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The July issue of *Journal of Communication Inquiry* takes the reader on a journey spanning diverse geographic contexts and media forms.

In the opening article, Elida Høeg and Christopher D. Tulloch analyze the representations of climate refugees by two global news organizations: the BBC and Al Jazeera. The findings show that both outlets tend to construct refugees as dehumanized, aggregated actors who are denied agency and operate as generic symbols of climate change whose ordeal is limited to the countries of the global South. Such portrayals, the authors argue, relieve developed countries from responsibility for the environmental crisis and reinforce the status quo in power relations between the global North and the global South.

The conversation about the broader meaning-making role of the news media continues in the article by Leigh M. Moscowitz, Andrew C. Billings, Khadija Ejaz, and Jane O'Boyle, who analyze the news discourses that surrounded the coming-outs of two prominent professional gay male American athletes, the NBA's Jason Collins and the NFL's Michael Sam, in mainstream media outlets. The analysis shows that although media stories heralded these coming-out announcements as historic watershed moments that deserve celebration, the actual lived experiences of the gay athletes remained backgrounded whereas their physicality and athleticism were emphasized. Taken together, the authors conclude, such media narratives contributed to "safely containing gayness within traditional notions of orthodox masculinity" that are entrenched in the major American sports leagues as commercialized sports-media complexes.

Seeking to interrogate news discourses as part of a broader cultural conversation, Moscowitz and colleagues in their analysis do not differentiate news articles from editorials, commentary, and other media texts that belong to today's converged media landscape. Neither does the author of the next article, Ryan Neville-Shepard, who in a similar fashion performs a close textual reading of regular news stories and opinion pieces from a variety of news publications to understand how the third-party voter in the 2016 U.S. presidential election was constructed in the broader news media discourse. The findings reveal that the media coverage mostly followed the logic of what Neville-Shepard refers to as "rhetorical containment," a form of marginalization of third-party voters that paints them as immature, uniformed, and naïve intruders who disrupt the political process. This contributes to further delegitimizing third-party candidates as falling outside the bounds of mainstream political discourse.

Transitioning from the news media to strategic communication, Christopher A. Chávez and Ricardo J. Valencia analyze the advertising strategies of two competing marketers of the Havana Club rum: Havana Club International, an enterprise of the Cuban government, and Bacardi, a private global corporation. Produced on behalf of the agents embedded within different political ideologies, the two campaigns both make claims for Cuban authenticity, which makes it possible to explore the specific mechanisms by which ideology can be enacted through advertising practice.

In yet another transition, from media production to media consumption, Lisa G. Perks turns her attention to the concept of media marathoning, by approaching it as a strategy of coping with a health crisis. Drawing on in-depth interviews with media marathoners, Perks challenges the stereotypical representation of media marathoning as a socially isolating experience. Instead, she argues, the media marathoning experience helps cultivate meaningful connections with both real and fictive others, and by doing so, can function as a reservoir of social support and capital that preserves its value outside the immediate media consumption experience.

The July issue is rounded out by reviews of two books that resonate with some of the central themes of the issue. In his review of Nancy MacLean's *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America*, Brian Michael Goss invites us to cross-reference the book with external realities to find its central argument both well substantiated and timely: "Get ready for convulsions in the economic and political sphere in the proximal future as an antisocial set of doctrines become embedded." Finally, Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar reviews Bryan J. McCann's *The Mark of Criminality: Rhetoric, Race, and Gangsta Rap in the War-on-Crime era*, to conclude that, despite some criticism, the book makes a worthy scholarly contribution by offering the analysis of gansta rap through the lens of what McCann dubs "the mark of criminality," which, despite functioning as a tool of oppressive utility, can prove useful for challenging racial subjugation.

Many thanks to all those who helped this issue to completion, including the Advisory Board members, Executive Editor, our reviewers, and authors. Happy reading!

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Article

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Sinking Strangers: Media Representations of Climate Refugees on the BBC and Al Jazeera

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Abstract

This study seeks to investigate the media representations of climate refugees in two global media outlets: The BBC and Al Jazeera. An exhaustive sample of the online coverage from 2000 until 2017 has been gathered and examined through a content analysis guided by framing theory and multimodal critical discourse analysis. After reviewing the 29 news stories, this article finds that climate refugees are framed in four ways: as victims, security threats, activists, and abstractions. In both media outlets, climate refugees are aggregated, collectivized, and made generic—and their situation is deagentialized. The study concludes that the BBC mainly talks about climate refugees instead of talking to them and that this has an impact on the climate refugees' depicted agency. Al Jazeera quotes more climate refugees in their journalistic coverage, and this allows the reader to understand and empathize. However, both media outlets tend to represent climate refugees as "third world others": as sinking strangers.

Keywords

environmental globalization, environmental justice, frame theory, representation, international communication

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"Goodbye from the world's biggest polluter." This was the phrase former U.S. President George W. Bush employed when he left the Group of Eight's discussions on new targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions in 2008. Even though he was wrong—China was the world's biggest polluter then and continues to be so today—the message was clear: The United States will not take responsibility for the planet's rising temperatures. Donald Trump reiterated this position when he withdrew from the Paris climate agreement on the 1st of June last year.

The consequences of climate change are global, though they hit people differently. In many countries throughout the global South, people are forced to leave their homes, becoming *climate refugees*. While there is no doubt about the urgency and severity of this issue, media coverage of climate refugees is scarce, arbitrary, and prejudiced. Farbotko (2010) criticizes the media and blames journalists and activists for *wishful sinking*: "Only after they disappear will the islands become an absolute truth of the urgency of climate change, and thus act as a prompt towards saving the rest of the planet" (p. 5). Bettini (2013) claims that dystopian narratives of fleeing refugees framed within both humanitarian and national security agendas reduce the concerned populations to the status of victims, "either to protect or to fear" (p. 67). Accurate and respectful coverage of climate refugees is vital to allow the global community to better deal with the issue. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate how climate refugees are represented in two transnational media outlets: the BBC and Al Jazeera English (AJE) as representatives of both the global North and the global South. Drawing largely on framing theory, this text reviews frames and discourses on environmental migrants and connects them to questions of global power structures in order to observe how they produce and shape knowledge about their plight.

Theoretical Outline of the Article

The article begins by presenting the theoretical parameters and leading scholarly references regarding the media representation of refugees and migrants in a wider context before fine-tuning the text toward the very concept of the climate refugee and their specific projection in journalistic texts. The methodological design follows including both main research questions explored as well as details regarding the sample used and the framing theories employed to exploit the statistical and qualitative results—including sources, photographic projection, and deterministic representations—which emerge from the study.

Among the driving motives behind this present study is an attempt to highlight the narrative framing of refugees in different forms and contexts and to analyze the professional logic behind such representations such as journalistic sourcing practices and the level of access to primary news actors. The media platforms chosen to do this—BBC and Al Jazeera—were considered to offer contrasting discursive strategies on this issue not only due to separate news agenda considerations or divergent working routines but also due to more underlying aspects regarding power structures.

Representations of Refugees in the Media

When analyzing why their media projection may be of interest to scholars of migrants and displaced minorities, Bleich, de Graauw, and Bloemraad (2015) consider that the media (i) provide a useful source of information about migrant groups and issues; (ii) convey and construct particular—and largely negative—representations of immigrants; and (iii) ought to provide a space for the participation of migrants in a public sphere where they can advance their interests and identities (p. 3). The media representation of asylum seekers includes elements of race, religion, and decontextualized narratives based on their (il)legal status. Extensive scholarly work over different time periods and in different countries has established frames that simultaneously project refugees as innocent victims and a threat to the socioeconomic status quo of Western society (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Van Gorp, 2005).

Media refugee discourse offers a narrative concerning a speechless collective out-group on the fringes of legality silenced by damaging in-house professional practices. Such a modus operandi may include the deployment of prejudicial textual strategies, decontextualized and distorted graphic representation (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Horsti, 2007), or the provision of limited sourcing practices. One of the tenets of responsible journalistic praxis is the inclusion of diverse voices in the construction of news narrative in order to offer access to all potential actors and thus allowing the media outlet to serve as an agora for contrasting points of view (Vos & Wolfgang, 2018). However, it is clear that minority groups such as migrants or refugees have clear access difficulties. While Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts (1978) distinguish the “primary interpreters” from those cut off from the media, Phillips (2010) emphasizes the advantages enjoyed by “insider groups” due to journalists’ predilection for “safe” sources itself as a result of production deadlines. This underrepresentation of marginalized groups such as refugees and the deployment of accompanying “othering practices” has been conceptualized in numerous texts (Orgad, 2012; Said, 1978). According to one observer, refugees are “silent passive others who when they do appear it is to confirm stereotypes and standard templates rather than actually conveying individual stories, diversity and agency” (Thorbjornsrud & Figenschou, 2016, p. 341).

The Climate Refugee Concept

Theories of marginalization could hardly be more pertinent than in the case of climate change refugees. Considered noncitizens, they have scarce access to media self-projection and do not dispose of a forum where they can impact decision-making processes. According to the United Nations (UN), a refugee is an individual who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence—and is unable or unwilling to return "owing to the well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2011). A *climate refugee* is thus not recognized by the Geneva Refugee Convention of 1951 and cannot be granted refugee status as an asylum seeker within the current judicial system. On these grounds, the UN and the foremost international body working on the issue, the state-led Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD), do not use the term, as the "concept does not exist in international law" (PDD, n.d.). Instead, they use the term *cross-border disaster-displaced person*, referring to an individual who "flees or is displaced across borders in the context of sudden or slow-onset disasters or in the context of the effects of climate change" (PDD, n.d.). While environmental organizations and engaged scholars have called for the legal recognition of climate refugees by including them in the Geneva Convention, this does not seem very likely as countries in both the global North and global South are reluctant to take on greater responsibilities toward refugees. The approach adopted by the PDD reflects the global unwillingness to prioritize climate refugees in an international legal framework, as they have chosen to focus "on the integration of effective practices by States and sub-regional organizations into their own normative frameworks in accordance with their specific situations, rather than calling for a new binding international convention on cross-border disaster-displacement" (PDD, n.d.).

Afifi and Jäger (2010) assert that when referring to climate refugees, a conceptual division between a sociological and legal definition can be helpful. Following this approach, all people who are forced to migrate to survive meet the wider *sociological* definition of a refugee, while they may not meet the essential element of the *legal* one which includes the right to protection. The "climate refugee" concept is necessarily more nuanced. While a climate refugee is defined as someone who is forced to leave his or her original territory as a consequence of environmental changes such as rising sea levels, drought, or extreme weather, like monsoons, hurricanes, and tsunamis (Terminski, 2011), this forced migration does not happen in a vacuum. The reasons behind this flight are often complex and multifaceted as the refugee could be fleeing from poverty, conflict, or discrimination in addition to the consequences of climate change. Climate change effects are therefore "intimately bound up with issues of development, population growth, and economic and social policy choices," and this accounts for the difficulty involved in quantifying the amount of climate refugees today and predicting their growth in the short and midterm future (Afifi & Jäger, 2010, p. 7).

Climate Refugees in the Media

Empirical research on the media representations of climate refugees is scarce, and the vast majority of the research conducted is geographically specific. Most of it stems from Oceania and is focused around Pacific island states such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu as well as Australia and New Zealand. Farbotko (2012) is perhaps the most prominent scholar in the field. She identifies three different discourses about environmentally displaced people in the Pacific Ocean: climate refugees, *skilful seafarers*, and *oceanic drifters*, through a discourse analysis of newspapers in the Pacific islands, Australia, and New Zealand. While the author claims that the *skilful seafarers* and *drifter* discourse had news value only within Pacific audiences, the *climate refugee* discourse dominated the media in Australia and New Zealand where it is used for political leverage by these countries to construct their images as regional super powers (Farbotko, 2012, p. 135).

Farbotko, Ransan-Cooper, McNamara, Thornton, and Chevalier (2015) develops these ideas into narrative frames that explain the various roles the climate refugees assume within the different discourses: victims, security threats, adaptive agents, and political subjects. They write:

> Within the contemporary policy debate unhelpful dichotomies still linger – between the North as developed and expert and South as victims and deficient – reducing the scope and reach of communication and advocacy. We have argued that this, in part, relates to the strong cultural resonance that the victim framing perpetuates. (Farbotko et al., 2015, p. 114)

When it comes to the media, climate refugees have mainly two roles: victims and security threats. The security threat frame is potentially very destructive. Hartmann (2010) reviews how the security threat frame is strategically used by the U.S. Department of Defense to serve its interests and increase its budget. The author raises the question of how the alarmist rhetoric on climate refugees and the deployment of dramatic vocabulary such as "extinction" and "apocalypse" could further militarize development assistance and distort climate policy (Hartmann, 2010, p. 233).

In line with Farbotko's concept of *wishful sinking*, Dreher and Voyer (2015) find another role assigned to climate refugees by investigating the Australian media's depictions of Kiribati and the focus on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) as "proof" of climate change. Here, the authors argue that the "proof" frame, in addition to the "victim" and "refugee" frame, "undermine the desire of SIDS communities to be seen as proactive, self-determining, and active agents of change" (Dreher & Voyer, 2015, p. 26). The Pacific islanders' own view of the coverage is presented, and participants from Kiribati propose alternative media frames such as climate justice frames, frames of human rights, active change agents, and migration with dignity.

Many observers consider that apocalyptic narratives on climate refugees recounted by the media are doing the climate refugees no good—and that maybe actually the opposite is happening. As part of his discourse analysis of documents stemming from both governmental and nongovernmental actors, Bettini (2013) presents four discursive categories: "scientific," "capitalist," "humanitarian," and "radical." In accordance with Farbotko's frames of victims and security threats, Bettini (2013) claims that the climate refugees are depicted as someone to either fear or protect in all the categories except the radical one. This in turn, he argues, is taking away their possibilities to form their own political agency (p. 68). As Nyers (2010) points out in the case of irregular migrants, these figures are "disqualified from sharing the stage with citizens as (political) actors and are rarely perceived as agents, actors, participants or subjects capable of making claims and demanding rights" (p. 130). In a similar vein, Hingley (2017) calls for the abolition of the categorization of Pacific peoples as "climate refugees" altogether, naming it "irresponsible" and "insensitive." She claims the use of such a term dismisses these peoples' potential to contribute to the fight against climate change and "is damaging as it depicts these peoples as a vulnerable, rather than resilient group" (p. 2).

What is certain is these narratives leave underlying power structures untouched despite the fact climate refugee literature assumes that climate-based displacement is deemed to originate in the developing world. Studies such as that by Philo, Briant, and Donald (2013) emphasize the role of Western countries in creating refugees and argue strongly that many of the conflicts from which refugees flee are "directly attributable to the actions of Western powers" (p. 48).

Methodology

Research Questions and Purpose

As mentioned in the literature review on the representations of refugees and specifically climate change migrants in the media, the main body of research on this issue has centered around peoples from the Pacific islands as the most widely known victims of climate change. This article tries to expand this horizon and look at the issue in a more global manner, recognizing the existence of climate vulnerability in many other parts of the world. In order to emphasize the transnational character of this subject, the authors aim to analyze the discursive frames employed on climate refugees through two international media platforms, namely the BBC and AJE websites in an attempt to address three research questions:

RQ1: *How are the climate refugees represented?*

RQ2: *In what way is historical climate responsibility part of the media discourse?*

RQ3*: How do the representations on the BBC and Al Jazeera differ from each other?*

Defining the Sample

The sample is made up of a total of 29 individual online news stories—14 items from the BBC and 15 articles from AJE—representing all stories produced by both media outlets on climate refugees throughout a 17-year period, from when the concept was first mentioned in the year 2000 until the spring of 2017 when the sample was closed (see Tables 1 and 2). The content has been gathered by entering the terms "climate refugee," "environmental refugee," "eco-refugee," and "climate migrant" on the BBC and AJE website search engines. News stories that may have been aired without being published and archived online are not taken into account. Stories that have climate refugees as their main focus are included, whereas those that only briefly mention climate migrants have been excluded from the sample. The stories are relatively evenly distributed throughout this time frame, although there are fewer articles during the first 10 years in both media outlets, a trend that reflects the initial disinterest of the media toward this issue in comparison to recent growing media attention.

Varying media genres are all present—news and feature articles, opinion articles, photo, video and radio features, and TV and radio debates, and these genre differences can affect the modes of journalistic representation of refugees. A recent study by Horsti (2016) considers various journalistic modalities and diverges from legacy media production to consider online manifestations of news framing of migrants which shows that while frames of "threat" and "victim" dominate regular news stories, alternative frames such as refugees as surviving heroes are reserved for nuanced feature genres. However, the majority (18) of the stories in the sample are news articles or feature articles (8 on AJE and 10 on the BBC). The news and feature articles contain text and images and quotes from one or several sources, and this is why these factors are the main focus points of the study. Criteria regarding article length, newswriting techniques, and physical presence were used to distinguish between news item and feature article. As for opinion articles, there are no interviews, which makes climate refugees unable to project their voice. Editorial articles on the issue are practically inexistent in line with previous studies (Turmo, 2010).

This multimodal approach defined in Kress' (2010) landmark study on *social semiotics* allows the researcher to move away from traditional linear methods of interpretation to analyze multiple dimensions of mediated meaning-making. According to Kress, the world of meaning has always been multimodal, and that the modes we dispose of—including of course image and text—for communicating are multiple especially in the age of new technologies which only serve to increase our options in the manufacture of sense. In this sense, two or more modes combine to form *modal ensembles* to communicate information (Kress, 2010, p. 28).

Explanations for the modest aggregate number of news items refers back to newsroom practices such as the fact that media in general do not cover migrant issues on a regular basis, the lack of specialized knowledge in the field, an insufficient network of direct sources, and the inferior news value of a nuanced portrayal of a complex and interdisciplinary subject (Gemi, Ulasiuk, & Triandafyllidou, 2013). If we consider the media to be event driven, a comparatively intangible phenomenon such as climate change does not coincide with this institutionalized function. In other words, if the newsworthiness of an event is classified by it being easy to understand, its capacity to convey a clear binary meaning, and the implication of geopolitical elites (Galtung & Ruge, 1965), it would be safe to point out that climate change refugees are not top of the news agenda. If to that we add the question of power relations and the comparative "political weakness" of climate change refugees with limited rights, pertinence to a minority group, and inability to influence the very mechanisms of news production (Akdenizli, Dionne, & Suro, 2008, p. 74), the restricted salience of this issue in mainstream media is to be expected.

The reduced nature of the sample is compensated by three innovative aspects: (i) an extended time frame—17 years—which allows for trends to be followed and theoretical extrapolations to be made. The literature on framing emphasizes time as an important factor for distinct patterns of frame differentiation (Muschert & Carr, 2006; Snow, Vliegenthart, & Corrigall-Brown, 2007), and it is clear that in a 17 year-long study, this is a particularly relevant issue; (ii) the fact that it is one of the few available studies with an Arab media outlet as previous studies on migrants and media have dealt with a single European press (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017; Horsti, 2013) multiple European countries (Gemi et al., 2013) or the U.S. press (Kim, Carvalho, Davis, & Mullins, 2001); and (iii) the analysis of a wide range of media genres and forms.

The BBC and AJE were chosen as dynamic, global, and multilingual outlets and as representatives of the global North and the global South. It has to be noted that they are both elite sources within their contexts. As hegemonic international news organizations, they contribute to constructing the political agenda on global issues such as climate change and migration whilst often adopting different stances. The former colonial influence of the BBC still exercises a *soft power* in different parts of the world, while Al Jazeera, representing Qatar—a former British protectorate that today has the highest income per capita in the world—is clearly critical of global North power politics particularly on its Arabic language website (Loomis, 2009).

Framing Theory

If we understand news discourse as a meaning-making exercise (Gemi et al., 2013, p. 267), then the frames used to attach meaning to events is a key element. When examining the framing of migrants and refugees in the media, Entman's (1993) benchmark approach to framing theory has guided this article. According to this author, the act of framing is characterized by compliance with four criteria: the identification of a problem, a causal definition, a moral judgment, and a proposed solution to the problem described (Entman, 1993, p. 52). In the case of climate refugees, the problem-based definitions are embodied by the arrival of migrants by forced displacement, the nonassumption of responsibility for climate change by the Global North, and the very definition of climate change refugee in itself. Solution-based frames include financial donation to the affected parties, more flexible border policies, and the need for greater precision when referring to terms such as the *climate crisis*.

Building further on framing theory media are accused of omitting aspects of an issue (de Vreese, 2005) as part of journalistic practices based on institutional givens as to how a story should be told. In order to present an easily understandable media text, this information selection process allows the media to sponsor a problem definition leading its readers to adopt this line of reasoning, attitudes, or biases (Scheufele, 2000) and enabling it to have greater widespread implications. In this sense, if stories about migrants or refugees consistently have a *criminality* or socioeconomic *threat* frame, they may convey a representation of those groups as deeply problematic for society as a whole.

Results

As for results, the statistical findings will provide an overview over the content and coverage of climate refugees on the BBC and AJE before moving to a more frame-based analysis that discusses the findings under these parameters. In order to manage the references, the news stories are referred to with their media outlet code—B for the BBC and A for Al Jazeera—as well as their number from the sample reference list provided earlier (see Tables 1 and 2).

Statistical Findings

Of the 14 news stories from the BBC, only three—the American island of Kivalina, the American city of New Orleans, and the Pacific Island state Kiribati (B6, B8, and B12)—are covered "on the ground," at places where people are or may be forced to move because of climate change. The rest of the stories are assembled from the home desk in Britain, except for one article from Dhaka (B5) written by a desk journalist at BBC Bangladesh. The vast majority of the BBC's coverage is thus produced in the global North. On the contrary, AJE presents extensive in-the-field reporting from the global South.

In-situ coverage comprises the main part of the sample as 9 of the channel's 15 stories are news features from Somalia, Bangladesh, Chad, India, Madagascar, and Tuvalu. The remaining six stories are either news bureau articles from Reuters and Associated Press or articles written by journalists and academics in Britain or the United States. The news features are *all* made in countries outside the global North.

The results show that the broader geographical range of reporting has an impact on the sources quoted in both media outlets. Regarding the BBC's coverage, only 5 out of 29 quoted sources—17% of the total—are climate refugees. The clear majority of these sources are in elite positions, such as the chief economist of the World Bank (B7), the UN Secretary General (B5), environment ministers in the United Kingdom and Bangladesh (B1), and Oxford University professors (B9). The level of direct source exclusion is evident in stories such as one about a climate refugee from a Pacific island state, which does not quote the refugee himself, even though he is named and depicted as the center of the story (B11). Only his lawyer and a judge from New Zealand are quoted. The clear majority of sources are based in the global North with just five exceptions in four articles: Two Bangladeshi environment ministers (B1 and B3), the director-general of Vanuatu (B14), the president of Kiribati, and a climate refugee from Kiribati (B12).

While 17% of direct source citation may seem a small figure, it is in accordance with the wide-scale study of "irregular migrant" presence in the United States, French, and Norwegian press carried out by Thorbjornsrud and Figenschou (2016) which showed that they made up only 10% of the quoted sources out of a total of 1,355 articles. Such findings on unequal access are also in line with scholars such as van Dijk (1991) who postulate that the opinions of migrants are both deliberately ignored or considered to be less credible or "newsworthy" by the social scripts employed by media organizations that systematically prefer those sociopolitical elites on which they themselves confer legitimacy. This self-fulfilling approach to source citation sidelines refugee voices who appear as powerless and disempowered whilst at the same time depriving journalistic coverage of the counterbalances necessary to offer a nuanced portrayal of events.

As for AJE's coverage, 16 climate refugees—or 41%—are quoted out of a total of 39 sources altogether. The remaining 59% are, as in the case of the BBC, largely elite figures such as the foreign minister of New Zealand (B5), the Tuvaluan secretary of foreign affairs, and the UN refugee agency representative (A11). However, the coverage presents more local sources, people who are working directly with the issue on the ground, like nongovernmental organization representatives in Somalia (A10) and Bangladesh (A8), and a water specialist in India (A3). In total, 23 of Al Jazeera's 39 sources are based in countries in the global South.

As for the information producers themselves, the BBC articles are penned by journalists specialized in one area of transnational affairs: an environment correspondent (B2), an economics analyst (B4), a rural affairs correspondent (B6), or a science correspondent (B7). At AJE, the stories are mainly written by nonspecialists who focus more on a geographic region—India, East Africa, Pacific Ocean—than on the specific topic itself. When it comes to the section under which articles are filed, the BBC content is mainly categorized under *science*, *science and environment*, or *Asia*. Almost all the content on AJE is categorized under the section *environment* until the year 2015. Interestingly though, from 2015 and until today, AJE content is categorized under *climate change*, *Africa*, or—the most frequent one—*humanitarian crises*. This categorization defines the coverage in a way: The BBC studies climate refugees as a global scientific phenomenon, while Al Jazeera, through interviews with protagonists and the recounting of personal experiences, approaches the issue from a humanitarian perspective.

One of the main findings of the sample refers to how, in both BBC and AJE's coverage, the vast majority of lead photos depict climate refugees without names, places, and context. In eight of the BBC's news stories, the head photo depicts an unnamed climate refugee who is later not mentioned in the story, except in one case, where the climate refugee in Kiribati on the photo is quoted in the article (B12). Of the eight photos where "climate refugees" are portrayed, only two informs the reader about the place where the photo is taken. Except for the Kiribati photo, the rest of the pictures look like stock photos, and no information is given in order to put them into context. The situation is similar in Al Jazeera's visual coverage: Seven pictures show "climate refugees," but only two of them are named (A2 and A8). The five other individuals are anonymous, and the photo location is mentioned in only two cases (A10 and A13).

It is clear then that, in general terms, the statistical data present some surprising findings. First, despite the emergence of climate change issues on the global political agenda, the small number of articles on the websites of two of the world's biggest broadcasters underscores the perceived fact that the concept "climate refugee" remains a widely underreported subject. Second, it is also noteworthy that the aggregate total of news articles is almost identical in the two media outlets. Due to their extended presence in the global South and widely proclaimed social agenda, it would have been reasonable to expect a greater number of articles from AJE about such a pressing issue as climate refugees. A third point to highlight is that pivotal climate change conferences such as the UN-sponsored sessions in Copenhagen (2009) or Paris (2015) does not translate into greater climate refugee coverage. From an agenda perspective, the coverage of both media outlets seems unstructured and arbitrary, centered around sporadic nongovernmental organization reports, occasional juridical debates, and occasional transnational meetings. As can be seen from the list, the media organizations under scrutiny do not cover climate refugees in regular fashion. An eye-catching headline may be followed by a months-long information vacuum. In her study of immigration in the European press, Gemi noted that "media tend to flood the media space with instant coverage when something dramatic happens but quickly drop the subject at 'normal' times, thus prompting the public to think of immigration in the 'problem/conflict/difficulty' framework" (Gemi et al., 2013, p. 276). Similar dynamics are at play here.

Framing the Climate Refugee

Throughout the sample, climate refugees were found to be framed in four different ways (see Table 3). The most widely employed frame on both the BBC and AJE websites perceives the environmental migrant as a *victim* (identified no less than 16 times in this way, 6 times on the BBC, and on 10 occasions on AJE). The victim frame presents climate refugees as those suffering the consequences of climate change and elicits a humanitarian discourse influenced by climate justice which calls on the global North to act and help them both regarding refugee policy and related legal and moral obligations (Harrell-Bond, 1999). Here, expressions such as "forced to flee," "huge loss," and "potential humanitarian disaster" are used to describe their plight, and the visual content often depicts climate refugees as suffering people surrounded by degraded or destructed environments (B2, A5 and B5). Thorbjornsrud's analysis of the victim frame when applied to "irregular" migrants is particularly appropriate here:

> When the victim frame is used, a key critique is that those portrayed as victims (. . .) are exceptionally compatible with a classic victim template displaying characteristics such as innocence, high aesthetic appeal and emotional universal cues such as cuteness, vulnerability and kindness. (p. 341)

The victim frame portrays climate refugees in need because of circumstances beyond their control, where they themselves are rendered less capable of dealing with the situation (Horsti, 2008). It is often gendered. While women are omnipresent as "innocent victims," it is the depiction of child refugees who often lead the "hierarchy of innocence" (Moeller, 2002).

The three other frames—*security threat*, *activist*, and *abstraction*—are equally salient throughout the sample, appearing six times each. When the climate refugee is framed as a *security threat*, a potential danger to countries in the global North is emphasized, and expressions such as "warning," "destabilize," "likely to trap," and "cause of conflict" abound along with lead photos that show poor people in great numbers, threatening to destabilize society (B1, B7, and A7). Triandafyllidou (2000) argues that such figures are framed as agent provocateurs capable of altering the political order and threatening geopolitical order. Metaphors related to elemental forces such as water and flooding are constant features (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008), and symbolic ostracization is the consequence of such media constructions.

When climate refugees are framed as *activists*, they are "outraged" figures "challenging the situation" and "facing the direct consequences." In this case, their faces are shown, confronting the reader directly (B12 and A2). This more confrontational representation refers to climate refugees attempt to gain recognition in the legal system, arguing that rich countries should open their borders as a result of the historical responsibility they bear. This discourse of abandonment and the use of the system that works against refugees in general then are discussed powerfully in a wider sense by Webber (2012).

The *abstraction* frame portrays the climate refugee as a vague phenomenon and is subject of intangible scientific debate. The accompanying visual content tends to show climate refugees in a distanced way (B9 and B10), or not to show them at all (A11). Here, statistics, definitions, and predictions are the main focus, and while some news stories encourage more research in the field, others dismiss the gravity of the challenge: "Climate migration fears 'misplaced'" (B10) and "How many climate refugees will there be?" (B9). A cross-comparison of these four frames shows that only the activist frame challenges the conservative nature of the framed debate given that in different ways the other three options—whether victim, threat, or abstraction—serve to keep the issue at a distance.

Increasing, yet Uncertain Numbers

One of the most prominent features of climate refugee coverage on the BBC and AJE is their alleged numerousness: "Approximately 20 million people will become ecological refugees" (B1), "deteriorating environment could drive about 50 million people from their homes by 2010" (A1), "the UN is predicting 50 million environmental refugees by 2030" (A5), or "there are potentially hundreds of millions of people" (B12) are just some examples. The effects of such arbitrary figures affect the public perception of the issue. As climate refugees are an abstract concept for many readers, journalists aim to combat this uncertainty with a numerical estimate in order to contextualize the dimensions of this future challenge. However, when the coverage as a whole lacks the voices of climate refugees—as we have seen, they are seldom quoted—then they are *aggregated* in media discourse, and once turned into statistics, are deprived of their human features as individuals. This, in turn, makes it harder for the reader to empathize with their situation. Arbitrary statistics are the core theme of many articles such as "Surge in eco-refugees predicted" (A1), "How many climate refugees will there be?" (B9), and "Fears of climate refugees 'misplaced'" (B10). Such predictions not only shift the focus away from the people behind the numbers but are somewhat useless because it is impossible to predict how many climate refugees there will be in the future. Considering the scientists quoted in all the news stories on both the BBC and AJE (except for one "climate sceptic" interviewed in A15), one could draw the conclusion that no one knows how many climate refugees there will be, but everyone knows there will be many.

Photographic Depictions of Climate Refugees

Aggregation mechanisms are further enforced by the visual content that accompany news stories on both the BBC and AJE websites. Many of the photos are long shots, providing social distance (A1, B5 and A8, see Figure 1). Second, many of the refugees are difficult to identify as they are photographed from behind (B9 and A9, Figure 1). Third, in those pictures where we can see those portrayed, the protagonists do not look at the viewer and are depicted as looking down or in another way (B6, A6 and B10 in Figure 1). Fourth, a recurring image in both the BBC's and AJE's coverage shows nameless people walking or swimming in water up to their thighs, waist and neck (B10, A6 and B3 in Figure 1). Here, we can observe victims of rising sea levels although who and where they are is unknown. The woman in one picture (B10) is carrying her child, has a bag on her head, and is clearly moving from one place to another. But to where, and from where? The two boys swimming in the second picture (A6) are also carrying things, but we do not know if they crossing a river because it is faster or if they are really escaping their homes with their belongings. The third example—a smoking man with water up to his waist clinching his fist toward a bunch of small plants—is more difficult to interpret without the circumstantial details. All these pictures—credited to the news bureau AP and the photo agency EPA—need further explanation, but none is provided. The captions of the photos only refer to how there will be more people like these in the future, and they do not provide valuable information by themselves The people depicted are *deterritorialized* in the images; they are taken out of their specific, geographic context and made into rootless icons of a global—but distant—problem. Poor people fleeing. Even though we cannot be certain, all the photos depicting climate refugees look like they have been taken in the global South. Unidentified victims of Hurricane Katrina in the United States, for example, are not used to illustrate articles about climate refugees, implying that this is an issue mainly affecting southern hemisphere countries.

The people in these illustrating pictures are anonymous symbols rather than individuals. This does not encourage reader engagement but rather detachment, as we are not able to communicate with them through the pictures. Rigid framing and aggregation techniques make them generic climate refugees, not specific people. The inattentive use of photographical evidence portrays them as *sinking strangers*, a collectivized group with few other functions than showing the consequences of human-made climate change.

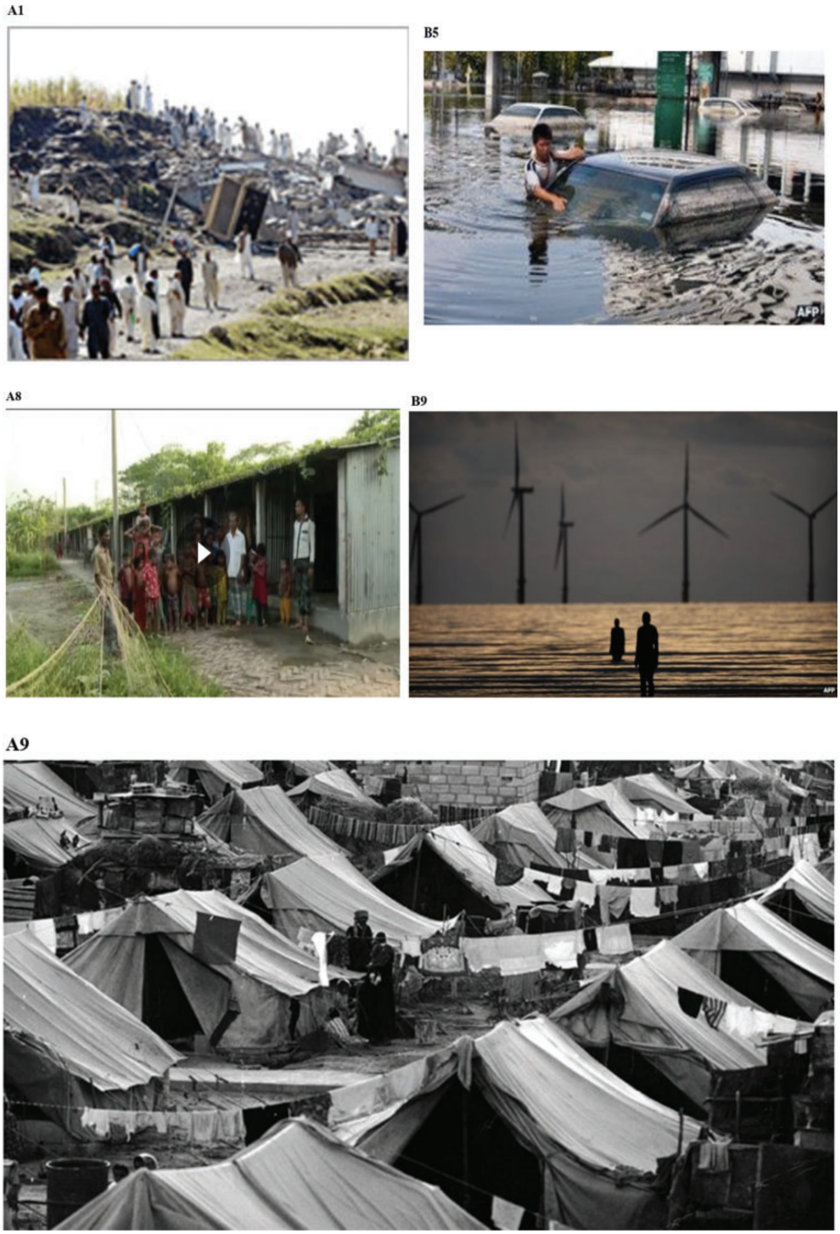

Figure 1. Sample table, Al Jazeera English. A1 —Al Jazeera English, "Surge in eco-refugees predicted," published in 2005; B5 —BBC, "UN chief Ban Ki-moon makes climate plea at Dhaka summit," published in 2011; A8 —Al Jazeera English, Rising waters swamp Bangladesh island, published in 2014; B9 —BBC, How many climate migrants will there be? published in 2013; A9 —Al Jazeera English, "The looming tides," published in 2015; B10 —BBC, "Climate migration fears 'misplaced'," published in 2013; B3 —BBC, "Rich nations have 'climate duty'," published in 2006; A6 —Al Jazeera English, "Climate change: The next challenge for national security," published in 2013; B7 —BBC, "Costing the earth. Can Lawyers Save The World?" published in 2013.

B10

B3

Refugees from floods and droughts are expected to increase

A6

Fights over resources, hunger and extreme weather will all go into the mix to further destabilise the world [EPA]

B7

Figure 1. Continued

Table 1. Samples, Al Jazeera English.

Headline	Genre	Year
A1: Surge in eco-refugees predicted	News article	2005
A2: The Pacific's climate refugees	Feature article	2007
A3: Hungry tides in India's Sundarbans	Feature article	2009
A4: The "ground zero" of climate change	Feature article	2009
A5: Tuvalu struggles amid water shortages	Feature article	2011
A6: Climate change: The next challenge for national security	Opinion article	2013
A7: Climate change "complicates" global security	News article	2014
A8: Rising waters swamp Bangladesh island	Video feature	2014
A9: The looming tides	Opinion article	2015
A10: Somaliland: A parched earth	News feature	2015
A11: Where will the climate refugees go?	Feature article	2015
A12: The climate change and its impact on democracy	Opinion article	2016
A13: Madagascar: On the hunt for sharks	Photo feature	2016
A14: Displaced refugees fear more loss as Lake Chad shrinks	Photo feature	2016
A15: How to help those displaced by climate change?	TV debate	2017

Table 2. Samples, BBC.

Headline	Genre	Year
B1: West warned on climate refugees	News article	2000
B2: Climate victims "are refugees"	News article	2003
B3: Rich nations have "climate duty"	News article	2006
B4: More or less: Behind the Stats podcast: Climate refugees	Radio debate	2011
B5: UN chief Ban Ki-moon makes climate plea at Dhaka summit	News article	2011
B6: Climate change migration warning issued through report	News article	2011
B7: Costing the earth. Can Lawyers Save The World?	Radio feature	2013
B8: The Alaskan village set to disappear under water in a decade	Feature article	2013
B9: How many climate migrants will there be?	News article	2013
B10: Climate migration fears "misplaced"	Opinion article	2013
B11: New Zealand denies climate change asylum bid	News article	2013
B12: The man who would be the first climate change refugee	Feature article	2015
B13: Should we recognize climate change refugees?	Radio debate	2015
B14: Website maps Vanuatu climate change flooding risk	News article	2016

Sink or Swim: Deterministic Representations

Throughout the sample, the consequences of climate change are often seen to be *deagentialized*, mere outcomes of actions committed by natural forces and not by human beings. This happens when the root causes of global warming are suppressed as in headlines which read "rising sea levels have submerged several islands and created thousands of refugees" (A3) or "a million residents (. . .)

Table 3. Climate Refugee Frames.

	Problem	Cause	Moral judgment	Solution
Victim Humanitarian discourse w. climate justice	People are suffering or forced to flee their homes	Greenhouse gas emissions from rich countries	Rich countries should help climate refugees	Donate money to developing countries
Security threat Geopolitical discourse	Climate refugees come to countries in the global North	Climate change	No particular moral judgment	Climate refugees should adapt, with help from rich countries
Activist Radical discourse	Rich countries are not taking responsibility for climate refugees	Rich countries do not care about climate refugees	Rich countries exploit poorer countries	Open borders to climate refugees
Abstraction Scientific discourse	Climate refugees are hard to define	Future impacts of climate change are unpredictable	Call for scientific accuracy	Cancel "climate refugee crisis"/ more accuracy

face bleak future as climate refugees as level of water wipes out villages" (A8). This also happens when climate change is represented as something inescapable, as in the feature article "the Alaskan village set to disappear under water in a decade" (B8):

> Almost no one in America has heard of the Alaskan village of Kivalina. It clings to a narrow spit of sand on the edge of the Bering Sea, far too small to feature on maps of Alaska, never mind the United States. Which is perhaps just as well, because within a decade Kivalina is likely to be under water. Gone, forever. Remembered - if at all - as the birthplace of America's first climate change refugees. (B8)

While the journalistic overdramatization of the islanders' plight is a clear example of Farbotko's *wishful sinking*, the determinism in this portrayal is a key element in the way climate change refugees are portrayed. Whilst it may be true that efforts to stop climate change may not save the island of Kivalina, we can still observe how the consequences are powerfully depicted as unavoidable and thus make the public think that there is not much they can do about it. When water in itself—and not what causes levels to rise—is depicted as the cause of the creation of climate refugees, the burden of responsibility of the global North is reduced.

Discussion

This modest study of climate refugee representations on the BBC and AJE has tried to identify dominant frames that emerge when journalists in both media outlets cover the issue. The following paragraph attempts to provide some answers for the research questions.

> RQ1: *How are the climate refugees represented?* In the Results section of this article, it is made clear that the refugee is framed according to the four most salient discursive categories: victim, aggressor, activist, and as a vague abstraction. While not exclusive, these media labels do seem to fit in almost all cases under analysis.

> RQ2: *In what way is historical climate responsibility part of the media discourse?* One of the main findings of the article is the relative absence of collective historical responsibility for climate change by the media platforms studied here. The news articles that form part of the sample seem to reveal a selective amnesia when it comes to the origins of environmental problems or the attribution of any national involvement in their creation.

> RQ3: *How do the representations on the BBC and Al Jazeera differ from each other?* The statistical findings outlined in the Results section of this article reveal the

nuances in climate refugee reporting by the BBC and Al-Jazeera. While only three of the BBC stories are covered on the ground, this figure in the case of the Arab networks is over 40%. On other issues such as the use of elite sources and photographic depiction, the channels do show greater convergence.

Findings indicate that through techniques such as aggregation, determinism, anonymity, and disempowerment, climate refugees are broadly represented in a manner that reinforces existing power systems and conditions policies. While the climate refugee is framed in four different ways—as *victim*, *security threat*, *activist*, and *abstraction*—all of them except the activist archetype identify underlying discourses on power relations between the global North and the global South. The research shows that the BBC dedicates a lot more time to talking about climate refugees than to actually interviewing them, a practice that affects their depicted agency. Al Jazeera, meanwhile, takes the time to meet climate refugees where they are providing possible openings for common understanding and action. That said, the coverage that both the BBC and AJE provide has margins for improvement. Climate refugees are generally left aside, but when they become headline news, they are collectivized and made into deterritorialized speechless actors. This research concludes that they are turned into *sinking strangers*, as unidentifiable "third world others."

The study has not looked closer into potential reasons for the differences between the two media outlets. However, one could perhaps suggest some potential causes. One is that AJE generally is more sensitive to the global South agenda, social and transnational issues form greater part of the AJE remit. This can be seen in sourcing practices and the corresponding higher use of elite sources by the BBC, more accustomed to playing a soft power style diplomatic role in global issues. Another reason could be the different professional backgrounds of journalists working for both networks. AJE disposes of multilingual staff with an Asian-Pacific perspective which formed a large part of the sample. One could maybe also imagine that editorial interests regarding historical responsibility affects the coverage. A media outlet more sensitive to the global south agenda, as AJE, would perhaps provide a coverage that put the developing countries' claims regarding climate change measures to the front. A media outlet that is representing the global North is maybe less likely to put the interests of countries the global south in the center.

In order to improve the coverage in both media outlets, one could propose more specialized training for journalists on climate change issues, as well as working toward the consolidation of climate change issues on to the mainstream news agenda. More local voices could be brought in as well as greater use of wider contextual information to draw more readers in the global North into the story. Treating the issue as something that is affecting the whole planet, not only certain areas, could also maybe broaden the coverage.

Future Research Opportunities

This limited contribution to knowledge production on what has traditionally been a "black hole" in environmental communication studies could be enhanced in many directions. Web-based content could be contrasted with regular television content on both platforms. Alternative non-English versions of the BBC and Al Jazeera—Arabic or Persian, for example—could be used to compare Anglophone findings. Additional global South media players could also be introduced to widen the sample. In all cases, it is to be hoped that the climate refugee issue may ascend on the elite-centered news agenda as the consequences and impact of such global environmental irresponsibility come further to the fore.

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Outside the Sports Closet: News Discourses of Professional Gay Male Athletes in the Mainstream

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Abstract

Contributing to a growing yet underresearched area of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer issues in sport, this study interrogates news discourses of the most prominent American athletes coming-out stories to date: the National Basketball Association's Jason Collins and the National Football League's Michael Sam. Mainstream media narratives invoked an overall congratulatory tone, hailing these announcements as watershed moments while at the same time emphasizing athletes' physicality and athleticism in ways that reinforced the hypermasculine. Journalists and opinion leaders celebrated these announcements while simultaneously relying on coded and overt homophobic labels and language. Media storytellers subsequently relied upon dualistic, self-contradictory binaries, highlighting the paradoxes implicit in celebrating increased gay visibility within the confines of a commercialized sports/media complex with heterosexuality and hypermasculinity at its core.

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framing, news coverage, sports and media, critical communication studies, coming-out narratives, gay athletes

The coming out of the professional athlete in an American team sport, until recently, only existed in the imaginary world of fiction. As one example, Richard Greenberg's (2003) Tony-award winning play *Take Me Out* dramatized a fictional baseball hero who comes out to his team as gay (Butterworth, 2006); at the time, no player in any of the U.S. professional leagues had come out publically while still in active play. It was not until April 2013 when the once-imagined gay professional athlete experience was catapulted into the mainstream. In the opening line of a *Sports Illustrated* piece, the National Basketball Association (NBA)'s Jason Collins wrote, "I'm a 34-year old center. I'm black. And I'm gay" (Collins, 2013, para. 1). Collins made history the next season when he became the first openly gay athlete to ever play in a major American league (Neyer, 2016).

A few months later, during a February 2014 interview on Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN)'s *Outside the Lines*, another announcement, this one from a 22-year-old All-American defensive lineman from the University of Missouri: "I am an openly, proud gay man .... No one has done this before... .I want to be a football player in the NFL" (Connelly, 2014, para. 2-4). With these words, Michael Sam—a soon-to-be National Football League (NFL) draftee—told the world he was gay (Connelly, 2014).

These stories about the first openly gay players in any of the major American leagues speak to complexities of coming out in the sports arena as largely a mediated act—for our purposes here, defined as the process by which media forms "[enter] into and [shape] the mundane but ubiquitous relations among individuals and between individuals and society" (Livingston, 2009, p. 7). Collins's and Sam's announcements led broadcast news and captured magazine covers, headlining the front pages of prominent newspapers and trending on social media. Woven into these mainstream journalistic narratives was the promise of the boundary-breaking, history-making gay athlete. The larger media response to these gay athlete stories was, at least initially, overwhelmingly congratulatory, heralded as milestones, clearing what many media figures argued to be the "last hurdle" in American team sports. However, as this project reveals, journalists, sports reporters, and media commentators simultaneously framed these coming-out narratives along oppositional—and often self-contradictory—binaries, highlighting the paradoxes implicit in increased visibility within the systematic confines of the sports/media complex.

This essay carefully considers the significance of media as a conduit—albeit an imperfect one—for sharing these stories, and with it, an implicit call for others to do the same. “I’m not the only one,” Sam announced in a widely reported interview with Oprah Winfrey, “I’m just the only one who’s open” (Brooks, 2014, para. 2), echoing Collins’s insistence that, “In the brotherhood of the NBA, I just happen to be the one who’s out” (Collins, 2013, para. 37). These players spoke of homosexuality in sport as a sort of “open secret,” a dam about to break, lifting the floodgates for the emergence of gay, lesbian, bi, trans, and queer athletes in American team sports. For hopeful activists and media pundits, the momentum seemed certain. *Outsports*’ Cyd Zeigler (2014) claimed 2014 the year of the gay athlete, assuring readers that “more are coming ... more are coming” (para. 11). John Affleck (2017), director of the John Curley Center for Sports Journalism at Penn State, wrote that from 2013 to 2014, “gay and lesbian athletes welcomed breakthrough after breakthrough in the historically closeted world of sports” (para. 1).

However, despite the intoxicating allure and hopeful impact these coming-out stories promised, a stark reality remains: There are currently no active gay male players in any of the four major American sports leagues, including the NBA, NFL, National Hockey League (NHL), or Major League Baseball (MLB; Neyer, 2016). Collins has since retired, and Sam failed to make an NFL roster, retiring from football while citing mental health reasons. Meanwhile, a handful of important stories emerged on the international sports scene, such as British rugby player Keegan Hirst, who in 2015 became the first British professional player to come out as gay; Great Britain diver Tom Daley; German soccer player Thomas Hitzlsperger; and England’s international footballer Sol Campbell—all players who out came after European rugby player Gareth Thomas did in 2009, describing his hypermasculinized environment created such conflict that he was close to committing suicide (Thomas, 2015). Furthermore, several players have come out in sports beyond the ones dubbed “major” in the United States, including solo sports (such as soccer’s Robbie Rogers, diving’s Olympic gold medalists Greg Louganis, swimming’s Ian Thorpe) or in team sports after retirement (such as Kansas City Chiefs’ Ryan O’Callaghan and the NBA’s John Amaechi). In addition, significant narratives of out lesbian and trans athletes are intertwined with stories of gay male athletes. The Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA)’s Sheryl Swoopes and U.S. tennis players Martina Navatilova and Billie Jean King remain forbearers in the broader story of LBGTQ athletes. Likewise, the WNBA’s Brittney Griner and Elena Delle Donne came out during this same time frame of our analysis, as well as the pervasive sports/entertainment story of Olympic decathlete Caitlin Jenner and transgender mixed-marital artist Fallon Fox.

Nevertheless, in an sports scene in which over three quarters of the media coverage is dominated by American sports leagues for football, basketball, and baseball (Cooky, Messner, & Hextrum, 2013), these announcements from Collins and Sam constitute unique and pivotal moments. And despite the significant impact of the athletes listed here, the reality remains: There are currently no out athletes playing in the major American men's leagues. Moreover, due in part to the relative absence of gay male athletes on the U.S. professional sports scene, little scholarship has investigated how their narratives are shaped and disseminated by mainstream media. This study thus contributes to a growing yet underresearched area of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) issues in sport by examining the journalistic discourses surrounding professional gay male athletes and highlighting the complexities of coming out through commercial media forms.

Intersections and Disjunctions: Sport, Media, and Sexuality

Many areas of overlap exist between sport and sexual identity, yet one core aspect of both is that each is, to some extent, *performed*—and in large part, they are performed in and through the media industries, which shape the normative boundaries of these performances. Sport and the body, for instance, have been argued as a "site of cultural inscription, self-regulation, and resistance" (Patterson & Corning, 1997, p. 7). With little exception, all sporting competitions bifurcate along the lines of biological, essentialized binary conceptions of sex (Pronger, 1990). As Birrell and Cole (1990) contend, there are "two apparently natural, mutually exclusive, 'opposite' sexes" (p. 2).

The dominant culture of professional men's sports has been heterosexual and hypermasculine (Baxter, 2012; Cashmore & Cleland, 2011; Kian & Anderson, 2009; Zirin, 2007), serving as a mainstay of hegemonic masculinity, heterosexism, and homophobia (Ward, 2015). The emergence of gay and lesbian athletes challenges these hegemonic traditions (Anderson, 2005; Hardin, Kuehn, Jones, Genovese, & Balaji, 2009). The experiences of lesbian athletes are often overlooked in professional sports, however, as their sexual orientation is problematically *presumed* because of their athleticism (Kane & Lenskyj, 1998). Thus, sport both reinscribes biological sex and socially constructed gender binaries; athletes failing to conform to notions of what it means to be a male or female athlete—compulsory heterosexuality for male athletes while, paradoxically, ascribing presumed homosexuality for many female athletes.

Making the News: Hegemonic Framing of Social Issues

Communication scholars have long recognized that newsmakers do more than report events; through the process of framing, they also organize, assign meaning, and establish the salience of those issues and events (Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1989; Gitlin, 1980; Goffman, 1974; Tuchman, 1978). Like other cultural storytellers, journalists rely on standard, familiar stories and symbolic representations that media audiences use to make sense of news events. Despite the long tradition of framing theory in communication scholarship, the notion of power is often absent or underdeveloped in framing research (Holstein, 2003; Vliegenthart & van Zoonen, 2011). Thus, this project examines media framing as complex processes within larger hegemonic ideological structures defining our natural, common sense notions of the world and, by default, limiting the perceived range of possible definitions (Gramsci, 1971; Williams, 1977). Indeed, as Gitlin (1980) argues, "What makes the world beyond direct experience look natural is a media *frame*" (p. 6).

Heeding the call of critical scholars to bring concepts of power and hegemony "back in" to framing discourse, this project thus relies on a critical-constructionist approach (D'Angelo, 2002) to the cyclical role of news in the social construction of meaning. Drawing from a critical paradigm informed by hegemonic theory and political-economic approaches, this project views the process of framing as "the outcome of newsgathering routines by which journalists convey information about issues and events from the perspective of values held by political and economic elites" (D'Angelo, 2002, p. 876). Media storytellers are governed by routinized occupational, cultural, and organizational values dictating that the most extraordinary, dramatic, or novel elements of stories will be emphasized. While newsmakers are certainly not the only meaning-makers in the culture, they "make available suggested meanings and are the most accessible in a media-saturated society" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 2).

Mainstream news media thus become a central site in which social actors and groups struggle to promote their preferred meanings, definitions, and images in news discourse. What becomes "news" out of this "struggle" depends on an ideological—and therefore necessarily powerful—"selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6).

One of the core tenets of how hegemony functions and endures is its flexibility—the ability "to accommodate and incorporate opposing views and absorb changes – but only in ways that minimally rock the dominant boat" (Holstein, 2003, p. 12). Particularly significant to this project, then, is the recognition that frames are often like hegemonic ideologies themselves: paradoxical and oppositional (Vliegenthart & van Zoonen, 2011)—or even what Gitlin (1980) refers to as "self-contradictory," explaining "how enduring ideology find its way into the news, absorbing and ironing out contradictions with relative consistency" (p. 11).

Gaining Representational Currency: Coming Out In/Through Commercial Media Forms

Narratives surrounding gay athletes have unfolded across a backdrop of what cultural studies scholars have dubbed "the era of the visible"

(Walters, 2001b, p. 338), the unprecedented media coverage of LGBTQ communities, and the advancement of gay civil rights issues in U.S. culture (Dow, 2001; Gross, 2001). Once considered "unfit to print" (Alwood, 1998), LGBTQ issues now routinely headline mainstream news, and coverage of coming-out stories has increasingly become more positive (Lavoi, 2013). While the 2000s witnessed a rise in the entertainment appeal, the advancement of inclusionary civil rights such as marriage and military service, and the recognition of gays and lesbians as a budding consumer market, these changes have not necessarily challenged homophobia or worked to combat heterosexual privilege.

A line of critical cultural work has demonstrated how media representations are always a part of larger hegemonic power structures, serving as powerful and instrumental sites for regulating the boundaries of gendered and sexual identities (Becker, 2006; Gross, 2001; Sender, 2004; Walters, 2001). This scholarship points to the potentially dangerous downside of increased media attention: That visibility comes at a price, a substitution for inclusive citizenship, with media as an inherently problematic conduit for coming-out narratives.

Moreover, the concept of the "closet" and the act of "coming out" of it depends on culturally constructed logics whereby heteronormativity, similar to Whiteness, works as an "invisible norm" (King, 2009, p. 274). The closet presumes a fixed and essentialized notion of sexuality, with problematically narrow definitions of normalcy centered around heterosexuality (Sedgwick, 1990). Coming-out discourses in mainstream media thus often position one's "self-disclosure" of sexual identity in confessional-therapeutic terms targeting straight audiences (it is rare, e.g., that one "comes out" as straight; Bailey, 2011; Dow, 2001). Celebrity outings are presented as a "confession, apology, and rehabilitation rather than a challenge or restructure of power inequalities" (Bailey, 2011, p. 16) and through the lens of "fitting in" (Dow, 2001; Richardson-Self, 2012). The decision to come out is framed as an individual choice, situated squarely on the shoulders of the closeted athlete, while the sports world is portrayed as largely receptive to gay athletes and reflective of a greater societal acceptance (Butterworth, 2006). These responses, of course, run counter to what much work has shown as a culture of toxic masculinity and rampant homophobia in the sports/media complex (Anderson et al., 2016; Hardin et al., 2009; Kian & Anderson, 2009; Ward, 2015; Wilson, 2014).

Part of the contradiction is that while media coverage is often critical of overt homophobia in sports (Hardin et al., 2009; Wright & Clarke, 2009), news reporters, sports journalists, and opinion leaders "are complicit in preserving hegemonic masculinity while failing to acknowledge their own role in doing so" (Hardin et al., 2009, p. 187). Athletes are often judged on the basis of their masculine traits and their athleticism, with an insistence that all that matters is how players perform on the court or field. Hardin (2009) refers to this phenomenon as "neo-homophobia," that by downplaying the notion that sexual identity has any relevance in sports, perceived threats to masculinity are carefully contained.

This Study's Approach

Rooted in interpretive approaches to knowledge, this study utilizes qualitative textual analysis to critically investigate media coverage and commentary of the most prominent gay sports stories in men's professional sports and the ensuing media treatment of LGBTQ issues in sport. Textual analysis was employed to more deeply investigate how language and framing devices (McKee, 2003) were used to construct meaning for mainstream audiences (Hardin et al., 2009; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Programs and publications were selected which are prominent, high impact, and appeal to large, national news and sports audiences. Lexus Nexis was used to determine stories for analysis using the terms *Michael Sam* and *gay* from the time of his announcement on February 10, 2014, through September 1, 2015 (to capture coverage of his retirement from football in August 2015), yielding 739 television and radio news transcripts. Likewise, search terms *Jason Collins* and *gay* yielded 371 television and radio transcripts from his announcement on April 29, 2013 through his retirement in November 2014. Duplicates of wire stories were excluded as were duplicate transcripts, Letters to the Editor, or articles shorter than 75 words (considered briefs). Therefore, 37 broadcast/cable/radio transcripts remained about Michael Sam and 31 about Jason Collins, with each article serving as the unit of analysis. Likewise, a Lexis Nexis revealed 181 articles published in *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, and *Newsweek* about Jason Collins and 307 about Michael Sam during these same time periods; once duplicate stories and shorter briefs less were eliminated, 14 stories remained of Collins and 48 of Sam. Qualitative textual analysis was used to determine dominant framing devices emerging consistently across the population of stories and articles. First cycle coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013) engaged in open coding without detailed or previously conceptualized frames to identify dominant narrative devices. Two researchers then collaborated to determine the most prevalent themes, then engaged in second cycle coding to group themes "into a smaller number of categories, themes or constructs" (Miles et al., 2013, p. 86).

Important for our analysis here, we did not eliminate nor intentionally differentiate editorials, commentary, or sports columns from more traditional news in this census of stories and transcripts. This study was interested in interrogating the framing discourses woven throughout these varied media products, as these stories and articles about the first players coming out in their respective leagues generated widespread traditional news coverage along with commentary and discussion from opinion leaders, sports commentators, journalists, and activists—all of which we consider to contribute to the larger "journalistic discourses" surrounding gay athletes in the sports/media complex. In a converged media landscape in which more traditional "breaking news" stories circulate alongside commentary and opinion about these contemporary social issues in sport and society, this study sought to examine the dominant discourses across platforms while acknowledging that these stories reach different audiences and serve different aims. The goal was not to amalgamate disparate news sources but to examine the common narrative framing devices within them. For example, *The New York Times* published a "breaking news" style feature story the day Michael Sam came out, which was anchored to more standardized professional norms of objectivity, sourcing, and structure, under the headline, "N.F.L. Prospect Michael Sam Proudly Says What Teammates Knew: He's Gay" (Branch, 2014). That article appeared on page A1 of the February 10, 2014 print edition as well as on the nytimes.com news site. That front-page story was followed up by analysis, commentary, and opinion pieces in that same publication, for example, "In N.F.L., It's Now Question of Ability, Not Orientation" (Shpigel, 2014), a piece on whether Sam's decision to come out will impact his position in the draft, and later, "Michael Sam Has a Spot in History, if Not With the Rams" (Rhoden, 2014), providing commentary on Sam being cut from the team. Likewise, CNN's *360 with Anderson Cooper* led with a traditionally style broadcast package about Jason Collins's announcement (news), which was followed by a lengthy discussion about its impact on his career and the sport at large with former and current athletes, coaches, journalists, and sports commentators (commentary). For the purposes of this study, then, we did not attempt to differentiate the narratives of reporters/journalists from columnists/commentators, as many writers and broadcast personalities toggle between these roles. We were instead centrally concerned with how "mainstream ideologies about sports, gender and sexuality are being contested or maintained" (Hardin et al., 2009, p. 190; see also Trujillo, 1991) collectively within the sports/media complex by journalists, reporters, columnists, and opinion leaders. We do acknowledge, however, that some writers and commentators may intentionally frame an argument for specific aims and audiences, while others may be unwittingly influenced by news production values, professional norms of detachment and objectivity, sourcing conventions, and the like. As a textual analysis of mainstream discourses, our study was not designed to examine intentionality of story frames. As we discuss in the following findings, these narrative framing devices, all produced within and for mainstream U.S. news organizations, emerged irrespectively across the range of news, opinion, and commentary that appeared in our sample.

As our analysis highlights, media stories invoked an overall celebratory tone that initially hailed coming-out announcements as historic watershed moments, signaling a new era of inclusivity. However, as we explore in detail later, our analysis yielded frames rife with contradiction as journalists and pundits alike worked to detach themselves from the coded and sometimes more overt homophobic sources they cited. The following discussion unpacks these often self-contradictory framing devices in depth, interrogating how hegemonic power structures are negotiated and reproduced in media narratives of gay athletes.

"Stereotypical" Gay Identity Confronts Hypermasculinity

Reports of both Collins's and Sam's announcements continuously emphasized the athletes' masculine form, bodies, and physical power, safely containing gayness within traditional notions of orthodox masculinity. Both Collins's and Sam's hypermasculinity and athleticism were used to emphasize their *novelty* in contrast to their sexual identities. In doing so, the figure of the gay athlete as one that threatens to transgress the normative boundaries of gender and sexuality is absorbed into traditional notions of orthodox masculinity. In effect, gay athletes are asked to distance themselves from their sexualities in ways that heterosexual athletes are not, reproducing compulsory heterosexuality as "natural" (see also Brody, 2016).

For example, the *Sports Illustrated* announcement cover story coauthored with *Sports Illustrated* reporter Franz Lidz emphasized Collins's physical size, power, and aggressiveness: "I once fouled a player so hard that he had to leave the arena on a stretcher" (Collins, 2013, para. 22). The morning after his story broke, in a rare on-camera appearance on *Good Morning America*, Collins's aggressiveness and toughness were positioned as the antithesis of gay identity:

> I bring that physical toughness, that physical attitude and, you know, it's part of the game. . . .I think that people like me are trying to rewrite . . . that stereotype and trying to let people know that you can't just put people in a box. (Schieffer, 2013, para. 38-40)

Sports writers, reporters, and commentators continued to emphasize his physicality in ways that anchored Collins to dominant notions of masculinity, referring to Collins's physical size and aggressive play: "He's always been tall, he's always been intimidating . . . " (Kornacki, 2014). Christine Brennan's (2013) column from *USA Today* notes that the image of the gay athlete might be expected in women's sports or even in "artistic" men's sports like gymnastics and diving. "But big, bruising Jason Collins," she asks, "Really?": "He stands 7 feet tall, weighs 255 pounds, has started almost 500 NBA games and is known as a durable, strong, physical, team-oriented big man. So much for stereotypes."

Similarly, Michael Sam's toughness and physicality were repeatedly emphasized in his coming-out story, an All-American, MVP in "the toughest conference in college football," "a quarter-back-sacking force" (Harris, 2014), a player who "rumbled with confidence, fast and powerful" (Hill & Melvin, 2015): "At 6′2″, two hundred and sixty pounds, University of Missouri defensive lineman

Michael Sam used skill and strength to lead the SEC in sacks last year" (Connelly, 2014, para. 27).

Journalists' physical descriptions and labels positioned both Collins and Sam as decidedly masculine—and, therefore, not "stereotypically" gay—reinforcing binary notions of gender performance. These tensions arose in part from the insistence that these sports figures wanted to be known as *athletes* first, not as *gay* athletes. Stories repeatedly sidelined sexual identity to focus on athleticism, emphasizing, for example, that Collins " . . . doesn't want to be known as the gay athlete. He just wants to be known as an athlete" (Costello, 2013 para. 20). Similarly, Sam at the NFL Scouting Combine, "I just wish you guys would see me as Michael Sam, the football player, instead of Michael Sam, the gay football player" (Babb, 2014, para. 12). As a way to highlight how "being gay" and "looking gay" ran counter to cultural stereotypes, news discourses unwittingly reinforced normative boundaries, both in self-described athlete narratives as well as in the editorial decisions on the part of reporters, editors, and commentators.

Watershed Moment and a Simultaneous "Nonevent"

Qualitative analysis revealed another binary in how coming-out stories were framed thematically, as historic, groundbreaking moments advancing the larger LGBTQ rights movement—and yet simultaneously dismissed as nonevents. These stories were discussed in the context of LGBTQ equality measures in the United States, including hate crimes legislation, the battle for same-sex marriage rights, equal service in the military, and greater visibility of gay celebrities and politicians. Paradoxically, however, many of these same stories questioned why these coming-out announcements were considered "news" in the first place, at times even diminishing their significance.

For example, in contrast to the words of Collins in the *Sports Illustrated* article that seemingly wished to make the announcement and get back to sport ("I'll be waiting for someone to make the first joke, we'll all laugh, and then we'll get out there and play"), Collins's coming out was framed as much more than just a sports story. CNN emphatically offered: "This is a big deal. We are all reporting it like major news, not just sports news" (Cuomo, Bolduan, Pereira, Berman, & Valencia, 2014). The Collins story was "the sports story that is much bigger than the basketball court, bigger than the league" (Bash, Toobin, Tapper, Amanpour, & Cooper, 2013). Several prominent commentators compared Collins's coming out to other historic moments in sport leading to social change and inclusion (Brennan, 2013), arguing, "the sense of history was inevitable" (Keh, 2014). Descriptors such as "groundbreaker," "trailblazer," and "historic" were frequently used to describe Collins, "another example of the progress that has been made" (Cooper, 2013). "Today, Jason Collins tore open the last remaining closet in America," claimed Brian Ellner of Athlete

Ally, a nonprofit focused on homophobia in sports (Welsh, 2014, para. 2). CNN's Anderson Cooper (2013) invited American audiences to "talk about the history-making night for pro sports in American society."

Media narratives also symbolically connected Collins's decision to other symbols within the larger LGBTQ movement. For example, news narratives emphasized that Collins "wore No. 98 for the Celtics and the Wizards, in honor of Matthew Shepard, the gay University of Wyoming student who was killed in 1998" (Beck & Branch, 2013, para. 22). Collins's announcement was also contextualized within "the 1969 Stonewall riots that launched the gay rights movement" (Wagner & Sharpton, 2013). *ABC News* headlined Collins's coming out as part of its media-dubbed "Historic Year for the Gay Right's Movement," situating the world of sport unproblematically within the context of the broader equality momentum:

> 2013 was a game changer. From the church and its new more accepting pope and state after state after state legalizing gay marriage, 2013 broke the rainbow ceiling. The biggest year for gay and lesbian rights since the Stonewall Riots 30 years ago . . . capped by the Supreme Court's historic sanctioning of gay marriage . . . to the most competitive court in the land [basketball]. (Stephanopoulos & Roberts, 2013)

Similarly, Michael Sam's coming out was largely a hurdle he wanted to clear to pursue his NFL dream ("I wish you guys would just say, 'Michael Sam, how's the football going? How's training going?"), media framed it as a historic milestone, "an uncharted area of the sports landscape" (Branch, 2014, para. 5). "One of the biggest stars of the NFL perhaps about to make history," predicted Willie Geist of *NBC News*; as *The Today Show* proclaimed, "The twenty-four-year-old is expected to be taken in an early round of the NFL draft come April" (Geist & Morales, 2014). Significantly, however, this celebratory tone was mostly contained to predraft coverage, as we explore in the following section. The impact of his announcement was expected to have far-reaching influence on the league: "Many believe that by publicly coming out he changed the culture of the NFL" (Daly & Melvin, 2014). ABC's George Stephanopoulos predicted " . . . the all-American football star . . . is certain to shape his career and shake up the league" (Stephanopoulos & Roberts, 2014).

Paradoxically, reporters simultaneously issued the equivalent of a journalistic shoulder shrug that ran counter to the historic, a tone of "much ado about nothing," questioning why these stories are—or should be—newsworthy in the first place. As Steve Kornacki (2014) told MSNBC audiences, "This shouldn't be an issue. This shouldn't be something that anybody has to talk about." The WNBA's Elena Delle Donne told *USA Today*, "That's where I hope our society moves to, where it's not a story. It's normal" (Amick, 2016, para. 5). Sports radio personality Mike Greenberg said, "Hopefully, and quickly, we will move to this is no big deal" (Sambolin et al., 2013), while Anderson Cooper (2013), who had ironically cited Collins's coming out as a historic milestone, later asked, "Why are we even talking about this? This is nobody's business."

Similarly, media reports emphasized Michael Sam's announcement as a non-issue: "It's nothing," Sam told reporters, "It's not a big deal to me" (Harris, 2014). Burwell (2014) noted that "Sam's 'secret' was not really a secret" at all. Author and columnist Dan Savage (2013) stressed that stories of athletes coming out is " ... another big nonissue, because the culture is ready for this."

Despite these journalistic claims that a gay athlete coming out really *shouldn't* be a story, this analysis has shown the ways these same media outlets consistently headlined these as among the biggest sports/news stories of the year. As this next section highlights, alongside congratulatory accolades of pioneering athletes, stories simultaneously questioned whether the "big four" American team sport leagues were really "ready" for a gay player.

Celebratory Proclamations Tempered by Homophobic Fears

The paradox of both celebratory and cautious assertions was subtle and tenuous, often relying on coded homophobic language of distraction and complication. In the case of Michael Sam, celebratory accolades were mitigated by foreboding statements (typically from "anonymous sources") about the potential "distraction" in the locker room and doubts about the readiness of the NFL to truly support an out athlete.

In the weeks leading up to the 2014 draft, Josh Elliot (2014) of *ABC News* tempered his enthusiasm over Sam's announcement by saying, "I do hope the world that he is entering is ready for him and those 32 front offices as well" (Stephanopoulos & Roberts, 2014). NBC's Kate Snow (2014) reported on overt expressions of homophobia as the draft approached, indicating that there were "online critics, some using anti-gay slurs, suggesting the NFL will be damaged." Tony Dungy, former NFL coach of the Indianapolis Colts and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, said he personally would not have drafted the first openly gay football player Michael Sam because he "wouldn't want to deal with all of it. It's not going to be totally smooth ... things will happen" (Boren, 2014, para. 2).

Under the protection of anonymity, news stories began to cite NFL executives and coaches predicting Sam's coming out would drop him lower in the draft. Citing "anonymous sources" NBC's Geist & Morales (2014) reported that "he could be a distraction in the locker room with this new issue." "'I don't think football is ready' for an openly gay player 'just yet,' one of the unidentified executives told *Sports Illustrated*" (Mizzou's Sam tackles intolerance, 2014, para. 3). Originally projected as a third-round pick, "some sources" (unidentified) said he "dropped 70 slots in one projection only a few hours after coming out as gay" (Babb, 2014, para. 2). Phil Harrell (2014) reported on National

Public Radio, "*Sports Illustrated* found eight unnamed coaches and executives who said that Michael Sam's coming out will negatively affect his draft stock." Likewise, *Sports Illustrated* writer Jon Wertheim (2014) noted that while Sam was initially considered a third or fourth round pick, "today executives will say anonymously that his stock has dropped. He may not even be drafted" (Snow, 2014).

Furthermore, Sam's celebratory kiss with his boyfriend after he was drafted by the Rams in the 7th round was met with controversy and backlash through highly publicized tweets. Miami Dolphins defensive back Don Jones tweeted "OMG," and "horrible," although he was later fined by the NFL for his comments (*All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, May 12, 2014). "I'm sorry but that Michael Sam is no bueno for doing that on national tv," former Super Bowl champion Derrick Ward tweeted. As David Wright reported for *ABC News*, "some of Michael Sam's potential teammates did not exactly welcome the idea of an openly gay player sharing the locker room" (Wright & Stephanopoulos, 2014), transforming Sam from "a highly touted NFL prospect to a potential locker room pariah" (Ruth, 2014, para. 2). While there were positive responses on social media as well, these high-profile examples reified the ways in which the NFL remains a "bastion of male supremacy" (Muir, 2014).

Such "locker room problems" were not as pronounced in the reporting of Jason Collins—perhaps because Collins was not actively dating anyone at the time of his coming out, did not display affection toward a same-sex partner, was coming out in a different league, and was near the end of his career—all factors that affected the tone of the coverage. Still, Collins himself knew the "locker room problem" would be a shadow cast on his story, one he would need to address directly in his original essay. For example, he assured his teammates and by extension media audiences that his showering habits, which had never been a problem before, won't be one now (Collins, 2013). Regardless, sports commentators were concerned about the NBA locker room, "because we have heard players already tweet about this disagreement with this [Collins's coming out]. . . . That's why I think the player is going to feel some trepidation" (Sambolin et al., 2013). Citing a few widely publicized examples that permeated coverage, Miami Dolphin's Mike Wallace's tone-deaf tweet read, "All these beautiful women in the world and guys want to mess with other guys. SMH [shaking my head]" (Miller, 2013, para. 11), while ESPN's Chris Broussard's equated being gay to "walking in open rebellion to God" (Greenberg, 2013, para. 2).

Still other stories expressed growing concerns not about teammates' responses but about those in the front offices of the NBA giving Collins a fair shot. As Steven Kornacki (2014) noted: "This year ... Collins is not playing anymore. Collins is not retired. It's simply that no one has offered him a contract." If homophobia in sports is really a nonissue, he asks, "Why is it that Jason Collins can't find a job in the NBA and how is it that football players still make allegations that an NFL locker room is still an acceptable place to slur someone's sexuality?" (Kornacki, 2014).

Highlighting a possible chilling effect, sportscasters noted how, despite these prominent stories, there were no active players out in any major American men's league. Applying a highly conservative Gallup poll estimate of 3.5% of the Americans who self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, that would translate to "60 gay NFL players, 42 Major League Baseball, 34 in the NHL, 16 in the NBA and 26 in Major League Soccer" (Kornacki, 2014). Where was the influx of openly gay athletes, commentators asked, if the leagues are truly welcoming in this new era of inclusivity? Or, as Affleck (2017) put it, "what happened to the openly gay athlete?" (para. 1).

"Others Like Me": The Legacy of Coming-Out Stories in the Mainstream

This project has sought to explore the discourses surrounding one of the starkest juxtaposition in athletics: No active male athlete is out in the NFL, NBA, MLB, or NHL, yet the number of athletes coming out at virtually every other conceivable level is at an all-time high (*Outsports*, 2017). Journalistic discourses of the first professional athletes coming out of the sports closet and into the mainstream—thus becoming "floodlit" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 5)—have the potential to threaten the long-standing hierarchies of heterosexuality and orthodox masculinity. However, this analysis has shown the ways in which stories may have served instead as cautionary tales, offering us the opportunity to explore the paradoxical media narratives driving public understandings of homosexuality in sport.

In an era in which the sports closet is positioned as the last remaining stronghold of orthodox masculinity and heterosexuality, the terrain for the gay athlete remains contradictory at best. As this project has recounted, the *discourses* surrounding homosexuality and sport are even more complex: Optimistic claims hailing "the gay athlete as sportsman of the year" (Zeigler, 2014) are juxtaposed with more cynical predictions that it will be another 20 years before men's sports see gay players equal to that of lesbian representation in women's sports (Strudwick, 2017).

Underlying these contradictions is the presumed agency, or lack thereof, of the closeted/out athlete. Whether more athletes coming out (in/through media) can effect broader changes speaks to the challenges of advancing equality *through* enhanced visibility. After all, much of the contemporary gay rights movement's gains have relied on strategies of increased visibility to gain access to state-sanctioned institutions that have historically outcast and criminalized LGBTQ citizens (Brody, 2016; King, 2009).

Constructions of the closet and coming out are culturally specific and, like visibility itself, are always a part of power relations tied to race, gender, class, and other political-economic forces. As Sedgwick (1990) argues, the closet as a social construct provides a convenient shortcut to understanding homosexuality as "a coherent definitional field rather than a space of overlapping, contradictory, and conflictual definitional forces" (p. 45). Brody's (2016) work, for example, while celebrating enhanced visibility for gay and lesbian athletes, critiques coming out as a "panacea to change" in that it relies on "neoliberal ideologies of personal responsibility, individual action, and market transactions" (p. 10), placing the responsibility for social progress on the shoulders of athletes who ultimately serve as commodities in the sports/media marketplace. While many athletes and activists passionately argue that the way to change the culture is by telling their stories, we must give pause when the "media have become the main resource for authorizing stories of sports culture and gay identity" (Brody, 2016, p. 8). The role of media and the visibility it affords emerges as a double-edged sword: providing a platform for potential change while also actively reinforcing power relations undergirding the coming-out narrative.

The contradictory framing devices employed by mainstream media outlets inevitably derive from the struggle to negotiate, accommodate, and absorb the gay male athlete within an institution that has historically served as the epicenter of heterosexual masculinity. The rigidity of the sex-gender system entrenched in the sports media complex serves a common purpose: It has operated to eradicate not only gay men from sport but also women as a way of ensuring the institution remains a primary vehicle for Western cultures to indoctrinate boys into heteromasculinity (Anderson, 2014; Griffin, 1998; Pronger, 1990).

With these announcements and the pervasive media coverage that ensued, the "invisibility" of the gay athlete was no longer possible. Rather, as this analysis has argued, the paradoxical framing surrounding gay athlete stories reveals the complexities of relying on outness (as an easily recognizable identity category) and visibility (predicated on an athlete's presumed agency) as portals to inclusiveness, even as long-standing forces of orthodox masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality remain firmly intact. Collins's and Sam's stories were heralded as "firsts" in world of sport while also clearing the "final" hurdle in achieving LGBTQ equality. These paradoxes become endemic as media narratives were simultaneously celebratory yet cynical; the announcements both historic and passé; and in adding the modifier "gay," audiences were reassured these athletes were no less tough, aggressive, or traditionally masculine than their counterparts. Thus, journalistic discourses and the sources they cited disavowed that sexuality does—or should—make a difference in the locker room or on the field, all the while obfuscating the ways in which it clearly does.

Reporters and pundits problematically engaged in self-congratulatory narratives showcasing progressiveness and tolerance (Hardin et al., 2009; Schwartz, 2011), while systemic homophobia in sport remains prevalent. In the case of

Michael Sam, for example, his NFL hopes sealed with a celebratory kiss fueled overt homophobic fears cautioning that gay athletes were "not welcome" in the locker room. While media discourses appeared to celebrate the *idea* of having an out player in the league, they were reluctant to acknowledge the lived material *realities* of how that may actually manifest. Indeed, the vitriol over Sam's kiss implies that athletes can be out only if their sexuality remains invisible, contained to the private sphere, cast away from the media spotlight.

The cases of Collins and Sam are, of course, inextricably linked—both are African-American players considered successful in their relative leagues, both conform to the norms of hegemonic masculinity, both stories emerged across similar news cycles. While examining discourses of race and religiosity was beyond the focus of this essay, it is important to note how striking the *erasure* of race was, most interesting because of its exclusion from the narrative. Indeed, as John Amaechi, retired NBA player who came out in 2007, noted, the biggest unreported story in sport may be the most significant:

> If you look at the people who've come out, we are brown. We are the ones who lead. I think it's amazing that the media ... has not yet noticed the color of the people who've been the vanguards in this. (Amaechi, personal communication, July 2, 2016)

Racial discourses may have existed beneath the surface of the story but were rarely discussed. Such blunting of racial dynamics are part of a history of sport in which "there's an entire history of blacks stepping outside of the social order—or protesting it—only to be told they can't" (Williams, 2016, para. 3). Indeed, the elimination of race in the cases of Collins and Sam stands in stark contrast to the contemporary cultural controversies surrounding Colin Kaepernick-inspired anthem protests, in which race has been highlighted to create a "reflexive visceral reaction" toward Black athletes who move outside their socially ascribed boundaries (Williams, 2016, para. 30).

One of the most important contrasts across these coming-out narratives is the overarching context of the media narratives. While Collins acknowledged he was nearing the end of his career, his story involved less perceived risk, while Sam's story evolved under much greater scrutiny given his hoped-for career into professional football was just beginning. As such, coded homophobic concerns over locker room "problems" and showering habits were more pronounced in Sam's coverage, citing potential team friction and distraction. In doing so, journalists and media pundits perpetuated fears surrounding predatory homosexuality, largely relying on anonymous sources and professional norms of detachment, in ways similar to how sports columnists in writing about the NBA's John Amaechi's coming out "rhetorically distanced themselves from the explicitly homophobic" comments of fellow players (Hardin et al., 2009, p. 191).

This project was limited to mainstream news coverage of only two—but arguably two of the most prominent—coming-out stories in the history of men's professional team sports in the United States whose stories were intertwined in complex and compelling ways. Our analysis was limited to 130 stories across prominent television, print, and online U.S. news and sports outlets and, thus, cannot be considered definitive or all-encompassing of the ways these narratives were shaped and communicated. Moreover, our cross-platform analysis (print, television, radio, and online; more traditional "objective" news treatment, sports analysis, and "talking head" commentary) provided a wide lens for media analysis and also creates potential conflicts in the nature of the goals of each platform, which can at times contrast one another (see Fowler & Ridout, 2009). Future work could more closely examine the narratives produced by journalists/reporters in contrast to pundits/columnists who practice different journalistic routines and writing styles to interrogate if, how, and why framing operates differently in these varied contexts. Future research should also explore the issues of how, why, and when such coming-out narratives in men's sports are treated compared with, for example, the aforementioned WNBA's Brittney Griner, whose coming out in the context of women's sports was met with comparatively little media interest (Borden, 2013). Because coverage of lesbian athletes is colored by a different set of inequalities and prejudices, future research should work to untangle the cultural presumptions about female athletes alongside the dimmer media spotlight on women's sport as a whole. Nevertheless, these narratives of the first openly gay male players in American team sport highlight the ways in which the institutions of sport and commercial news media reproduce already-entrenched hierarchies centered wholly on heterosexuality and hypermasculinity, revealing the limitations of coming-out narratives in advancing the position of LGBTQ athletes.

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Containing the Third-Party Voter in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election

Ryan Neville-Shepard

Abstract

Third-party candidates in the United States routinely see a decline in support in the final weeks of presidential campaigns. While political scientists attribute this partially to Duverger's Law, many communication scholars have tied this collapse to media coverage that frames third-party candidates as fringe outsiders, longshots, and spoilers. This study extends these explanations of third-party failure by describing the rhetorical containment of third-party voters. Based on a case study of the 2016 presidential election and public debate about supporters of Gary Johnson and Jill Stein, the essay suggests such voters face a form of marginalization that portrays them as intruders in a two-party race, as immature and uninformed, and responsible for eventual victors, while presenting them a false choice of *winning* by sacrificing their cause.

Keywords

third parties, containment rhetoric, Duverger's Law, voters, 2016 presidential election

Third-party hopefuls were predicted to have unusual success in the 2016 presidential election. Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump were historically unpopular, as satisfaction with the major parties' nominees hit its "lowest point in 20 years" (Shalby, 2016, para. 3). Voters seeking an alternative to the

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mainstream parties were flocking to the Libertarian Party and Green Party, as Gary Johnson at one point was averaging over 10% in national polls and Jill Stein was pulling in around 4.5% (Malone, 2016). Moreover, Johnson was favored over Trump by the nation's largest newspapers, picking up endorsements from the *Chicago Tribune*, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, *The Detroit News*, *New Hampshire Union Leader*, and many others (Borchers, 2016). Although they were never predicted to win, such outsiders were projected to possibly tip outcomes in several states and potentially influence the results of the election (Huffaker, 2016).

Despite these predictions, third parties in 2016 "went out with a whimper," altogether receiving around 4% of the popular vote (Berenson, 2016, para. 1). There were obvious reasons for the collapse of the Stein and Johnson campaigns, chief among them that the candidates stumbled as they received more media coverage. Berenson (2016, para. 15), for instance, stated that "support for them began to crater" when Johnson appeared unfamiliar with the Syrian city of Aleppo during an interview on MSNBC, and after another interview when he was unable to name a world leader he respected. Making matters worse, Johnson's running-mate said he was more interested in keeping Trump from winning the presidency than guaranteeing a win for his own ticket, adding that nobody in the campaign was more qualified to be president than Hillary Clinton (Levenson & Phillips, 2016). Johnson, however, suggested the cause of his decline was clear, noting, "People will take the third party options more seriously until the general election comes closer, and then they'll be swayed by less evil-ism" (Berenson, 2016, para. 24). As Johnson described it, he was doomed to lose as soon as he announced his candidacy.

Political scholars writing about third-party campaigns agree with Johnson's perception that the sudden drop in third-party support toward the end of the campaign is inevitable. Political communication scholars have suggested that third-party candidates exhibit a rhetorical style that is too extreme to sustain support (Harold, 2001; Neville-Shepard, 2017; Tonn & Endress, 2001; Zaller & Hunt, 1995). Additionally, political scientists have described various cultural and structural barriers to third-party success, ranging from political socialization that creates an allegiance to the two major parties, to restrictive ballot access, single-member plurality districts, limited media coverage, and exclusion from debates (Bibby & Maisel, 2003; Gillespie, 2012; Kirch, 2015; Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1996). While all of these factors play a role in third-party shortcomings, the 2016 election also saw a distinct effort to dissuade voters from casting ballots for the outsiders, suggesting yet another reason why third parties are bound for defeat.

The framing of third-party supporters in the 2016 campaign became more evident as the race got tighter, especially as news outlets began focusing on the influence of young voters. Weigel (2016) wrote in September that "a wide range of polls have found Clinton losing votes" (para. 8) to Johnson and Stein, especially in battleground states like Ohio. Illustrating the trend, a Quinnipiac poll in September showed "millennial likely voters supported Clinton over Trump by a 55-34 margin. But when Stein and Johnson were included in the survey, Clinton received just 31% support" (Kohn, 2016, para. 4). The fear that Clinton was losing younger voters led to "deep-pocketed" backers "[blanketing] 1.1 million households in battleground states with mailers warning millennials that a vote for a third-party candidate only helps Donald Trump" (Seitz-Wald, 2016, para. 1). Such pressure came not only from mailers, though. This study focuses on voters' public engagement with other voters via online news sites, applying social pressure to reframe third-party support.

Through an analysis of public arguments about third-party supporters in the 2016 election, this essay suggests that a possible reason candidates like Stein and Johnson lose support at the end of the race is the rhetorical containment of third-party voters. While previous scholars have described tactics employed by the major parties and media elite to negatively frame third parties (Harold, 2001; Kirch, 2013, 2016; Rosenstone et al., 1996), this study expands that scholarship by focusing on how such attacks target third-party supporters themselves. The study develops in several sections. First, I explain the concept of Duverger's Law to elucidate conventional understanding of third-party failure. Additionally, after describing what other scholars have called the rhetoric of containment (Anderson, 1999; Malkowski, 2014; Neville-Shepard, 2018; Smith, 2010), I propose a form of lateral containment where agents appearing to be of the same power status or ideological disposition attempt to contain one another. After describing how the containment of third-party voters functions to reframe the nature of casting one's ballot for an outsider, the essay explains how third-party supporters were contained in the 2016 presidential election. Finally, I conclude by discussing the implications of this study.

Third-Party Failure and the Rhetoric of Containment

Even the strongest third-party campaigns experience declining support in the final months before election day. Often their shortcomings stem from their own missteps. For instance, most third-party candidates struggle to raise enough money to be competitive, they appeal to small constituencies, and they often lose supporters by seeking ideological purity and rejecting compromise (Dwyre & Kolodny, 1997; Harold, 2001; Neville-Shepard, 2017). Moreover, many third parties nominate candidates who lack qualifications for the offices they seek (Rosenstone et al., 1996), and their limited focus on issues means their positions are easily coopted by the major parties (Hirano & Snyder, 2007; Lowi, 1999). However, third-party shortcomings can also be explained by a psychological challenge among voters, not only due to the structure of American democracy but the culture it develops in enforcing loyalty to the two major parties. In tying this problem to the containment of third-party voters, this section first explores

Duverger's Law. The section then turns to review what scholars have described as systemic efforts to delegitimize third-party candidates. Finally, the section expands understanding of these depictions of third-party candidates by arguing that efforts may target voters more specifically, demonstrating what I call a form of lateral containment.

Duverger's Law and Third-Party Failures

Political scientists have summarized the tendency for voters to support one of the two major parties as Duverger's Law. Because the United States has a plurality-vote-win system, which means third-party candidates could win a high percentage of the popular vote yet no electoral votes, Duverger's Law says "some voters who prefer a candidate or party that they think cannot win will cast a vote for their first choice among the major-party candidates" (Abramson, Aldrich, Paolino, & Rohde, 1995, p. 353). Often called "strategic voting," the phenomenon is described as a "mechanical effect of the U.S. electoral system" (p. 353), as if it naturally flows from the design of the plurality-vote-win system. The evidence of the phenomenon suggests that it is remarkably consistent. As Bibby and Maisel (2003) noted, "Only 57 percent of pro-Anderson voters [in 1980] actually cast their ballots for him" (p. 74). Moreover, 16% of George Wallace supporters jumped ship to the Democrats and Republicans in 1968, 21% of Perot voters eventually supported a major party candidate in 1992, and "more than 90 percent of those who rated either Buchanan or Nader as their preferred candidate [in 2000] voted for someone else" (p. 75).

The explanation that third-party supporters abandon their preferred candidates as a "mechanical effect" of the electoral system unfortunately downplays the significance of the public persuasion that shifts voters' allegiances. Third-party supporters are fickle, Collet (1996) argued, as their "antipathy toward the 'system' itself'" and their "desire for more choices at the polls" is usually outweighed by their "serious reservations about [third-party candidates'] abilities to govern" (p. 436). The concerns about governing grow stronger as the campaign progresses, due to public deliberation about the third-party candidate's strengths and weaknesses. Tonn and Endress (2001), for instance, argued that attention to Ross Perot's gaffes and odd decisions "pressed the citizenry into more honest reflection and introspection about the challenges and obligations of governing and being governed" (p. 282). By election day, they concluded, "most Americans ultimately questioned [Perot's] fundamental judgment," and public dialogue about his campaign caused "deeper appreciation of necessary political leadership qualities and processes starkly at odds with the Texan and his anomalous run" (p. 294). Thus, the voters' eventual rejection of third-party tickets is not necessarily mechanical as much as it is a result of arguments about these candidates' weaknesses.

The Cultural Delegitimizing of Third Parties

Many scholars have described a public effort, driven by the mass media and major parties, to delegitimize third-party challengers. Zaller and Hunt (1995) found that second thoughts about the Perot campaign in 1992 were partially driven by "the barrage of media-initiated criticism of Perot's character in the spring" (p. 120). Rosenstone, et al. (1996) argued that the effort to delegitimize third-party hopefuls is propelled by accusations that they are "'fringe' candidates who stand outside the bounds of acceptable political discourse" (p. 44). Ultimately, Harold (2001) suggested, the last-minute campaigns against third-party candidates seek to build a "corruption of signification" (p. 595), framing one's ballot not as an expression of free will, but as potentially undemocratic when cast for a fringe outsider. Altogether, Kirch (2016) wrote about the news media's tactics of delegitimizing third parties, they ironically work to "essentially undermine the democratic process by systemically ignoring or ridiculing alternative viewpoints that run counter to cultural and political assumptions that are accepted as natural to American democracy" (p. 166).

Previous scholars have noted many ways that third-party candidates get delegitimized by the news media and mainstream campaigns. Most often, third parties are written off as a wasted ballot. Abramson et al. (1995) wrote that Socialist Norman Thomas was marginalized by supporters of Franklin D. Roosevelt who labeled his campaign a wasted ballot. Supporters of George Wallace in 1968 were also scared off as Nixon's surrogates warned "a vote for Wallace is a vote for Humphrey" (p. 354). In this framing, Kirch (2013) argued, third-party candidates are either "portrayed as inconsequential players who have little chance of winning," or they have the prospect of tipping "the election in favor of a major-party candidate, leaving citizens with a sense that they will be wasting their vote if they cast a ballot for anyone other than a Democrat or Republican" (p. 40). Unsurprisingly, third-party candidates frequently get portrayed as "long shots," "underdogs," and "spoilers" (p. 47), treated as an "abnormal phenomenon that [disrupts] rather than legitimately [challenges] 'the system'" (p. 50). Similarly, Harold (2001) found that the "last-minute offensive against Nader" cast him as a "contaminating element in an otherwise well-ordered political system" (p. 582). These attacks on third parties are "stock arguments" (p. 595), Harold summarized, meaning they are frequently employed against such outsiders. And as Harold noted, together the attacks are significant in the way they do not challenge the positions of third-party candidates as much as their "very right to *participate in the electoral process*" (p. 594).

The Containment of Third-Party Voters

Previous studies have illuminated the ways third-party candidates are delegitimized by the major parties and news media, but little has been said about how those attacks are turned on the voters themselves. Kirch (2013) has gotten closest to this observation, noting that the negative framing of third-party candidates "suggests that citizens and voters who are looking for fresh perspectives and alternatives to established political organizations are marginalized and alienated from the political process" (p. 51). By performing as "one more cog in the nation's political power structure," Kirch argued that the national media creates "political storylines that automatically push aside viewpoints that attempt to challenge fundamental assumptions about the American political order" (p. 51). What Kirch suggested is that negative framing of third parties has a way of at least implicitly marginalizing their supporters. This essay extends Kirch's argument, suggesting that third-party voters are *explicitly* marginalized in this effort to corrupt the signification of a third-party ballot, especially through the rhetoric of containment.

Containment rhetoric, according to Poirot (2009), is utilized by hegemonic groups in an "attempt to tame the threat of alternative views through discipline and confinement, clearly articulating the other as outside of the dominant values and structures" (p. 266) of any given culture. While the term originates from the Cold War era (Nadel, 1995), if not earlier (Anderson, 1999), De Hart (1999) argued that it essentially describes the "systematic efforts to maintain traditional gender, sexual, and racial boundaries, ideologically as well as behaviorally, through cultural imperatives and social policy" (p. 352). When applied to politics, the purpose of containment rhetoric is to shut down deliberation. As Singer (2011) argued, the containment narrative "attaches simplified meanings to controversy, creates an appearance of consensus, closes off public involvement in [political decision making] and preserves the inertia of system-wide distortions" (p. 98). In other words, the purpose of containment rhetoric is to undermine critical thinking and force conformity by reinforcing the values of a dominant group, consequently preventing "consideration of other points of view that might enrich and complicate those values" (Smith, 2010, p. 143).

While scholars have described tropes of containment rhetoric in a variety of ways (Malkowski, 2014; Murphy, 1992; Smith, 2010), Neville-Shepard (2018) recently united these models to provide a four-part framework for rhetorical containment. Containment starts with "a dominant group identifying intruders" (p. 5), rhetorically marking someone as outsiders and turning the public gaze on them to divide them from the community. Second, the dominant group engages in an effort to define "the outsider by values and goals in violation of the norms of the dominant community" (p. 5), so as to create a sense of dissociation, or what Malkowski (2014) called a "process of (dis)identification" that allows the audience to join the dominant group as being in "an authoritative role over a subgroup" (p. 214). Third, the dominant group creates a sense of victimage by "portraying outsiders not only as violating norms of the dominant community, but also as posing a threat" to the status quo (Neville-Shepard, 2018, p. 5).

Finally, containment is completed through "appeals for normalization [suggesting] that the best way to act is by restoring the natural order" (p. 5).

By analyzing public debate about the third-party vote in 2016, especially as it surfaced on online news sites, this study expands previous scholarship that describes the rhetoric of containment as driven by powerful elites. Of course, many of the websites where this discourse was featured are owned by elites, but the authors frequently adopted the role of a fellow citizen, a liberal reaching out to other liberals, and a former third-party voter. Previous studies describe containment as being hierarchical since it is a tool used frequently to preserve hegemony. For instance, Neville-Shepard (2018) called containment rhetoric a response "designed to purify and defend elite institutions" (p. 3). Likewise, Duerringer (2013) wrote of containment rhetoric as a way that "hegemonic groups" maintain "relations of domination and oppression" (p. 321). De Hart (1999) clarified that such "systemic efforts to maintain traditional" power relations were orchestrated by elite policy makers, public officials, and professionals who essentially represent a class of "architects of domestic containment" (pp. 352–353). Missing from this approach, however, is a recognition of how groups appearing to be of the same power status, or those sharing an essential identity like the same ideological disposition, attempt to contain one another; in other words, overlooked is how such rhetoric may not always be hierarchical, but exhibiting a form of lateral movement instead.

In the clearest effort to recognize this dynamic of lateral containment, Poirot (2009) wrote that social movement scholars have been overly focused on how containment functions as a "hegemonic [mode] of self-preservation," while ignoring how "social movements themselves engage in disciplinary rhetorics that aim to confine or tame the threat of the outside other" (p. 267), including radicals in the movement, competing social movements, or even forces of the status quo. The key for Poirot is not that the forces of lateral containment are necessarily of the same power status, but that they participate in a mode of containment "that turns back on itself, not toward the other, to mitigate a supposed threat" (p. 264). Even "social agitators," she argued, "have stakes in containing the threat of other rhetorics in order to preserve the rhetorical force and terms of the movement's own critique" (p. 267). Focused on the rhetorics of radical/lesbian feminism in the 1970s, Poirot explained that such "identity political movements" may unwittingly "engage in disciplinary processes and limit change to what possibilities are known in advance," meaning that "political critiques with identity commitments seem to be confined at the outset as they are moored to anything but the unforeseen" (p. 268). Consequently, she writes, such "locales normalize and strengthen a supposed border between the movement's claims to radical authenticity and the status quo" (p. 268). Poirot hesitated to apply the phenomenon to other social movements, declaring it as falling "outside the purview" (p. 267) of her study. As such, this study picks up where Poirot left off. By analyzing how progressive voters addressed other progressive voters in 2016 in a way that contained dissenting voices, this study further elaborates on the nature of lateral containment, suggesting that two-party hegemony is enforced not only by elites such as party leaders and executives of major media outlets (Neville-Shepard, 2018), but by lower level party members, activists, newspaper columnists, and rank-and-file party members who enforce a fixed identity onto those who generally share their political ideology and objectives.

The Containment of the Third-Party Voter in the 2016 Presidential Election

The Democratic National Convention in 2016 revealed that the party suffered deep divisions. The primary campaign shed light on the unfairness of super-delegates to party outsiders, possible corruption in a national party that seemed enthusiastic to give the nomination to Hillary Clinton, and Clinton's struggle to appeal to young people, progressives, and White working-class voters. As many backers of Bernie Sanders walked out of the convention, they told the news media that his loss would not stop the movement he represented. Sanders supporter Kshama Sawant, for example, told *Time*, "We are people who have for years been angry at not being offered a real choice. We don't believe that the Dems are any answer for the Republicans" (Rhodan, 2016, para. 6). The scene became more dramatic as Green Party candidate Jill Stein arrived at the convention, promising "Bernie or Bust" supporters she would carry the torch that he left behind with his endorsement of Clinton (Stein, 2016a). As the race between Trump and Clinton grew tighter, these divisions and the threat of Democrats bolting the party for Stein or Johnson led many Americans to address these specific voters, forming a genre of public statements attempting to persuade third-party supporters to commit to a major-party candidate instead.

In this section, I perform a close textual reading of these regular and guest op-ed or opinion columns to understand how many Democratic voters constructed and contained the third-party voter in the 2016 election. My analysis includes 43 representative examples of these statements printed in a variety of popular traditional and online news publications. Altogether, the statements came from 30 outlets, including *The Atlantic*, *Chicago Sun Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, CNN, *Cosmopolitan*, *The Daily Beast*, *Elle*, *Esquire*, *Huffington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Times*, *Paste*, *Rolling Stone*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, and many others. While the search for such columns spanned dates ranging from when Gary Johnson announced his campaign around January 1, 2016, to the day of the election on November 8, 2016, the majority of the articles were printed after July, when it became clear that third-party candidates might play a significant role in the race. My reading of these statements traces the patterns of lateral containment of third-party voters, essentially following McGee's (1990) approach of constructing a text based on "dense truncated fragments" which together produce a more complete picture of the discourse. As McGee argued, public rhetoric is made up of various fragments across electronic media, meaning "nothing in our new environment is complete enough, finished enough, to analyze" (pp. 286–287). Consequently, critics in a fractured culture are left to "provide readers/audiences with dense, truncated fragments which cue *them* to produce a finished discourse in their minds" (p. 288). Adopting this approach, I suggest the discourse I am describing follows the general characteristics of rhetorical containment described by Neville-Shepard (2018), but mitigates political threats by turning within the progressive movement rather than toward the other, specifically by identifying third-party supporters as intruders infiltrating the political process, creating dissociation by marking such voters as young and naïve, portraying these supporters as a threat to democracy, and framing real "choice" in the election as supporting the two-party system.

Identifying the Intruder: The Third-Party Voter as Infiltrator

For third-party voters to be contained, they first were marked as different from other voters, ultimately depicted as outsiders even among the progressive movement. Employing an extreme form of causal argument, those seeking to call out third-party supporters described them as the decisive vote in America's presidential election. Such voters, like the candidates they represented, posed a risk of spoiling the system, meaning that they were outsiders with too much clout, and by their very nature represented what Harold (2001) called "a contaminating element in an otherwise well-ordered political system" (p. 582). Drawing the gaze to these outsiders, journalist Jill Abramson (2016) warned, "Even with all the self-inflicted wounds, Trump still starts out with a likely base of 170 electoral votes" (para. 6). While getting 100 more votes was "extremely hard but not impossible," Abramson argued that Clinton needed "to win the swing states" and could not "have too many votes siphoned away by fringe candidates" (para. 6). Similarly, *Huffington Post* contributor Paul Richardson (2016) claimed to favor third parties, but stressed that the "latest polls have the race as a dead heat" and a "swing of even 1-2 percent of third party voters to Trump or Clinton may decide the election" (paras. 24 & 25). Further distinguishing third-party voters as intruders, Richard Hasen (2016), professor at the University of California-Irvine School of Law, clarified that the United States "could end up with Trump as president . . . because a relatively small group of voters prefers a third-party candidate" (para. 5). This framing reflects the stock argument casting third parties as possible spoilers, suggesting their mere presence in a race is problematic. By implying that third-party candidates could "siphon" votes, that they represent only a "small group," and that they are only

"1-2 percent" of the voting public marks them as a foreign "other," unnatural to the system and potentially taking what did not rightfully belong to them. This description marks the beginning of a rhetoric of containment by turning the gaze on those who for some reason do not belong.

Continuing this criticism of third-party supporters, articles addressing this small group of outsiders were quick to specify that they had a direct impact on the outcome of the race. In short, a vote for third parties was said to be just as bad as sitting out the election, thus eliminating any possibility of neutral ground. In this sense, being a third-party supporter meant being an intruder, because there was no way to avoid influencing the election. Political strategist Robert Creamer (2016) argued, "While it is easy to understand the reasons that some people might be inclined to choose a 'protest' vote – or decide to sit on their hands" in a particularly nasty election year, "the fact is that either of these actions will have one and only one result: putting Donald Trump into the White House" (para. 4). After the election, public discussion about the results focused on those who caused the race to be decided by razor thin margins. *Paste* contributor Charles Dunst (2016), for example, argued that Clinton's win in the popular vote suggested "Democratic policy isn't unpopular," but that "young leftists cost Hillary 80,000 votes, thereby losing her the election" (para. 2). While Dunst added that "Democrats need to find a way to bring them into the fold" (para. 3), the language depicts "young leftists" as outside the norm and responsible for the electoral outcome. Even though White working-class voters were equally likely to break from the party and cast ballots for Trump, it was third-party voters who were marked as liable for Clinton's loss.

Beyond analysis of the polls and election day data, critics drew heavily on historical anecdotes to paint third-party supporters as infiltrators who were responsible for flipping elections; in other words, they were voters with a history of possessing too much influence and tipping elections based on the whims of a recalcitrant minority. When accusing Stein voters of infiltrating the election and swinging the results, even Hillary Clinton argued that this was "just like [what] Ralph Nader did in Florida and New Hampshire in 2000" (Silverstein & Otis, 2017, para. 7). Many statements addressing third-party supporters reflected Clinton's criticism. Abramson (2016) remembered the "Green party zealots who went for Nader because they said there wasn't a dime of difference between Bush and Gore" (para. 2). Reflecting on the 2000 race, Creamer (2016) wrote, "History makes the results of third party 'protest' votes in modern American elections crystal clear" (para. 6). Others criticized anyone who voted for third parties in Florida in 2000. *Miami Herald* columnist Carl Hiaasen (2016) remarked that "More than 138,000 voters in the Sunshine State cast their ballots in that election for third-party candidates . . . [including] Harry Browne, John Hagelin, Monica Moorehead, Howard Phillips, David McReynolds and James Harris" (paras. 13 & 14). The math from that race, Hiaasen concluded, showed that "If only 538 of the 138,000 Floridians who threw away their votes on no-chance, third-party candidates had chosen Gore instead, he would have won the presidency" (para. 19).

Altogether, the causal arguments tying third-party ballots to some shocking electoral outcome narrowly select one reason for a major party candidate losing, while deflecting the reality that these candidates may have been able to adapt their message to appeal to a wider base of supporters. Yet this focus on third-party supporters marks them as intruders, agents to be tamed and contained. Thus, attempting to explain a tight race, liberal voters turned their gaze not on their own candidate or contextual factors that accounted for a surging Republican candidate, but on a group of fellow progressives marked as outsiders needing to correct their ways.

Dissociation and the "Millennial Voter"

After fixing the public gaze on someone marked as an intruder, containment rhetoric defines the outsider by values, goals, and behaviors that violate the norms of the larger community. Third-party voters in 2016 were panned for their youthful naiveté, as citizens and public figures took to the Internet to share their own stories about being third-party voters in the past. While their confessions were attempts to identify with young voters, they consequently marked such citizens as self-obsessed and short-sighted, immature, and irresponsible. Ultimately, what this discourse called the "millennial voter" used young voters for Stein and Johnson as a synecdoche for third-party voters in general.

Public remarks about third-party voters began the process of dissociation by portraying millennial voters as immature kids. The characterization commonly came in the form of personal anecdotes from "reformed third-party voters," people with stories of their own impact in past elections who had now grown up enough to realize the harms of their youthful indiscretion. Many of the anecdotes stretched far back in time. Law professor Henry Weinstein (2016) of the University of California, Irvine, remembered that he "cast [his] first vote for president" in 1968, and was an "angry Berkeley law student active in a variety of causes, including the civil rights movement" (para. 1). When he cast a ballot for comedian-activist Dick Gregory, Weinstein remembered, "My emotions prevailed" (para. 7). Other reformed voters explained they were third-party supporters when they were too young to know better. News columnist Neil Steinberg (2016) described how he "threw away my first presidential ballot by registering a protest vote," adding he "was 20 and worldly as a tadpole" (paras. 1 & 2). Columnist Donna Blankenship (2016) of *The Seattle Times* emphasized that she, too, was a third-party voter when she was younger, when "I was a 19-year-old college student" and voted for John Anderson in 1980, joining other voters "in a disaffected huff" (para. 1).

Warnings to millennial voters were most often issued through stories of deep shame and regret from former Nader voters in the 2000 election. These reformed voters, too, cast their third-party vote as immature kids. After claiming that "younger voters" would not remember the 2000 election and Bush's disastrous presidency "because they were kids," actor Wil Wheaton (2016) identified himself with third-party voters because "I was *exactly* that kid in 2000 when I voted for Ralph Nader, because George W. Bush was an a—hole and Al Gore was a terrible candidate" (para. 5). Similarly, *Elle* contributor Rachael Combe (2016) portrayed her vote as an act of foolish rebellion, stating that she was a liberal Democrat who had voted for Bill Clinton in 1996, but was "young" and "unhappy" and wanted "big changes" without "time-intensive, slogging-through-it, compromising, incrementalist crap" (para. 5). Confessing that she "was an idiot, but [not] delusional," Combe added, "It was like smoking: I knew it was dangerous, but it felt good" (para. 6). Likewise, psychology professor Darby Saxbe (2016) of the University of Southern California wrote that she voted for Nader in 2000, but that she was "young and idealistic and wanted political revolution" (para. 5), just like the "college students who are feeling the Bern" (para. 8). While attempting to identify with these voters, these statements further marked third-party voters as intruders in American democracy since they wielded tremendous clout but could not comprehend their self-absorbed, short-sighted, and impatient ways.

The confessions of former Nader voters came with a warning to all third-party voters, suggesting that impulsive decision-making would come with a life of regret. Filmmaker and *Quartz* contributor Michael Kang's (2016) confession treated his past support of Nader as something he had long been guarded about, writing, "It feels good to get that off my chest. For years, my voting record has been a shameful secret" (para. 2). Even though John Kaufman (2016), a writer from Wisconsin, was voting in a state where Nader did not make a difference, he stated, it was "a vote I now regret" (para. 8). Expressing that same remorse, Saxbe (2016) remarked about Bush's electoral victory, "I share the blame . . . I jumped on the Nader bandwagon and bought into a set of beliefs that seemed right to me at the time but were proven wrong over the eight years that followed" (para. 3). These citizens were not only identifying themselves with younger radical voters, they were coming clean to warn about the deep guilt one would feel for rejecting mainstream candidates. Ending his plea to younger voters, essayist John Stoehr (2016) concluded, "I hope young voters, especially idealistic millennials, won't repeat the mistake I and other idealists made in 2000" (para. 21).

Beyond portraying third-party voters as overly idealistic and immature, those addressing Stein and Johnson supporters continued to create a sense of disassociation by playing into harsher stereotypes of millennials, emphasizing the point that there was something unnatural about such a small group wielding so much influence. Telling young Americans to realize "your vote matters, so please take it seriously," economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman (2016, para. 3) spoke to third-party sympathizers as aloof teenagers who needed a lecture about their behavior. Complaining that it was "hard to believe that young voters who supported Bernie Sanders" would think it was a "good idea" to support Gary Johnson, Krugman added that "voters have no idea what [third-parties] stand for" (para. 7). The logic for supporting them was overly simplistic, he added, "their names sound nice: who among us is against liberty?" (para. 7). Other critics addressing third-party voters also attacked them for lacking seriousness. Jim Newell (2016) of *Slate* suggested that "the youngs" know nothing about Gary Johnson, but "that a good number of them sure seem to like him" (para. 1). Adding that young voters were immature, journalist Morgan Brinlee (2016) argued that Johnson being the "one presidential candidate you'd most like to chill with" (para. 16) is not enough of a reason to support him. Other critics went further, telling millennial voters they had not "done their homework" if they gave third parties their vote (Rampel, 2016, para. 26). The stereotype of millennials in these attacks is hard to miss: They do not work hard, and they think only about themselves and their feelings. Krugman (2016) further admonished young voters for acting out, stating, "don't vote for a minor-party candidate to make a statement. Nobody cares" (para. 12). Like parents reprimanding their kids, others said voting for Johnson or Stein was "naïve and dangerous" (Blankenship, 2016, para. 4), while others called it a "self-indulgent waste of time" (Gran, 2016, para. 1). To all the third-party supporters who seem to make "the loudest complaints" while not demonstrating the "time and energy and attention span" for developing a movement, *Paste* columnist Ben Gran (2016) advised, "Grown-ups have to make hard choices and accept less-than-thrilling results every day in life, and democracy is no different" (para. 7).

With millennial voters symbolically standing in for all third-party voters, these last-minute pleas constructed such citizens as emotional, intellectually immature, overly idealistic, self-indulgent, lazy, and loud. While such rhetoric was addressed to younger voters, using millennials as a synecdoche had a higher goal of portraying a vote for Stein or Johnson in simple language: Third-party voters belong at the kids table.

Victimage and the Dangers of the Third-Party Vote

As the rhetoric of containment turns the gaze to the intruder and builds disidentification with their cause, it continues by portraying intruders as a danger against the natural order. In terms of the containment of third-party voters, the dangers were linked to the election of the less desirable major party candidate. The argument emphasizes causal claims, implying that intruders who risk tipping an election are not only responsible for the "greater evil" being elected, but they are also liable for the evil they eventually accomplish. In essence, third-party voters are not only marked as immature and short-sighted outsiders, but an actual danger to society.

Examples of the dangers of the third-party vote stemmed largely from the lingering discomfort of Nader's possible impact on the 2000 election. Expressing her regret as a former third-party voter, Combe (2016) argued, "My failure to take the 2000 election seriously and make my vote and voice count had serious consequences that we and all of our children – and the children of mothers in Iraq, Afghanistan, and all over the world – will be feeling for decades or maybe even centuries" (para. 14). Focusing on Nader voters in Florida, political analyst Jill Filipovic (2016) remarked, "Think of how different things would have been if those voters supported Gore instead: No Iraq War, which almost surely means no ISIS; probably no great recession" (para. 13). A vote for a third-party was not simply a protest vote, according to this logic, but an endorsement of everything accomplished by the eventual victor. Matthew Levinger (2016), professor of International Affairs at George Washington University, listed Bush era decisions that could be attributed to Nader voters, including massive budget deficits, the fabricated evidence that led to the Iraq War, the 2001 Bush tax cuts that "put our federal government on a glide path to insolvency" (para. 7), and the corporate corruption of politics through the *Citizens United* decision. In corrupting the signification of a third-party vote, these warnings to Johnson and Stein supporters suggested that Bush was sent to the White House with only 537 votes, linking a third-party ballot to murder, the violation of civil liberties, and economic collapse.

Linking the disaster of the Bush administration to the threat of a Trump presidency, other critics warned that the world may never recover from a third-party vote that enabled the rise of Trump. Kang (2016) argued that progressives seemed too willing to "burn it all down," cautioning, "If Trump is elected president, we could very well see the dismantling of our country" (para. 12). Entertainment attorney Miles Mogulescu (2016) similarly warned, "With climate change advancing so rapidly, the planet may not survive four or eight years of inaction and sabotage by a President Trump" (para. 15). Just a few days before the election, Filipovic (2016) wrote, "Donald Trump threatens American democracy and the country as we know it." She continued, "Whatever you think about Hillary Clinton – that she's dishonest, that she's craven, that she's wrong on the issues, that she just bugs you – she's not going to subvert American democracy or jail reporters or bar immigrants based on their religion" (para. 15). Thus, the containment of third-party voters continued by tying a ballot to crimes against humanity, and arguing that the sins committed by Trump would be committed by his enablers, too. In this framing, third-party voters were not just immature outsiders, they posed real dangers to American democracy.

Moral Culpability and the Return to Normalcy

Completing the process of rhetorical containment requires the restoration of a natural order by calling for unity against the threat posed by those infiltrating the body politic. As this requires self-enclosure, in the context of third-party voters, this entails eliminating dissent by scrapping plans for a protest vote and recommitting to the natural order of the two-party system.

Central to the call for returning to normalcy in the context of party politics is the notion of the spoiler charge. Critics of third-party voters in 2016 explained that "voting is zero-some game: There are a certain number of votes cast, and if you vote for one person, you are taking a vote away from someone else" (Filipovic, 2016, para. 2). Cautioning those considering a protest vote, even Bernie Sanders told his supporters they should assume "either Clinton or Trump will become president," that there is no middle ground since there is no parliamentary system (Rampel, 2016, para. 6). As Kang (2016) explained, even resisting Clinton "in solid blue states only emboldens and legitimizes those voters in vulnerable contests" (para. 2). Moreover, Kang continued, "it gives the hardcore progressive a false sense of righteousness, making engagement and productive discourse increasingly difficult" (para. 11). This elimination of neutral ground emphasized the effort to contain third-party supporters, as they now faced a crucial ethical dilemma.

Aside from the pragmatics of third-party support, critics added that supporting the two-party system was an issue of morality. This point, too, borrowed a stock argument against third-party campaigns, claiming that voters had an obligation to vote for the "lesser of two evils." Political scientist Julia Maskivker (2016) wrote that rejecting Clinton if she was the lesser evil of the two candidates was unethical, especially since everyone was called to be good Samaritans, and because societies occasionally need to "be rescued from unaccountable, corrupt, ineffective or indifferent leaders" (para. 9). Sitting the election out was problematic, Maskivker explained, because "If our vote is part of a set of votes that will contribute to the defeat of the realistically electable 'lesser evil'" (para. 20), then maintaining a clean conscience would come at a high price for the rest of society. This point was less about marking third-party candidates as outsiders, and instead limiting voters' options as they attempted to resolve this ethical dilemma.

If Clinton represented the status quo, which by its definition is a sense of normalcy, then third-party sympathizers were given an uncomfortable "choice." As Kaufman (2016) argued, in the face of "political buffoonery right out of a satirical novel, the only sane, democratic thing to do is help elect our first female president" (para. 5). Critics addressing third-party supporters not only asked them to return to the two-party system, but suggested they were obligated to defend it. Wheaton (2016) explained, "We're going to need every single vote we can get to defeat and utterly demolish and humiliate Donald Trump and everything he stands for" (para. 3), even if that meant supporting a Clinton campaign that stood against the values of die-hard progressives. While sold as a choice, it was clearly a false choice for third-party voters. Wheaton stated, "If you, like me, wanted Bernie Sanders to be our president . . . then your choice in this election is Hillary Clinton" (para. 8). Ironically, this call to defend democracy meant forming a coalition where sacrifice was one-directional. Framing the options, *Quartz* editor Paul Smalera (2016) suggested, "The choice in front of Americans today could not be starker. A vote against Hillary Clinton is a vote for demagoguery, for racism, for inequality, for xenophobia, for white supremacism, and for hate, no matter who else you mark your ballot for" (para. 17). As *Daily Beast* correspondent Michael Tomasky (2016) emphasized, voting for Hillary Clinton is "serious politics. Everything else just isn't" (para. 18).

Conclusion

American politics has occasionally seen the rise of third-party candidates who appeal to a wider swath of voters than anyone initially expected. Candidates like Henry Wallace, George Wallace, John Anderson, Ross Perot, and Ralph Nader all generated headlines for potentially spoiling an election. However, third-party candidates always see a decline in their support by election day. This essay has contributed another reason for their shortcomings, grounded in the mediated debate about what it means to cast a ballot for an outsider. Shaped around Neville-Shepard's (2018) four-part framework of containment, and thus confirming the utility of that approach, this essay has suggested that third-party voters are subjected to a form of lateral containment where they are portrayed as the decisive vote in a presidential election, as immature citizens who are too short-sighted to understand the consequences of their self-indulgent choices, and as citizens who are responsible for the bad policies of unpopular victors in close elections. These voters are encouraged, if not coerced through guilt, to return to mainstream politics for at least a day.

This essay has several implications. First, in the context of third parties, lateral containment is obviously closely connected to hierarchical notions of containment rhetoric. Ultimately, lateral containment may be best understood as a consequence of the effects of hegemony rather than its alternative. After all, those targeting third-party supporters are likely just enforcing hegemonic norms that are products of the structure of the party system and framing and priming effects of news media. In this sense, lower level progressive activists may not be intentional and independent agents in containing third-party sympathizers, but another consequence of the systemic influences traditionally linked to the shortcomings of such fringe hopefuls. If traditional forms of containment are elite-driven, those norms are ultimately enforced by lower level defenders of the hierarchy.

Second, in corrupting the signification of a third-party ballot, the rhetorical containment of third-party supporters is clearly a perversion of the burden of proof in campaigning. Traditionally, representative government requires aspiring leaders to appeal to the electorate to receive their support. Conventionally, the burden of proof in political communication falls on the campaign, as candidates prove they can deliver on the change they promise, that such change improves the country, and that support will be reciprocated with results. In the case of third-party voters, however, defenders of the two-party system insist that a candidate's persuasiveness does not always matter, and that citizens have an obligation to support people they dislike in a competition between two parties they may even despise. As Barkan (2016) noted about how Johnson and Stein voters were addressed, "The command to fall in line behind Clinton . . . shifts the burden from the candidate to the voter" (para. 4). As Jill Stein (2016b) complained, "No candidate owns anyone's vote – votes have to be earned" (para. 5). This case study suggests that in corrupting the signification of a third-party ballot, third-party containment corrupts the signification of democracy itself.

The way that prospective Stein and Johnson voters were portrayed also suggests that democratic deliberation in the United States is greatly limited by the hegemony of the two major parties. Even without winning, third parties have contributed greatly to American politics by focusing on neglected issues. Abolition, women's suffrage, workers' rights, and the national debt were all forced into the national political conversation by third parties (Gillespie, 2012). However, the rhetorical containment of third-party voters disrupts this system of influence. Such containment sends a message that being different and thinking differently is okay, as long as it does not interfere with the interests of the two-party hegemony. As an alternative, the major parties assuming the burden of political campaigning by coopting issues may not be good for the longevity of a third party, but it certainly benefits deliberation by remaining open to the concerns of the minority and adjusting a dominant ideology when necessary.

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Branding the Revolution: Havana Club Advertising and the Fight for Cuban Authenticity

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Abstract

Focusing on Havana Club as a case study, we examine how an authentic Cuba has been discursively constructed by agents embedded within different political ideologies. Our research centers on advertising produced in 2015–2016, when two competing rum marketers were laying claim to the Havana Club brand: Havana Club International, an enterprise of the Cuban state, and Bacardi, a global corporation. Previous research has found that the tensions between capitalist and socialist ideologies can be bridged within a single advertisement by assigning political symbols new meanings. Drawing from both critical political economy and critical studies, we move beyond a semiotic approach and examine the professional mechanisms by which advertising practitioners encode brands with political meaning. Based on our review of internal and external documents, we found that both the Havana Club International and the Bacardi campaigns are claiming authenticity to advance similar specific economic goals while asserting competing political worldviews.

Keywords

ideology, critical political economy, advertising, authenticity, Cuba

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Introduction

In 1994, the Cuban government entered into a joint agreement with Pernod Ricard, a French liquor conglomerate, to globally distribute and market Havana Club, Cuba's state brand of rum. In an effort to stimulate its lagging economy, advertising, which has long been discouraged in Cuba, suddenly became a viable option for developing new markets for state-produced products. To assist with their branding needs, the newly created Havana Club International (HCI) enlisted the help of global advertising agency, M&C Saatchi.

The agency sought to establish the Havana Club brand by leveraging the rum's Cuban heritage. As Scarpaci, Segre, and Coyula (2002) point out, Cuba's national identity has become inextricably linked to its products, particularly cigars and rum. Furthermore, the capital city of Havana is said to have cachet within popular imagination, largely due to its association with music and art, as well as its history of revolution. The agency wanted to benefit from this cachet, claiming "Cuban culture became competitive advantage" (Effie, 2012).

To accomplish this, HCI launched *Nothing Compares to Havana*, a global campaign meant to showcase an authentic Cuba by focusing on the capital and its residents. According to HCI,

> *Nothing Compares to Havana* embraces Havana Club's strong Cuban roots and supports the brand's ambition to "Havanise" the world. The unique character of Havana is captured by reflecting the true values of the Cuban city - humanity, spontaneity and creativity. Through a series of snapshots of everyday life, *Nothing Compares to Havana* personifies the unique and inspiring attitude which is synonymous with the authentic Cuban rum. (Havana Club, 2012)

HCI's goal of presenting Havana Club as "an authentic Cuban rum" was a measurable success. Since entering into its partnership with Pernod Ricard, Havana Club has become the number three international rum brand in the world and has become competitive in Germany, France, Italy, and Spain (Pernod Ricard, 2017). In 2015, HCI followed up the success of *Nothing Compares to Havana* with a campaign titled *From the Heart*.

It was a surprising move when, during that same year, competing rum marketer Bacardi Ltd. announced the launch of its own advertising campaign produced under the Havana Club brand name. Arguing that it had purchased the trademark from the Arechabala family, Havana Club's original owners, Bacardi also made claims to Cuban authenticity. However, rather than locating authenticity in place, Bacardi framed Cuban authenticity in terms of time. Titled *Aged Well*, Bacardi's campaign conjured up the image of a thriving Cuba prior to the socialist revolution.

The sponsors of both campaigns are attempting to leverage Cuban authenticity in an effort to distinguish themselves a crowded marketplace, yet each is articulating the concept of authenticity in a different way. Using an industry case study approach, we explore how competing actors leverage Cuban authenticity in an effort to advance their economic interests. We begin by grounding our study in critical political economy and critical studies, which focus on the underlying economic considerations that predetermine the creative message. However, we build on this literature by analyzing separate campaigns that were produced under different sociopolitical conditions. Specifically, we explore the ways in which political ideologies reassert themselves within the advertising texts.

Rum, Advertising, and Political Ideology

Scholars working within a critical tradition have long characterized advertising as a vehicle for capitalist ideologies, promoting both consumption and individualism (Hardy, 2014). Much of this research has taken a semiotic approach, attending to the recurring images, words, and tropes that are embedded within advertising. According to Williamson (1978), for example, advertisers play an important role in promoting capitalist values by linking commodities with words, images, and themes that carry personal and social value. In their attempt to distinguish between products, advertisers also promote ideologies of individualism and personal choice.

Describing advertising as "the official art of modern, capitalist society" (p. 421), Williams (2000) similarly argues that everyday commodities are transformed into signifiers of a vivid, more fulfilling life, a process that is made possible by a large, organized system of artists, writers, and their attendant managers. In the process of selling products, Williams asserts, advertisers obscure the inequalities that are inherent within a capitalist society.

Building on Williams' argument, Schudson (1986) compares advertising to socialist realism, a form of state-sanctioned art practiced in the Soviet Union. According to Schudson, the art of socialist realism served the state through its optimistic depictions of life in the Soviet Union. Meant to be realistic in its representation, this art form was proletarian, meaning that is was intended to feature the worker and understandable to the everyday public. Characterizing advertising as "capitalist realism," Schudson argues that advertising does not claim to depict reality as it is but instead depicts reality in its aspirational form. Furthermore, advertising promotes consumption by presenting the illusion of consumer choice and portraying consumer satisfaction in its idealized form.

Cuba's Havana Club campaign, however, complicates Schudson's capitalist-socialist dichotomy. Produced on behalf of a socialist state, Havana Club is made in partnership with Pernod Ricard, a global marketer. Furthermore, to advance the sales of that product, Havana Club relies heavily on advertising, a form of communication that is explicitly commercial in nature. Here, we build on Zhao's and Belk's (2008) research, which examined Chinese advertising during the nation's transition from a communist society toward a consumer-oriented society. By conducting a semiotic analysis of advertisements in China's *People's Daily*, the researchers found that the tension between rival ideologies was bridged within the span of a single advertisement through the reconfiguration of political symbols. For example, Zhao and Belk (2008) found that the image of the worker is celebrated in communist myth but has been repurposed in a consumerist society to promote the sale of goods.

In similar ways, Havana Club reflects the tension between socialist and capitalist principles, but while Zhao and Belk were interested in advertising texts, we explore the industrial conditions that give rise to particular messages. Scholars working within the tradition of critical political economy have advanced the notion that advertising is both an economic and symbolic product. Thus, when analyzing advertising messages, researchers must also account for how advertising is organized, funded, and regulated (Hardy, 2014; Murdock & Golding, 1979). A comparative case study enables us to build on Zhao and Belk's work by examining the ways in which economic goals are articulated by agents that are grounded within two different political-economic systems.

In this study, we focus on the concept of Cuban authenticity, which is the central claim advanced in both the HCI and Bacardi campaigns. According to Banet-Weiser (2012), consumers' desire for authenticity is a direct response to capitalism and an oversaturated brand culture, motivating consumers to seek out genuine affect and emotions that exist outside of the marketplace. In turn, marketers have been eager to claim authenticity in order to tap into consumer demand.

The competition for authenticity is especially pronounced in the wine and spirits category, which has long been defined by proprietary connections to land, traditional techniques, and heritage. Beverland's (2005) study of the wine industry, for example, revealed that marketers frequently make connections to local climatic and topographical conditions, but they also circulate stories about their family histories and traditions that are designed to position their products as artisanal rather than mass produced. In similar ways, rum marketers also affirm time and place. As Smith (2008) notes, a number of rum brands promote images of plantations, family crests, and awards in an effort to connote tradition and prestige.

Because authenticity is closely attached to the concept of originality, however, competition for authenticity is a zero-sum game. After all, only a limited number of brands can claim to be authentic. From this perspective, we explore the following questions: First, how do HCI and Bacardi discursively construct Cuban authenticity? Second, how do those strategies relate to larger economic imperatives? By focusing on competing campaigns, one produced on behalf of a socialist state and another on behalf of a private corporation, we can explore the relationship between ideology, representation, and advertising practice.

Using an industry case study approach, we examine how an authentic Cuba has been discursively constructed by competing entities, embedded within different political ideologies. Specifically, we examine Havana Club advertising produced by both brands during 2015–2016, when both campaigns were running simultaneously. According to Yin (2013), case studies are particularly useful for investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context through the use of multiple forms of evidence. Working in this tradition, we analyzed campaign development from multiple vantage points.

To understand the strategies used to discursively create an authentic Cuba as well as the specific economic imperatives that drove those strategies, we examined internal forms of communication generated by the various actors involved in producing the advertising campaigns, including HCI and Bacardi as well as their respective advertising agencies, M&C Saatchi and BBDO. The documents that were analyzed included press releases, case studies prepared for advertising award competitions, websites, media kits, and annual reports to investors. In total, over 320 pages of printed material were analyzed.

Because industry discourses reflect the preconditions for the creative messaging (Chávez, 2012), we also analyzed the advertisements themselves, looking for the recurring images, words, tropes, and themes used to construct differing versions of an authentic Cuba. By drawing on multiple sources, we were able to engage in a process of triangulation, in which we assessed both the intended goals of the campaign and how these goals were executed creatively. For example, by analyzing the agency's strategic documents and press statements, we were able to identify specific campaign objectives, which then informed our reading of the advertisements themselves.

Furthermore, we attempted to move beyond the manifest content of the texts and focus on their underlying ideological and cultural assumptions. As part of this process, particular attention was paid to the connotative and denotative meanings of imagery and copy choices and how such stylistic choices contributed to the overall meaning of the text (McKee, 2003). At the same time, ideology involves a certain masking, distortion, and concealment. While certain people, classes, areas of life, and experiences are privileged, others are left out, silenced, and rendered invisible. Consequently, we also attended to omissions within the texts.

We were further interested in specific strategies used by marketers to invoke authenticity. Therefore, we also employed Gilmore's and Pine's (2007) typology of authenticating practices, which include "natural authenticity" (claiming that a product exists in a natural state in or of the earth, not artificial or synthetic), "referential authenticity" (tapping into shared memories or longings), and "original authenticity" (pp. 61–62; claiming that a product or service is the first of its kind).

HCI and the Affirmation of Place

Havana Club was originally produced by José Arechabala SA, whose founder, José Arechabala y Aldama emigrated to Cuba from Vizcaya, Spain in 1862. During his career, Arechabala established a sugar refinery and a distillery, which was incorporated in 1921, but the company did not begin selling Havana Club rum until March 1934. During its time as a private enterprise, the company's success was inconsistent. According to Ospina (2002), in the years before the Castro government came to power, the Arechabala family had let its trademark expire in some global markets, including Spain, due to financial setbacks.

After the revolution, the Cuban state began nationalizing all private enterprises. At first, the state focused on Bacardi but was unsuccessful because the company had already established its presence abroad, enabling it to reorganize and resettle in the Bahamas. The state then turned its attention to Havana Club, which was in a more financially vulnerable position. Having been dispossessed of their facilities, distillery, and trademark, the Arechabala family left for Spain.

Today, several Cuban brands are held in high regard, including Varadero and Ron Mulata, but it is Havana Club that has become the country's flagship brand abroad. However, advertising has only recently played an important role in promoting the sale of Havana Club globally. Between the years 1975 and 1984, the Soviet Bloc accounted for over 90% of Cuba's rum exports (Gjelten, 2009), meaning that Cuba had little motivation to pursue global advertising. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc, however, the Cuban government engaged in a series of reforms intended to regain economic stability, what has come to be known as the "Special Period in a Time of Peace." In an effort to promote the export of Cuban products abroad, advertising has increasingly played an important role in advancing the interests of the Cuban state.

Because HCI's Havana Club competes in the premium rum category, its communication strategy is centered on establishing product superiority against other rum brands, several of which also have ties to the Caribbean and are leveraging country of origin as a way to establish authenticity, including Appleton Estate (Jamaica), Diplomático (Venezuela), and Mount Gay (Barbados). Of these, Bacardi, which is based in the Bahamas, dominates the world market, selling in over 160 countries globally (Bacardi Ltd., 2017).

HCI's proprietary connection to Cuba has become a defining characteristic of their advertising strategy. Within the international marketplace, HCI is the only brand that can claim to be the Cuban rum distributed outside of Cuba, a relationship that is encoded on the packaging. All bottles of Havana Club rum feature a bright red banner with the phrase "El Ron de Cuba" and the brand's logo features La Giraldilla, a figure that has come to signify the City of Havana (Scarpaci et al., 2002).

The company's strategic documents reveal that HCI had hoped to use Cuban authenticity as a way to exploit a weakness in the Bacardi brand. Bacardi's dominant position within the category has undermined its claim to authenticity. Category leaders tend to be seen as more as ubiquitous and commercial and, therefore, less as genuine and original. As Banet-Weiser (2012) contends, consumers are motivated to seek out authentic brands as an antidote to mass-produced products. Furthermore, Bacardi executives appear to have made purposeful decisions to distance itself from Cuba. For over 30 years, Bacardi advertising has made little mention of its origins in Cuba (Gjelten, 2009).

Therefore, Havana Club's advertising was designed to exploit Bacardi's vulnerability as a brand with little connection to place. According to the agency, HCI's priority was to position "Havana Club as the genuine Cuban brand against the vaguely-Latin Bacardi" (Effie, 2012). In doing so, M&C Saatchi had hoped to position Havana Club as an artisanal drink for discerning consumers while counter-positioning Bacardi as a generic product meant for mass consumption. As the agency stated, "Bacardi was the mainstream rum for mainstream partygoers and Havana Club wanted to become the preferred alternative for the more premium and discerning spirits drinkers" (Cannes, 2013).

HCI's first efforts to bolster their Cuban credentials, however, were not a success. HCI's first global, advertising campaign titled *El Culto a la Vida*, which the agency translated as "Cult of Life" (Effie, 2012), attempted to associate Havana Club with a contemporary Cuba by featuring young, attractive, models in sexualized poses. However, the agency later acknowledged that the campaign did not resonate with consumers because it presented Cuba in a way that was not ownable. In the agency's words, the campaign was "selling too much joie vivre, and not enough Cubanness" (Cannes, 2013).

In 2010, Bacardi began to revive its Cuban heritage credentials in an effort to tap into the growing demand for the mojito, which originated in Cuba. This put new pressure on Havana Club to affirm its Cuban identity. Rather than depict a contemporary Cuba, however, HCI decided to present a version of Cuba that had already become vivid in the minds of Western consumers, what Gilmore and Pine (2007) call "referential authenticity" or the practice of tapping into shared memories as they exist within popular imagination.

To accomplish this, HCI launched *Nothing Compares to Havana*, a comprehensive campaign that included print, television, online, and experiential marketing. According to internal documents, HCI's priority was "positioning Havana Club as a non-aligned Cuban brand against Bacardi, the embodiment of globalization and of the marketing establishment" (Effie, 2012).

Within popular imagination, Cuba occupies a unique space relative to other rum producing Caribbean countries like Jamaica, Martinique, and Barbados, which are often associated closely with Western tourism. By contrast, Cuba's association with images such as 50s-era automobiles or the patina of its historic buildings help to substantiate consumers' perceptions of the island as one that is less visibly marked by overconsumption.

Havana Club's ad campaign was engineered to affirm these perceptions. When the agency launched *Nothing Compares to Havana*, physical place played a significant role. The campaign was executed by global advertising agency M&C Saatchi, who in turn hired a number of marketers, professional photographers, filmmakers, and curators, based primarily in the United Kingdom and the United States. For example, M&C Saatchi hired New York-based photographer Guy Aroch to provide the images for the print portion of the campaign. In the agency's words, they gave Aroch "carte blanche to capture a truly spontaneous Havana" (Cannes, 2013). For its video footage, the agency turned to U.S.-based film director Harmony Korine. According to the agency, the advertising campaign was filmed on location and, in the agency's words, "featuring genuine Cuban people, expressing their different sense of priorities."

The result is a campaign that occupies a space between the real and the staged. Consider a print advertisement that ran as part of the campaign titled "Ballet" (Adforum, 2012). The ad focuses on two ballerinas, caught in a "spontaneous" moment as they stretch at a public bus stop. According to the agency, such moments are meant to depict the spontaneity of the Cuban people, but a deeper reading suggests that the advertisement also reflects Cuba's socialist values.

Unlike much of Western advertising, which focuses disproportionately on the wealthy or middle class, Havana Club's advertising is notable because it reflects populist sensibilities by collapsing class distinctions. After all, it is the deliberate juxtaposition of the ballerinas (signifiers of high culture) and the public bus stop (a marker of low culture) that is meant to compel the Western viewer, who is the primary audience for this campaign. There are other advertisements in the campaign that deliver on the theme of joy, disconnected from material wealth. There is an advertisement that depicts a newly married Afro-Cuban couple, riding on a bike, still wearing their wedding garb. Another ad showcases a group of men, both young and old, engaged in a game of dominoes, which is occurring in public space. While the images themselves reflect socialist ideals, they have been clearly reconfigured for commercial purposes. By adding product shots, logos, and commercial copy, the photograph is converted into a marketing message.

When the agency launched their follow-up campaign, *From the Heart* in 2015, the brand wanted to make more explicit connections between the Cuban land and the extract ingredients that compose the rum. In doing so, HCI attempted to position its rum as existing in a natural, rather than artificial state, what Gilmore and Pine refer to as "natural authenticity." Havana Club touts itself as the only brand that is 100% made in Cuba and claims that its rum benefits from Cuba's rich soil, warm weather, and quality sugarcanes. This strategy was evident in a short video titled "The Maestro Ronero" that was produced as part of the campaign (Havana Club, 2012). The video focuses on Asbel Morales, one of Havana Club's "Maestro Roneros," who is also featured in a print ad and in HCI's press materials. In the video, we spend a day with Morales from the time he leaves his home in Havana, to his time in the sugar-fields, to the warehouse, where he tests the quality of rum. Asbel's voice-over reads as follows:

> I think I would describe the rum as Cuba. We have such a beautiful land for sugarcane to grow. This place is full of mysteries that, with time, you will get to discover. Rum is . . . color, it's time, it's aroma. It's not just a written recipe. It's so much more. It's a pleasure passed down through generations. I know it's a passion for all Cubans. Because I live it. Because I feel it. Because I share it, with everyone. It's a legacy that is passed from Cuban to Cuban. The rum *is* Havana. (Havana Club, 2012)

By equating their rum with Cuba itself, HCI is following in the tradition of other wine and spirits marketers attempting to establish product superiority by touting a proprietary relationship with their land. For example, the concept of *terroir*, which includes the natural environment in which a product is produced, has become a mainstay of wine and spirits marketing. According to Beverland (2005), a focus on traditional practices is meant to downplay modern production techniques in an effort to position products as naturally produced.

By avowing its commitment to traditional methods, HCI is making the argument that only Cuban rum made by Cubans, using traditional Cuban practices, can be considered authentic. But we also found that HCI is showcasing the workers who make the rum. In the campaign, Havana Club's maestros del ron are framed as stewards of the land and guardians of secret processes. As stated in Havana Club's press materials (Havana Club, 2017),

> Over the years, experts have perfected the art of crafting Cuban rum and passed it down from one generation to another. We call them Maestros del Ron Cubano. They are the people who guard the Cuban rum-making tradition, selecting the finest sugar cane, watching over its transition, distillation, ageing and blending. It takes about 15 years of learning the craft of rum-making first hand from the eldest Maestro del Ron Cubano to become a member of this select group. As Don José Navarro, Primer Maestro del Ron Cubano says, "Rum has no magical recipe. It' a cultural heritage, passed on from Maestro, from heart to heart, from one Cubano to another."

We also found that HCI extends the brand's connection to the land through a variety of experiential marketing efforts. The Havana Club website includes a section called "Live Havana," which showcases a number of travel destinations within Cuba. This is designed to promote not only the sale of rum but also tourism, an important source of revenue for the state. Once on the island, visitors can visit the Havana Club Museum, which has become a popular tourist destination. There, visitors can learn more about the history of Havana Club, which is inextricably linked to the history of Cuba.

Bacardi Ltd. and the Cultivation of Memory

Conspicuously absent from HCI's history of Cuban rum is the Bacardi family. However, Facundo Bacardi, a Catalonian immigrant, who settled in Cuba in 1830, is widely credited for developing international markets for Cuban rum, both by innovating distillation processes and through his prolific use of branding (Gjelten, 2009).

For almost 100 years, Bacardi operated as a family-owned business, but after the socialist revolution, the Cuban state made moves to expropriate the company, which was intended to be named Compañía Ron Bacardi (Nacionalizada). Unlike the Arechabalas, the Bacardi family was in a much stronger position to resist, and in 1964, the Cuban government finally gave up trying to export any rum under the Bacardi label.

In several ways, Bacardi's advertising campaign builds on the company's ongoing attempts to impede the entry of HCI rum into the marketplace by appropriating the Havana Club brand through the court system. Since their departure from Cuba, Bacardi executives had hoped to acquire the Havana Club brand believing its strong brand value. Like Bacardi, Havana Club is easy to say in multiple languages and also evokes the music and entertainment scene in the years before the Castro government took power (Gjelten, 2009).

While the Cuban government has registered the Havana Club trademark in its various export markets, Bacardi has challenged Cuba's ownership of the trademark arguing that it had been acquired illegally. To strengthen their case, Bacardi purchased the Havana Club recipe and trademark from the Arechabala family in 1994, despite the fact that the family had let the U.S. trademark expire in 1973. The United States renewed the Cuban government's ownership of the trademark in 2016, but their ownership of the brand remains tentative as the courts continue to evaluate the case (Sesin, 2018). This has created urgency for Bacardi to demonstrate that it is actively using the Havana Club brand.

When asked how Bacardi can market a rum called Havana Club when the product is not produced in Cuba, Bacardi executive Rick Wilson defended the move, stating "just the way you say I'm calling it Arizona Iced Tea and I'm not making it in Arizona" (Alfonsi, 2017). With no connection to place, however, laying claim to Cuban authenticity in advertising is no easy task. Bacardi no longer has material connections to Cuba, and each bottle of Bacardi's Havana Club features the words, "Puerto Rican Rum."

When faced with such challenges, Gilmore and Pine (2007) advise marketers, "if you don't have any old brands in-house that qualify, consider obtaining the rights to others" (p. 60). And that is exactly what Bacardi did. Bacardi rolled out their own Havana Club rum based loosely on the original Arechabala formula, which they acquired when purchasing the rights to the trademark.

In 2015, Bacardi launched its *Aged Well* campaign in the United States. Produced by New York-based agency BBDO, the agency then turned to its global network of talent, which included both Brazilian and U.S. artists and producers. Collectively, the organization had hoped to invest its product with what Gilmore and Pine call "original authenticity," in which a product is perceived to be the first of its kind, not a copy or an imitation. Obtaining the Arechabala family's endorsement, however, was important to Bacardi's strategy, and the company made strong efforts to showcase the family in a variety of ways. The vintage-style packaging for Havana Club features the Arechabala family crest and a portrait of the company's founder, José Arechabala y Aldama.

The Arechabala family's presence was also highly visible during the public relations that surrounded the launch of the campaign. In a public statement released by Bacardi Ltd. (2016), José Arechabala, great-grandson of the Havana Club's founder, expressed his support for the effort:

> Our family could not be happier that Bacardi is launching HAVANA CLUB Añejo Clásico, which is based on the original recipe created by the Arechabala family in 1934. Our families knew each other before we were both exiled from Cuba, and with Bacardi being the premiere rum company in the world, it's only fitting that they continue our legacy by paying proper homage to the capital city of Cuba, a place we once called home.

Fabio Di Giammarco, global vice president for Bacardi, echoed this sentiment, stating "this is the ultimate convergence of two Cuban families in exile coming together to continue the legacy of this incredible brand and introduce it to a new generation" (Bacardi Ltd., 2016).

Involving the Arechabala family enabled Bacardi to present itself as a family business rather than a large corporation. Furthermore, the campaign was able to invoke an image of Cuba that existed before the socialist revolution. Therefore, Bacardi also attempted to tap into referential authenticity, but rather than locating authenticity in terms of space, the company located authenticity in terms of time, invoking a vision of pre-Castro Cuba that existed in the minds of consumers. One of the clearest articulations of Bacardi's Cuba was found in a press statement released during the launch of the campaign. Its version of Cuba existed in the years spanning 1920 to 1950, beginning in the U.S. Prohibition. According to Bacardi,

> HAVANA CLUB rum is based on the original recipe created by the Arechabala family in Cuba in 1934, capturing the exuberant spirit of the Golden Age in Havana, a period of time that spanned from the 1920s, when people flocked to

> the island during prohibition, through the 1950s when everything stylish and glamorous reigned supreme. (Bacardi Ltd., 2016)

In its execution, the campaign, and the press surrounding it, Bacardi showcased the music, fashion, and style of pre-Castro Cuba. Prior to the launch of the campaign, Bacardi held a party at the Faena Hotel, a luxury hotel in Miami Beach, in which the Arechabala family had a visible presence. The party featured blue-feathered showgirls, salsa dancers, and a 10-piece band playing Cuban classics (Montgomery, 2016).

The print-based campaign builds on this vintage aesthetic, including images of young, attractive models who are fashionably dressed in styles that evoke past eras (Whitefield, 2016a). The ads evoke the aesthetic of vintage movie posters and each feature a different headline, designed in a font fashioned on the Victorian Gaslight style. For example, one advertisement titled “Glamour” centers on a young woman holding a daiquiri (Adforum, 2016). She is wearing an evening gown and a large summer hat. In the background is an image of a young, attractive, well-dressed couple. The images within the ad evoke different eras yet are not tied to any particular time. Similarly, there is no specific mention of place; however, the images of palm trees and a 50s-era automobile suggests Cuba. The headline reads, “the freedom, the decadence, the dazzle, the glamour: If only someone had bottled it.”

As a form of marketing communications, the advertisement meets its economic goals by featuring a product shot, brand logo, and the campaign’s tagline. An important and consistent feature in all of the advertisements is a callout that reads, “based on the original Cuban recipe.” As an advertisement, however, it must also adhere to the legal standards that are designed to protect consumers from claims about the product’s origins. Therefore, the advertisement also includes words “a Puerto Rican rum” which are printed in small type and inconspicuously located in the bottom corner of the ad.

The Reassertion of Political Ideology

In the process of selling their own brand of rum, the Bacardi campaign also expresses a distinct political point of view, consistently condemning the socialist revolution for its suppression of freedom and capitalist values. Our comparative analysis reveals that both campaigns are utilizing advertising in similar ways not only to advance specific economic objectives but also to express differing political worldviews.

Ultimately, the function of both campaigns is to promote the sale rum, by putting the product at the center of a vivid, more fulfilling life. Therefore, our findings support Zhao and Belk’s assertion that the tensions between rival ideologies within the space of a single advertisement can be bridged by the decontextualization and reconfiguration of political symbols.

However, our comparative analysis reveals that each campaign promoted a different political ideology. Contrary to Schudson's claim regarding the clear distinctions between Soviet and capitalist art forms, the HCI campaign blends elements of both. According to Tertz (1960), artists working in the Soviet realist tradition were encouraged to present "authentic" scenes of everyday life of the proletariat. Tertz further argues that the artistic representation of reality must be purposeful in nature by supporting the aims of the state and the Party.

Furthermore, the HCI campaign is based on realism, purporting to depict a genuine and authentic Cuba. This is accomplished through the campaign's photojournalistic approach, which define the visual aesthetics of the campaign. It is also evident in the campaign's focus on "genuine Cubans" rather than professional models and actors typically used in commercial advertising. Finally, rather than focus on the consumer, there is an emphasis on the everyday workers who make, distribute, and serve the rum.

Because it features a state-owned product, the HCI campaign also serves the state in more direct ways, both by promoting tourism and by presenting a positive face to the country. Thus, the campaign serves as a form of public diplomacy, a form of strategic communications that emphasizes the importance of a nation's image, thereby promoting national interests abroad (Molleda & Roberts, 2008). Beyond the advertising, HCI hired a number of artists to curate the arts and culture portion of the Havana Club campaign, including Flora Fairbairn, a British art curator, who set up the Havana *Cultura Visual Art Project*. The agency also turned to British deejay Gilles Peterson, who produced a number of albums and concerts under the Havana Club brand. The effort has showcased Cuban musicians performing in a variety of genres, including jazz, rap, hip hop, and R&B.

Finally, we found that the HCI campaign serves as a vehicle in which to showcase socialist values. HCI deliberately set out to showcase Cubans' "different set of priorities" as the remedy to Western preoccupation with consumer culture. Agency documents reveal that the brand had hoped to tap into Western anxieties about the failures of capitalism during the height of the economic crisis. According to the agency,

> Cuban difference is not just a product of ideology or geography, but about a different set of priorities. These priorities echoed new aspirations in the western world. Back in 2010, the subprime crisis had just hit the world. The western model was severely questioned, and it was going to last. This crisis acted as a catalyst for various emerging trends: the urge to opt out of the rat race: the quest for more meaning and authenticity. (Cannes, 2013)

McAllister (2010) previously found that marketers attempted to capitalize on the disillusion associated with the global recession, but in the wake the crisis, Cuba was presented as a superior model. However, we also found evidence that

HCI and its partners made a conscious effort to present Cuba in a way that would be appealing to Western audiences. As HCI stated, “Cubanness is a tricky thing to ‘sell,’” (Cannes, 2013) given the island nation’s association with communism and its contested place in the geopolitical landscape. Consider the following statement:

> When you think Cuba, you think beaches and communism. Beaches are appealing, but not differentiating for rum. Communism is differentiating, but not appealing for a global premium spirit brand. . . . We wanted to depict the Cuba of today, in a non-touristic and non-political way. (Cannes, 2013)

While HCI attempted to critique capitalism, the Bacardi campaign more closely resembles what Schudson describes as “capital realism.” The campaign is not meant to be representational in any way but instead relies heavily on professional models to fulfill its creative vision. Unlike the HCI, the campaign does not feature any actual Cubans but instead assumes a decidedly American perspective. Invoking what Urry (1990) calls, the tourist gaze, Cuba is presented as a recreational destination rather than as an autonomous state with its own citizens.

Furthermore, the Bacardi campaign focuses solely on the wealthy, utilizing cultural markers that connote wealth and privilege. In their words, the campaign was designed to evoke a “glamorous, effervescent feeling” associated with a better, more affluent past, what Bacardi referred to as its “gilded origins” (Bacardi Ltd., 2016). To accomplish this, the advertising copy is written to emphasize luxury. One headline reads “for those with a love of all things, rich, full-bodied, and sophisticated.”

In their efforts to present their version of an authentic Cuba, Bacardi has engaged in the careful reconstruction of memory. All ads feature the verbiage, “the Golden Age Aged Well,” referring not only to the aging process that results in a more complex rum but also to an unspecified past. But by focusing on the wealth and glamour during the pre-Castro years, Bacardi’s campaign makes clear that the authentic Cuba is the one that flourished under capitalism (Whitefield, 2016a). It is no surprise that Bacardi launched their campaign in Miami, a place where Cuban heritage is ubiquitous but is read through the lens of capitalism. It is also a part of the country that is decidedly anti-Castro.

The overall sentiment of the campaign is based on luxury and nostalgia, which necessarily involve various forms of erasure. In their effort to present an idealized account of pre-Castro Cuba, we found that Bacardi simultaneously erases social inequalities that led to the revolution. Therefore, Bacardi is engaging in what Goldman and Papson (1996) refer to as a “collective amnesia” (p. 139). After all, the “Golden Age” to which Bacardi is referring includes the infamous Batista regime that, while friendly to U.S. enterprises, was also known for its military rule and its corruption.

We also found critiques of socialism that were much more pointed in nature. One print advertisement features the headline, "Even A Revolution Couldn't Topple the Rum." The most pointed critiques, however, were channeled through the Arechabala family. In a press statement released by Bacardi, José Arechabala, great-grandson of the founder, who framed the revolution as an injustice, stating

> Our family was disheartened after the forced exile from Cuba, and has always felt the need for justice for what happened to our ancestors. We feel like their life's work continues to live on through this rebranding of Havana Club. (Montgomery, 2016)

We found that Bacardi has invested significant amounts of resources toward carefully framing the Arechabala family story, a process which involves blending myth with history. For example, during an interview with *CBS*, Paola Consuegra, a second-generation member of the Arechabala family, recounted the story of how her father smuggled the original recipe for Havana Club out of Cuba:

> My dad was the one who was in Havana at that time and he himself took the recipe out of the island. I do not know how he did it, but knowing him, he probably memorized it and then wrote it down when he got the chance. (Osorio, 2018)

While difficult to verify, the story is also recounted on the rum's label (Montgomery, 2016). More recently, Bacardi has turned this story into a form of high art, creating an interactive theater experience titled, *Amparo*, which was performed in Miami and New York City. Named after the family's matriarch, *Amparo* recounts the Arechabala family's experience in Cuba, beginning when José Arechabala arrived in Cuba to when he and his family fled the island after the revolution. The show concludes Arechabala sharing his rum with the audience.

Like other elements of the campaign, *Amparo* is both ideological and strategic. According to Bacardi executive Rick Wilson, the purpose of the play was to openly criticize the Cuban government for its suppression of the right to private ownership, stating that "[*Amparo* can help] educate the public about the wrongdoings of the Cuban government and their business partners, Pernod Ricard, against the Arechabala family, the original owners of Havana Club rum" (Wong, 2018).

The play certainly does some effective ideological work. In the process of critiquing Cuba, Arechabala is transformed into the quintessential capitalist hero, having arrived in Cuba with nothing, creating a thriving business, only to be thwarted by the socialist state. It is only through their partnership with Bacardi that the Arechabala family is vindicated. In telling this story, Bacardi is also transformed. By claiming to advocate on behalf of the Arechabala family, the corporation becomes the unspoken hero in the story.

But in this case, the Cuban government is not only a political regime but also a direct, business competitor. Therefore, the play also serves an important strategic objective. By establishing Bacardi as the rightful owners of the Havana Club name, the play is also meant to meet the longer term objective of securing the U.S. rights to the trademark. As Wilson stated,

> In telling the story of the Arechabala family, we hope to end the confusion as to which Havana Club is the real, authentic version and reinforce that it does not matter where Havana Club rum is produced. . . .Unlike Pernod Ricard, the Bacardi and Arechabala families are not misleading consumers. (Wong, 2018)

If Bacardi can win the battle for Cuban authenticity, they are in a better position to realize their long-term goal of impeding the entry of HCI's Havana Club into the U.S. marketplace. However, Bacardi is not unique in conflating their political and economic interests. Our comparative analysis of both campaigns reveals that advertising managers have become adept at using politics as a form of marketing. Conversely, we found that in the process of advancing their economic goals, companies can also articulate a clear and overt political point of view. Whether it is Bacardi's purported outrage at that the socialist state or HCI's implicit critique of capitalism, we found that political ideology can translate into persuasive and effective advertising.

Conclusion

In this article, we sought to reexamine the relationship between ideology, representation, and advertising practice. As we have previously argued, critical research has largely found that advertising celebrates capitalism by depicting consumption in its idealized form. In Schudson's (1986) words, "advertising is capitalism's way of saying I love you to itself" (p. 231). By analyzing two campaigns, produced under different political-ideological contexts, we were able to explore the degree to which competing ideologies can coexist within a single advertisement. Our finding that HCI's campaign can promote the sale of rum, while also celebrating socialist values and advance the interests of the Cuban state, complicates the capitalist-socialist dichotomy.

The specific focus of this research has been on brand authenticity. While there has been growing research on how individual brands attempt to position their products as authentic (Beverland, 2005; Gilmore & Pine, 2007), the competitive nature of authenticity-building has been left relatively unexplored. By comparing these two campaigns at this remarkable moment in time, we are better able to understand the ways in which brands engage in an ongoing struggle to assign and reassign meaning to both themselves and their competitors. In their attempt to establish their own Havana Club brand as the truly authentic rum, HCI and Bacardi are engaged in what Goldman and Papson (1996) call "sign competition" (p. 5) in which one's success at claiming authenticity is dependent on the other's failure. The outcomes of this struggle are not only symbolic but also have legal and economic implications. If, for example, Bacardi is successful at establishing its version of Havana Club as an authentic, Cuban rum (despite having no material connections to Cuba), it is better positioned to retain its rights to the Havana Club trademark, thereby impeding HCI's entry into the U.S. marketplace.

Brand authenticity has largely been examined as a semiotic process, in which marketers actively link their products with words, images, and themes that carry cultural and social meaning. Thus, a unique contribution of this project has been to move beyond a semiotic approach to advertising and examine the specific mechanisms by which ideology is enacted through advertising practice. Overall, we found this process to be highly orchestrated, involving a disciplined and coordinated approach to strategic analysis, creative development, and production. Our analysis of internal documents reveals that advertising professionals are astutely aware of their political and cultural environments and actively seek ways to exploit consumer disaffection for strategic advantage. Furthermore, this process involved a global network of professionals that included not only marketers but also writers, photographers, musicians, filmmakers, and artists who are based primarily in the United States and United Kingdom.

Collectively, these various actors engage in an ongoing struggle to discursively construct Cuban authenticity. But in doing so, they are asserting a value statement on the revolution itself. As we have discussed in this article, how one sees the revolution is dependent on one's orientation. Cuba's Havana Club campaign presented socialism as a superior model to Western capitalism, suggesting that the revolution was a success. The joyful, everyday Cubans who populate their campaign are meant to substantiate this argument. For Bacardi, the revolution was a failure because it interrupted capitalism and free choice. In both cases, however, consumption becomes essential to experiencing authenticity. After all, choosing the authentic Cuba is dependent on choosing the authentic rum. From this perspective, the revolution truly has been branded.

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Media Marathoning Through Health Struggles: Filling a Social Reservoir

Lisa G. Perks[1]

Abstract

This essay uses grounded theory to analyze interviews with a dozen people who media marathoned while going through a health struggle. Three prominent relationship-focused themes emerged from the analysis: (1) Interviewees experienced "parasocial encouragement," drawing inspiration from characters' perseverance; (2) interviewees often marathoned stories recommended by family or friends, which led to conversations about the stories; and (3) interviewees struggling with depression or anxiety were able to learn more about human relationships through media and to use media engagement experiences as springboards for communication. In sum, through the cultivation of social support and social capital, media marathoning experiences helped study participants buildup and draw from a meaningful social reservoir in their time of enhanced need for connection. The social reservoir metaphor captures media marathoning's embeddedness in a rich social environment of real and fictive others, with relationships that can both precede and live on beyond the media engagement experience.

Keywords

audience research, binge-watching, media marathoning, media-related coping, social support

Doctors are not yet writing binge-watching or media marathoning prescriptions, but people struggling with health problems are certainly self-medicating that way. Reddit contains several posts requesting recommendations for shows to binge-watch while "sick" or "on bed rest," with one situated in the Crohn's

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disease subreddit ("Blahcentral, 2015"). *The New Yorker's* Hannah Goldfield (2013) recounted binge-watching the first season of *Gossip Girl* in 1 day while "holed up with the flu" (para. 4). The "get well faster" blog for zinc lozenge "Cold-Eeze" offers a list of six binge-worthy shows for people who are under the weather ("Top TV Series," 2015). In interviews with media marathoners, Perks (2015) found that several were using the "immersive media experience" to "carve out a healing space" while recovering from surgeries and illnesses (p. 30).

This study presents a deeper look at the experiences of people who media marathoned through a health struggle that took them out of their usual routine. A dozen people were interviewed, and the transcripts were analyzed using grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Participants met the study criteria if, according to their personal judgment, in the 24 months prior to the interview, they had media marathoned while "a health-related concern kept them out of work, or school, or rendered them unable to conduct their normal daily activities for at least one day." Because this is an exploratory study on a research subject with a paucity of literature, the criteria were intentionally inclusive.[1] Participants were not specifically asked about their health struggle, but some volunteered that information. The health challenges included pregnancy bed rest, mental illness, surgical recovery, injury, recovery from cancer treatments, and the flu.[2] The inclusivity of the recruitment process, combined with in-depth interviews, allowed for more flexibility to probe into disparate experiences and also to distill commonalities among them. Participants in this research were asked about their marathoning motivations, their emotional and physical experiences while marathoning, and interactions with fellow viewers, among other topics.

The phrase "media marathon" and its operationalization were used when designing the study to both avoid stigmatized language (e.g., "binge") and include multiple media. Drawing from Perks, media marathoning was operationalized as watching at least one season of a TV show in a week or less, watching three or more films from the same series in a week or less, or reading three or more books from the same series in a month or less. Although binge-watching is certainly "defined through highly individualized terms and practices" (Jenner, 2016, p. 265), other studies have operationalized it as watching two or more episodes of a show in one sitting (see, e.g., Exelmans & Van den Buick, 2017; Pittman & Sheehan, 2015). The definition of media marathoning used here focuses on holistic engagement with a narrative. Indeed, Netflix is also moving in that direction, using the definition of binge-watching as "completing at least one season of a show within 7 days of starting" in a recent study (Netflix, Inc., 2018).

Scholars researching media and coping have posited that negative perceptions of media engagement—such as thinking of media as a "guilty pleasure" or television viewers as "couch potatoes"—are a barrier to the potential stress relief afforded by such practices (e.g., Nabi, Torres, & Prestin, 2017; Reinecke, Hartmann, & Eden, 2014). Study participant Isabel[3] (Latina woman, 32) noted that her doctor putting her on pregnancy bed rest was the only reason "no one will be like, 'You're gross. Get off the couch,'" while she was media marathoning. Helen (Caucasian woman, 45), who dealt with chronic health conditions, faced more regular scrutiny: "My husband thinks [media marathoning] is harmful. He's like, you know 'shut that off and do other things,' but I disagree because it's comforting to me."

In contrast to the isolated couch potato stereotype, interviewees revealed that social connections facilitated by media marathoning (see also Pittman & Sheehan, 2015) were a notable part of their coping processes. Three prominent themes emerged from the analysis of transcripts: (1) Interviewees experienced "parasocial encouragement," meaning that characters' positive attitudes and perseverance often inspired interviewees to feel more optimistic and agentic in their own health struggles; (2) interviewees sometimes media marathoned with family members, spending quality time together while laid up. Those who watched alone frequently reported using shared, asynchronous media experiences as a communication topic with friends, family, or coworkers; (3) interviewees struggling with depression or anxiety were able to learn more about human relationships through media and to use media engagement experiences as springboards for communication with others.

These themes can be divided into two essential findings: Participants used media marathoning to (1) cultivate social support from real or fictive others or to (2) create openings for the human coordination and cooperation that constitute social capital. Although media engagement may be thought to restrict social opportunities, being ill and experiencing restricted mobility, pain, and isolation changes the calculation of opportunity costs. Media marathoning experiences functioned as a hub for meaningful social engagement for a population that often had few alternative avenues for social activity. In sum, media marathoning enabled viewers and readers to buildup and draw from a unique social reservoir in a time of enhanced need for connection.

The social reservoir metaphor emerging from this grounded theory analysis captures media marathoning's embeddedness in a rich social environment of real and fictive others, with relationships that can both precede and live on beyond the combined media engagement experience and health event.[4] The word reservoir connotes a vessel to be filled. Health struggles can often lead to isolation and a change in social routines. While not all changes can be negative, some marathoners connected their health struggles with loneliness and boredom. Media marathoners filled these social reservoirs from combinations of media recommendations, coviewing experiences, asynchronous media engagement, character inspiration, media knowledge, and deeper understanding of the human condition. Many participants continued filling their social reservoirs beyond the initial marathons by convincing others to view with them (perhaps at a slower pace), communicating with other viewers/readers about the stories, socializing with others after media engagement helped improve their self-concept or anxiety, and integrating certain characters into their self-concept or identity.

Mediated and Nonmediated Social Support

Social support, which refers to functional, informational, or emotional assistance provided by friends, family members, coworkers, and other significant people in one's life, can be considered "a coping resource—in this case a social 'fund' from which people may draw when handling stressors" (Thoits, 1995, p. 64). Lazarus (1999) offered a simple definition of coping as "the effort to manage psychological stress" (p. 111).[5] Social support through various dimensions is crucial to the coping process because social support can function as a buffer that mitigates the deleterious effects of stress (Thoits, 1995; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). In their meta-analysis of studies analyzing social support and physiological factors, Uchino et al. (1996) found "strong evidence" connecting social support to beneficial effects on the "cardiovascular, endocrine, and immune systems" (p. 521). Buffering stress can have many notable physiological, mental, and physical health benefits that span prevention, to coping, to recovery.

Media engagement promotes social support in part because it grows social capital. Social capital, a phrase popularized by Putnam (1995), "refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (para. 7). Relevant to understanding social capital, Matrix (2014) wrote that binge-watching is "not about social exile but about enabling and enhancing participation in social conversations" (p. 127). Russell, Norman, and Heckler (2004) went so far as to describe television viewing as a "catalyst for community building" (p. 286). A shared experience of media engagement, even if asynchronous or spatially distant, can help form or strengthen a network and cultivate trust. The relationships emerging from media-related points of contact and cooperation may thus ultimately be converted into a social reservoir.

This contact need not be in person to yield benefits. Studies have revealed that computer-mediated social support helps cultivate social capital and initiate offline support. Leung (2007), for example, found that adolescents with entertainment and relationship-related Internet use motives found Internet use to be a "positive coping strategy to temporarily reduce stress and anxiety" (p. 211). Clarifying mechanisms of social media-based social support, Vitak and Ellison (2013) found that social media platform Facebook facilitated emotional and informational social support in part because it reduced barriers to communication and made it easier for users to widely broadcast messages that implicitly or explicitly requested support. Interviewees in their study were able to gain support from weak social ties but also attract support from strong ties through other channels such as phone and e-mail (Vitak & Ellison, 2013).

Comparing social support in online and offline contexts longitudinally, Trepte, Dienlin, and Reinecke (2015) found that online informational support exceeded that which was provided offline, whereas offline emotional and instrumental support exceeded online support in those areas. Also observing a flow from online to offline social support in their study of online gaming involving clans or guilds, Trepte, Reinecke, and Juechems (2012) found a positive relationship between both bridging social capital (heterogeneous, looser ties) and bonding social capital (homogeneous, stronger ties) and offline support. The authors surmised that this support mechanism would be particularly beneficial to those who are socially isolated because of health or mobility struggles (Trepte et al., 2012).

Substantial evidence cited above indicates that face-to-face and computer-mediated communication effectively channels social support. A smaller but growing body of research has emerged, which demonstrates that one-way exposure to fictive characters may also be a valuable resource for emotional social support. Horton and Wohl's (1979) concept of parasocial relationships serves as the backdrop for understanding this mechanism of support. The phrase parasocial relationship describes the "seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer" (Horton & Wohl, 1979, p. 32). Studies have uncovered notable similarities between interpersonal and parasocial relationships: These relationships develop according to similar standards of social- and task-related attraction (Rubin & McHugh, 1987), repeat exposure helps these relationships form (Rubin & McHugh, 1987), spectators feel like they understand character personalities and habits (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991), and the intensity of a parasocial relationship is a predictor of distress following a "parasocial breakup" (Eyal & Cohen, 2006). Relevant to the current study in which participants rapidly engaged their media content (through a media marathon), duration of media exposure have not been shown to correlate with strength of parasocial relationships (Rubin & McHugh, 1987) or feelings of loss when a show ends (Eyal & Cohen, 2006).[6]

But how do parasocial relationships interact with human relationships? Although studies have hypothesized about correlations between loneliness and parasocial interaction, significant correlations have not emerged (e.g., Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). Rubin et al. (1985) did find, however, that parasocial relationships and loneliness were both linked to greater television reliance. Thinking on the subject has evolved to see parasocial relationships as meeting various affiliative needs. Finn and Gorr (1988), for example, described a set of "social compensation" television viewing motives that met companionship and escapism needs. Greenwood (2008) discovered that people having "difficulty with emotion and arousal regulation" were more likely to experience both parasocial interaction with a favorite character and media transportation (p. 421). Offering more comprehensive findings from four related studies, Derrick, Gabriel, and Hugenberg (2009) put forth the social surrogacy theory, which argues that well-established parasocial relationships provide the experience of belongingness. These findings highlight the importance of accounting for viewers' affective states and relationships with characters when assessing or predicting viewing experiences and outcomes.

Using television for social compensation purposes or engaging in parasocial interaction may pave the way for drawing inspiration from perseverant or optimistic media characters. Johnson, Slater, Silver, and Ewoldsen (2016) offered a narrative-based explanation for the inspirational effects of media engagement, writing that "[n]arrative worlds permit temporary expansion of the boundaries of the subjective experience of self because they allow people to experience capabilities (or the lack thereof) beyond their own [and] other relationships (wonderful or awful)" (p. 387). When adding an actively reflective component to the narrative experience—such as journaling about the content—viewers of dramatic films in Khoo and Oliver's (2013) study exhibited "character identification and improved self-efficacy in handling sadness, [which] indirectly gave rise to greater general health, lower depression, and a tendency for lesser anxiety" (Khoo & Oliver, 2013, p. 286). Although participants in this study were not asked to journal, many seemed to be actively processing character or personae struggles and successes.

Methodology

This study was initiated after recognizing a gap in the literature regarding health coping and newer patterns of immersive and holistic media engagement. Interview questions were created to focus on behavioral, social, and affective dimensions of marathon experiences, thus presenting full-bodied answers to the study's two research questions: What patterns emerge from experiences media marathoning while dealing with a health concern? What are peoples' perceptions of the role, if any, media marathoning played in their coping processes? After receiving institutional review board approval in spring of 2016, participants were recruited in the United States through several means: flyers posted in a condominium complex, flyers posted around a college campus, social media posts about the study made to personal connections and community groups, and a post in a community newsletter. Interviews were conducted from June to December of 2016. All interviewees were offered $10 Amazon gift cards.

The study closed after data saturation had been achieved with a dozen participants. The average age of participants was 39, with a range of 24 to 65. The study included eight women and four men. Participants' self-identified races and ethnicities were African American ($N = 1$), Asian ($N = 1$), Caucasian ($N = 8$), Caucasian/Jewish ($N = 1$), and Latina ($N = 1$). Because social support or isolation could play a role in health coping, participants were asked about their living situation. The majority ($N = 6$) lived with a spouse or partner and children, four lived with a spouse or partner, and two lived with roommates.[7]

The semistructured interviews were conducted by phone ($N = 8$) or in person ($N = 4$). The recruitment language specified that the media marathons during health struggles had to have taken place in the 24 months prior to the interview. This temporal boundary was designed to promote detailed recall of these significant events. The time span between interview and media marathon ranged from 0 to 13 months, with an average of 4.3 months. This relatively short time gap suggests that the experiences were likely fresh in interviewees' minds.

Interviews were based on a list of 12 core questions about topics such as participants' motives to media marathon, their selection of particular content to marathon, their emotional and physical reactions to the marathon, any connections to fan communities, comparisons between marathoning and channel surfing or watching/reading one-off texts, and if they would recommend a media marathon to someone in a similar circumstance. The author transcribed the interviews, which yielded 42 single-spaced pages.

Transcripts were analyzed using grounded theory, which helps to "demonstrate how logic and emotion combine to influence how persons respond to events or handle problems through action and interaction" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 11). This method was selected over others because of its explanatory power and focus on theory building. The use of grounded theory yielded recommendations to other scholars studying media-related coping and to other individuals going through a health struggle. The social reservoir theory emerging from these interviews offers one reason *why* study participants found that media marathoning aided in recuperation.

Using grounded theory's recommended procedures (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), the author first read through the transcripts without taking notes. During the second reading, notes were made in the margins about key ideas and repeated themes. The third reading involved "cross person analysis" (Chávez, 2014, p. 29). In this step, core concepts repeated among three or more interviewees were listed in a transcript memo, yielding 20 total themes. Even after collapsing redundant categories (Vitak & Ellison, 2013), there were too many categories for one standard-length scholarly essay, so the findings were broken into two essays.[8] This article arose from the identification of three cohesive themes centered around relationships—with characters and fellow viewers.

Parasocial Encouragement

Inspiration and hope springing from mediated "friendships" emerged as parasocial benefits of media marathoning while coping with health struggles. Abby was emboldened by the persistence of contestants on *America's Got Talent* when she marathoned the show while dealing with depression. Citing several "encouraging" stories about contestants who succeeded despite setbacks, Abby concluded:

> I pick up a lot of things that really motivate me to think that life doesn't really have to be stagnant [...] You shouldn't let circumstances stop you. All these things, I just put them together to [...] build my confidence in whatever I'm doing.

Experiments have shown that underdog stories can inspire hopefulness and the pursuit of one's goals (Prestin, 2013) and that media content evoking feelings of admiration for a character or persona's excellence left viewers more committed to working hard to reach personal goals (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Abby's proclamations affirm these findings in a natural setting. *America's Got Talent* is built on unlikely American dream stories, and Abby was able to take inspiration to pursue her own dreams and recover from her own setbacks, all because of stories from people whose journeys differed greatly from hers. The marathon pace of watching television shows and several movie series offered Abby company to visit with regularly once she got home from work: "I had less people around me so [media] was like more or less like a friend I have. 'Oh, I have this movie I want to go back to.'"

Despite a surface disconnect between interviewee/character demographics and circumstances, two additional interviewees related to characters' challenges. Although this pattern did not have support from the majority of thus suggesting that Glen (Caucasian man, 32), an injured runner, was inspired by Katniss Everdeen's journey in *The Hunger Games* books while he rode a stationary bike in his recovery process. Glen was not fighting for his survival, but he related to Katniss's physical struggles, explaining their connection this way:

> [Katniss] does describe several ordeals that she had to go through and she would describe having to deal with physical fatigue and pain and basically gritting her teeth and enduring it. While I was injured and not happy and in pain, I did find myself identifying with that.

While Glen was riding a stationary bike in his basement, he was alone in terms of human company, but he forged a connection with Katniss Everdeen and their shared physical pain. Glen drew from the character's more arduous and painful struggle while engaged in his own coping and recovery efforts. In contrast to reading more slowly or picking up one-off books, the marathon pace of reading a series helped Glen feel "immersed" in *The Hunger Games* trilogy. He explained, "having one story to follow throughout that time was kind of a good thing I think. It kept me focused."

In Maria's case, her physical pain was not mirrored in the character she connected with; rather, both women were united by adverse conditions that they could not change. Their primary site of agency was their reaction to the situations. Maria (Caucasian woman, 63) described the character's struggle as such:

> She was kind of in a situation that was beyond her control. And she was funny, and she handled it with grace [. . ..] Maybe I identified with her a little bit because she was dealing with adversity and how she dealt with it.

Maria hedges, using tentative language here, perhaps because of the seeming divide between her and the character: Maria went through debilitating cancer treatments and surgeries, while the character she connected to, Piper Chapman, was serving a prison term for drug trafficking on *Orange is the New Black*. But their stories, or at least the conditions under which they struggled, had many similarities.

Maria compared herself to Piper just after describing prison-like hospital conditions: "[I]t's horrible, especially because when you're in [the Intensive Care Unit] and the lights are on all the time and all that stuff. So it's weird not knowing day from night and where you are." Maria felt stuck in the veritable prisons of the hospital environment and her health struggles. She was unable to move comfortably, socially isolated, out of touch with the temporal rhythms of her regular life, and unable to control the conditions that surrounded her. What she could decide was how she dealt with and reacted to those conditions.

The interviewee experiences that comprise this theme have notable commonalities. Characters or personae dealt with challenging circumstances that led to frustration, emotional pain, or physical pain. The characters' journeys left marathoners feeling encouraged, motivated, or inspired. The divergence between character and interviewee experience suggests that we are seeing evidence of bridging social capital in which weak ties among diverse beings are a potential source of meaningful social support. Characters and media personae represent an always available, no obligation social reservoir awaiting activation from viewers or readers. The fictive component of the social reservoir can be drawn from in times of need (such as enjoying a character in the moment) or it can be used to shore up one's reserves—if, for example, a character has a more enduring impact on one's outlook, approach to the world, or self-concept. The temporally condensed, marathon-style reading or viewing pattern may help activate the reservoir by enabling viewers and readers to more strongly connect with the characters. The narrative arc can feel more personalized and relevant as people spend an intense, focused time period in that world forging various relationships. The characters' wisdom, strength, hindsight, and optimism are readily available for readers' and viewers' inspiration.

Connect With "Real" Others

The process of finding a new text to media marathon often began with human contact, human recommendations. Wendy (Caucasian woman, 26) and her husband sought television show recommendations through social media:

> We put this thing out on Facebook, which is what a lot of people are doing, looking for a good show to watch [...] We had a lot of requests for [*Friday Night Lights*], so we were like "Oh, it must be good."

Helen's (Caucasian woman, 45) Facebook friends would take the unsolicited initiative to offer up their opinions: "if you like that [show] you'll like this [show]." Anjali's (Asian woman, 24) friend offered both recommendations and viewing companionship: "In the beginning I was not into movies. I used to lose interest, so [my friend] used to sit with me and make me watch movies. All the good movies." The homophily of these personal connections, the bonding social capital, often led to study participants finding enjoyable texts. They were perhaps more encouraged to give the texts a chance because of trust in friends' opinions and because of the opportunity to connect through a common experience. Perks also found benefits for the one who recommended the story, notably the "enjoyment of re-visiting beloved story worlds and comparing interpretations and perspectives" with friends and family who took the recommendation (p. xx).

Spousal persuasion helped Bruce (Caucasian/Jewish man, 65) discover a show that would get him through 6 weeks of recovery from neck surgery. Bruce was drawn to *Call the Midwife* after catching a newer episode with his wife. He went back to the first season following surgery, and *Call the Midwife* became a topic of conversation for the two. Bruce recalled that conversations commonly started with his wife asking, "So where are you now in the series?" When media marathoning, one can get quickly caught up on a story line and be ready to discuss with others who have already engaged with the narrative. Perks found this to be a common practice among marathoners, which offers benefits to both the new marathoner and the one who has already read/viewed: "It's a shared, but temporally separate, experience that reactivates latent memories" for the one who recommended the text (Perks, 2015, p. 34).

Daniel (Caucasian man, 46) also chose a show that would be of interest to his family, but in his case, they watched in person, at the same time.[9] *This Old House* gave Daniel the chance to spend time with his sons while he was laid up with a shoulder injury. Daniel recalled *This Old House's* appeal to all: His youngest son "was excited because they used a crane and a bulldozer. Then my older son was like 'look at all the tools they are using.' That's sort of the way that I chose [the show]." Daniel noted that marathoning was an important part of the family bonding experience: "It was the intent to watch an entire season in a relatively short period of time because my older son had not seen it before so he didn't sort of understand the whole arc of the show." The strategic selection of *This Old House* worked for different ages and generations, allowing Daniel to have a temporary, enjoyable ritual with his boys during a difficult health stretch. Both the one struggling with the health problem and the social support network may need a break from talking and thinking about health problems. The enjoyable entertainment in these examples was an innocuous, escapist opportunity that facilitated bonding.

Many study participants found parasocial relationships to be enjoyable commonalities—mutual friends, if you will—in human relationships. Isabel and Rebecca, in particular, described meaningful triangulations of self, character, and human connection. After noting that she would sometimes feel lonely staying home with her new baby all day, Isabel (Latina woman, 32)[10] explained how marathoning stories helped her keep communication going with characters and friends:

> [Y]ou know, 'I'm going to watch my show and I'm going to catch up with all of these [fictive] people.' And then when I go on Facebook, I can at least talk to other [real] people through it that way. For me, it gave me like a connection to the outside world.

Being able to share experiences with others (even though not in the same room) was a valuable form of social capital for Isabel, who noted, "it also gives you a way to talk to other people." The collective value of the media engagement experience could thus be realized in the moment *and* stored up for redemption in future social interactions.

Rebecca (Caucasian woman, 38) found the characters from her *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* marathon to be "very human and engaging," noting that she "enjoyed being with them throughout the entire season." It was challenging for Rebecca to slow down her regular pace of work and parenting while dealing with an extended illness and a hospital stay. She noted that the marathoning experience helped her to feel "happier" as she "went along through this character [Kimmy Schmidt] through her life." Media marathoning *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* and *Midsomer Murders,* Rebecca recalled, helped "keep my mind active while I was forcing my body to rest." The show and characters were so captivating that Rebecca recommended the show to her husband, who also watched and was then able to talk about it with her. Instead of thinking of media marathoning as a solitary, isolating activity, Isabel's and Rebecca's experiences position marathoning as preparation for, or facilitation of, interactions with others.

Coping With Mental Illness

The third theme specifically concerns interviewees who were dealing with depression or anxiety, which often made it difficult for them to socialize and nurture or draw from their social support networks. Existing research has shown that media can help people cope with negative emotions (Nabi, So, & Prestin, 2011), handle sadness (Khoo & Oliver, 2013), and indirectly lower depression and proclivity for anxiety (Khoo & Oliver, 2013). The experiences described here involved positive affective and social outcomes from media marathoning, most notably boosting one's confidence and facilitating future interactions. Both Anjali (Asian woman, 24) and Abby (African American woman, 27) marathoned movie series and a few television series to cope with depression and feelings of isolation. After losing her best friend because of shared romantic interest in the same man, Anjali recounted, "I was depressed and my [other] friend suggested I watch movies. [. . .] I picked up so many things from [viewing]. [I learned that] people who want to stay in your life, they will stay." The vast expanse of life experiences Anjali saw in movie series helped her reduce uncertainty about interacting with others. Before she watched the movies, she said, "I was a very shy person. I wouldn't talk to you like this," but now, "I am just so confident in my own skin." Anjali's story positions movie marathons as a turning point in her improved self-esteem and comfort while socializing.

Abby (African American woman, 27) made a similar argument when citing movies as a source of transformation for her:

> I used to be an introvert, more of a melancholic when it comes to my personality traits [. . .] so I kind of decided to start watching movies that can help me build my relationships with people and at the same time try to understand people better and know how to relate with them.

Because Abby was dealing with a lot of work stress at the time, she purposely selected that which did not relate to those negative experiences: Each title she chose "had to do with family, friends, love, nothing was job related, which really helped me." The escapism in Abby's experiences involved a strategic, content-specific dive into fictive worlds. The social reservoirs, in the cases of Anjali and Abby, were more of a respite, helping the women temporarily escape from challenging real-world relationships into more healthy, fictive relationship models.

Helen (Caucasian woman, 45) dealt with long-term depression and anxiety and strategically used media to cultivate social support and alleviate her anxiety. At the time of our interview, she belonged to all the Facebook fan pages for *Supernatural, Dr. Who*, and *Sherlock*, plus a hybrid called "SuperWhoLock." Helen laughed when describing her communication with fellow fans: "It's awesome because we all talk about [the shows]. And we're like 'nobody else would understand what we're talking about but we understand each other.'" The social media fan sites were a space in which Helen's viewing constituted a form of social capital that she could leverage for social support. Helen noted that she met "a lot of online friends" through the sites. Media marathoning and connecting with fan communities made her more comfortable in her home and also emboldened Helen to go out into the world: "I watch my show, my anxiety gets a little better, *then* I can leave my house." She was not changing her circumstances or ridding herself of anxiety, but Helen deliberately used familiar, engaging stories to enable her to function more comfortably with anxiety.

Helen was not tuning into just anything on television; the shows she strategically watched earned the label "my show." Marathon viewing was an important process in forging those loyal relationships. When asked to compare random television viewing (channel surfing or watching episodes of different shows in a row) with purposeful marathoning, Helen offered, "[W]ith the marathon, with these shows, I feel like I know them better. But if I turn on the TV and anything is on, it's not comforting to me." The strong sense of agency in Helen's interactions with the shows, characters, and with other people in niche fandoms provided her with support, belongingness, and relief.

Limitations and Future Research

This exploratory study has limitations that (1) caution against drawing generalizations from this data and (2) suggest productive areas of future research. To begin, this is a qualitative study that cannot yield conclusions about the general population. In addition, the study population did not include representation from demographics that are salient to this work. The mean age of the study population (39 years) was close to the U.S. median age (37.9 in 2016 [U.S. Census Bureau, 2017]), but the study did not include anyone younger than 24 years old. The study also did not include anyone who lives alone. These were not intentional exclusions in study recruitment; rather, they were simply a product of who volunteered to be in the study. Future studies should include a more diverse population in terms of age and living situations. In addition, studies should assess participants' other sources of social support—before, during, and after a health event—to uncover what unique role mediated social support might be playing as part of that overall mix.

People with disparate health conditions were included in the study to cast a wide net regarding health-related marathoning behaviors. Although the inclusive study criteria was a methodological strength in terms of uncovering themes that transcend a variety of experiences, the disparate health struggles mean that we cannot draw conclusions about best practices for people with particular health conditions. Future studies should hone in on media marathoning experiences for people with the same diagnosis or a similar ailment. That work may illuminate best practices and cautions regarding media marathon-related coping and even suggest the types of genres or texts that are preferable to that population (see also Nabi et al., 2017).

Exploring the interactions of text and coping situation could yield additional insights about the types of characters who are most "supportive." The "parasocial encouragement" theme supports forging a link between quantitative scholarship analyzing the effects of experience-related media messages (Kim & Tsay-Vogel, 2016; Nabi, Finnerty, Domschke, & Hull, 2006) and cultural studies scholarship focused on relevance (Fiske, 1988; Sender, 1999). Further studies should tap into the points of relevance participants find with particular texts when examining possible coping opportunities and outcomes. Although logistically challenging, experience-related media effects experiments should include a greater variety of mediated messages and greater depth of participant exposure to allow relevances to bubble up.

Conclusions

Many participants in this study were using media marathoning to build social capital and facilitate social support during a health struggle. The grounded theory analysis yielded the concept of the "social reservoir," which accounts for the social value of media marathoning-enabled interactions with both real and fictive others. This value may begin accruing before watching—if, for example, the reader/viewer knew a character from a previous story or the marathoned text was recommended by a friend/family member. The value in one's social reservoir may build while watching/reading by engaging in coviewing, by drawing inspiration and sense of a connection from the characters, or by escaping from stressful lived-world social situations. The value of the social reservoir may still build and be drawn from after media marathoning if one continues connecting with friends and family over the story or helps see their personal identity anew because of resonance with characters.

A notable theme, related to the idea of drawing on this reserve of social support is that most interviewees tapered from their media marathon once they started to feel better. Daniel (Caucasian man, 46) shrank his viewing pattern down from several episodes to one per day. Instead of forcing herself to make time to socialize (as she did when she was depressed), Anjali (Asian woman, 24) found herself having to make time to watch movies after she recovered—just one movie on the weekend if she was lucky. Rebecca (Caucasian woman, 38) eventually finished the *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* series "in little bits" after starting to feel better. Study participants were reconnecting with friends, family, and colleagues after their health struggles, often using the stories as a way to build more bonding social capital. These findings indicate that media marathoning was often a coping strategy for an acute health event rather than a regular maintenance strategy for this population. This pattern may have emerged because of the nature of the study population (their particular characteristics and health struggles) or it may be more a widespread coping pattern—perhaps for those who are in mourning, dealing with a personal tragedy, or going through another type of hardship.

The tapering pattern may be attributed in part to three notable demographic features of our population: The age range did not include anyone younger than

24 years, no study participants lived alone, and the population was more highly educated than the average U.S. population. It is possible that people aged 24 and older have more work and family responsibilities than younger individuals; therefore, that population may have felt a stronger obligation to taper from their marathoning behaviors. In addition, Henning and Vorderer (2001) found a significant relationship between living with others and watching less television. The living situation may create additional opportunities to socialize or potentially lead to greater self-regulation of media use. In addition, formal education correlates with a higher need for cognition, which is negatively related to time spent viewing television (Henning & Vorderer, 2001). Thus, although a media marathoning viewing pattern need not exceed the national average of time spent viewing television daily, which 2016 Nielsen figures placed at just more than 5 hours per day (cited in Koblin, 2016), the study population may not have been used to that much media engagement on average. They may therefore have had an easier time scaling back to a more moderate media engagement pattern.

Collectively, these findings suggest that media marathoning during a health struggle can function as more than avoidance coping: Media marathoning can be a strategic vehicle for creating, activating, or bolstering various forms of social support and social capital in the face of potentially isolating circumstances. The essay's literature presents much evidence to support the idea of using media for recovery, but why has not this practice been widely embraced? Why do the characteristics of introversion, loneliness, and laziness still remain attached to media (and especially television) engagement? Reinecke et al. (2014) uncovered a positive correlation between perceiving entertainment media engagement as procrastination and experiencing guilt with media engagement, along with a negative correlation between feeling that guilt and experiencing media-induced recovery. Reinecke et al.'s (2014) findings suggest that negative connotations associated with media use and negative appraisals of such experiences limit or hurt media-related recovery opportunities.

This study is one additional piece in the pile of mounting support for the efficacy of media-related coping. The qualitative evidence provided here does not conclusively prove that media marathoning is healthy in all circumstances for all people. More simply, interviewees' stories chip away at some negative connotations attached to media engagement. These findings about purposeful, inspiring, socially engaged media marathoning can be marshaled to reduce the stigma for those who rely on media for coping and recovery from a variety of ailments. Although a media marathon may be completed alone, it is not necessarily a lonely pursuit: Media marathoning can be both inspired by and nurture real and fictive social connections. Letting people know that others cope the same way they do and that these media-related coping strategies have self-reported effectiveness paves the way for reduction of guilt and the promotion of a healing media engagement environment. The day may soon come in which the phrase "Netflix and heal" is part of the common lexicon.

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Notes

1. Nabi et al. (2017) stated that the work on media and recovery is "still in its very early stages" (p. 126), and no binge-watching studies have yet been published as part of that literature.
2. The types of health struggles are not meant to seen as similar. A wide variety of experiences were desirable because a homogeneous population could have yielded polarized results: For example, Nabi et al. (2017) found a positive association between media use and social support for college students during times of stress and a negative association between media use and social support for breast cancer survivors.
3. Pseudonyms are used when introducing interviewees' quotes. They are all identified using the race/ethnicity they preferred, along with their gender and age to shed light on any patterns that may be related to demographics.
4. To be sure, most people have a social reservoir before a health event; however, the products going into that reservoir and the needs that draw from that reservoir often change during a health struggle when one's typical opportunities to communicate with others, to work, and to socialize may be diminished.
5. Recovery, a related but separate concept, is a process that involves change back to a normative standard, which can be "reflected in a decrease of physiological strain indicators" (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007, p. 205). The majority of study participants were engaged in recovery, but at least one as dealing with a chronic condition; thus, coping is the most fitting term to describe the experiences.
6. A main difference between "real" and parasocial relationships is the lack of behavioral interaction (Cohen, 2003); however, two-way interaction is increasingly possible through newer media avenues and trends such as Reddit "AMAs," social media accounts from fans who produce content in a character's name (see Wood & Baughman, 2012), and the YouTube or Web 2.0 paths to celebrity, among other examples.
7. Recruitment did not intentionally target people who live with others.
8. The other essay focuses on how people with health struggles were gaining beneficial cognitive, emotional, and physical regulatory opportunities from media marathoning.

9. Although interacting in person may still be seen as a gold standard of social support in the digital age, the social reservoir theory does not prioritize in-person contact. Interviewees found value in many different forms of social support and social capital, which is particularly important when dealing with an isolating health struggle.
10. Isabel marathoned both on pregnancy bed rest and while recovering from childbirth and staying home with her baby.

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