses are a lot of time, well pretty much nurses, all nurses myself included, don’t rely very heavily at all on the pain scale.” This apparent distrust of the NRS stemmed from a mix of subjectivity and patient empowerment that the scale provides, creating a discrepancy between nurses’ perceptions of patient pain and patients’ self-rating. At the same time, nurses run the risk of not following

---

1 The authors recognize that there are grammatical issues and sentence fragments in the participants’ responses but felt that it was important to let the data speak accurately about the nurses’ thoughts and feelings. Some issues, such as “like,” “and,” etc., were often signs of the participants thinking about their answers while making sense of their experiences. We have chosen to omit the typical [sic.] with every quotation to keep the quotations cleaner and easier to read.
policy in medical settings where the pain scale is required. Researchers speculated that, due to the discrepancy between the organizational mandates and the nurses’ personal beliefs and practices, some nurses might perceive a potential for disciplinary action if their true feelings were revealed regarding the pain scale’s shortcomings. Such disregard for standard protocols could leave nurses directly exposed to job sanctions, even termination.

The nurses’ responses reflected an ongoing problem with patients’ discrepancies because the patients both underrated and overrated their pain. Nurses expressed frustration when a patient rated his or pain low when he or she was in obvious pain. Because of the low rating, the nurses felt that they couldn’t do anything about it because of the organization’s medical protocol. Moreover, a low pain score was indicative that pain is present, but not necessarily to a degree where pain meds were needed. Participant #14 put it this way:

I can’t say every time, but it is a very high percentage, maybe nine out of 10 times a patient will report a numeric, a pain level that I as a nurse can’t, you know, that I wouldn’t match. I wouldn’t say hey that’s really a pain level 10, you know. I think it’s lower than that or its opposite, like you will have some tough cowboy kind of a guy, and they will say “Oh one or two” and they’re just dying; their blood pressure is up; their heart rate is up; and you want to treat them, but really I can’t. If they report a one or two below a three I can’t treat them.

Nurses also expressed frustration when they perceived that patients rated pain higher than nurses thought it should be. Most nurses who expressed this frustration described these patients as “drug seekers” or as patients who were seeking faster or more attention. For example, participant #19 recalled:

We had a guy that had been in the ER over 12 times in the last month . . . he’s a drug seeker, and he is there for pain meds. He asks for Benadryl right when it is due, Phenergan right when it’s due, Dolson right when it’s due, Dollata right when it’s due, and it’s a little frustrating when he’s saying his pain is a 10 and, and they are not finding a thing wrong with the guy, you know.

Whether patients were rating their pain too low or too high, the respondents felt that the NRS was often a detriment to patient care, despite its centrality and overall purpose.

Feeling Limited

As an extension of the first theme, nurses who shared their experiences noted that they felt the NRS scale limited their ability to help patients in the manner and to the extent that they would like. As a whole, the participants felt slightly less satisfaction with their jobs and the quality of care that they were able to provide. For example, participant #4 stated, “I’ve run into, don’t empathize with the patient and go strictly by objective criteria instead of subjective interpretation, and it is unfortunate when I see that because the patient has been left in an uncomfortable state.” Here, participant #4 was referencing the standard hospital protocol that must be followed to find the sweet spot for keeping patients comfortable while preventing any start toward addiction.

Because nurses view themselves in a role of helping patients, their frustrations with the contradictions inherent with the NRS greatly limit their ability to treat pain. As participant #14 noted, despite being able to state a number, patients “don’t adequately understand the scale, or they misuse it.” These feelings ultimately led some nurses to rely more on their instincts while steering them away from the scale after the initial categorization that occurs during the admission
process. Unfortunately, these limitations continue to compound the pressures that nurses must manage in order to do their job effectively for themselves, their patients, and their medical employer (e.g., hospital or hospice).

**Subjective Satisfaction**

Not all of the responses regarding the NRS and subsequent communication about it were negative. The participants also described their experiences with the NRS as a satisfying, subjective experience. In short, nurses valued the subjective nature of the scale that allows patients to consider their individual pain separate from other people because pain is an individual experience that is based on factors such as patient anxiety and pain threshold. For example, participant #3 expressed:

> I think it’s a very effective tool because pain is a symptom you know; it’s something the patient has to tell you. A lot of things that you do in assessment is what the patient has to tell you, and pain is one thing the patient has to tell you. A lot of people are okay with tolerating a higher level of pain, and they don’t want medication, and so that’s why the pain scale is good.

Participant #6 stated, “I like that it can be individualized for each patient. You know, pain is a different experience for every different person. And so, a patient is able to give it the number that they feel is appropriate personally for them.”

In addition to the feelings of personalization, nurses reported that they believed patients liked the NRS. Participant #11 stated, “I think that probably 75% of patients like it because they can give us an answer.” However, the answer was often a guess because patients, especially people with little NRS experience, were trying to use a ranking system that they use nowhere else in their lives. The nurses who participated in the study believed that the NRS’ subjective nature provides a means for patients to not only express their pain, but can also facilitate a conversation between nurses and patients, thereby initiating a climate of trust, if both parties can get in sync communicatively. Such a climate not only facilitates more communication, but also a higher-quality interaction, leading to more effective and efficient pain treatment.

**Discussion**

This study attempted to understand the way(s) that nurses communicate about the NRS Pain Scale while attempting to understand the instrument’s utility as a routine part of patient care. The research question explored the communicative means that nurses use to make sense of their experiences with the NRS Pain Scale as a regular, required part of their jobs. The responses showed a troubling pattern. A scale that allows a patient to talk with a nurse is valuable because it opens an important line of communication and can create a climate of caring and trust, a type of medical partnership. However, most of the nurses in this sample were caught in a dialectical tension with their perceptions. On the one hand, they felt that patients struggle with the translation from physiological/psychological sensations to a specific number. The result was a desire to discontinue using the scale. On the other hand, the nurses were restrained by hospital policies and were required to do exactly the opposite. The themes pointed to a need for medical professionals to re-examine their policies. Such procedures should provide nurses with the flexibility to adjust the medication strength based on their interactions with the patient and pain management, in general, rather than relying on the numbers alone.
In the myriad of responsibilities that nurses must juggle, institutional pressure to follow rules may account for the positive communication and nurses’ high estimate (e.g., 75%) of patient satisfaction with the NRS scale. This observation is consistent with a number of studies in the literature which talk about the constricted and increasingly demanding environment surrounding nurses (Apker et al., 2005; Rothschild et al., 2006; Shattell, 2004). Nurses must follow rules and provide front-line care for patients, unlike the doctors whose time with patients is much more limited. The findings show that nurses are trapped between a world of not wanting to create or perpetuate patient addiction to painkillers and not wanting patients to suffer needlessly because they fail to use the NRS the way it is intended. Additionally, the scale itself is hopelessly flawed for a number of cases because it requires patients to rate pain that they have no basis for comparing due to experiential novelty (e.g., a woman in labor for the first time).

Conclusion

Although exploratory in nature, this study is useful in many ways. It reveals that there is a level of frustration felt by nurses in regard to pain assessment, generally, and the NRS, more specifically. While nurses view their role as one of helping the patient, they expressed feelings that, in some ways, the NRS constrains them for this important role. The most interesting finding is that the essence of their complaints is the communication problem created by the scale, showcasing the need for clear, precise communication with patients as well as the void that is created when these avenues are partially blocked. Nurses are caught in a hopeless situation where they have to use a highly fallible instrument, forcing them into situations where they must break the rules and trust their own judgment, a professional ethics quandary (Manias et al., 2004). Nurses report that they feel helpless because the consequences for mismanaging pain can lead to addiction for patients as well as potentially strained relationships with doctors and administrators if mistakes are made and if second-guessing occurs. Moreover, the frustration that patients report when trying to give their pain a number, using metaphors such as “it feels like someone hit me with a bat,” may seem concrete to them while leaving nurses in a precarious position. The nurses are then forced into premature judgment and frustration as they aid patients in understanding how to translate their pain sensations and to match them with the appropriate number.

There are several limitations that should be noted. The sample was limited to nurses from one small region of the country, and they only represent one of many cultural backgrounds working in health care. Language barriers, cultural beliefs and similarities may have changed the outcome if this study had captured such data. The sample size, 20, could also be viewed as limiting, despite the study’s qualitative nature. Additionally, participants gave shorter-than-anticipated answers because researchers promised to be brief, perhaps too brief. Taking the time to catalog more in-depth stories from nurses’ experiences may provide richer insight about the themes discovered as part of this study. Due to the nature of their erratic shift work, the nurses agreed to phone interviews. That technique was most convenient for them so that nurses could focus on their responsibilities.

A certain amount of speculation seems to be in order about the reservations that some nurses felt with how this data would be used and how they might be tied to the results, despite careful steps to maintain participant privacy. Such concerns may have exacerbated the overly brief responses, and the fears of being “too negative” about an instrument and system that they cannot change may be attributed to making the best of a challenging situation. These barriers
lead to some uneven depth with the responses, but they also speak to the time pressures and increasing responsibility which nurses do, in fact, face on a regular basis.

Clearly, it is time to listen to these important, unheard voices, allowing them to set the agenda for change, not only about the instrument, but also about the quality of communication between nurses and patients. While this study serves as an initial foray into looking closer at the pain-management problem from the inside out, the results are worthy of consideration because all parties involved with the healing process win when a regular, healthy dialogue about pain diagnosis and management can be fostered.

References


Holdgate, A., Asha, S., Craig, J., & Thompson, J. (2003). Comparison of a verbal numeric rating scale with the visual analogue scale for the measurement of acute pain. Emergency Medicine, 15, 441-446. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1046/j.1442-2026.2003.00499.x


of Nursing Scholarship, 38, 141-147. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2006.00091.x


An Examination of the Narratives of Lottery-Scholarship Legislation

Kristopher Copeland, PhD
Assistant Professor
Northeastern State University
Copela03@nsuok.edu

Abstract
States have relied on lottery-scholarship policies to support public goals, such as higher education. In this paper, I utilize the narrative paradigm to examine how stories from the Hope for Arkansas lottery campaign became embedded in the policy-design process. Through in-depth interviews with 19 participants and a document analysis of 86 documents, the findings suggest that the Hope for Arkansas campaign’s narratives were tied to the policy-design process of the lottery legislation.

Keywords: Narrative Paradigm, Lottery, Public Policy, and Campaign Messages

On March 29, 2012, the Mega Millions lottery reached an all-time high at $656 million. When the numbers were announced, 3 people across the United States matched all 6 numbers to receive $218.6 million each (Fox News, 2012). Media outlets buzzed about this jackpot. Of particular interest was the commentary by the Fox News Channel anchors. The three news anchors discussed and praised many states that provide revenues generated by the lottery for educational purposes. The discussion, however, never focused on the demographics of the citizens who typically buy lottery tickets: primarily the poor (Bowden & Elrod, 2004; McCrary & Condrey, 2003; Rubenstein & Scafidi, 2002). Instead, the lottery was admired because it provided revenue to help achieve the public goal of funding education.

With the Georgia Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE) lottery scholarship paving the way, 10 states have now adopted lottery-scholarship policies. The empirical research points to the regressive nature of lottery policies, specifically noting that lottery scholarships disproportionately benefit middle- and upper-income families at the expense of the poor (e.g., Bowden & Elrod, 2004; Duffourc, 2006; Heller & Marin, 2002; 2004; McCrary & Condrey, 2003; Rubenstein & Scafidi, 2002). Researchers have examined lotteries, especially in the southeastern region of the United States, to investigate the effects of lottery-scholarship aid on access, retention, and brain drain (Cornwell, Mustard, & Sridhar, 2006; Dee & Jackson, 1999; Heller & Marin, 2002; 2004; Henry & Rubenstein, 2002; McCrary & Conrey, 2003; Ness & Tucker, 2008). However, studies have not focused on how citizens are discussed in relation to policy creation.

The purpose of this study is to describe and provide insight about the policy process for an initiated act that moved a lottery issue to the Arkansas state legislature in 2009. Examining stories from the Hope for Arkansas lottery campaign and the policy-design process provides a frame of reference to connect the discussion of ideas within the policy formation to the public’s general understanding of the policy. Because they address policy issues for an audience and debate among themselves when formulating a new policy, legislators are classified under deliberative political discourse (Bitzer, 1981). Therefore, examining the Arkansas lottery policy...
allows for a better understanding of how legislators generate stories about citizens in relation to a public problem and policy solution.

In this essay, I argue that the Hope for Arkansas lottery campaign created a narrative that was continuously adopted by policy actors during the lottery’s policy design. The major theoretical approach for this study is the narrative paradigm which assumes that humans are natural storytellers (Fisher, 1984). Therefore, the conceptual knowledge of the stories from the Arkansas lottery’s campaign and policy-design process provides a case study to better understand how narratives about the citizenry were communicated among the policy actors. Yin (2009) noted that, in order to explore a real-life phenomenon within a bounded system, such as a specific policy, a qualitative, case-study research design should be used. The Arkansas lottery-scholarship policy became the case to understand the narratives that were generated within the campaign and policy-design process. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. How did policy actors narrate the Hope for Arkansas lottery campaign?
2. To what extent did the narratives from the Hope for Arkansas lottery campaign become embedded in the policy design of the Arkansas lottery policy?

**Theoretical Approach: The Narrative Paradigm**

Fisher (1984) introduced the narrative paradigm as “a theory of symbolic actions” (p. 2) that is grounded in the constructivist interpretation of stories that helps one create and understand the lived experience. As Bute and Jensen (2011) noted, the paradigm provides a means for one to understand and connect personal experiences with narratives. Galvin, Braithwaite, and Bylund (2015) stated, “We tell each other stories to make sense of our world, construct and alter identities, cope with stress and loss, and help others become part of our experiences and lives” (p. 75). Barker and Gower (2010) stated, “Stories are memorable, easy to understand, and establish a common ground with others that create credibility” (p. 299). Essentially, the narrative paradigm explains how stories are purposeful and provides a means for receivers to organize and make sense of the world around them. In the current study, the narrative paradigm offers an opportunity to examine how policy actors utilize stories to garner support for controversial policies, such as state lotteries.

While stories provide a means for a receiver to understand an experience, narratives also develop communities of people that share and position stories within a historical and cultural frame (Barker & Gower, 2010; Claire et al., 2014; Fisher, 1984; Spector-Mersel, 2010). Bute and Jensen (2011) illustrated that narratives are grounded in social and political contexts; the narrative’s historical frame depicts a specific context of “time, space, and social positioning” (p. 216). Grounded in constructionism, the cultural frame was described by Spector-Mersel (2010) as follows:

Through the stories common to the groups we belong to we create our familial, organizational, community and national identities. Our culture’s “grand stories” teach us what “worthy” life is, what we should aspire to and what we should avoid, what is good and what is evil, what is forbidden and what is permitted. (p. 208)

As Harding (2012) noted, “narratives are constructed from the (textual and non-textual, verbal and non-verbal) elements and events that surround us” (p. 230). Thus, narratives are linked to one’s identity and existence (Spector-Mersel, 2010).
Additionally, Burns (2015) discussed how a story is judged with two determining standards of reasonable quality: narrative probability and narrative fidelity. First, narrative probability refers to the cohesion that provides a realistic, meaningful, factual, and consistent narrative (Burns, 2015; Fisher, 1984). Galvin et al. (2015) explained this concept: “You experience narrative coherence when parts of the story work together, the story ‘fits’ with other related stories, and the characters are described in ways that seem consistent with what else you know about them” (p. 75). Narrative fidelity signifies the narrative’s truthfulness, reliability, and degree of relevance (Fisher, 1987). Narrative fidelity is created when a narrative appears to be authentic and plausible, and there is a connection to one’s personal experiences and beliefs.

Storytelling has already been recognized as a tool utilized for political communication. It has been used to examine party platforms (Smith, 1989), political social movements (Douglass, 1993; Gustafson & Neff, 2007), and campaign rhetoric (Hammond, 2013; Rivett, 2009) to name a select few. To extend the narrative paradigm’s application in political communication, this study assumes that the narrative paradigm can help explain how the stories that are narrated by policy experts provide a means for the general public to judge the story’s coherency, rationality, and consistency (the story’s narrative probability). Additionally, the narrative paradigm allows the exploration of narrative fidelity related to the relevancy and plausibility of the lottery-policy narratives. Utilizing stories that incorporate high levels of narrative probability and fidelity may help political actors narrate public policy in a way that garners support for issues that are controversial, such as state lottery policies. In particular, this study directly examines the power of creating political messages about narrative probability and fidelity that relate a policy problem (the value of higher education) to a policy solution (creating a state lottery). Accordingly, this study provides a new perspective about controversial state-lottery policies in the United States.

Arkansas Profile and Characteristics

Lotteries had been prohibited in Arkansas since 1874; however, the lottery topic was an issue that the Arkansas legislature continuously revisited as part of its agenda (Wickline, 2007). Before the eventual passage of the lottery in 2008, proposals were flawed by procedural aspects of the constitutional-amendment process, through a joint proposal that would have called on the legislature to reverse a civil-rights provision (Nelson & Mason, 2007), or with religious opposition that helped to diminish the lottery proposal’s momentum. Previous lottery-proposal attempts failed to gain enough support from the voting public in 1996 and 2000; both options included much broader forms of gambling with the addition of casinos.

The failure of these first lottery attempts relates to citizens’ conservative values that deem gambling as a societal and moral ill. Therefore, when lottery proposals were, once again, introduced via the legislature, lawmakers, reflecting their constituents’ previous conservative will, shot down the lottery proposals (Wickline, 2007). Arkansas has an initiative process that allows citizens to circumvent the state legislature by giving them the right to gather signatures in order to propose a ballot measure for an election. A proposed constitutional amendment goes on a ballot if petitioners can gather valid signatures from at least 10% of the turnout for the most recent gubernatorial election (Nelson & Mason, 2007). With lottery legislation losing traction in the state legislature, Lieutenant Governor Bill Halter (D) began a formal lottery campaign in January 2008 after successfully gathering enough signatures to propose a ballot initiative. Lieutenant Governor Halter (D) was a catalyst for driving the attitude change about the constitutional amendment which was passed by voters in 2008; he focused on the educational
benefits with the lottery’s revenue. The lottery campaign became known as Hope for Arkansas and proudly claimed that voting for the Arkansas lottery would provide the same opportunity for Arkansans as the HOPE lottery scholarship had for Georgia’s residents.

On November 4, 2008, the majority of Arkansas voters supported the constitutional amendment that allowed the Arkansas legislature to create a lottery that would fund higher-education scholarships for state institutions. The 87th Arkansas General Assembly completed the task of creating the Arkansas Lottery Scholarship Act in March 2009. Originally created in 1991, the Academic Challenge scholarship was revamped and expanded to create wider access to residents. Unlike other states that divide lottery revenue among higher education and K-12 programs, Arkansas is unique because all funds generated by the lottery are designated for Arkansans enrolled at Arkansas’ public and private, nonprofit, two-year and four-year colleges and universities, and the scholarships are offered regardless of people’s income. The Academic Challenge lottery scholarship is awarded to 30,000 students each year and has led to record enrollment (Wickline, 2013). However, scholarship retention has been an issue; 40% of the Arkansas students fail to make the grades to receive lottery-scholarship funding for the next school year (“Why Did,” 2011).

**Methods**

**Participants and Data Collection**

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, I utilized a purposeful sampling technique to recruit participants, which helped identify a sample that provided in-depth details about the specific case (Patton, 2002). I recruited 19 participants who were tied to the Arkansas lottery-policy process, including former state senators and state representative members as well as members of the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, the University of Arkansas System, regional institutions, governor’s staff, the retail community, an Arkansas college association, and the Hope for Arkansas lottery campaign. Participants consisted of 9 male and 10 female participants. Additionally, 17 participants were White or Caucasian, and 2 were African American.

Interviews took place over a six-month period in 2013, and I received informed consent from all participants before conducting the interview. The participants agreed to audio record the interview. During each discussion, I gathered participants’ storied recollections of their lottery-campaign and/or policy-design experience by using qualitative, semi-structured interviews. This format allowed participants to share their personal narratives. Overall, the interviews provided a means to uncover the complex storytelling about the passage of the Arkansas lottery policy. As suggested by Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2007), I fully transcribed each interview. To maintain confidentiality for all participants, I assigned pseudonyms during the transcription process.

Because the study’s participants relied on reconstructions for the policy-design process of the Arkansas lottery legislation, I included a document analysis, or a review of the relevant documents, to complement and to provide a deeper context about the qualitative interviews’ data. For this study, 14 primary documents were analyzed, including legislative-committee meeting minutes, a memorandum, government-policy reports, the actual legislative bills, the legislative act, and initial lottery-scholarship program information. I also reviewed 72 secondary documents, such as local and national newspaper articles, advertisements, and opinion columns.
Data Analysis

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested reviewing the interview transcripts simultaneously with the document analysis by using the constant-comparative method, which allows the findings to be grounded and rich in the phenomenon’s context, rather than the researcher’s own perspective. To utilize the constant-comparative method in this study, I categorized the narratives’ data themes, either using the language or general data from the interviews and documents, allowing a comparison to evolve into an emerging property for each theme (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that the qualitative study’s reader must find the research trustworthy. Therefore, I employed a triangulation strategy. I simultaneously analyzed interview data with a variety of archival documents to triangulate and to verify the interview data’s accuracy. Additionally, I utilized member checking to test the study’s interpretations and conclusions by allowing the participants to appraise the overall sufficiency of the data analysis. After completing the coding process, participants were contacted to review the preliminary findings. Fourteen participants approved the findings, and five participants did not respond to any member-check requests. By utilizing a triangulation strategy and member checking, I established that the study’s findings are trustworthy.

Findings

By analyzing the interview and document data with the constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), a descriptive and conceptual understanding led to three major narrative themes of the Hope for Arkansas lottery campaign: a primary narrative about higher education, and secondary narratives that focused on neighboring lottery states and the poor.

Primary Narrative: Higher-Education Beneficiaries

All participants noted that the lottery campaign’s central narrative was higher education and that the narratives influenced the policy-design process. The participants described how the campaign narratives specifically emphasized the importance of Arkansans obtaining a degree. Blomeley (2008) noted that Halter (D) stated, "[W]hat this is really about in my mind is hope. What this is really about in my mind is education. I wouldn't be pushing this proposal if the proceeds wouldn't go toward college scholarships” (p. 13). The lieutenant governor campaigned on the idea that education was a public good, focusing primarily on the low number of residents who had degrees. Therefore, the campaign narrative focused on the need for higher education and how the lottery would not only increase the residents’ level of education, but also create an opportunity for economic growth within the state. Page (2008) noted:

The state is one of the lowest in per capita income as well as educational achievement and Halter said that educational achievement and per capita income were linked -- one affecting the other. "No state that has high educational achievement has low per capita income," said Halter. "We must improve the percentage of college grads to improve per capita income." Arkansas holds the No. 49 spot and West Virginia follows at No. 50 in per capita income. (p. A3)

Donald, a higher-education interest-group participant, noted, “The messaging that college is important is part of the message of the lottery scholarship. For that, I thought it elevated the
discussion of the importance of higher education and the importance of getting a degree.”

Larry, a legislative participant, noted that the Hope for Arkansas campaign was “able to influence the discussion by driving the media narratives.” The perception about the lottery was formatted in the storytelling in order to promote the need for educational access. For instance, Kevin, a lottery-campaign interest-group participant, noted that the story given to the media focused on low-income, minority students who would become “student endorsements.” Kevin discussed the narrative’s creation:

I got us a black female [student] studying aviation mechanics. Then, I had Hispanics [students]. I brought in a couple of these profiled spokespersons for the lottery. Gave them their script, and basically [said] say this in your own words and go on camera saying why you and your peers support the lottery. We put those types of students[on camera]. We didn’t take your high-profile debutant, urban league, I mean, junior-league girls. They didn’t tell the story. It was your middle-class, lower-class students who were perceived to be incapable of financing their own way.

Therefore, the campaign’s story promised citizens wide eligibility for the scholarships. As scholarships for all citizens became the narrative’s focus, support was gained from the voting public on all different levels, regardless of socioeconomic income or ethnicity. As a result, earmarking the lottery funds for education helped to gain support from a conservative state’s residents who once had an unfavorable view of the lottery. Once the lottery amendment passed with a majority vote, the legislature had to complete the people’s will. Therefore, the focus on higher-education scholarships within the Hope for Arkansas lottery campaign had important implications for the formal policy-design process during the 87th Arkansas legislature in 2009.

The Hope for Arkansas campaign narratives continued as the legislature crafted the lottery policy.

The study’s participants noted that students were the primary beneficiaries of the lottery’s net proceeds because of the focused narratives that were communicated by the Hope for Arkansas campaign. Bob, a legislative participant, stated, “Some of this was already dictated by the campaign itself since the constitutional amendment voted on by the public stated that higher-education students would receive scholarships as a result of the lottery’s creation.”

The legislature adopted the higher-education narrative by expanding the eligibility for an already established state scholarship program, the Academic Challenge. Maggie, a higher-education interest-group participant, said, “I mean legislators wanted to help everyone.” To expand this scholarship program, the legislature lowered the GPA and ACT requirements (2.5 GPA or a score of a 19 on the ACT) and removed the income limits. Jennifer, a higher-education interest-group participant, stated:

Of course, the other component was getting rid of the income cap because there were so many families that didn’t meet that income cap that was on the original Academic Challenge scholarship. It expanded the scholarship. When you take the income cap away, when you set the academic requirements at where they set them, you cast a pretty large net.

The policy was broad enough to ensure the inclusion of low-income residents as well as first-generation college students. Jason, an interest-group participant from higher education, noted that broadening scholarship access to low-income, minority, and first-generation college students was important to the Hope for Arkansas lottery campaign’s narrative because “low income and minority populations are usually the most dominant users of this type of gambling that had been experienced in other states.”
Secondary Narratives from the Campaign

While the lottery campaign’s main narrative focused on higher-education scholarships, two more contributing narratives were found within the lottery campaign: neighboring lottery programs and the poor.

**Neighboring states’ narratives.** Prior to implementing the Arkansas lottery, five of the six neighboring states had created lotteries. Arkansans were driving across the border to purchase tickets and were funding various educational initiatives for those states. Creating a lottery to stop the funds from moving outside the state and to finance higher-education scholarships in Arkansas was a clear secondary narrative. As a guest columnist for an Arkansas paper, Halter (2008) commented:

> Count the Arkansas tags on vehicles parked outside the Stateline Citgo in Texarkana, Texas; or Mr. T's Liquor Store in Cardwell, Mo.; or Freddy's One Stop in Roland, Okla. These retailers, just across the Arkansas border, are the top lottery retailers in their respective states. Tens of thousands of Arkansans spend millions on state lotteries every year. Audiences at civic clubs and community forums from Texarkana to Fort Smith to Springdale have witnessed the outbound flow of traffic and revenue. They appreciate the need to keep Arkansas money in Arkansas, working for public education here at home. (para. 4)

When Kevin, a lottery-campaign interest-group participant, was promoting the lottery idea around the state, he let Arkansans tell the narrative about the amount of money that was leaving the state to support neighboring lotteries. He gave this viewpoint:

> The local message, particularly the speaking message, was how far is it to the nearest lottery-sales store. You could ask that at any town in Arkansas, and they could tell you to the mile in Arkansas how far it was because they knew, and that meant they were doing it. So the message was you guys are already buying lottery tickets to the advantage of another state. We just thought it was obvious you should do it for your own advantage. That was a very persuasive message. In fact, people were actively engaged in lotteries in other states. So the message was you are already spending this money, and Arkansas isn’t getting anything for it. Those were two very powerful messages.

**Low-income narrative.** The other secondary narrative was related to oppositional narratives that were produced by several religious groups and the Arkansas Family Council. Kyle, a legislative participant, noted that the opposition’s narrative was that, primarily, the poor fund the lottery. He stated:

> That mainly came from folks that were against it in principle. They would spend most of the time telling you that everybody that was going to be buying tickets were people that didn’t need to be buying them because they couldn’t afford them anyway. There is some truth to that.

This argument, that primarily the poor fund the lottery, was the major message sent by the opposition during the lottery campaign. For instance, the following message came from pastor Larry Page as he spoke to a Baptist church in North Little Rock: "A government is supposed to be a guardian of its weakest people, but the lottery makes it an economic predator, and those are mutually exclusive roles" (Hahn, 2008, p. 16). Typically, each organization would state that it was for education and the potential to increase scholarships, but not with a state lottery. Hahn (2008) noted, “Page said he supports efforts to fund more college scholarships for Arkansans, as the lottery aims to do, but ‘the cost is too high’” (p. 16).
Within the policy, the state lottery was framed as entertainment and did not specify a type of person who was required to play (Arkansas State Legislature, 2009); however, this study’s participants identified discussions within the lottery-policy design process that focused on low-income families. Bob, a legislative participant, stated, “There was discussion and concern about who might play and being concerned about how you market to players so you aren’t targeting those who, in other states, tend to play more than others that have less to play with.” The legislative participants noted that they were freed of blame from their conservative and religious constituents because the lottery amendment had developed through a ballot initiative and had not been referred to the ballot from the legislature. Mary, a legislative participant, stated, “I think we all said it doesn’t matter whether we voted for it or not; the people passed it, and now, it is our job to make sure it is the best legislation that we can possible write.”

Kevin, a lottery-campaign participant, discussed the narrative as follows:

The group that took a leadership position in opposing the lottery was Arkansas Family value. They are for a variety of conservative, Christian issues. He said that the lottery is going to create a very dangerous incentive to people who are not capable of understanding their finances. It’s a very veiled, racist message there. You are talking about low-income people spending money on cigarettes and booze and gambling when they should be buying food for their kids. So in Arkansas, that’s a Black message. That’s lower-income people.

**Discussion and Implications**

A deeper understanding about the Arkansas lottery policy’s political process is gained from this study’s findings, which complement and extend the discussion within the context of a narrative paradigm (Fisher, 1984). The findings underscore the importance of taking a closer look at the narrative paradigm in order to describe and explain the implications of the campaign narratives on the policy-design process. Specifically, this study’s findings suggest that the narratives designed by the Hope for Arkansas lottery campaign heavily influenced the policy-design process in the state legislature.

The study’s exploratory nature provides policy actors with a more conceptual understanding about the role of narratives in the policy-design process. First, the narrative paradigm gives the general public a way to judge an expert’s story on the grounds of narrative probability and narrative fidelity. More specifically, the experts, or the policy actors, place a story, in this case higher-education scholarships and a state lottery, in a narrative rationality that allows the public to join the lottery’s cause. By creating a narrative that focused on the deficiency of higher education in Arkansas, citizens were given a frame of reference to understand the state’s important policy issues. This focus on higher education directly relates to the narrative’s power to organize information, lend credibility, and connect to the receiver’s personal experiences (Barker & Gower, 2010; Bute & Jensen, 2011; Fisher, 1984). Policy actors behind the Hope for Arkansas lottery campaign effectively created a narrative to garner support for a controversial topic that had not been favored in the past. The narrative constructed reality in a way that portrayed higher education as a public good that all Arkansans could find attainable, which directly links to creating stories that bind community groups together by relaying life’s aspirations (Spector-Mersel, 2010). The Hope for Arkansas campaign’s narrative provided a persuasive story that had both narrative probability and fidelity. Narrative probability was created by the coherency narrative about the need for higher-education scholarships in relation to
the funding mechanism, the state lottery. Because the campaign continued to paint a picture for
the deficiency of degreed citizens as it related to the state’s economy, a rationale for the lottery
policy was justifiable to the people. As citizens heard and completed the stories about
neighboring states that were being supported by Arkansans, the narrative fidelity was
established. Therefore, the narrative was approved by a majority of voters, and the state
legislature had to design a public policy that was directly linked to the reality produced within
the narrative.

Specifically, this study explained how the campaign’s narratives shaped the policy-design
process. The Hope for Arkansas lottery campaign constructed a policy problem by highlighting
the state’s deficiency with higher education as it related to a policy solution which focused on the
adoption of a state lottery to generate higher-education scholarships. The lottery campaign’s
narrative was crafted to promote higher education as a public good. Therefore, the higher-
education narrative was encouraging for voters who once deemed lotteries as unfavorable. By
focusing on higher-education students, the stories promoted within the lottery campaign focused
on cultural characterizations of popular images related to the need for higher education.

Moreover, the majority of the voters and the legislature ignored the oppositional
messages, drafted by religious organizations and the Arkansas Family Council, that pointed to
the lottery’s ramifications on the poor, consequences which were supported by research that
demonstrates a disproportional financial burden on individuals who live in low-income
households (e.g., Bowden & Elrod, 2004; Duffourc, 2006; Heller & Marin, 2002; 2004; McCrary
& Condrey, 2003; Rubenstein & Scafidi, 2002). Because little attention was paid to the problems
with low-income residents disproportionately spending money on lottery tickets, the lottery
campaign and legislature valued higher education over the policy’s consequences on the poor.
While study participants noted that they were freed of blame because the voters passed the
lottery amendment through the initiative campaign, the final policy did little to protect the poor
from the lottery policy’s adoption. Because public policy helps the citizenry view society, when
policies are framed in a way that dismisses a group of citizens, such as the poor, the institutional
structure that marginalizes that group of people is reinforced. In this case, the poor’s voices,
feelings, and actions are assumed to not have any weight in the lottery-policy discussion.

Perhaps the target population of low-income citizens is not deemed a problem because
the label itself presents mixed messages, from a group that is simply down on its luck to
messages that suggest that the group is lazy and feeding off people who work hard for their
money. Regardless, the low-income group is unable to really defend its status within the lottery
policy due to lower political participation and resources at their disposal, perpetuating the notion
that this problem is, once again, not of significant importance to policy makers.

A contribution of this study to the narrative paradigm is the examining the impact of
narratives in the policy design process. For instance, the narratives found in the Hope for
Arkansas campaign heavily influenced the policy-design process and became absorbed within
the Arkansas legislature. Subsequently, the legislature adopted the lottery campaign’s social
construction of student beneficiaries due to the constraints of the lottery amendment that was
approved by a majority of the voters.

**Limitations and Conclusion**

There were several limitations related to this study. Because the study relied on
reconstructions of the past, information recall about policy-actor names, lottery lobbyists, and
specific pressures was a limitation for some participants. To counter these issues, I employed a triangulation strategy, analyzing primary and secondary documents, as well as utilizing member checking to verify the participants’ data. Additionally, this study omitted student voices. To circumvent these limitations, a future study should observe a state that is in the process of designing a lottery to consider the political discussion as the policy unfolds, rather than relying on reflections about the past.

The study’s result suggests that the policy-design process for lottery scholarships is complex. States continue to gain support for lottery policies that focus positive social constructions, such as the benefits of higher education, that are embedded within the culture. While the National Communication Association (2011) and Silver (2011) brought attention to the role that researchers have in connecting communication research to public policy, more research in the field of communication studies should focus on discussions during the policymaking process. Besides examining the effects of lottery implementation, Ness and Mistretta (2009) extended the scholarly research about lottery-scholarship policy by describing the lottery-adoption process. In agreement with Ness and Mistretta (2009), researchers should pay more attention to the policymaking process, in particular the communication exchange among policy actors, to gain a better conceptual understanding of public policy. Specifically, researchers should continue to examine political discourse and rhetoric used to describe the citizenry during the policy process.

As Bitzer (1981) reinforced, legislators address policy issues for an audience and debate among themselves when formulating new policy, providing a point of reference from policy formation to the public’s general understanding of the policy. By applying the narrative paradigm, insight was obtained about how policy actors created a narrative with labels that became embedded in the political discourse during the Arkansas lottery’s policy-design process. It is my hope that this study serves as a catalyst for researchers to continue examining the role of communication in the policy-design process.

References


Enemies of the State: The Symbolic Annihilation of White-Zimbabwean Identity in the Twenty-First Century

Rick Malleus, PhD
Associate Professor
Seattle University
malleusr@seattleu.edu

Abstract

This article explores the Zimbabwean government-controlled newspapers’ symbolic annihilation of white-Zimbabwean identity in the twenty-first century. Zimbabwe has been through political, social, and economic upheaval in the last 15 years, and it is in this context that the media’s construction of white identity is examined. Using a content analysis of online articles from The Herald and The Chronicle, six themes of constructed white identity were identified. The government media’s motivation for this symbolic annihilation of white-Zimbabwean identity is discussed, and the article concludes with a consideration about why this construction of white-Zimbabwean identity matters.

Keywords: Zimbabwe, Symbolic Annihilation, Newspaper, Identity

Introduction

Hammar (2010) contends that the “post-2000 political and economic crises in Zimbabwe generated significant changes in physical, social and symbolic landscapes” (p. 395). How white Zimbabweans are depicted in The Herald and The Chronicle, the two Zimbabwean, government-controlled national daily newspapers, is the focus of this article. Using thematic analysis, six elements of white-Zimbabwean identity that are constructed in government-controlled newspapers are identified. Based on these themes, arguments are developed, explaining why this symbolic annihilation took place, and four implications of this symbolic annihilation are addressed.

Historical Context

Zimbabwe is an independent nation in southern Africa. Prior to independence, Zimbabwe was called Rhodesia, was run by a racist white minority government that declared unilateral independence from Britain in 1965, and practiced abhorrent apartheid policies that discriminated against and oppressed the black majority. Those racist policies led to a brutal war that was fought against a protracted guerilla insurgency and that was waged by blacks fighting for freedom, land, and a democratic dispensation. In 1980, following a negotiated settlement, Zimbabwe gained independence and majority rule: All Rhodesians, black, white, mixed race, and Indian, became Zimbabweans.

The government urged white Zimbabweans to stay and pursued a policy of reconciliation (Fisher, 2010). Prime Minister Mugabe declared, “If yesterday I fought you as an enemy, today you have become a friend and ally. . . . If yesterday you hated me, today you cannot avoid the love that binds you to me and me to you” (Zvayi, 2012a). About “three-quarters of the white...
population emigrated between 1979 and 1990” (Hughes, 2010, pp. 9-10), a time period that coincided with the end of the liberation war and black-majority rule. Whites who chose to stay in independent Zimbabwe slowly began to assume their new Zimbabwean identities. Whites were never more than 5% of the total population (Hughes, 2010) and are estimated to be 40,000 people in a population that is between 12.5 and 13 million (Chinaka, 2008). Post independence, whites have primarily been involved with the farming, ranching, business, mining, tourism, and education sectors, having retained economic power even while losing political power.

Race relations improved post independence, but racial tensions had peaks and valleys in the first 20 years of independence. Whites believed that they had a place in Zimbabwe and identified as Zimbabwean. However, after the war ended and years of relatively stable independence had passed, “the calm could be unmade on precisely the terrain on which it had been produced: national identity, inclusiveness and citizenship” (Barnes, 2007, p. 634). The social reconciliation and the economic progress that occurred post independence would not last into the twenty-first century.

In 2000, the Zimbabwean government, led by the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) supported the adoption of a new constitution; a referendum was held, and the government’s position was defeated. Shortly after the referendum, ZANU-PF was nearly defeated in parliamentary elections that saw the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) challenge the party’s political dominance in a significant way. In response to the “defeat in the constitutional change referendum of 2000 and its near defeat in the parliamentary elections,” the government “abandoned both its political conciliatory approach and the inclusive nationalism of the early period and instead adopted a radical, exclusive nationalist stance” (Muzondidya, 2007, p. 333). ZANU-PF felt threatened and developed a new political strategy. It was in this context as part of the renewed political strategy that the symbolic annihilation of white identity in government newspapers took place and can be explained. Further context is provided here:

Zimbabwe has been through a period of extremely intense social and political upheaval in the last decade and all aspects of Zimbabwean life have been affected by that upheaval. . . . A new political party emerged to challenge the entrenched political leadership, an agrarian land reform policy was implemented with national and international consequences, a hyperinflationary economy made living and working in Zimbabwe extremely difficult, and the social fabric of the country was torn. (Malleus, 2011, p. 130)

These political, social, and economic crises in Zimbabwe were, in part, created by and affected government policy and, therefore, messaging in government media. Pfukwa (2008) was correct in suggesting that the names “people call each other are powerful barometers of social relations” (p. 38).

Theoretical Frames

Race and Identity

Theorists often apply two main orientations to model racial identity (Scottham, Cooke, Sellers & Ford, 2010). The first one is a process orientation which takes a developmental view that describes how attitudes regarding race develop and change over a person’s lifetime. The second orientation is a content one that focuses on people’s attitudes toward their racial membership, both positive and negative (Scottham et al., 2010). Both process and content views of racial identity are useful to remember when reading this article because whites’ position in
Zimbabwe has shifted over time.

Further, Ansell (2004) points out that “whiteness and blackness as constructed categories of identity” constitute “imagined notions of ‘selfhood’ and ‘other’” (p. 7); this view should be considered when understanding why the social construction of white Zimbabweans matters in the context of Zimbabwe’s development as a democratic, independent nation that is emerging from political, economic, and social crises. Identities provide connections between groups of people, but they also create boundaries of exclusion and inclusion that have implications for political, social, and economic associations (Wilkins & Siegenthaler, 1997).

It is important to note that “identities are not value-neutral. . . . they are intricately woven with the ideological and existential concerns of a given people” (Ndhlovu, 2007, pp. 138-139). Identity is relational; identity recognizes “sameness and difference between ourselves and others . . . has meaning within a chain of relationships” (Watson, 2006, p. 506). As Narváez, Meyer, Kertzner, Ouellette, and Gordon (2009) point out, identities are context dependent and “become more or less significant, functional, or active” (p. 65), depending on context.

**Media and Identity**

**Symbolic annihilation.** Symbolic annihilation has been defined as “the way cultural production and media representations ignore, exclude, marginalize, or trivialize a particular group” (Merskin, 1998, p. 335). Media, as a cultural vehicle, provide symbolic messages to audiences about the value of certain groups (Klein & Shiffman, 2009). Tuchman (1978) suggests that, in the media, the process of symbolic annihilation demonstrates to an audience that certain groups are not valued. This process “is of concern because it presents people with implied messages about what it means to be a member of a culturally valued group versus a member of a socially disenfranchised group” (Klein & Shiffman, 2009, p. 57).

As a theoretical frame to guide media studies, symbolic annihilation theory, as proposed by Tuchman (1978), has been used to study different media, such as television news and dramas, animated cartoons, magazines, and newspapers (e.g., Harp, Harlowe & Loke, 2013; Hestroni, & Lowenstein, 2014; Klein & Shiffman, 2009; Skalli, 2011; Stanley, 2012). Symbolic annihilation has been used to describe, explain, and problematize media portrayals for a variety of demographic elements, such as ethnicity, gender, age, race, and sexual orientation (e.g., Harp et al., 2013; Hestroni & Lowenstein, 2014; Klein & Shiffman, 2009; Skalli, 2011; Stanley, 2012). As such, symbolic annihilation is an appropriate guiding frame for the current study.

**Assumptions.** While the media play an important role in society, media effects are rarely the only determinant of public opinion and do not influence people in a uniform way (McQuail, 2000; Wasserman, 2005). When most people form opinions and make judgments, they “rely on a combination of their preexisting views and the information . . . in the news media as the mutable material from which to mold their opinions” (Nisbet & Myers, 2011, p. 686). Meanings attached to identities are generated in society, and media are one set of institutions that play a role in deciding which version or interpretation of identity prevails in a culture (Wilkins & Siegenthaler, 1997). Media support or undermine identities, and often, political elites have close connections with media institutions and have an influence about which identity interpretations prevail (Wilkins & Siegenthaler, 1997).

Media play an important role in the discourse of identity, and this role explains why “control of the discourse is important, and an explanation of why the media as a site and instrument is so vigorously contested” (Wassermann, 2005, pp. 76-77). Because the media play a
crucial role in developing identity and have a role in socialization, it is necessary to understand the Zimbabwean government’s media strategy.

Criticism of the Zimbabwean Government’s Media

In Zimbabwe, “the print media sector is largely dominated by Zimpapers, a state-controlled entity comprising two national dailies, two national weeklies and some provincial newspapers” (Moyo, 2009, p. 551). The government “is critically aware of the power of the media in the struggle over the shaping of minds of its citizens” and has tried mightily “to control this space through legal and extralegal measures” (Moyo, 2009, p. 551). Chikwanha, Sithole, and Bratton (2004) argued that “most Zimbabweans . . . get only one side of the story . . . the majority of citizens hear only what the government wants them to hear” (p. 5). Christiansen (2009) found that, in 2006, Zimbabwe had “a media landscape which was almost entirely controlled by the government” (p. 180).

Academic and institutional sources criticized the Zimbabwean media’s quality. Thram (2006) suggested that the “state-owned Zimpapers—The Herald in Harare and The Chronicle in Bulawayo—are vehicles for dissemination of the regime’s relentless propaganda themes of patriotism, sovereignty, and ‘national values’” (p. 77). Weza (2002) characterized government-controlled media as being “the unquestioning messenger” (p. 546) of government policy. Chari (2007) echoed that concern, suggesting that it “is rare to find news reports that disparage government policies in the public media . . .” (p. 41).

Willems (2011) contended that “state-sponsored media such as The Herald and the monopoly broadcaster the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC)” tend to rely “to a large extent on the official voice of government elites” (p. 131). Government newspapers often published press statements from government departments as news reports without any critical analysis of the messages in those statements (Willems, 2011). Chari (2010) lamented how “the press lost an opportunity to analyse the multiple layers attendant to the Zimbabwean crisis . . . abdicating their social responsibility to inform and educate the public” (p. 147). Chari (2007) also suggested, “the public media have more latitude to lie without being punished” (p. 49). Willems (2011) asserted that both “ZBC and The Herald, therefore, primarily sought to attribute legitimacy to the state and the ruling party ZANU-PF” (p. 131). This idea was supported by the findings of the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (2009b) that “the overwhelmingly dominant public media continue to serve as the propaganda tools of ZANU PF” (p. 1).

Recognizing this criticism and the lack of critical analysis about government policy in the government-controlled press is key to understanding the context in which mediated portrayals of white-Zimbabwean identity was investigated. This recognition was important because Zimbabwe’s government-controlled media provide an essentially unfiltered voice to promote government policy and to attack detractors of those policies. This recognition was also important because government policy is context dependent, and media content both reflects and influences changing policies and contexts.

Using a thematic analysis, this study sought to answer the research question “How and why was white-Zimbabwean identity symbolically annihilated in government-controlled newspapers?” The analysis identified six themes around which the white-Zimbabwean identity was constructed in those media. A rationale about why this symbolic annihilation took place was provided, along with a discussion about why the nature of that symbolic annihilation matters in the Zimbabwean context.
Method

Text
Online newspaper articles from *The Herald* and *The Chronicle* (the only two national, daily, government-controlled newspapers) served as the text for analysis. The articles were drawn from the 2011 and 2012 archives, serving as a convenience sample spanning multiple years. The newspaper websites’ search engines were used to identify relevant articles (defined as articles that discussed white Zimbabweans as a group or mentioned individual, prominent white Zimbabweans: politicians and economists). The search terms used were “white Zimbabweans,” “whites,” “Rhodesians,” “Rhodies,” “David Coltart,” “Eddie Cross,” “Eric Bloch,” “Roy Bennett,” “John Robertson,” and “Trudy Stevenson.” One hundred and sixteen articles were identified as meeting the search criteria.

Procedure

A thematic analysis was performed on the 116 articles. Thematic analysis may establish “data-driven codes . . . constructed inductively from the raw information” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 30) and is a “method used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). A theme identified by a researcher “represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82), and those themes can be considered markers for how a group is portrayed in the media (Greenberg & Salwen, 1996). Each article’s content was examined twice, by one coder, to identify themed descriptors of white Zimbabweans. A second coder was asked to code 10 randomly selected articles using the identified theme categories to establish reliability for the coding scheme because the “closeness of the code to the raw information increases the likelihood that various people examining the raw information will perceive and therefore encode the information similarly” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 30). The second coder identified the same themes that the first coder had found for all 10 articles, providing a measure of reliability for the coding scheme.

Findings

Themes

Six specific portrayals of white Zimbabweans were found in the thematic analysis about how white-Zimbabwean identity was constructed in the newspapers. Those themes were that whites are Rhodesians, racist, enemies, unrepentant, Machiavellian, and not authentic Zimbabweans/Africans.

**Whites are Rhodesians (Rhodies).** An illustrative example of this theme follows:

... the overprotected Rhodies. ...We have never seen them queuing for bread or petrol neither selling tomatoes to improve family incomes or buying from our shops or commuting on our roads or participating in our national events. (Humanikwa, 2011, para. 11)  

Humanikwa was arguing that all whites have been immune to the pain caused by economic conditions and that black Zimbabweans have suffered while whites have not. The invocation of the term “Rhodie” had a set of negative connotations that were familiar to the audience and denied whites a Zimbabwean identity, separating them from black Zimbabweans.

Prominent white Zimbabweans were often labeled Rhodesian. For example, Eddie Cross,
a Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) politician, and Eric Bloch, a well-known economist, were described as “remnants of racist Rhodesia who now seek ablation in crass reasoning” (Manheru, 2012b, para. 6). The writer denied Cross and Bloch the right to make social commentary or to express their opinions because they were Rhodesian, claiming that their reasoning was clouded by their identities as Rhodesians, automatically excluding their voices from legitimate public debate.

**Whites are racist.** The second theme was that whites are racist. A writer in *The Chronicle* (“No,” 2012) claimed, “To whites, angry over the success of our armed revolution, a good African is a dead one” (para. 20). Specific, prominent white Zimbabweans were also identified as racist: “Bennett, a former member of the Rhodesian army, dreams of returning to what he calls a new Zimbabwe where the whites will once again be masters and blacks reduced to servants, or rats, as he calls them” (“Editorial Comment: We,” 2012, para. 13). Given Zimbabwe’s history, being branded as a racist is a dangerous and damaging label.

**Whites are enemies.** The third theme was the idea that whites are enemies. At times, the entire white population was declared enemies, and individual white Zimbabweans were also often subjected to this characterization as an enemy. An excerpt from an op-ed article about the white MDC politician Eddie Cross served as an example:

He is a cross we have had to bear due to our good hearts when we could have nailed him on the cross along with his Rhodesian kith and kin on account of the atrocities they committed during the liberation struggle. (Zvayi, 2012a, para. 15)

Cross was still the enemy, as were other whites; “kith and kin” was a prominent phrase in government media because it allowed the audience to draw a connection between whites in Zimbabwe and whites outside the country, often in Britain and America. Those British and American whites were depicted by Zimbabwean government media as supportive of white Zimbabweans, and not the black majority.

**Whites are unrepentant.** A fourth theme was that whites are unrepentant for the crimes of the colonial past, the recent past, and the present. The first example below came from *The Chronicle* and discussed Roy Bennett; the second example was from *The Herald* and reflected Eddie Cross’ political comments: “He is unrepentant and mindless over the terror he and his imprudent ancestors caused on Zimbabweans since time immemorial. Bennett should be the last person to preach democracy if ever he is to speak at all” (Munendoro, 2011, para. 2).

Surprising, quite surprising coming from a Rhodie who was spared the gallows by the same people he threatens today . . . stands up today to thumb his nose at his benefactors to the extent of issuing empty threats, and misrepresenting history, testifies to the triumph of our democratic tradition and tolerance. (Zvayi, 2012a, para. 12)

The themes characterizing the unrepentant white Zimbabwean had two underlying messages: one, the whites were not sorry for their past “sins,” effectively rejecting reconciliation, and two, the threat of punishment for those sins still existed, but it was only the government’s forbearance that keeps punishment at bay.

**Whites are Machiavellian.** The fifth theme for white-Zimbabwean identity found in the data was that they are Machiavellian. One consistent message in the government press was that whites are manipulating the MDC for their own nefarious purposes. Media messages ranged from claims that the MDC was “a party infamous for receiving cheques from the bitter former white farmers” (Nyamurundira, 2012, para. 3) to larger conspiracy theories:

Roy Bennet fails to tell the public that, their massive support of the MDC-T is a clandestine strategy to restore the white supremacy . . . set-up a puppet government
which they could manipulate, and re-impose their failed control of resources in the country. He is a frustrated former white colonial Rhodesian who is seeking undue revenge over their broken rule in this country. (Munendoro, 2011, para. 8)

A campaign slogan of ZANU-PF’s, “Zimbabwe will never be a colony again,” that fits into this myth was echoed in much of the government-media examples which can be found in excerpts from three reports in *The Chronicle*: “Zimbabwe will never be a colony again. Re-establishment of white rule is now an abomination” (Munendoro, 2011, para. 10). “We want to say it loud and clear to Bennett and his kith and kin that Zimbabwe will never be a colony again” (“Editorial Comment: We,” 2012, para. 14). “We want to once again remind those who miss serving their masters tea that Zimbabwe will never be a colony again so whites are never again going to be masters in our motherland” (“Editorial Comment: There,” 2012, para. 8).

**Whites are not authentic Zimbabweans/Africans.** The final theme was about how white-Zimbabwean identity is the explicit portrayal of those citizens not being Zimbabwean or African. In an opinion piece about Eddie Cross, Manheru (2012a) claimed:

But to have to assert your rootedness against a black indigene who has no other root, no other place, no other country, no other continent to come from, sounds to me not just preposterous, but also a blunt way of provoking hurtful questions, questions that boomerang. It amounts to inventing nationality and I am ready for a debate on such an issue. After all a pig hardly asserts its piggi-ness, it just wallows in mud! Yet Cross does that in his sanitised self-history, much like his kind (para. 15).

Manheru is thought to be a pseudonym for George Charamba, a government spokesperson who has a weekly column in *The Herald* (Sithole, 2009), and he continues in the same article to dismiss Cross’ claims of being a Zimbabwean and, by extension, to deny other white Zimbabweans’ claims of an African identity: “He calls himself ‘a white African’, an oxymoron so much in vogue for Rhodesia’s erstwhile privileged whites when they seek to stake a claim in post-independence Zimbabwe” (Manheru, 2012a, para. 6). Manheru makes the claim that there is no such identity as white African and that the assumption of that identity is a self-serving turn of phrase, an invention of the Rhodesian racists.

**Discussion**

All six identified themes that characterize white-Zimbabwean identity as constructed by the government newspapers served to symbolically annihilate whites by portraying them as “the other,” as alien to Zimbabwe. This section explores why the symbolic annihilation took place, providing several possible explanations. Then, there is a discussion about four implications for this symbolic annihilation of white Zimbabweans in the media.

**Rationale for Annihilation**

Thematic analysis may focus on the directionality of the media content, and from such studies, researchers may infer the media messages’ motives and intentions (Greenberg & Salwen, 1996). White-Zimbabwean identity was negatively constructed in the government newspapers (and other media) to serve strategic political purposes that were determined by the context, both historical and current, in the country and the southern African region over the last 15 years. In context, it is not unreasonable to consider identity construction and contestation as part of a struggle for political power (Wasserman, 2005). The government concluded that, to remain in
power, required it to “create enemies, define sides to a conflict” (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004, p. 9), and the media were a tool for this endeavor.

Keeping this need to create enemies in mind, there were several explanations about why the symbolic annihilation of white-Zimbabwean identity took place at the time it happened. In part, it was a response to the whites’ active participation in politics. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems (2009) suggested that the MDC had “support from white Zimbabweans, civil society organisations and major world powers such as the United States and the United Kingdom” (p. 952). This support angered ZANU-PF and was seen as a betrayal of the implied agreement between whites and the government that was reached at independence. McGreal (2008) summed up the implicit “deal”:

They could go on as before, so long as they kept out of politics and did not criticise publicly. That is the way it stayed for 20 years, but then quite a number of whites - some of them farmers - made a misjudgment. They thought they had the same rights as everyone else. (para. 9)

Hughes (2010) suggested that it was understood that whites should not undermine the ruling party, ZANU-PF. There were accusations against “whites that ventured into opposition politics of being ‘unreconstructed rhodesians’” (Mashingaidze, 2010, p. 23). As Zimbabwean journalist and author Peter Godwin reflected (as cited in Hughes 2010, p. 103), “We had broken the unspoken ethnic contract. . . . We had tried to act like citizens instead of expatriates here on sufferance . . .”

Kabwato (2010) provided the example of Roy Bennett, a white Zimbabwean who accepted the call for reconciliation in the early 1980s . . . supported Zanu PF. His switch of allegiance to the Movement for Democratic Change was unforgivable on two fronts: he was white and he was a farmer. Having taken away his farm without compensation, the next level of punishment was to deny him his humanity. (para. 5)

Only part of this story played were discussed in government media: Bennett’s right to be in politics and questions about his identity.

This rhetorical strategy of identifying political scapegoats had resonance because it “employed the language of the liberation movement, appealing to a sizeable population both within and without Zimbabwe” (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004, p. 7). This government-media rhetoric was also successful at exploiting “a narrative of race and exclusion played out and remembered from the Chimurenga,” or war of liberation (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004, p. 7). The discourse of the Third Chimurenga, as the period of land redistribution came to be framed by the government and its media, was mainly characterized by “constructing the government’s political opponents as traitors or “sell-outs” (Christiansen, 2009, p. 177). The government in power since 1980 had not adequately resolved the land issue, (i.e., an equitable redistribution of land, primarily from white to black people.) A radical new land policy was ZANU-PF’s strategy to survive politically, and the policy revolved around blaming whites for the land question not having been settled.

Whites were socially constructed in the government media, to link them with the black opposition (specifically, the MDC). “White Zimbabweans were increasingly excluded from official versions of the nation. They were portrayed as part of the opposition MDC, which according to government sought to counter radical reform and re-instate colonial rule” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems, 2009, p. 954). The reasoning for this linkage was to create doubt in the minds of black Zimbabweans about the legitimacy of the MDC as a viable governing alternative
to ZANU-PF. Reading stories about “the black component of the MDC-T rub shoulders with the Roy Bennetts and Eddie Crosses of this world who constituted a privileged class in Rhodesia” (Chubvu, 2011, para. 5) served to exacerbate that doubt in the mind of some black Zimbabweans.

If the media audience missed these messages’ “subtle” implications, the government also sent un-interrogated messages, with an explicit linkage and dire consequence, through government media. The MMPZ’s (2009a) Language of Hate report, produced after the violent 2008 presidential-election campaigns, provided an example for that kind of message:

I came here to warn you about the machinations of the Rhodesians... they intend to come back using one of our fellow Zimbabweans, Tsvangirai, as their running dog—chimbwasungata. If you vote for Tsvangirai on June 27, you are voting for the former Rhodesians and thus you are voting for war. (Zimbabwean Vice-President Joseph Msika, as cited in MMPZ, 2009a, p. 3)

Morgan Tsvangirai was the MDC presidential candidate to whom Msika referred in the previous excerpt. Socio-historical context helps race-based messages take hold (Ansell, 2004). It was not out of the realm of the Zimbabwean audience’s experience to recall a time when black Rhodesians worked with white Rhodesians against those blacks fighting in the liberation struggle. Though the context was very different then, for some, this kind of government-media messages seemed plausible. As the MMPZ (2009a) suggested, “the government-controlled media have not only reported these offensive and undemocratic sentiments without question or censure, they have endorsed and amplified them... in the news and ‘analysis’ columns of the papers under government control” (p. 4).

Linking the MDC to white Zimbabweans, the government’s media messages also served another purpose, to link the MDC to whites outside the country. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems (2009) contended:

The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was considered as the antithesis of “independence.”... MDC accommodated white Zimbabweans in its ranks and this enabled ZANU-PF to link the opposition to Rhodesian and British interests. (p. 956)

Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems (2009) posited that “cultural nationalism became an important project for ZANU-PF, and a means of re-asserting its anti-colonial message in the face of what it saw, and increasingly represented, as a new ‘imperial threat’ embodied by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)” (p. 952). White Zimbabweans provided the “faces” that could easily be linked to the MDC and also to Britain and ‘the West’.

A further rationale for the symbolic annihilation of white Zimbabweans was to explain Zimbabwe’s problems. The move toward nationalist rhetoric and the re- invocation of the liberation struggle successful shifted the focus away from “governance shortcomings, political ambitions, and the cronyism” (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004, p. 7) in Zimbabwean political life. As Zimbabwe’s political decline steepened, so did the economic decline, to a point where the country could no longer provide food for the population (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004). Zimbabwe was in a state of hyperinflation with price changes multiple times a day, everyday transactions taking place in billions and trillions of Zimbabwean dollars, the local currency becoming worthless, and shortages for commodities such as sugar and cooking oil that were being bought and sold on the black market (CNN 2008; “A Worthless Currency,” 2008).

Blaming whites, the MDC, Britain, and the West for Zimbabwe’s problems was essential. ZANU-PF had been in power since 1980 and could not admit that its policy failures had caused such crises, or it would have meant certain electoral defeat. Framing the twenty-first century and
land reform as the third liberation struggle meant that enemies were needed, and it was those enemies who were responsible for all the troubles that the Zimbabwean people were facing. The government media’s narrative went that way. That narrative was sorely needed to convince Zimbabweans that paying 1.6 trillion Zimbabwean dollars for a loaf of bread (CNN, 2008) was someone else’s fault, not the result of irresponsible and ill-considered government policy.

A final reason to explain the negative social construction of white Zimbabweans in the government media related to legal definitions of citizenship and voting. In Zimbabwe, the 2000s saw “politically charged, narrowed-down definitions of national identity and citizenship” (Mano & Willems, 2010, p. 183), with the white population being one target of these narrowed-down definitions. Along with whites, many of whom held dual citizenship, the legislative framework around citizenship had a negative impact on black farm workers, many of whom had Malawian and Mozambican ancestry. These workers were seen as a voting block that helped drive the defeat of the constitutional referendum and the near defeat of ZANU-PF in the 2000 parliamentary elections. Disenfranchising those workers, and their white commercial farmer employers, was part of the government’s strategy to ensure its political survival.

Mano and Willems’ (2010) thoughts on how Zimbabwean-ness was constructed in Zimbabwe encapsulated why white Zimbabweans, under the government media’s construction, cannot claim belonging: “in order to qualify as an authentic and patriotic Zimbabwean, one was expected to: be black; have ancestors who were born in Zimbabwe; live in rural areas or at least be entitled to land in rural areas; and vote ZANU PF” (p. 187).

Nisbet and Myers’ (2011) contention that political “identities may be best understood as forms of collective social identities situated in a political context” (p. 687) helped to explain why this restrictive construction of Zimbabwean identity and citizenship was performed in the government media. This symbolically restricted definition of citizenship reinforced the government’s legislative attempts to limit citizenship. In practical terms, most whites stayed out of post-independence politics (O’Sullivan, 2000) and, as a voting bloc, held negligible power because they were such a tiny fraction of the voting population. Symbolically, however, portraying whites (and the blacks they employed on farms, a much larger bloc of people) as non-citizens was powerful. This restrictive definition of citizenship served as one part of the government media’s “campaign to revive the nationalist fervor of the liberation war” (Chikwanha et al., 2004 p. vii) in the twenty-first century.

Implications of Annihilation

Having considered explanations about why this annihilation took place, this section briefly discusses four implications of the government newspapers’ symbolic annihilation of white Zimbabweans. First, the symbolic annihilation of white-Zimbabwean identity represented a cynical and strategic manipulation of race for political ends that largely went unchallenged by African leaders in the region and the continent. “There was a loud silence from African leaders” (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004, p. 7).

The government media’s rhetoric, channeled with daily regularity, going virtually unchallenged or questioned, served to isolate “white Zimbabweans—and anyone who sided with them—identifying them as the enemy, vestiges of a racist and separatist past in which blacks were exploited” (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004, p. 7). Colonialism and the cruel racist policies that went along with the era marked Zimbabwe and the southern African region in many ways, influencing policies, conflicts, and development today. However, strategically using the
government media to fan the flames of racial hatred by manipulating perceptions about white identity is neither the way to redress past injustice nor to build a democratic dispensation. Allowing the Zimbabwean government’s media to escape critique by most leaders from other democratic African nations in the region and on the continent does not bode well for the future of race relations in Zimbabwe or on the continent.

If the media tell a culture’s stories (Baran, 2009) and if the story of white Zimbabweans is being told in a negative, partial way, then white-Zimbabwean stories are not being told. Untold stories are the second reason that the symbolic annihilation of white identity is important to consider. What stories are not told about whites? The white commercial farmers’ experience, since being removed from their farms after the land-redistribution exercise, and white poverty are two examples of these untold stories. There was an absence of coverage about white farmers’ lives after their farms were taken for the land reform; there was no examination of their anger, grief, despair, resolution to move on, and how they rebuilt their lives or continued to work in order to develop Zimbabwe.

Writing for *The Telegraph*, a British media publication, Freeman (2011) provides a glimpse into the feelings of one white farmer who was about to be evicted from his farm after years of struggling to keep some of the land through the process of law in Zimbabwean courts. At the prospect of finally being moved off the farm with his family or going to jail for “trespass” white, commercial farmer Cloete stated:

> To be honest, I don’t really fancy the idea of moving to Harare, and the idea of giving up farming is heart-rending. If I was going to serve a couple of years in jail and then get the farm back, it might be worth it, but that’s not how it is. . . . I have never viewed myself as anything other than Zimbabwean, and that is what hurts me most. . . . We are not being looked at as citizens of this country, yet my father was born here . . . (as cited in Freeman, 2011, para. 7).

Zimbabweans do not get to read these stories that show a different side for the land-reform program and humanize the 4,000 plus white farmers and their families who lost their homes and livelihoods.

A second example of white stories not being told in government newspapers is white poverty. Hammer (2010) points out that Zimbabwe’s economic problems “gave rise to a new phenomenon: white poverty” (p. 45). With Zimbabwe’s rampant inflation, one subsection of the white population that was particularly hard hit was the elderly white Zimbabweans who relied on pensions and then fell into poverty when those pensions could not compete with rapid rises in the cost of living.

Most muddle through, somehow, though they live in constant fear of serious illness or major house repairs. They long ago stopped using their swimming pools. They have turned lawns into vegetable patches. They gave up whisky, then meat, and take their ageing cars out less and less. In extremis there are a couple of charities that offer discreet help to indigent whites. (Fletcher, 2009, para. 6)

Stories of white Zimbabweans suffering the ravages of economic collapse like the rest of the black population were not a useful part of the narrative about white identity for the government media and, therefore, were not told.

A third implication for the symbolic-annihilation image of white Zimbabweans is the negative impact that those constructions have for citizenship and the democracy. The “redeployment of race and ethnicity in the discourse of rights under the current dispensation has had important implications for the exercising of full citizen rights, including the constitutionally
guaranteed rights, of subject minorities” (Muzondidya, 2007, p. 335).

A new definition of patriotism was seen in the government media where “the MDC was cast as a puppet of imperialist forces, social groups deemed disloyal were excluded from citizenship (affecting whites and large numbers of migrants of Malawian, Zambian, Mozambican and other origins)” (McGregor, 2009, p. 190). In Zimbabwe, the “issue of rights and entitlements, as in the colonial period, is now being defined in terms of racial binaries: black and white binaries, without any middle ground” (Muzondidya, 2007, pp. 333-334).

Muzondidya (2007) contended that, in the twenty-first century, “the government has actively promoted rigid notions of indigeneity, rights and nationhood, which seek to exclude certain categories of Zimbabweans from both the economic restructuring processes and the nation” (p. 340). The government’s ability to pursue policies as Muzondidya described was aided by the negative media messages about whites constantly broadcast and printed in government media, closing democratic space for minorities, and “legitimizing” policies that do so based on arguments about who is and who is not Zimbabwean. The government’s “bluntly racist conception of nationality” (“Foreigners,” 2010, para. 3) affected whites’ ability to fully participate in some spheres of Zimbabwean life, and the government media served as a platform for a specific, constrictive construction of identity representations for Zimbabwean-ness and citizenship.

The fourth implication is that the government newspaper’s media strategy to symbolically annihilate white Zimbabweans makes Zimbabwe’s future more difficult. The land question is still not resolved with some redistributed land being underutilized, agricultural production still being inadequate to feed the nation, multiple farm ownership by political elites, violations of bilateral trade agreements about land repossession, insecurity of land tenure, problems securing loans and funding for commercial agriculture, etc. Global Crisis Solutions (2004) suggests that while “colonial policies on land, labor, and resettlement reveal that they were designed to serve racist ends . . . reactions to these racist policies bear the strains of racial antagonism” (p. 9). The government engages in rhetoric that “revived nationalism delivered in a particularly virulent form, with race as a key trope within the discourse, and a selective rendition of the liberation history deployed as an ideological policing agent in the public debate” (Raftopoulos, as cited in Muzondidya, 2007, p. 333). As part of this discourse, white Zimbabweans have been depicted as the enemy and, by this discourse, effectively excluded by government policy from being part of any solution to the land questions that still prevail.

There appears to be an inability or unwillingness for the government to “acknowledge culpability for these unsavory dimensions of the land reform, because it would downplay the moral imperative of their claims for racial empowerment through land repossession” (Mashingaidze, 2010, p. 27). Mashingaidze argues that this silence on the government’s part demonstrates that “the suffering of whites and poor black Zimbabwean citizens matter little in official circles” (p. 27). Having developed this narrative of white-Zimbabwean identity, how can the government then seek to change that narrative without admitting policy mistakes? Media can contribute “to the raising of boundaries for inclusion and exclusion from public life” (Madianou, 2005, p. 537), and in Zimbabwe, the government media has rhetorically constructed those boundaries based, in large measure, on the construction (and deconstruction) of identity.

**Conclusion**

White identity, as described in this article, in government-controlled newspapers was
constructed for strategic political purposes. This symbolic annihilation served to divide the Zimbabwean population, promoting exclusion and constrained definitions of citizenship and nationhood. People feel excluded when the media, particularly the news media, “instead of being based on an all-embracing notion of citizenship . . . projects a model of belonging based on a homogenous and uncontested national identity” (Madianou, 2005, p. 537). Zimbabwe’s government newspapers contributed to a feeling of exclusion for white Zimbabweans and, importantly, millions of black Zimbabweans who supported the MDC or who did not have links to the liberation struggle. If, as Yu and Kwan (2008) claimed, “a nation is socially constructed as a result of evolving consciousness in people’s minds” (p. 47), then the government newspaper’s portrayal of white identity can be seen as being partially responsible for erecting a stumbling block to true reconciliation and nation building as Zimbabwe moves further into the second decade of the century.

Whites are, in some ways, culpable for allowing those images to take root unchallenged. Hughes (2010) suggests, “Whites demarcated and regulated their own cultural reserve” (p. 98) that was distinct from and unknown to large portions of black Zimbabwe. Further, Herbert (2000) reports “that many Zimbabwean whites have not made much effort to interact with the black population” (para. 21). As MDC politician Bennett (as cited in Herbert, 2000) argued, whites living in Zimbabwe “have to get involved and know the people” (para. 21). Fisher (2010) quotes a civil rights activist who makes this point:

Whites here are part of the problem. . . . They will not recognise their contribution to the government’s anger over reconciliation . . . they act like victims . . . it is so easy to complain about the government but they [whites] won’t join the opposition parties or the civil rights groups. (p. 194)

Hughes (2010) claims that whites turned their minds away from black Zimbabweans and “focused instead on African landscapes . . . to negotiate their identity” (p. xii). This focus allowed the government media an easier road to portraying whites as alien and enemies of the people. Many whites did not really know the black population, its culture, its customs, or the reality of its lives (Hughes, 2010). From the inaccurate, negative picture of whites that was depicted in the government-controlled media, many black Zimbabweans may be ignorant about the existence of layered white-Zimbabwean identities.

In Zimbabwe, responsibility lies with all parties to challenge the distorted media messages, and “Zimbabwe must address its multicultural nature, even within its historical narrative of conflict” (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004, p. 11). Global Crisis Solutions (2004) recommends the promotion of “open discourse on Zimbabwe’s history and its effect on the present . . . community dialogues on race and land” (p. 3) as well as the prohibition or elimination of “rhetoric that promotes racial and ethnic division” (p. 3). The limits of media effects need to be realized. White MDC politicians have been elected to national and local government office even though, as MMPZ (2009a) suggests:

“. . . hate speech” has become an endemic and poisonous epidemic that has fractured and polarized society by promoting extreme levels of political and social intolerance and hostility towards any group or individual that disagrees with the ruling party’s perspective of reality. (p. 10)

Those whites have been voted into office in constituencies that are overwhelmingly black, despite the negative nature of the news construction about white politicians’ identities.

The negative elements of white-Zimbabwean identity in the government media were crafted for political purposes without concern for the effect that those identities had on white
Zimbabweans or for the perceptions built of white Zimbabweans in the minds of the black population. It is crucial to develop space for a dialogue on issues about Zimbabwean identity, which would necessarily include an exploration of how race intersects with identity in twenty-first century Zimbabwe (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004). The Zimbabwean media, both government and private, is one logical space for part of that dialogue to occur.

References
Freeman, C. (2011, June 22). The end of an era for Zimbabwe’s last white farmers? *The


Stanley, J. (2012). Women’s absence from news photos: The role of tabloid strategies at elite and
non-elite newspapers. Media, Culture & Society, 34(8), 979-998.


Blending Theory and Application: Student-Authored Organizational Case Studies

Colleen Arendt, PhD
Assistant Professor
Fairfield University
carendt@fairfield.edu

Abstract
Case studies have been used as a pedagogical method for nearly a century. The case-study method provides numerous benefits for students, encouraging problem-solving, perspective taking, reflecting, and strategizing. After a semester of reading and discussing published case studies, the purpose of this assignment is to have students write and analyze their own case studies based on their organizational experiences. This assignment blends theory and application, helps students engage in important sensemaking about their experiences, and calls on them to contribute knowledge and content to the course. Variations, debriefing prompts, and an assignment appraisal are included.

Courses
Organizational Communication, Interpersonal Communication, and specialty topic courses such as Conflict and Leadership

Objectives

• To help students connect course material to their own lives.
• To facilitate the blending of theory and application.
• To help students process their various organizational experiences.

Introduction and Rationale

For nearly a century, case studies have been utilized as a valuable pedagogical method in a variety of disciplines (Fyke, Farris, & Buzzanell, 2017). Because of their many benefits, cases are widely used in organizational communication courses. Cases encourage perspective taking, reflecting, and problem-solving while blending theory and practice (Keyton & Shockley-Zalabak, 2010). In addition, case studies can convey organizations’ complex, nonlinear, and context-specific nature (Kitano & Landry, 2001) in ways that traditional pedagogical methods

---

1 Keyton and Shockley-Zalabak (2010) note, “Literally all of the undergraduate organizational communication textbooks now include cases as an in-text pedagogical technique” (p. xix).

Colleen Arendt (PhD, Purdue University) is an Assistant Professor of Communication at Fairfield University. Her research interests lie at the intersection of organizational, risk, and crisis communication, specifically focusing on critical approaches to crisis communication. She also studies feminism and gender, particularly gendered careers. She has published in the International Journal of Communication, Communication Studies, Iowa Journal of Communication, Qualitative Studies of Interpersonal Communication: Method, Context, and Analysis and Case Studies in Organizational Communication: Understanding Communication Processes.
cannot. While lectures and textbooks help transfer information to the learner, the case-study method encourages students to think critically about content and then apply it (Ellet, 2007), providing students with “opportunities to analyze critical incidents, translate their own knowledge into practical applications and develop strategies for their own organizational practice” (Keyton & Shockley-Zalabak, 2010, p. xix).

Because communication is “fundamentally an applied discipline” (Fyke et al., 2017, p. xiv), I incorporate the case-study method throughout my organizational communication courses in order to combine theory and application. I developed the following activity, where students create and analyze their own case studies, as a fitting final assignment. I not only want students to continue the practice of applying theory, but by the end of the semester, I also want students to participate in the creation of knowledge and course content. After reading about this assignment, you can see how it can be applied to other, specific organizational-communication “topic” courses, such as leadership, conflict, negotiation, and gender, as well as to broader communication courses, such as interpersonal, relational, and family communication. I also include an entertaining variation.

**Description of Assignment**

Throughout the semester, students in my organizational-communication course read case studies from case-study books and from *Harvard Business Review*. For this assignment, I have students write their own case study based on their organizational experiences (e.g., paid work, volunteering, team sports, academic clubs). If they cannot think of anything about which to write, they can ask their parents or other family members for organizational stories and for the required case study. I have never had a student struggle to find an organization/topic. Then, I have them connect the case to three course concepts of their choosing, such as leadership, emotion, and organizational change. I also prohibit certain course concepts and theories that we have already covered, at length, in previous assignments, such as classical approaches to organizing or organizational culture. I typically give them a short list of exhausted topics that are barred for this assignment and tell them that anything not on this list is fair game. Depending on your needs and the course level (introductory, advanced, senior capstone, or even graduate course), you can determine the research parameters, such as having students only cite the lecture notes, textbook, course packet, etc.; you can also require students to include more traditional forms of research: journal articles, book chapters, etc. See Appendix A for assignment directions.

**Variation**

As one entertaining variation, instead of writing about their own—or family members’—organizational experiences, students can also write a case study about a *fictional* organization as though it were a real organization. Example companies from television include Dunder Mifflin (*The Office*), Pawnee Parks & Recreation (*Parks and Rec*), and Sterling Cooper (*Mad Men*). Examples from movies include *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *Office Space*, and *Devil Wears Prada*. The rest of the assignment works the same; the only difference is that students describe the fictional organization and characters as though they are real. Students can focus on a particular aspect of the organization (i.e., something that occurred in an episode) or can describe the organization generally in order to create their case. Then, students draw three appropriate connections (e.g., culture, conflict styles, gender and diversity, leadership, power, etc.). This variation can be useful
if students struggle to select a real-life case, especially if they lack organizational experience when they take the course.

Not only can this assignment be used in organizational-communication courses and related-topics courses, instructors can use this assignment—and its fictional variation—for any course that blends theory and application. For example, in an interpersonal communication course, students can write a case about their first semester in college and then connect it to various principles and theories, such as uncertainty-reduction theory, social-penetration theory, and relational-dialectics theory.

Debriefing

I save time at the end of the semester to discuss the cases in class. Depending on the class size, students can discuss their case in front of the entire class or in small groups. I find that discussing the cases, at some point, in small groups—either when students turn in the assignment or earlier after I first assign the paper—is a nice way for students (a) to hear each other’s stories and (b) to process their organizational experiences. If I debrief on the day they turn in their papers, I follow these prompts: (a) In small groups, discuss your case (approximately 1-2 minutes) and the three connections you made to course material (additional 1-2 minutes). (b) How did you feel after the event in question occurred? (c) What did you learn about yourself, the organization, and other parties involved? (d) After taking this course, how would handle the situation differently? (e) Do you have any advice for the person in the case? (i.e., What would you tell yourself if you could go back in time?)

If I have a number of cases that are too sensitive to share (I tell students ahead of time to indicate if they are not willing to discuss their case in small groups.), and/or if I have a few standout cases, another way to handle the debriefing is to bring copies of the exemplary cases (with the students’ permission) to class. I only bring the cases, not the three connections that the student wrote to accompany his or her case. Students take approximately 8-10 minutes to read one of the cases and then discuss it as a small group, using the prompts below (tailored to the specific case). You can also use these prompts for published case studies that you might use in class:

1) What are some ways this case connects to the course content? Name as many connections as possible. [At some point, you can have the author share what three connections he or she chose.] You can also begin by having students take 2-3 minutes to create a list of how many connections to course content they can list, and then, they can share their answers with their small group.

2) Have students within the small groups take different perspectives or represent different characters in the case.

3) What would you do/how would you handle the situation/do you agree with…?

4) Would you work for this organization? What if you worked (or volunteered) for this organization and heard about this case? Would the situation impact your feelings about the organization or impact your interactions with people? Why or why not?
5) Have students create recommendations if the case is particularly open-ended. Students can also create recommendations using different theories or perspectives (e.g., classical, critical, human relations, etc.). You can assign various approaches to different small groups and then discuss the differences together as a class.

6) Do you have any questions for the classmate who wrote this case? (Often, students, both in this activity and throughout the semester, want to hear how the open-ended case studies resolve.) The author can decline to answer any question, and the instructor can preemptively decline for the author if the question is obviously off limits.

7) You can also ask students how they think the open-ended cases concluded. This question helps students with perspective taking and also shows a higher-level of comprehension. In other words, based on the author’s description of the case, e.g., organizational culture or the parties involved, students can argue what they think happened (or did not happen) next. This technique can help them think strategically about working in organizations.

If utilizing the variation of fictional organizations, you can adjust some of the debriefing questions. You can also ask questions about whether the portrayal of organizational life is realistic. (Why or Why not?) In addition, perspective-taking questions and questions about which approaches (e.g., classical, systems, or human relations) apply to the fictional case are especially useful.

Appraisal

I find this assignment to be very effective at helping students learn the course material, helping them to apply the course content to their own lives (blending theory with practice). As mentioned, the assignment is generally an important sensemaking activity. As they turn in their paper, I have had a number of students tell me that they really enjoyed writing the case, which is always great to hear, especially toward the end of a busy semester. Others have told me that the assignment forced them to analyze and reflect on their experiences, which will help them as they think about potential careers or when preparing to discuss past employment during job interviews. Those students who lack organizational experiences tell me that hearing their classmates’ stories gives them a better sense of organizational life for someone their age. The students’ cases often provide another opening for discussing ethical and social-justice issues in a more organic, student-led manner.

The main drawback of this assignment is that, while it is perfect for an end-of-semester evaluation of students, I would love to hear these cases ahead of time so that I can incorporate them into class throughout the semester. However, I know from reading some cases that students would not be comfortable sharing their most negative experiences with the class. This assignment does provide students with a chance to share their experiences with the professor. (If they share in small groups, the students can decide and control how much detail to share or to withhold. Students with serious concerns can opt out of sharing their case publicly). Another benefit of this assignment is that I can use anonymous aspects of the cases for future semesters, adding variety to my examples.
References

Appendix A. Assignment Directions

Write your own case study and connect it to three concepts and/or theories you learned about in class, citing any course materials (e.g., textbook, other case studies or articles, and class notes). The case itself should be 1.5-4 single-spaced pages and each of the three connections should be 1-2 pages, single-spaced. In total the assignment is 4.5-10 pages. Your case study can be written in first or third person, using a story format like a few case studies we have read [i.e., with dialogue] or they can read more like a synopsis of a situation. Read this opening paragraph as an example of the synopsis-style case:

“In the summer of 2010, I worked for Company Green. Company Green produces plastic bottles for various products and employs 115 workers of various backgrounds. The culture of Company Green is one of constant stress, worry, and conflict. This case study focuses on how a small group of employees finds ways to relieve stress and reduce conflict throughout the day, including trying to find moments of joy in an otherwise stressful, and often toxic, work environment.”

You can leave the case study open ended [i.e., like many cases we read this semester did] or you can explain how the situation was resolved, and then that resolution can also be part of your connection.

Each connection to course content should be written separately. In other words, do NOT weave the three concepts together. Also, the concepts should be different from each other. In other words, using two approaches to organizational change only counts as one connection. As another example, discussing two phases of socialization and assimilation only counts as one connection.

For example, you could connect your case to 1) company culture [1-2 pages], 2) critical theory [1-2 pages], 3) organizational change [1-2 pages]. Or: 1) socialization, 2) leadership, and 3) network theory. The combinations you can use are numerous.
Closing the Assessment Loop in the Basic Communication Course

Claire H. Procopio, PhD
Associate Professor
Southeastern Louisiana University
claire.procopio@southeastern.edu

Abstract
Participation in the learning-outcome assessment is an important expectation of most communication teachers. Considerable communication research has been devoted to defining assessment, identifying what is assessed, and determining how best to do assessment (Morreale, Backlund, Hay, & Moore, 2011). The National Communication Association (NCA) recently announced the publication of Learning Outcomes in Communication (NCA, 2015). This case study explores how a program, one new to learning-outcome assessment in the basic course, overcame common challenges with implementing assessments. The case illustrates how to use assessment data meaningfully and offers specific strategies that individual communication instructors, course directors, and assessment leaders can use to close-the-loop for communication learning-outcome assessment. The strategies discerned help to ensure that the time and energy that are devoted to the assessment’s data collection and analysis benefit students and faculty.

Keywords: accreditation, assessment, basic course, faculty development, learning outcomes, and public speaking.

The development of oral communication skills is essential for college graduates (Wisker, 2004), but knowing whether our efforts to teach those skills are working is difficult. Discussions of effective oral communication assessment are common. Morreale, Backlund, Hay, and Moore’s (2011) content analysis of communication assessment research over 35 years yielded more than 558 studies that were focused on three distinct areas: defining assessment, identifying what is assessed, and determining how best to do assessment. The majority of communication programs today engage in some form of learning outcomes assessment (Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006).

Unfortunately, there are problems associated with fulfilling the institutional mandate for outcome assessments. Morreale, Hugenberg, and Worley (2006) reported that basic course directors list inconsistent instruction as their number-one problem. The authors pointed out that inconsistent instruction confounds the validity and reliability of the assessments in unpredictable ways. Inconsistency’s threat to effective assessment may be magnified in a department where the basic course is taught by faculty who are loosely connected to the public-address tradition or in the 33% of departments Morreale et al. (2006) found that do not have a designated course director. Furthermore, unlike written skills or knowledge-based assessments, standardized communication assessment instruments have not been readily available (Farris, Houser, & Wotipka, 2013), and those instruments that exist face inter-rater reliability challenges. Finally,
the faculty across disciplines have reported viewing assessment as a burden placed upon them by external forces (Robertson & Beck, 2003), resisting participation in the assessment process (Clark & Filinson, 2011) and desiring to stop assessments when the process is not required (Pringle & Michel, 2007).

In these circumstances, assessment can be easily dismissed as a pro-forma requirement that is a time-waster, at best, and a threat to academic freedom and instructional autonomy, at worst. Absent from the communication-related assessment research is a specific focus on taking assessment results and convincing the faculty to do something with them. As this author has pointed out in previous research (Procopio, 2010), there is a great deal of assessment literature that is generally aimed at higher education. Much of that research offers strategies and techniques for “closing-the-loop,” a common expression in accreditation circles for using assessment data to improve practices, pedagogy, and policies that results in the attainment of learning outcomes (see, for example, Angelo, 2002; Berlanger, 2006; Hill, 2004; Lakos & Phipps, 2004; Moltz, 2009; Piascik & Bird, 2008; Rothwell & Khera, 2009; Weiner, 2009). It is not enough to collect the data; departments must do something with the data in order to justify the collection’s time and expense and to improve student learning. Morreale et al.’s (2011) analysis of 434 national convention presentations, 89 journal articles, and 35 other books and publications painted a picture of a field that was growing from believing that the assessment was important to defining what gets assessed and then working on instruments that are useful for such an assessment. This author’s analysis of communication-assessment literature since that study found nothing else specifically related to how to use communication assessments for continuous quality-improvement efforts. There is a gap in the current literature when it comes to communication scholars identifying successful closing-the-loop strategies. Those strategies need to consider the unique circumstances that challenge effective oral-communication assessment: potential inconsistency across sections with or without a course director, a lack of easily deployed and reliable assessment instruments, and faculty resistance with conducting assessments. This article offers a case study about closing-the-loop strategies for one department that used assessment data to demonstrably improve faculty and student performance through targeted faculty training, structural changes to the basic course, and ongoing refinement of the assessment process.

**Departmental Context**

Each communication department faces its own challenges to assess student learning. The author’s department faced a number of challenges before deploying the assessment initiative. Prior to 2012, no formal assessment of the basic communication course had been implemented. The driver for the new assessment initiative was the university’s general-education committee seeking a way to assess oral-communication competence in advance of an accreditation visit. Absent that impetus, the assessments probably would not have been conducted.

Expectations and instruction for the basic course varied widely in the department. As is the case with 33% of programs nationally (Morreale et al., 2006), no one person was formally designated to direct the basic communication course. Seven tenured faculty members, six instructors, and five part-time faculty members developed their own syllabi to conform with the guidelines outlined by a flexible master syllabus. For example, the master syllabus required at least one informative and one persuasive speech, and set minimum minute and source-citation requirements for those two speeches. However, the master syllabus left it to faculty to flesh out
the specifics for each assignment and to choose two to three additional speech assignments for the course. Different educational backgrounds and research emphases also contributed to varied expectations for the course among faculty members. Four of the seven tenured faculty members were mass-communication professors with no formal training in public speaking instruction. The instructors were evenly split between those whose master’s education included public speaking instruction and those who were in a related field (mass communication and organizational communication) but did not teach the course as part of their graduate programs. Each adjunct had public address as part of his or her master’s or doctoral work.

Two versions of the basic course were offered at the university: one for education majors (COMM E) and one for all other majors (COMM A). COMM A was a traditional public speaking course with informative, persuasive, and ceremonial speech assignments that were focused on developing extemporaneous delivery skills, audience-analysis and adaptation abilities, and effective use of supporting materials and organization. COMM E shared the same public speaking outcomes as COMM A, but focused on the classroom as the context and students as the audience where communication occurs. Faculty members differed widely in the grades that they were assigning for the two courses. The average grade issued for the education majors’ basic course the semester prior to implementing assessments was a 3.69/4.00, with A’s constituting 67% of the final grades. The average grade issued for the all-majors’ basic course was a 3.01/4.00, with A’s constituting 37% of the final grades. To provide some context, the grade distributions for the two courses were compared to other freshman-level courses, without prerequisites, that were offered by the same college at the university. Only 26% of the students in the other departments’ comparable courses received A’s, and those courses averaged 2.4-2.7/4.0 for the final course grade. Because each course is recommended to freshmen for their first or second semester, the classes are populated by the same students who are enrolled in the basic communication course. Ostensibly, the communication basic course had learning outcomes with the same level of rigor as the college’s other freshman courses. Therefore, it was puzzling why students’ communication-course grades were so different from the rest of the college’s basic courses. Either these same students were performing much better in communication courses than in other freshman courses, or our faculty had very different grading criteria than people teaching for other departments.

Bringing these data to the communication faculty before launching the assessment process allowed the department to use the design and implementation of the student learning-outcome assessment process formatively. That is, assessment leaders began to discuss the nature of the department’s challenges and how the issues might be addressed to design the process for gathering the learning-outcome data that, ultimately, would be used for summative evaluation.

Data-Collection Design

Instrument Reliability

Inconsistent evaluations of oral performance pose a challenge for effective communication assessment (Hughes & Large, 1993). Having the grade-distribution data and a mandate to assess gave the department a pretext to engage in speech-grade norming for inter-

---

1 The university’s Institutional Research Office provided data for the other courses that were open to freshmen without prerequisites, including the introductory courses for English, psychology, Spanish, and sociology.
rater reliability. Further analysis of the departmental grade distributions revealed a wide range of grading tendencies. For instance, one professor issued fewer than 12% A’s in any given semester while another routinely issued up to 80% A’s. Following Morreale, Moore, Surges-Tatum, and Webster’s (2007) advice to work with the NCA’s Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation (CSSE) form as a group with norming before implementing any multi-section assessments, the department held a series of meetings to watch speeches, to score them, and to discuss expectations for the students’ oral performance.

The CSSE was selected because it was specifically designed to measure public speaking skills, including competencies related to the preparation and performance of a successful speech. This measure has been tested for validity (McCroskey, 1970; Rubin, 1982), and the instrument comes with an elaborate appendix that includes the Rasch analyses conducted before concluding that the instrument is “appropriate for general application” and recommended for “national distribution and use” (Morreale et al., 2007, p. 31). The CSSE was created by professionals in the communication field and was specifically recommended by the NCA to generate assessment data for accountability-related objectives. Furthermore, the CSSE is relatively easy to use. The instrument assesses eight competencies at three levels: unsatisfactory, satisfactory, and excellent. Each competency comes with a description of behaviors that would typify a performance at that level. The faculty received a copy of the 45-page CSSE at a meeting early in the assessment’s design process. Assessment leaders felt that seeing the instrument in the context of the work that produced it would enhance its credibility with faculty members who were unfamiliar with it and, in some cases, unfamiliar with NCA and basic course assessment in general.

The first step of the norming meetings was to select speeches that represented various performance levels. Two assessment leaders (one instructor and one associate professor) worked together to identify 12 student speeches. The examples were chosen from a pool of student speeches that were easily found on the internet. Three speeches were obviously flawed in terms of delivery and content. These speeches were under-developed; had speakers who did not make eye contact with the audience and lacked vocal variety; failed to cite sources; and lacked clearly defined introductions, bodies, or conclusions. Three speeches were obviously excellent with those speakers engaging their audiences verbally and nonverbally; selecting interesting topics and supporting material; and making effective use of previews, transitions, internal summaries, and the other hallmarks of good structure. The remaining six speeches exhibited some strengths and some weaknesses: for example, having a strong use of language devices but poor extemporaneous delivery, or exhibiting strong audience adaptation but establishing little credibility for the supporting material. Once a range of speeches, in terms of quality content and delivery, were selected, the two assessment leaders met with two additional faculty members to pick one excellent, one average, and one below-average speech from the group to share with the remaining faculty.

The faculty then met as a group to watch the three selected speeches and to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of each one using the CSSE. Interesting insights about the different priorities that the faculty had for assessing speeches emerged. For example, two faculty members felt strongly that delivery should constitute the bulk of any assessment for student speaking. Two individuals felt that supporting material—its selection and citation—should count most. An interesting discussion arose when two faculty members understood “use of supporting material” to mean the use of visual support during a speech but not to include oral source citations or selecting the material to support a claim. This discussion before the norming helped to reveal problems that we might encounter with validly and reliability when implementing the
CSSE. The discussion also reinforced the idea that the department had an expectation problem when it came to evaluating student learning; assessment might help address this issue.

Sample
To assess students’ attainment of oral-communication competence, instructors for all sections of the basic course digitally recorded the students’ speeches. A random sample of speeches comprising 10% of the students in the basic course was collected at the end of each semester between Fall 2012 and Fall 2013 (N = 410). All types of instructional delivery were included for the sampling frame: 100% online, hybrid, early start, and traditional face-to-face sections. The university’s Institutional Review Board approved the sample’s use for this analysis.

Overloaded faculty members may resist the assessment because it can add another uncompensated requirement to their jobs. Accordingly, a number of steps were taken to ease the requirements for data collection and assessment. A small grant enabled the department to purchase cameras for the faculty to use during the speech taping. The faculty could check the cameras out from graduate students in the department’s advising office; those graduate students would also help upload speeches from the camera to a computer. To facilitate convenient speech viewing for the assessment, the program’s graduate assistants uploaded the speeches to a private YouTube™ channel, enabling faculty reviewers to work from home while ensuring that the student speeches were not viewable outside the faculty review team.

Analysis of the Sample
To analyze the sample of speeches, four of the department’s communication professors were trained as raters. They met and again reviewed the NCA guidelines for using the CSSE. Next, the four raters discussed the selected three speeches to illustrate the CSSE’s three achievement levels (unsatisfactory, satisfactory, and excellent) for each of the eight competencies. The four raters discussed what ratings they would assign for each speech in every category. To establish inter-rater reliability, the raters then scored the nine remaining pre-selected speeches (not from the sample) and calculated an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) to measure the level of absolute agreement among raters. Shrout and Fleiss (1979) pointed out that the ICC is effective for assessing measurements made by multiple observers because it accounts for both intra- and inter-observer variability. Raters scored higher than 86% agreement within each competency rating with an overall agreement of 89.9% across all competencies (Table 1). Having established consistent inter-rater reliability, steps were taken to ensure that the raters did not receive their own students to assess, and then, two raters were assigned to each speech.

For easy data analysis, scores were assigned to the NCA rubric as follows: 1 = unsatisfactory, 2 = satisfactory, and 3 = excellent. When averaging the two raters’ scores, the following ranges were used: 1-1.9 = unsatisfactory, 2-2.9 = satisfactory, and 3 = excellent. To receive a rating of “excellent” for any one competency, both raters had to perceive the performance for that competency as excellent. Oral-communication competence was measured by summing the two-reviewer averages on all eight competencies and comparing the sum to the following range of scores: ≤13 = did not meet expectations, 14-20 = met expectations, and ≥21 = exceeded expectations.
Closing-the-Loop Strategies Employed

Having established reasons for assessment and having designed an assessment process, the department collected its first data in Fall 2012 and Spring 2013. Data were reviewed with the faculty at the end of each academic term. Strategies for improvement were implemented. Data were collected and reviewed again in Fall 2013.

Closing-the-Loop Strategy 1: Strategic Training

Morreale et al. (2011) noted that one reason consistently reported for doing assessment is that it brings faculty together. Indeed, other assessment leaders argued that no meaningful assessment initiative can sustain itself without “a coalition for change” (Shera, 2008, p. 280). After the first semester of data collection, it was clear the department’s basic communication course needed to change. The students’ learning-outcome attainment varied widely across competencies. The majority of the students were minimally competent with topic selection, language use, articulation, and clarity of thesis, but less than half of the students were rated as satisfactory for their vocal variety, organization, use of supporting material, and physical delivery. Of additional concern, despite half of the students performing unsatisfactorily for half of the outcomes that are central to effective public speaking, course grades were very high. It was apparent that a coalition of the willing would need to emerge if the department were going to make changes.

To address the varied learning-outcome attainment shown in the data, assessment leaders conducted two half-day training sessions with communication faculty, targeting behavioral and affective changes for the course and assessment. These sessions covered teaching strategies for areas with the lowest scores. Faculty members also engaged in more expectation norming by viewing and scoring speeches from the sample as a group. Frey, Hooker, and Simonds (2015) recently argued that the most important training that new basic course instructors can receive is effective speech evaluation. This case study’s results suggested that training about effective speech evaluations may be just as valuable to all public speaking teachers who are interested in collectively improving the student-learning outcomes.

To address the affective element of instructional improvement, assessment leaders identified the faculty members who were most resistant to the assessment initiative and approached them about leading portions of the training sessions. From the faculty of 13 full-time teachers, the resistant ones were not hard to identify. They had the highest percentage of A’s awarded, sat cross-armed and stony-faced at assessment meetings, and openly questioned why they “had to do any of this.” After seeing the data and being approached to share their teaching strategies for one of the low-scoring assessment areas, these faculty members were surprisingly willing to stand up before the rest of the faculty and to share the strategies. Following that sharing, most faculty members showed an increased support for the assessment initiative and the course modifications. Only one assessment-resistant instructor was happy to share her advice about improving student speaking but remained convinced that her students were giving nearly perfect speeches. She continued to defend her free awarding of the A grade and reported how students had little room to improve their speaking in her class because they were already excellent. Because the assessments were not tied to particular professors in the reporting and because grade distributions were shared without identifying the specific section or instructor, it is impossible to know if this professor’s student performance improved or if her course grades...
matched the students’ performance better at the end of the assessment period, but that result was certainly the case collectively.

The training sessions took place after the data were analyzed each semester. The sessions began by sharing the assessment results, reporting the averages and percentage of students who were rated at each level for all eight competencies identified in the CSSE. Following the initial data review, the assessments with an average score below “met expectations” were addressed. The assessment coordinator shared examples of student performances in each category by playing parts of speeches from the assessment sample. The faculty discussed the examples. Then, previously identified faculty members shared strategies and resources that they had for helping students to master the outcome. General comments followed, and a number of faculty members volunteered additional ideas to improve student performance for the outcome.

At the close of the third data-collection semester, student scores had improved considerably (data below), but competency areas with lower relative scores required more targeted training. The faculty continued to meet in order to review the assessment data and committed to an array of specific instructional improvements (e.g., increased classroom emphasis on the format for oral citations and the importance of establishing source credibility) as well as shared best practices, assignments, and instructional material for the course learning management system. The nature of the sessions had clearly moved from justifying the need for data collection and analysis (a common theme at the process’ early meetings) to more specific strategies for using the data to improve student-learning outcomes.

**Closing-the-Loop Strategy 2: Structural Changes for the Course**

As a consequence of discussions during the data-review sessions, the department identified a need for more instructional time in the basic course. Budget constraints prohibited a reduction for the number of students per section. An alternative solution emerged in the assessment-review discussions: the faculty required students to digitally record one speech on their own time. The faculty members shared ideas to facilitate this requirement (e.g., speech labs on campus, small-group assignments to establish the audience for these speeches, and multimedia support resources) and agreed to reclaim almost two weeks’ worth of instructional time by relegating one speech to an out-of-class assignment.

**Closing-the-Loop Strategy 3: Refining the Assessment Process**

Departments need to resist the urge to change their objectives or assessment instruments too frequently, especially as a response to not reaching a target. However, programs that are new to the assessment game will probably need to refine their assessment processes through the first few rounds of data collection and analysis. Feedback from this department’s faculty early in the process suggested a number of needed modifications. Following the initial semester, data collection occurred later in the course to ensure that the sample captured the students’ fullest mastery of competencies. The instructional staff refined the assignments to make sure that the faculty shared common expectations for length and supporting material. The department head formally designated an instructor as the public speaking course director to coordinate the efforts that were needed to measure and achieve the master course’s syllabus objectives.

**Evidence that Efforts to Close-the-Loop Are Working**

Prior to the implementing the assessments, grade distributions (67% and 37% A’s) and GPA (3.69 and 3.01) for the two basic communication courses were high and out-of-line with grades for comparable courses. This disparity suggested grade inflation for the course, a finding
which was confirmed when the initial results for the students’ oral performance showed few students (4.1%) exceeding expectations. After the first year of assessments, the course GPAs were more in line with comparable classes at the institution (Table 2) although there was still room for improvement; ongoing assessments continue to address this issue.

Three semesters’ worth of data suggested that student performance is improving. As Table 3 shows, the percentage of students meeting and exceeding expectations was up, and the percentage not meeting expectations was down. As Table 4 shows, the average score for each competency also increased during the assessment period. Independent-sample \( t \) tests comparing the means from Fall 2012 (the first semester data were collected) and Fall 2013 (the most recent semester for which data were available) showed that the increases were statistically significant at the .05 level for each of the eight competencies. Analyzing the average sum of competencies showed statistically significant improvements between Fall 2012 (\( m = 14.3, \text{ std } = 2.18 \)) and Fall 2013 (\( m = 16.7, \text{ std } = 2.2 \)) at the \( p < .001 \) level (\( t = -7.484, \text{ df } = 180 \)). Semester-by-semester tracking for the percentage of students meeting and exceeding expectations showed steady increases: Fall 2012 = 71.4\% (\( n = 50 \)), Spring 2013 = 84.8\% (\( n = 105 \)), and Fall 2013 = 97.4\% (\( n = 109 \)).

**Conclusion**

Concerted efforts to close the assessment loop create opportunities for meaningful discussions with faculty colleagues and pay dividends for the faculty who coordinate the assessment efforts. Involving faculty with designing the assessment processes, sharing data about the need for assessment, taking the time to meet and review assessment results, and involving assessment-resistant faculty when developing response plans are closing-the-loop strategies that have allowed at least one department to measurably improve instruction and students’ oral-communication performance.

Limitations for this research include the particular context of the assessment initiative. A department with a longer tradition of assessment and greater consistency across sections might not yield as much improvement as quickly as this department did when using the same strategies. Additional research on strategies to sustain momentum and interest for an assessment-based improvement would be useful to communication assessment leaders.

For this program, these findings demonstrated that students’ oral-communication competence can be improved with a concerted effort even if pockets of resistance exist initially. Much of what turned out to be valuable for the individual faculty members in the assessment process was not the data per se. It was the act of sharing the data and communicating about them. From the inception of the assessment initiative, faculty members were exposed to data comparing their individual grade distributions to other faculty members’ distributions and their courses’ average grade compared to the average grade for similar courses across campus. Teaching can be solitary work. Taking the time to consider how one’s instruction, one’s class, and one’s course fit into the larger picture of institutional performance shifted the thinking about the assessment process from one of complying with a compulsory mandate to one of better achieving the department’s goals for its students. Similar focus shifts would be useful for any program that is launching an assessment initiative, or reinvigorating a waning one, in the face of accreditation or a similar external driver.

Involving the faculty in meaningful ways to address any weaknesses unearthed during the assessment is this case study’s second important implication. It is the irony of assessment that assessment directors sometimes drag faculty kicking and screaming into the assessment; once the
data are secured, the directors take on the burden of writing the reports, submit them to institutional-effectiveness trackers, and then get back to other work, all in the name of not making the assessment process any more burdensome for their faculty colleagues. If that attitude prevails, assessment work truly does become the waste of time that faculty members sometimes lament that it is. Only when taking the time to have faculty reflect on the collective findings for the basic course assessment is the initial investment of time and energy worth it. This case study’s faculty members who initially resisted “having to do” assessments brought forth some of the best ideas for restructuring the course to increase instructional time and for adjusting the assessment process to better reflect student learning. If faculties are going to spend the time to do assessments, they should see it through to reap the rewards of that effort. Department heads and assessment coordinators should insist on faculty time that is devoted singly to closing the assessment loop and then look to their talented faculty colleagues in order to generate ideas and practices for improvement.

References


### Table 1

**Interrater Reliability Scores for Normed Speeches**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Competency</th>
<th>Intraclass Correlation Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chooses and narrows a topic appropriately for the audience and occasion.</td>
<td>.916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicates the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion.</td>
<td>.885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides supporting material appropriate to the audience and occasion.</td>
<td>.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses an organizational pattern appropriate to the topic, audience, occasion, and purpose.</td>
<td>.886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses language appropriate to audience and occasion</td>
<td>.869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity (volume) to heighten and maintain interest appropriate to the audience and occasion</td>
<td>.897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience and occasion.</td>
<td>.931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses physical behaviors that support the verbal message.</td>
<td>.908</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2
Spring 2013 Post-Assessment Grade Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>% Issued Grade of “A”</th>
<th>Mean GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication E</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication A</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish 101</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology 101</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology 101</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 101</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Sum of Scores for All Eight Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students Earning the Rating in Fall 2013</th>
<th>% of Speakers Earning the Rating in Fall 2013</th>
<th>% Change from 2012-13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not meet expectations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met expectations</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>91.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeded expectations</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean = 16.8 (n = 112) - an increased mean score of 2.5 points over 2012-13.

Table 4

Mean Scores for Each Competency from Highest to Lowest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NCA Competency</th>
<th>Fall 2013 Mean</th>
<th>Change from 2012-13</th>
<th>Fall 2013 Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrows topic</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>+.30</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear thesis</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>+.30</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language use</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>+14</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>+.23</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulation</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>+.01</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting material</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>+.08</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal variety</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>+.15</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical delivery</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>+.16</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Men’s Rights Activists and the Ray Rice Domestic-Violence Case:  
Using Critical Communication Pedagogy to Counter Hegemonic Masculinity

David H. Kahl, Jr., PhD  
Associate Professor  
Penn State Erie, The Behrend College  
dhk10@psu.edu

Abstract

Some groups in society communicate in ways that attempt to marginalize others. One such group is the Men’s Rights Activists (MRA) who use language to attempt to normalize the subjugation of women through its rejection of feminism. This activity is designed to engage students in a dialogue about MRA’s response to the domestic-violence incident involving Baltimore Ravens’ running back Ray Rice and his fiancé, Janay Palmer, in a hotel elevator. Specifically, the activity allows students to learn about MRA members and their hegemonic ideology, to examine/view the domestic-violence incident, and to use critical-communication pedagogy (CCP) as a means to examine a MRA’s blog that was devoted to the incident. Overall, the activity allows instructors and students to engage in a meaningful dialogue about MRAs through the lens of CCP in order to respond to instances of hegemony in their own lives.

Courses

Gender Communication, Women’s Studies, Men’s Studies, Sports and Communication, Public Speaking, or Intercultural Communication.

Objectives

- Students will recognize the principles of critical communication pedagogy and how the principles can be used to respond to marginalization.
- Students will examine the Men’s Rights Activists’ hegemonic ideology.
- Students will examine the Ray Rice domestic-violence incident.
- Students will apply critical communication pedagogy to the Men’s Rights Activists’ blog statements in order to determine how students can respond to an instance of hegemonic masculinity that they encounter.

Introduction and Rationale

Scholars, activists, and communication instructors recognize that some movements in society advance marginalizing messages. Such movements perpetuate marginalization toward groups whom they deem to be a threat to their own ideologies. One such movement, the masculinist movement, actively speaks against women and feminist movements in an attempt to silence their voices (Blais & Dupuis-Deri, 2012). Unlike feminist movements that work against marginalization directed toward women, masculinist movements seek to perpetuate it. Thus, their
marginalizing messages result in hegemony. Gramsci (2005) explains that hegemony functions as ideological domination. As one ideology becomes dominant, others are silenced. He states that ideology is transmitted by language. As society shapes what people believe, they engage in domination by consent. As Gramsci (2005) explains, although people may not agree with a dominant ideology, they tend to adopt a fatalistic attitude about it, believing that they have no power to counter the dominant ideology. Thus, when masculinist groups use language to subjugate women and their role in society, masculinist groups often succeed with their goal of normalizing subjugation and attempting to make women (and pro-feminist men) believe that the marginalization that they experience is normal and even acceptable. Masculinist movements succeed when people adopt the fatalistic viewpoint. Gramsci explains, “Fatalism is nothing other than the clothing worn by real and active will when in a weak position” (2005, p. 337).

Unfortunately, the hegemonic ideologies of masculinist movements are often overlooked in gender-communication courses (Blais & Dupuis-Deri, 2012). I argue that gender-communication courses should present students with the opportunity to examine the hegemonic messages that these masculinist groups use to advance their cause so that students learn to uncover and to challenge these marginalizing messages of domination.

**Description of the Activity**

Given the need for gender-communication courses to address this important topic, the activity demonstrates how students can study the ways that masculinist groups perpetuate hegemony. This activity helps students learn to identify and to evaluate marginalizing messages as well as how these messages can have the effect of sustaining society’s power structures. This activity also provides students with an opportunity to respond to hegemonic masculinity through the application of critical-communication pedagogy.

This activity focuses on the domestic-violence case involving Baltimore Ravens’ running back Ray Rice. This case has garnered much media attention; therefore, students are largely aware of the incident’s specifics. Because students are not aware of the masculinist groups’ responses to the incident, this activity asks students to examine the ways in which a masculinist group uses this event to perpetuate hegemony.

Students will engage in the following four-step process, the activity’s objectives. First, students will learn about critical-communication pedagogy and how it can be used to respond to marginalization. Second, students will study the Men’s Rights Activists and its hegemonic ideology. Third, students will examine the Ray Rice domestic-violence incident. Fourth, students will apply critical-communication pedagogy to the Men’s Rights Activists’ blog statements about the Rice incident in order to determine how people can respond to instances of hegemonic masculinity that they encounter in their own lives. Each of the four steps is discussed in the following sections.

**Step #1: Learning About Critical Communication Pedagogy (10 minutes)**

In this step, students learn about the principles of critical communication pedagogy (CCP) in order to, later, respond to the MRA’s hegemonic blog comments. Thus, this first section follows a lecture format where instructors explain the CCP’s ideology to students. This lecture is followed by dialogue. To aid instructors in facilitating the lecture and dialogue, the following section provides a brief description of CCP.
Critical communication pedagogy. Instructors should discuss the idea that CCP is a pedagogical approach that examines language and meaning in order to uncover power imbalances in society (Kahl, 2011). Allen (2011) explains that the goal of CCP is to make learners, both teachers and students, consciously aware of how power benefits some groups and subjugates others. Specifically, CCP accomplishes this goal by examining the role of race, sex, gender, social class, and economic status in society (Kahl, 2013, 2014). Thus, CCP works to make power visible and “hold power and authority accountable” (Giroux, 2014, pp. 40-41). Hegemony, a social construct, is a system that privileges one ideology over another by shaping what people believe (Gramsci, 2005). As society shapes belief, people adopt that ideology, thinking that they are powerless to counter the dominant ideology. CCP often employs conscientization, a process to analyze and respond to hegemony (Freire, 1970). Conscientization involves a) gaining a heightened awareness of hegemony and b) identifying ways to respond to hegemony when they encounter it (Freire, 1970).

To assess students’ understanding of CCP, hegemony, and conscientization, instructors can pose the following discussion questions: How would you describe hegemony? Why is it important to be able to recognize hegemony? What effect does hegemony have on our lives? Are there ways to respond to hegemony?

Step #2: Examining the Ideology of Men’s Rights Activists (20 minutes)

In this step, students examine the MRA’s ideology and its hegemonic beliefs regarding women. To help students understand the MRA’s ideology, instructors should provide students with a background of the MRA movement. Instructors should discuss that masculinist groups, such as the MRA, are generally comprised of white, heterosexual men who believe that feminism puts men in crisis (Wood, 2013) and that women are to blame for the socio-economic problems that men face. MRA members believe that feminist movements have become too powerful and have harmed men. Specifically, MRAs “deny any idea of men’s power and argue that men are the real victims” (Flood, 1996, p. 22), claiming that “women have become the true power holders in our society” (Maddison, 1999, p. 39). This ideology originates from the belief that “the gender equity pendulum has swung too far and, as a result, men are now disadvantaged and discriminated against” (Maddison, 1999, p. 39). Blais and Dupuis-Déri (2012) describe this belief system as the “scapegoat thesis” (p. 24). This belief system leads MRAs to work in opposition to feminism by “revalorizing masculinity” (Wood, 2013, p. 224). To accomplish their goals, MRAs attempt to use masculinity to subjugate women. Because of these beliefs, MRAs tend to be more sympathetic to the goals of liberal feminism which “holds that women and men are alike and equal in most respects” (Wood, 2013, p. 69). Thus, like MRAs, members of the liberal feminism movement strive for equality between sexes in terms of “rights, roles, and opportunities” (Wood, 2013, p. 69). Alternately, MRAs tend to be more hostile toward the goals of cultural feminism which “holds that women and men are fundamentally different and, therefore, should have different rights, roles, and opportunities” (Wood, 2013, p. 69).

To assess for understanding about the MRA’s ideology, instructors can pose the following discussion questions: Why do MRAs exist? How would you describe the MRA’s ideology? Why might men believe that they, not women, are subjugated in society? Is the MRA’s ideology dangerous? Why or why not?
Step #3: Examining the Ray Rice Domestic-Violence Incident (15 minutes)

In this step, students view a much-publicized domestic-violence incident involving Baltimore Ravens’ running back Ray Rice and his then-fiancée, Janay Palmer, which occurred in February 2014. In the footage captured by a security camera inside a casino elevator in Atlantic City, NJ, Rice is seen punching Janay Palmer, knocking her unconscious, and dragging her outside the elevator. Because of the video’s graphic nature, instructors need to gauge whether or not it is appropriate to show the video to their students. This video is available at http://www.tmz.com/2014/09/08/ray-rice-elevator-knockout-fiancee-takes-crushing-punch-video/. One of the primary benefits of viewing the video is to contrast the obvious violence inflicted upon Janay Palmer with the MRA’s lack of objection to it on its blog (which is discussed in Step 4).

To assess the students’ understanding of the video, instructors can pose the following discussion questions: What is your reaction to this video? How does this video represent hegemony regarding gender roles? How is Janay Palmer marginalized in this video?

Step #4: Applying Critical Communication Pedagogy to the MRA’s Blog (30 minutes)

In this final step of the activity, students apply their knowledge of CCP to accomplish two goals, gaining a heightened awareness of hegemony and learning to respond to its presence in society. Specifically, students read sections of an MRA blog where masculinists provide their marginalizing views of the Rice incident. Doing so affords students the opportunity to conclude the activity with a focus on praxis.

Gaining a heightened awareness of hegemony. To help students become aware of the hegemonic language that MRAs use regarding this incident, students read entries in the MRA reddit.com blog posting titled “Ray Rice: The elevator video.” The blog where the MRA’s comment about the incident can be accessed at http://www.reddit.com/r/MensRights/comments/2fsvse/ray_rice_the_elevator_video/. The reading and subsequent discussion of the blog help students to accomplish the first step of conscientization, gaining a heightened awareness of hegemony. To do so, instructors should ask students to read the blog in order to examine the marginalizing language that is generally used in the responses. Some examples follow. One post uses metaphoric language to attempt to explain Janay Palmer’s subservient role to Ray Rice: “It isn't the lion's fault that they're a lion, it's the zebra's fault for poking the lion when it's just a zebra.” Other posts justify Rice’s actions: “Retaliating would be following a person a beating the tar out of them. Retaliating would be, continually hitting the person. He used just enough force to stop her continual attacks.” Some MRAs’ posts blame the handrails in the elevator for injuring Palmer. One MRA stated:

It was her head hitting the rail that caused the knock out. The blow seemed to just knock her off balance. If the blow was bad enough, there would be pictures. I have yet to see pictures of significant bruising.

Another MRA member, after calling for the removal of handrails from elevators, stated that “Ray Rice should be playing football this Sunday.”

To assess the students’ understanding of hegemonic masculinity that is advanced by MRAs, instructors can pose the following discussion questions to small groups of students: Despite the evidence against Rice, why do the MRA’s blog posts tend to indicate that Ray Rice
is not at fault? How does the MRA’s language subjugate women? How do the comments justify male violence against women? How does the language silence women’s voices? How do these blog postings reflect the MRA members’ beliefs about power distribution? How do these comments advance their cause? How does society empower MRAs in ways that legitimize these rationalizations for Rice’s actions?

**Learning to respond to hegemony.** Students engage in the second facet of conscientization, identifying ways in which they could respond to hegemonic messages. Because most students have not previously engaged in conscientization (Kahl, 2014), they do not know how to respond to hegemonic masculinity. When discussing the following questions, students learn to become active participants in society by recognizing that they can respond to the hegemony that they encounter. To assess the degree to which students are learning to become active participants in society, small groups of students should discuss the following questions: How could you respond if you heard someone make these comments? How could you assist someone who has been affected by the MRA’s disparaging language? How could you make other people aware of the damage that the MRA’s messages perpetuate? What challenges would you face from MRAs if you did respond?

Dialoguing with students about these questions is an important step because it helps them to understand hegemonic messages and to work toward action (praxis) (Freire, 1970; Smith, 2002). Freire (1970) discusses the idea that praxis is informed action, an important means to enact change in society. Students often state that, when they apply CCP and conscientization to analyze the blog, they become aware that critically minded citizens should use their understanding of the effects of MRA members’ language to move to informed action.

**Assessment of the Objectives**

This activity allows students to meet the objectives set forth at the outset of this paper. First, students learned about CCP and how it can be used to respond to marginalization. Second, students discussed and viewed the Ray Rice domestic-violence incident. Third, students studied the MRA’s ideology to learn about how the group marginalizes women. Finally, students applied CCP to the MRA’s blog to determine how they could respond to instances of hegemonic masculinity that they encounter in their own lives.

In this activity, instructors established dialogue as a form of assessment, allowing them to gain important information about student progress and depth of understanding. By using dialogue as an assessment procedure for each step of the activity, instructors discerned the following: whether this activity aided students in becoming better prepared to engage in praxis regarding instances of hegemonic masculinity and in becoming critically engaged in society (Kahl, 2013) through the practical application of their knowledge (Kahl, 2010).

**Debriefing**

Students often acknowledge that they were not aware of the negative consequences of hegemonic language prior to engaging in this activity. Therefore, instructors could ask students to reflect on their new awareness by posing the following question: How has this activity helped you to realize how damaging the MRA’s hegemonic language can be? This final question helps students to reflect on what they have experienced in order to make a connection between the activity and their lives.
Appraisal

This activity develops critical thinking by using a dialogue process that allows students to share their opinions and experiences to gain new levels of awareness about oppression. This activity possesses utility because it has the potential to actively involve diverse students in important civil discussions about hegemony, marginalization, and MRAs. Specifically, the dialogic aspects allow students who come from different backgrounds to express their opinions. This activity helps students to recognize that they can respond to hegemonic masculinity through their public speeches, their intercultural interactions, their discussions about gender and sex, and/or their knowledge of the relationships between sports and society.

Additional benefits for the activity are that the examination of hegemony is applicable to a variety of courses in the communication discipline. For example, beyond the obvious application in courses involving gender communication or sports and communication, the application of the activity in a public speaking course allows further discussion about how hegemonic masculinity could affect a speaker and his/her interaction with an audience. The integration of this activity into an intercultural communication course could allow detailed discussion about the ways in which masculinity and violence are perceived similarly and differently across cultural contexts.

References


**Handout**

**Discussion Questions**

**Step #1: Learning about Critical Communication Pedagogy Questions**

How would you describe hegemony? Why is it important to be able to recognize hegemony? What effect does hegemony have on our lives? Are there ways to respond to hegemony?

**Step #2: Examining the Ideology of Men’s Rights Activists Questions**

Why do MRAs exist? How would you describe MRAs ideology? Why might men believe that they, not women, are subjugated in society? Is the MRAs ideology dangerous? Why or why not?

**Step #3: Examining the Ray Rice Domestic Violence Incident Questions**

What is your reaction to this video? How does this video represent hegemony regarding gender roles? How is Janay Palmer marginalized in this video?

**Step #4: Applying Critical Communication Pedagogy to the MRAs Blog Questions**

a. **Gaining a heightened awareness of hegemony.**

   Despite the evidence against Rice, why do MRAs blog posts tend to indicate that Ray Rice is not at fault? How does the MRAs language subjugate women? How do their comments justify male violence against women? How does their language silence women’s voices? How do these blog postings reflect MRAs beliefs about power distribution? How do these comments advance their cause? How does society empower MRAs in ways that legitimize these rationalizations for Rice’s actions?

b. **Learning to respond to hegemony.**

   How could you respond if you heard someone make these comments? How could you assist someone who has been affected by the MRAs disparaging language? How could you make other people aware of the damage that the MRAs messages perpetuate? What challenges would you face from MRAs if you did respond?

**Debriefing Question**

How has this activity helped you to realize how damaging MRAs hegemonic language can be?
Developing a Supportive Communication Climate for Virtual Task Groups

Brent Kice, PhD
Assistant Professor
University of Houston-Clear Lake
kice@uhcl.edu

Abstract
This class activity places students in virtual teams to assess Gibb’s (1961) defensive or supportive behaviors as a means of reinforcing trust among virtual task-group members. A worksheet offering a fictitious online chat transcript is provided for group analysis; student directions for creating unique team names are also given. This activity helps students to establish positive climates for virtual task groups.

Courses
Small-Group Communication, Computer-Mediated Communication, and Basic Communication

Objectives
1. To assess a defensive group-communication climate for an online video-game task group.
2. To develop solutions for a supportive group-communication climate by developing creative team names while interacting through an online chat.

Introduction and Rationale

Students’ future professional success requires them to navigate negative and positive climates efficiently in the workplace. Gibb (1961) referred to the communication that establishes these climates within interpersonal relationships as defensive or supportive behaviors. Ideally, individuals should utilize supportive communication strategies to promote positive relationships. In particular, supportive communication generates a positive group climate that, in turn, guides a small task group toward the successful development of solutions for the assigned tasks. The ability to generate positive group climates and to rectify negative group climates is of great value to students because they will participate in small task groups as part of their future careers. In addition, as they engage in more digital interactions, people may find themselves in careers that rely on virtual teams; hence, they must develop the ability to work successfully in computer-mediated task groups.

Gibb (1961) offered six dichotomies to assess a group as having a defensive communication climate or a supportive communication climate. First, the evaluation versus description dichotomy clarifies the use of accusatory defensive statements in contrast to neutral descriptive statements. For example, accusatory statements are identified best by you-statements, such as “You forgot to make copies of the spreadsheet.” Second, the control versus problem orientation dichotomy addresses group members’ desires to establish control over other group members, as opposed to listening to all group members for mutually beneficial solutions. For example, an oriented group member develops a solution that helps all members, as opposed to a...
controlling member who avoids listening to the other members’ concerns and develops solutions that are exclusive to her or his own views. Third, the strategy versus spontaneity dichotomy relies on group members using manipulation or honesty. For example, a group member may strategically withhold information from other members as opposed to revealing information to all members as information unfolds. Fourth, the neutrality versus empathy dichotomy describes group members’ emotional connections, or lack thereof, to each other. For example, a neutral group member may appear indifferent to others’ concerns, whereas an empathetic group member attempts to understand others’ feelings. Fifth, the superiority versus equality dichotomy distinguishes a group member’s desire to establish herself or himself as dominant or equal to the other group members. For example, a group member acting in a superior manner portrays herself or himself as better than the other members, whereas a group member who acts in an equal manner displays the opposite behavior, such as avoiding statements like “I’m better at public speaking, so you all sit behind me while I present the material to our boss.” Finally, the certainty versus provisionalism dichotomy clarifies group members’ willingness, or not, to be open-minded to others’ views. For example, a certain member may make statements such as “I’m right,” while a provisional member is eager to consider alternative points of view.

These six dichotomies provide small-group communication researchers with the means to assess a group’s climate as being supportive or defensive, identifiers about whether group members feel comfortable sharing ideas. A defensive climate reduces the members’ comfortableness, thereby resulting in a lack of creative solutions for problems. Supportive communication climates lead to creative solutions, and professionals need to possess the skills to adapt supportive communication techniques for both face-to-face and virtual small task groups in order to meet a digital society’s career demands.

However, members of virtual teams face both the positive and negative aspects of group climates, so people need the ability to evolve negative climates into positive ones. Meluch and Walter (2012) posited that individuals who were facing a conflict during computer-mediated communication were less likely to collaborate or compromise than individuals who faced conflict as part of a face-to-face communication. In addition, Johnson, Bettenhausen, and Gibbons (2009) concluded that individuals who rely on computer-mediated communication as the primary means of interaction for work teams felt low affective commitment toward their work teams. Therefore, virtual task groups were susceptible to negative issues, following in the footsteps of face-to-face task groups. In turn, a virtual team’s possible lack of collaboration and commitment suggested a defensive communication climate that was in need of remedy. In addition, members of the virtual teams may have faced the problem of being unfamiliar with the other group members, especially when they were unable to rely on the typical nonverbal cues that are utilized in face-to-face interactions. Jarvenpaa and Leidner (1998) found that small virtual groups with high degrees of trust solved problems effectively, so the crux of small task groups that are comprised of members who are unfamiliar with each other was how to establish trust. Jarvenpaa and Leidner (1998) applied Meyerson, Weick, and Kramer’s (1996) “swift trust” to virtual groups as a means of resolving this issue. “Swift trust” existed in temporary task groups where members lacked the lengthy relationships that are required for trust development; therefore, the members assumed trust at the onset of the group task and adapted their trust expectations accordingly as the group progressed (Meyerson et al., 1996). Basically, upon the initial formation of computer-mediated task groups, members have no other option than to trust fellow members in order to complete the assigned task in a timely manner. Without positive reinforcement, that assumed trust can dwindle. Therefore, I postulated that Gibb’s six aspects of
a supportive communication climate can be adapted to foster trust in virtual-group climates. If virtual members trust each other consistently throughout the completion of their task, then they, more than likely, will develop successful solutions for their problems.

Thus, the aim of the following class activity is to enhance students’ abilities to recognize defensive communication in action and to improve their abilities to provide solutions that could transition defensive communication climates into supportive communication climates for the virtual teams. In addition, this activity forces students to consider particular word choices because some virtual task groups do not permit all forms of nonverbal communication to which many people have become accustomed in typical face-to-face task groups.

**Description of the Activity**

The following in-class activity addresses the need to enhance supportive communication skills for members of virtual task groups. The assignment should take place in a computer lab. After a lecture about Gibb’s (1961) supportive or defensive communication climates, students are handed a worksheet regarding a fictitious computer-mediated group that is in the midst of conflict while playing a fictitious, multiplayer online game: Swordcraft. Refer to Appendix A for a copy of the worksheet. The fictitious virtual-game team members do not know each other, making it a prime example to analyze the establishment of trust and a supportive communication climate. Next, the students are assigned to virtual groups with three to five people and are instructed to use a chat room in order to communicate for the entire activity. Students are asked to identify examples of Gibb’s six forms of defensive communication within the fictitious virtual-task group. Refer to Appendix B for answers to the worksheet’s first item. Then, students develop team names to instill supportive climates.

**Chat Room**

Because this activity assesses computer-mediated communication within small groups, it requires the use of chat rooms for students to communicate. Several free chat-room websites, such as chatzy.com, are available. Instructors may also elect to have students set up group chats via Facebook. If using chatzy.com, instructors should set up the chat rooms before class. On the site’s home page, simply type in a screen name, provide a title for the chat room, enter the email addresses for the students associated with the group, and click the “create my chat” button. Group members will have the option of changing the text color to differentiate among members. Repeat this process for the total number of groups that are needed.

**Worksheet**

Print enough copies of the Appendix A worksheet so that every student has one. First, the worksheet provides an assessment artifact in the form of a transcript for an in-game chat among members of a team who are playing an online video game. Second, the worksheet provides three items for student groups: a way (a) to apply Gibb’s (1961) dichotomies to the gaming transcript, (b) to develop a solution for the online-game group’s lack of trust by creating a team name, and (c) to witness their own creation of trust and positive dichotomies by establishing a team name for their student group. Appendix B provides answers for question number one on the worksheet.
Team Names

Groups are asked to develop two team names, one for the fictitious group and one for their own group. Groups create an acronym to serve as the fictitious group’s team name, with each fictitious group member referenced implicitly in the acronym. Students are instructed that the acronym should be creative and inspirational for the fictitious team as a means of welcoming a supportive communication climate. Then, the groups are asked to develop an acronym to serve as their team’s name, with each group member referenced implicitly in the acronym and by following the same creative and inspirational instructions that were used for the fictitious team name. Each student should have a letter of the acronym that corresponds with some aspect about herself or himself. For example, a group may decide to use the letter H for “hula hoop” to represent one member. The development of creative acronyms is a means for students to steer the impact of the neutrality versus empathy and superiority versus equality dichotomies in order to foster a supportive climate. Using implicit references to each group member in the acronym forces students to appreciate all group members’ contributions while the including each group member in a team name establishes the members’ equality. In turn, these supportive behaviors reinforce the “swift trust” (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998; Meyerson et al., 1996) that group members assume at the onset of a virtual-task group as opposed to the negative behaviors that reduce any assumed trust. Group trust allows individuals to willingly accept ideas and information from other members, thereby encouraging creative discussions. Also, groups are informed that they will present their fictitious team name and their own team name, along with a brief explanation about how the acronyms inspired a supportive group climate, orally to the class.

Procedure

1. Present a lecture on Gibb’s (1961) six dichotomies: evaluation versus description, control versus problem orientation, strategy versus spontaneity, neutrality versus empathy, superiority versus equality, and certainty versus provisionalism (5-15 minutes).
2. Pass out copies of the Appendix A worksheet to each student, and read the worksheet instructions. Then, establish the student groups by instructing students to click the chat-room invitation link that was sent to their email accounts (5 minutes).
3. Tell students to work in their groups via chat in order to provide answers for questions one, two, and three on the worksheet (30 minutes).
4. Have the groups present their team names to the class, and reveal the correct answers for question number one on the worksheet (5-10 minutes).

Debriefing

After each group presents its team names, the instructor asks the students to browse through the group’s chat history individually in order to reflect on the defensive and supportive communication usage within their groups. Students should be given approximately 5 to 10 minutes for individual reflection. Finally, the instructor leads the class in a short discussion about the groups’ uses of defensive or supportive communication while engaging in the activity. In particular, the instructor should gear the discussion toward reflection on how different group
members approached each other when creating the acronyms and how their communication 
would have differed if the groups had communicated face-to-face instead.

**Appraisal**

Although this activity revolves around a fictitious video game, it forces students to be 
cognizant of how supportive or defensive climates are created in computer-mediated 
communication in an effort to provide realistic solutions for improving virtual, small task groups 
through a creative team name. In general, students are receptive to the computer-mediated 
assignment, with only a minority of students having issues with the assignment’s creative 
aspects. Working together, most groups answer the examples of defensive communication for 
question one of the worksheet correctly. While some groups develop creative acronyms, several 
students require clarity about acronyms. Those students are hung up on explicitly using the first 
letter of a group member’s name in the acronym, as opposed to implicitly referencing the 
fictitious group member with an adjective or descriptive phrase. However, students seem to be 
more creative and enjoy developing the acronyms that represent their actual groups as opposed to 
the fictitious groups. Last, several students tend to be unaware of their own supportive or 
defensive statements until they are required to reflect on the chats individually. Thus, the 
assignment forces them to consider how they communicate online along with the impact that 
negative comments can have on their trust of virtual group members.

Most importantly, after analyzing the defensive communication for the virtual group 
mentioned on the worksheet, students seem appreciative of applying supportive communication 
through creative team names. This activity’s experience provides students an actionable example 
of working efficiently in small task groups. In turn, this activity prepares students to become 
successful contributors for virtual task groups, an ability that future employers will find quite 
valuable.

**References**


teams. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 3*. doi:10.1111/j.1083- 

Johnson, S. K., Bettenhausen, K., & Gibbons, E. (2009). Realities of working in virtual teams: 
Affective and attitudinal outcomes of using computer-mediated communication. *Small 

Meluch, A. L., & Walter, H. L. (2012). Conflict management styles and 
argumentativeness: Examining the differences between face-to-face and 

In R. M. Kramer & T. R. Tyler (Eds.), *Trust in organizations: Frontiers of theory 
Appendix A

Swordcraft Activity Worksheet

Directions: In small groups of 3-5, read the following transcript between five members of a small group that rely on computer-mediated communication while playing the fictitious multiplayer video game Swordcraft. Then, complete items one (1), two (2), and three (3).

Group members: Samantha, Lance, Natalya, Buddy, and Nate

Background: The group is having difficulty getting past a particular part of the game...

Lance: “Why did you go around the corner, Samantha, you’re not waiting for everyone.”
Buddy: “He’s right. Slow down.”
Samantha: “Let’s go around the corner faster right now. Lance, Buddy, move it!”
Lance: “Wait!”
Samantha: “I’m right, move on.”
Nate: “Well, I managed to clobber that monster while we got separated, and it dropped treasure.”
Buddy: “What’d you get?”
Nate: “Don’t worry about it.”
Buddy: “Just tell me.”
Nate: “It doesn’t matter. Let’s go. I’m the only one that knows how to make the most of this treasure anyway.”
Natalya: “Come on. We’re so close.”
Samantha: “Whatever, it’s just a game.”

1. Identify specific examples from the transcript that illustrate the following types of defensive communication.
   a) evaluation:
   b) control:
   c) strategy:
   d) neutrality:
   e) superiority:
   f) certainty:

2. Develop a group name that inspires the fictitious group to establish a supportive communication climate. Also, the group name should act as an acronym that incorporates each fictitious group member’s name into a component of the acronym implicitly.

3. Develop a group name that inspires your group to establish a supportive communication climate. Also, the group name should act as an acronym that incorporates each group member’s name into a component of the acronym implicitly.
Appendix B

Swordcraft Activity Answer Key

1. Identify specific examples from the text that illustrate the following types of defensive communication.
   a) evaluation: Lance: “Why did you go around the corner, Samantha, you’re not waiting for everyone.”
   b) control: Samantha: “Let’s go around the corner faster right now. Lance, Buddy, move it!”
   c) strategy: Nate: “Don’t worry about it… It doesn’t matter. Let’s go.”
   d) neutrality: Samantha: “Whatever, it’s just a game.”
   e) superiority: Nate: “I’m the only one that knows how to make the most of this treasure anyway.”
   f) certainty: Samantha: “I’m right, move on.”
The *American Pickers* Demonstrates Communication Skills

Jeffrey Brand, PhD
Associate Professor
University of Northern Iowa
jeffrey.brand@uni.edu

Abstract

This activity prepares students to identify persuasive communication practices in non-classroom environments and to view reality-based television programs as a learning platform for understanding communication theories and concepts. Using selected scenes or an entire episode from a popular reality-television program, *American Pickers*, students can observe how Mike and Frank establish a rapport with new customers, get to know them and their stories, negotiate sales, interact with each other as a team, and leave with a new relationship (client) and connection intact. The purpose of this exercise is to help students observe these initial contacts and relationships as they develop on the show in order to better understand persuasion theory and practice.

Courses

Interpersonal Communication, Communication Theory, Persuasion, Introduction to Mass Media, and Argumentation

Objectives

- To demonstrate persuasive communication skills when interacting with strangers.
- To learn the role of narrative and personal stories in order to add value and identity to individuals and objects.
- To expand the students’ perspective on visual communication and how different audiences view the same artifacts.
- To demonstrate students’ understanding of Cialdini’s Seven Principles of influence techniques and their capacity to identify them during an episode of *American Pickers*.
- To expand the students’ understanding of reality television for the purpose of modeling and learning communication concepts.

Introduction and Rationale

There is a natural gap between persuasion theory as presented in the classroom and persuasive performance in public. There are a variety of ways to bridge that gap in order to prepare students to use academic knowledge during their interactions with others. Performance courses, such as public speaking, provide students with a place to model and experience the
challenges of reaching audiences. We can also send students into the campus and community to apply communication theory during interviews, internships, and class projects that provide opportunities to apply, study, and reflect on communication concepts.

Mediated presentations, such as reality television, are an additional resource for the instructor who is looking to bridge theory and practice. Baruh (2010) has argued that reality television serves as a form of voyeurism that provides viewers with exposure to information and experiences that might not be personally accessible. Reality television might also provide a way for viewers to engage in social comparison between themselves and their assumptions about how others communicate and relate to each other. Ouellette (2010) has also advocated for the role that reality television plays in translating “broader sociopolitical currents and circulates instructions, resources, and scripts for the navigating the changing expectations and demands of citizenship” (p. 68). DiGregorio (2006) recommends teaching by using television programming: “shows that have something to offer can provide the material for a fruitful analysis of the world around us, and a successful deconstruction of the ways in which people accept, reinforce or resist dominant ideologies and the status quo” (p. 58).

Scholarship about the implications behind the popularity of reality television has been growing as this genre of television programming has expanded. Collins (2009) identified at least 19 book-length projects, in multiple disciplines, concerning reality television over a 9-year period. Journal articles and other scholarly outlets have also contributed to discussions about the role of reality television in people’s lives. This research supported the importance of reality television in the classroom as a means to study the relationships between theory and practice as they are modeled on the programs. For example, a recent study of self-disclosure and liking on reality television by Tal-Or and Hershman-Shitrit (2015) found interesting relationships between viewers and mediated characters, and recommended recognizing reality television for what it can teach us about audiences as well as how such research can contribute to more successful television programming.

This activity recognizes the relationship between reality television and persuasion theory, encouraging the faculty to seek creative ways to accomplish the goal of teaching these principles and concepts by using reality-television programs. This activity has selected a particular program, American Pickers, as an exemplar of how to proceed. Other programs can also contribute to this instructional goal, depending on course content and purpose.

Description of the Activity

Start the exercise with a discussion about reality television, why these programs are popular, and what viewers might learn from them. Introduce the American Pickers television show; explain the show format; and set the scene to allow students to concentrate on the persuasion concepts that are displayed. For a background on the show or a reading about its development, have students read Ankeny (2011) or other reports of the series. Limited scholarly work has been published on the show. One essay that is critical of the series as a form of commodity fetishism provides an additional perspective about the series but may not be needed for this activity (Jenkins, 2015).

When viewing the show, there are common activities and themes that are easily recognized, regardless of the specific episode. For example, a common challenge in the show is often described as “breaking the ice” with a client. This exchange represents the first sale and agreement. The process of negotiation and price agreement is always a present challenge in the
series. How to find agreement on a price, to offer justifications for a higher or lower rate, or to argue successfully for one perspective or another is an ongoing challenge. When describing the items that are being bought and sold, references to their appearance or aesthetics are common. The story, or narrative, behind the items is also a sought-after part for both the valuation and interpretation of the featured items. Examples of persuasive communication tactics in the show’s exchanges are numerous and varied.

Students should be prepared to view the television episode through the lens of a persuasive communication theory. This exercise recommends Cialdini’s (1993) work on influence techniques. His identification of Seven Principles can serve as a framework for students to view the episode and to relate it to persuasive-communication approaches. Cialdini looks at contrast, reciprocity, consistency, social proof, authority, liking, and scarcity as techniques to understand persuasive communication (Simons, Morreale, & Gronbeck, 2001, p. 136). Cialdini’s work has been referenced in a variety of persuasion textbooks and can be used as a supplemental theory for class. Students can be introduced to the seven principles; a handout or matrix can be created to allow students to define and to identify the various principles that are depicted in the show.

After viewing the episode or show segment, have students, in groups, identify the specific influence techniques and practices that they observed with reference to particular moments in the broadcast. Students should be able to explain the technique they observed and attach that description to the action that is taking place in the show.

Debriefing

Debrief the groups by having them identify the persuasive tactics and practices that they observed. Discuss techniques, and compare the results with other groups. Discuss the differences between the persuasion concepts in the abstract and the actual demonstrations that were viewed in the television show. This activity can take place over one or two class periods, depending on the instructor’s goals and the content that is evaluated. Prescreening the episode is necessary to prepare instructions for the class and to facilitate discussion. This exercise could be repeated with additional scenes or at another point during the semester in order to illustrate other persuasion theories and to reinforce the relationship between theory and practice.

Evaluation

In addition to the classroom discussion and debriefing on the show, a follow-up project can be assigned to require students to select a different reality show. Then, students can identify and justify their analysis of persuasion theory for the episode. Students use their critical-thinking skills and their accumulated knowledge of theory to evaluate actual communication practices. An alternative assignment might be to have students study the similarities and differences between various reality programs and/or types of programs. Such an assignment could explore the role of persuasion or communication theory and practice in reality television as a genre. These assignments might be useful early in the course to evaluate a specific area of persuasion theory or might be used as a summary or assessment of a student’s success with internalizing an entire course or select groups of principles. Through this activity and assignment, students can demonstrate critical thinking, creative interpretation, and communication-research skills.
Note: Episodes or scenes from the show can be found on the History Channel, YouTube, iTunes, or Netflix.

References
Constitution of *Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD*
Ratified by the Editorial Executive Committee, November 2014

**Article 1. Name**
The name of the journal shall be *Discourse: The Journal of the Speech Communication Association of South Dakota* (Also known as *Discourse* or *Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD*).

**Article 2. Affiliation**
*Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD* shall be the official journal of the Speech Communication Association of South Dakota (SCASD).

**Article 3. Publisher**
*Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD* shall be self-published and distributed through the SCASD official website, the url for which shall be disseminated via CRTNet and professional networking channels. Each volume of the journal shall contain the Call for Manuscripts for the following volume. The call will also be disseminated via CRTNet and professional networking channels. The annual deadline for submissions shall be February 1.

*Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD* shall be published annually in the Fall beginning with Volume 1, Fall 2014. As the number of quality submissions increases, the Editorial Executive Committee will consider a move to a biannual (Spring and Fall) publication schedule.

**Article 4. Purpose**
*Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD* shall be a scholarly journal committed to the submission of refereed manuscripts concerning human communication, performance, and the education of these matters.

**Article 5. Structure and Responsibilities**
*Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD* Editorial staff shall consist of the following members:

a) An Editor  
b) An Associate Editor  
c) An Editorial Executive Committee  
d) An Editorial Board  
e) An Article Review Board

*a) The Editor shall serve a three-year term.*  
The Editor shall be responsible for the general management of the journal. His/her duties shall consist of receiving submissions, delegating manuscripts to appropriate reviewers, and making final decisions concerning the acceptance or rejection of all manuscripts received by *Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD*. The Editor, working with the reviews and recommendations of the Associate Editor and Editorial Board, is responsible for the quality of all manuscripts published by *Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD*. The Editor shall also be responsible for constructing an Editor’s Statement for every volume of *Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD*. 


b) The Associate Editor shall serve a three-year term in preparation for an additional three-year term as Editor, assuming that all duties assigned by the Editor have been performed as agreed. The Associate Editor shall perform duties as assigned by the Editor.

c) The Editorial Executive Committee
The Editorial Executive Committee shall consist of the Editor and Associate Editor. This body is empowered with the authority to make and enact necessary and proper decisions regarding operations and handling of the journal (e.g., obtaining and communicating with reviewers and Editorial Board members, marketing the journal, any changes of web-hosting services, decisions on printing and dissemination, acquisition of funding as needed, copy editing services, etc.). Any actions that alter standards and practices (e.g., the blind review process; the mission statement; general formatting) of the journal shall also invite participation from the Editorial Board.

d) The Editorial Board
The Editorial Board shall advise the Editor in matters concerning the publication of Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD, including changes to the constitution and to editorial policy. The members of the Editorial Board shall include past Editors of Discourse and the sitting SCASD association President, as well as the best possible blend of members who are experts from the various publics represented by the journal. All members of the Editorial Board shall be expected to review at least 2-4 manuscripts per volume (see item e), and to provide precise copy edits for at least one additional manuscript per volume.

e) Article Reviewers
Article Reviewers, including Editorial Board Members, shall be experts in their respective fields and will be asked to blind review manuscripts in their field of expertise and make recommendations to the Editor as to whether each manuscript reviewed should be: (1) accepted without change, (2) accepted pending minor revision, (3) revised and resubmitted, or (4) rejected.

Article 6. The Review Process
For every volume of Discourse, the Editorial Executive Committee shall ensure that all submissions are devoid of identifying information before sending all eligible submissions that meet a minimum set of standards (defined by a rubric) for a minimum of two blind peer reviews using a standard review rubric. In the case of a “split” recommendation between reviewers, the Editorial Executive Committee may choose to send the piece for a third review.

Article 7. Meetings
The Editor shall present on the state of the journal at the annual Speech Convention Association of South Dakota convention.
Article 8. Amendments
This constitution may be altered, amended or repealed by a two-thirds majority of members present (which may include a roll call vote via online or digital communication) at a General Meeting of the Editorial Advisory Board.