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Editorial

Editor's Introduction

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As the incoming Managing Editor of *JCI*, I would like to begin by thanking John C. Carpenter under whose editorship *JCI* has become more international in its scope. A small, yet significant, example of this expanded scope of *JCI* is the two articles related to Ghana and India published in this issue under the theme "Articulations of International Media and English," which is guest-edited by John. I am also grateful to him for training me in the editorial management of the journal, and I look forward to building on some excellent work done by previous editors as well as reviewers in continuing to develop *JCI* as one of the principal venues for critical–cultural scholarship.

In this edition, Kristin Marie Bivens and Kirsti Cole study grotesque protest—a technique that uses body fluids to rhetorically resist attempts to regulate bodies—on social media. Through three case studies, the authors demonstrate how grotesque protest on social media can serve as a powerful means for "opening space, transgressing boundaries, demanding attention, and equalizing differential political power relations." The study is timely given the U.S. government's ongoing efforts to control women's bodies and Congressional attempts to reduce the health-care benefits accorded by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

In the next article titled "Wedding Reality TV Bites Black," Lindani Mbunyuza-Memani examines the representation of weddings in South African reality television shows. Situating the research problem within the framework of political economy, the author analyzed two South African wedding reality programs, *Our Perfect Wedding* and *Top Billing Weddings*. It was found that the two programs ironed out cultural diversity by sidelining black weddings and highlighting white weddings, pointing to the underlying market logic of producing what sells. Additionally, white weddings were portrayed as "universal and normative."

The question for researchers Casey Scheibling, James Gillett, and Gordon Brett in their article "Making the Virtual Rounds" is why do health-care professionals create blogs and how do they use blogging as a component of their work. Through a thematic analysis of interviews with medical bloggers featured on *Grand Rounds*, a weekly medical blog forum, the authors find that blogging is used to articulate and reestablish a professional reputation as well as connect with patients informally. Blogs serve a "therapeutic function" for bloggers who read and write them to find personal and interpersonal comfort amid various

forms of stress and pressure. Through blogs, bloggers also negotiate institutional constraints and promote community and health-care reform.

In a review of "What Journalism Could be," J. David Wolfgang explains that author Barbie Zelizer provides an interpretation of and insight into how scholarship can improve the practice, purpose, and use of journalism. Without taking sides, Zelizer addresses "both those who see change in journalism as an exciting time for growth and those who see it as the loss of the nostalgia of the past." The book, Wolfgang notes, is a refreshing and creative examination of the tensions of journalism at a time of excitement and anxiety.

Subin Paul
University of Iowa, IA, USA

I'm happy to introduce two articles under the theme "Articulations of International Media and English." As part of a growing body of scholarship about the ways languages inform media production and conceptualization, these articles make important contributions.

In the first, Abena Animwaa Yeboah-Banin, Modestus Fosu, and Marian Tsegah employ a mix of applied linguistic and media theory to examine the case of English-language public service advertising in Ghana meant to reach a broad English-as-a-second-language audience. They note that most people never question the impact broadcasting in English has on mass media content, a legacy of its colonial imposition. Furthermore, they find that by employing complex linguistic structures, which are understood by only the most highly educated, the radio ads in their study will probably never reach their intended audience with messages of democratic importance.

Pallavi Rao, meanwhile, examines paratexts produced by Indian author Chetan Bhagat in India's English-language media. She finds that discourses of neoliberal ascent and caste neutralization characterize Bhagat's media contributions, hiding the dominance of Brahmin-savarna males in mainstream media positions. While Bhagat's paratexts naturalize caste hierarchies, subalterns among his audience and readers are able to carve out a space within the English public sphere by turning discourses of neoliberal ascent to their own advantage.

John C. Carpenter (guest-editor)
University of Iowa, IA, USA

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Article

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The Grotesque Protest in Social Media as Embodied, Political Rhetoric

Kristin Marie Bivens[1] and Kirsti Cole[2]

Abstract

The grotesque protest—emboldened through social media—employs the body's fluids to push back against attempts to legislate bodies. Although social media use is commonly understood as engaging audience members who share ideological frames, it can instead diversify protest networks and encourage discourse. Social media provides individuals opportunities to resist attempts to control bodies and to reinsert individuals' voices in political discourse aimed to exclude those bodies. The body functions as the modality in which the communicative act occurs, and the body's fluids function as the medium for inventing disruptive, grotesque protest strategies. Activists such as Rupi Kaur, The Satanic Temple's Jex Blackmore, and those using Twitter hashtags #periodsforPence and #PEEOTUS use bodily fluids and tissues to emphasize resistance to political movements attempting to control and legislate bodies. The protest campaigns show that the grotesque can be an effective tool for opening space, transgressing boundaries, demanding attention, and equalizing differential political power relations.

Keywords

feminist media, communication, body, resistance, political discourse

[1]Harold Washington College, Chicago, IL, USA
[2]Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN, USA

Corresponding Author:
Kristin Marie Bivens, Harold Washington College, 30 East Lake Street, Chicago, IL 60601, USA.
Email: kbivens@ccc.edu

The national climate in the United States is steeped in increased dissatisfaction with state legislatures' ongoing attempts to control women's bodies and recent (2017) Congressional attempts to reduce the health-care benefits gained by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (P.L. 111–148) and the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 (P.L. 111–152), more commonly known as the ACA or Obamacare. When combined with ubiquitous social media use, such disapproval leads to increased and inventive protest strategies. For some, the result of the U.S. Presidential Election on November 8, 2016 signaled a potential dismantling of the mechanisms upholding *Roe v. Wade* and the ACA at the federal level. For others, the Election indicated a go-ahead to begin to push for legislation circumventing *Roe v. Wade* and repealing the ACA. The social climate in the United States became even more ripe for dissent post-2016 Presidential Election as protestors sought means to equalize the differential power relations between elected officials and individuals. The prevalence of social media use, like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, provides one possible method through which individuals can push back against the legislative structures in the United States. Social media provides individuals opportunities to resist attempts to control women's bodies and to reinsert individuals' voices in political discourse aimed to exclude those bodies.

That these protest strategies take place via social media is no accident. Tufekci and Wilson (2012) found that social media use greatly increased the odds of being involved in a protest. Not only do odds of participation increase, but social media use "represent[s] crosscutting networking mechanisms in a protest ecology" (Segerberg & Bennett 2011, p. 197). Although commonly understood as like minds speaking to like minds, social media can diversify protest networks and encourage discourse. According to Boyle (2016), the function of such rhetorical action is inventional: "Rhetoric, in practice and performance, is a continuous exercise of tendencies of inventional media or the writing body that produce new capacities of relating within an ecology of practice" (p. 551). If Boyle's context applies to protest rhetoric, social media protest strategies represent an inventional media that produces new practices. In our context, the body functions as the modality in which the communicative act occurs, and the body's fluids function as the medium (Simonson, 2014) for inventing disruptive protest strategies. According to Simonson (2014), "the concept of medium indicates a way of looking at the phenomena found in the [11] different [heuristic] categories" (p. 315) he suggested as the new framework for invention theory. He defines medium as habitat, as artistic material, as modes of communicative expression, and "as in the medium through which we address or interact with audiences" (p. 314). We look at bodily fluid as the medium through which protest interacts with audiences. The medium provides the opportunity to redistribute "rhetorical resources" more equally (p. 315). We refer to this inventional act as grotesque protest.

The grotesque protest uses the body's fluids to push back against attempts to legislate bodies. Although the grotesque as a protest technique is not new, it is gaining traction because of a resurgence in nation-wide state legislative attempts to regulate bodies. The case studies we analyze include Rupi Kaur's *period.* project, The Satanic Temple's (TST; n.d.) Jex Blackmore's call to send semen socks to an anti-choice Texas government official, and the Twitter hashtags #periodsforPence and #PEEOTUS. Grotesque protests capitalize on societal depictions of bodies and bodily fluids as grotesque, vulgar, and taboo. In the process, such protests show that the grotesque can be an effective tool for opening space, transgressing boundaries, and demanding attention. Attempts to legislate bodies will never account for or conceal the functions of the body; and the more powerful the attempts to sanitize the body, the more unsanitary the bodily displays. In the cases we present, we focus on the potential of menstrual blood, semen, and, most recently, urine as tools of grotesque protest to frame arguments about the body. We argue that grotesque protests represent an embodied rhetoric in which bodily fluids serve protesters by exaggerating and emphasizing their resistance to ineloquent political movements attempting to control bodies.

The Grotesque Body

In his article on satire and politics, Thorogood (2016) asks, "In what ways might fart jokes be geopolitical?" (p. 215). As Thorogood unpacks the role of "satirical humor that generates laughter that is politically ambivalent, vulgar, and messy" (p. 217), he identifies the grotesque as a common aspect of geopolitical critique. Grotesque realism, according to Bakhtin (1965/1984), includes the material bodily principle (p. 18) which is "contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed . . . This exaggeration has a positive, assertive character" (p. 19). The grotesque can be understood as a positive, public exaggeration of the bodily element. Moving the destructive or repulsive aspects of the lower bodily stratum (e.g., genitals, organs), the grotesque presents them as generative and affirming (p. 62). Like Bakhtin, Thorogood points to the vulgar offshoots of the body as productively political, particularly when paired with humor. In other words, when deployed with humor, the tools of vulgarity have a lasting effect.

According to Dodds (2007), satire often relies on grotesque bodily humor to be effective. Thorogood (2016) argues that in order to affect the audience, the political message must be funny, repulsive, or vulgar. We understand the grotesque as exaggeration of the vulgar for use. Bakhtin says that the grotesque opens the possibility for the untouchable to be reversed and renewed. No longer is the vulgar simply gross, nor is it to be rejected or dismissed. Instead, it is invoked for its value to strategically reframe public and political discourse about the body. Bakhtin (1965/1984) accounts for productive vulgarity by formulating

the grotesque as transgression—as open, as fluid: "[the grotesque body] is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits . . . the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose" (p. 26). The various offshoots of the grotesque body inevitably include bodily fluids: snot, nasal mucus, cervical mucus, vaginal discharge, menstrual blood, urine, and semen. Bakhtin distinguished between the purpose of exaggeration to reappropriate and to revalue the body and its bodily elements. But, according to Russo (1995), Bakhtin neglects sociogender relations when he points to the figure of the pregnant hag as "a typical and very strongly expressed grotesque" (p. 25). She uses Cixous to explore the social ramifications of the gendered grotesque, claiming that Cixous configures the female boy in her discussion of *ecriture feminine* with striking similarity to the continuous process of the grotesque body. Cixous refers to this as "the body without beginning and without end" (as cited in Russo, 1995, p. 67). According to Gasbarrone (1994), however, Bakhtin's configuration of the hag is as an overt figure, positive in nature, which celebrate life in its extreme intermediacy, in the fullness of its indetermination. Depending on one's vantage point, then, bodily elements and fluids might appear to be vulgar; however, in recent contexts, this kind of vulgarity is positive, endless, and exuberant. And when deployed as protest, it is strategic, political, and pointed. The grotesque body might represent a constantly evolving embodied subjectivity (Shabot, 2006). For Shabot, grotesque bodies provide the ideal apparatus to reunite disconnected notions of the body and its bodily fluids—an embodied conception. To understand the grotesque frame as a useful tool, we present several cases that emphasize the material body and the processes of the body as both individual and communal. The examples below first demonstrate the dominant assumptions surrounding bodies and bodily fluids as grotesque, vulgar, and taboo; and second, that the grotesque can be an effective tool for opening space, for transgressing boundaries, for demanding attention, and for equalizing differential political power relations.

The grotesque—in the protests and marked resistance we examine—can upend existing power structures, call attention to the inequality or discrimination inherent in the power structure that one seeks to supplant, resist attempts to control bodies, and reinsert individuals' voices in political discourse aimed to exclude those bodies. As grotesque protests—and components of grotesque rhetorical strategies—capture momentum to create movements, protesters call upon others to resist by reaching within their bodies to extract their bodily fluids. Physically embodying resistance to attempts aimed to control bodies, these individuals use existing structures (e.g., the U. S. Postal Service) to deliver their body's fluids to the desks of elected government officials. Through the grotesque protests, we explore what Thorogood (2016) calls for: an "attention to the relations between corporeal, material phenomena and representations in popular culture" (p. 221). Although other strategies are available to react to potential threatening laws and lawmakers, the grotesque protest is unique because it calls

upon individuals to use the very thing that is being regulated—the body—to push back, to resist, to dissent, to protest.

Legislating Bodies in the United States

Undeniably, legislation across all 50 states has passed regarding women's bodies and the limitations placed on those bodies, including nearly 340 abortion restrictions since 2010 (Nash, Gold, Ansari-Thomas, Cappello, & Mohammed, 2017). The Guttmacher Institute cites certain states as categorically hostile or extremely hostile to abortion. Feminists actively oppose restrictions placed on women's bodies in their own states, as well as in other hostile or extremely hostile states. In 2016 alone, Republican state legislatures passed over 60 abortion restrictions, after proposing more than 500. According to the Center for Reproductive Rights (2017), "medically unjustified, red-tape regulations" have been "ubiquitous in state legislatures across the country since 2011" (p. 4). The report provides a state-by-state comprehensive overview of new legislation enacted in 2016. Table 1 includes a sample.

The legislative actions listed represent only a few of the numerous ways in which women's bodies are legislated and regulated in the United States. The Republican legislative agenda represented earlier is a direct attack on women's rights in the United States. Located in the body, these attempted legislative restrictions seek to regulate the processes of the body and to provoke protest responses that are deeply rooted in cultural commonplaces about women. The grotesque provides a unique platform for understanding how an embodied rhetoric can successfully resist such restrictive regulatory acts by disrupting cultural and social expectations for bodies, and in particular, women's bodies.

The suggested "cultural politics for women" appear to be contained between the poles of "radical negation, silence, withdrawal, and invisibility, and the bold

Table 1. A Brief Snapshot at Reproductive Right Restrictions Across Several States.

State	Action
Alabama	Criminalize physicians; shut down clinics
Georgia	Funding crisis pregnancy centers
Idaho	
Indiana	Embryonic and fetal tissue cremation and burial
Louisiana	
Texas	
Ohio	Abortion restrictions
Oklahoma	
South Dakota	

affirmations of feminine performance, imposture, and masquerade (purity and danger)'' (Russo, 1995, p. 54). Russo begins her analysis of the female grotesque with the colloquialism, ''She is making a spectacle out of herself'' (p. 53). She argues that the danger of exposure, the danger of being a spectacle, is specifically a feminine concern. What she does not discuss in this section is the inherently racialized and classed nature of the spectacle. We acknowledge that in an intersectional reading, women of color and poor women have no access to the dominant constructions of purity. For example, one of the most frequently circulated news stories about the international Women's March on 21 January 2017 celebrated their nonviolence. The celebration of nonviolence not only points to the privilege associated with predominantly White women's bodies (the police were not under threat) but also points to the ways in which ''behaving'' bodies are celebrated and disruptive bodies are punished.

Purity/behaving or danger/disrupting seem to be motivating forces behind abstinence-only obsessed Republican politicians who appear to lock women's bodies into either the role of virgin or mother. Anything beyond that purity is threatening enough to close down the federal government.[1] Obviously, the extremes of this cultural logic (Ratcliffe, 1999) are not mutually exclusive; however, the grotesque protest might open the space for a translocation of the binary discourse surrounding women's bodies—a way to move beyond identifying the artificial separation of women from their bodies.

In *The Purity Myth*, feminist and activist Jessica Valenti (2010) points to another way in which women's bodies are censored and controlled:

> [In 1996 (Pemberton, 1999),] Laura Pemberton—while in active labor—[was] shackled, and forced to undergo a cesarean section she did not want. Pemberton had wanted to have a vaginal home birth, but when she became dehydrated during labor, she decided to go to the hospital to receive fluids. When a doctor noticed a scar from a previous C-section, the hospital staff panicked—many doctors won't perform a vaginal delivery (VBAC) after a cesarean section. They told Pemberton that she wouldn't be able to give birth vaginally, and that she would have to stay at the hospital. She refused, and went home to continue her labor. (She actually had to sneak out of the hospital, as the staff had called the district attorney to come and compel her to get surgery.)
>
> Once she was back at home, a sheriff came to her house, at which point her legs were shackled together and she was forced to go to the hospital, where a hearing was being held about the rights of the fetus—her child. A lawyer had been appointed to her unborn child, but not to Pemberton. After being forced to have surgery, Pemberton sued. She lost. The state told Pemberton that her rights hadn't been violated; doctors could operate on her without her permission because the rights of her fetus—as defined by the state—trumped her own. (pp. 140–141)

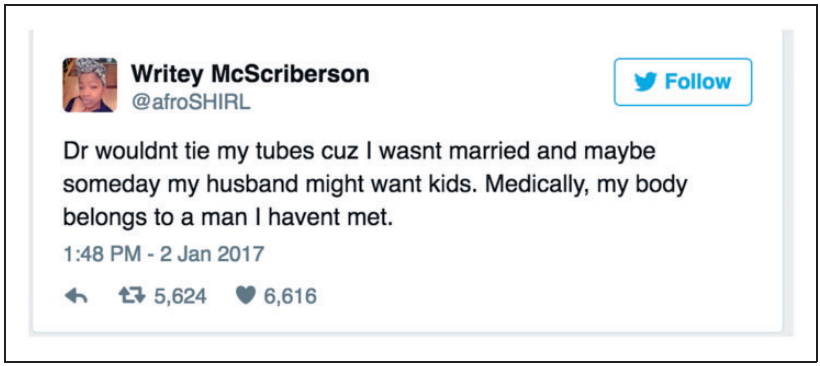

Figure 1. January 2, 2017 Writey McScriberson tweets her birth control experience.

We include this extended excerpt because it so aptly demonstrates the legal reality faced by women in the United States. The issues extend beyond abortion or anti-choice arguments. Clearly, women's reproductive autonomy cannot easily be encapsulated within an either/or binary: *either* you are for "life" *or* you are not does not justify legislative action or court injunctions that have consistently attempted to commandeer women's bodies. Additionally, in some cases, members of the medical profession operationalize the same ideology to deny women control over their own bodies. A Tweet from @afroSHIRL went viral when "Writey McScriberson" relayed her experience attempting to get tubal ligation (Figure 1).

When it comes to sex and pregnancy, women's bodies are not, according to patriarchal discourses, safe when left in the hands of women. Instead they must be controlled ideologically or physically, in some cases with shackles, to conform to dominant constructions of pure womanhood—a womanhood that makes the body's functions like menstruation obscene, unseemly, and indecent.

The Grotesque *period.* and Menstrual Blood

As part of a final project in a visual rhetoric course, Canadian poet Kaur (2015) posted a photograph of herself to Instagram. In the photo, Kaur wears gray sweatpants and a white tank top and lies on a bed with a yellow comforter covering part of her body (see Figure 2). The sheets of her bed were stained with fake menstrual blood and matched a fake crimson stain on her sweatpants. Twice, the photo was removed by Instagram for violating community guidelines (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Kaur's repost of the twice-removed Instagram photo on Facebook, along with her commentary and caption on the photo's removal from Instagram (Rupi Kaur, 2015).

Eventually, the photo was reinstated with an apology from Instagram. However, in response to Instagram's removal of her photo, Kaur (on March 25, 2015) posted the same photo on Facebook and wrote:

> thank you instagram for providing me with the exact response my work was created to critique. you deleted my photo twice stating that it goes against community guidelines . . . when your pages are filled with countless photos/accounts where women (so so many who are underage) are objectified. pornified. and treated less than human . . .
> Experience. Learning. No.
> Their patriarchy is leaking.
> Their misogyny is leaking.
> We will not be censored.

The 4,135 comments in response to Kaur's public post[2] were diverse. From supportive ("preach!"; ". . . natural and normal . . .") to condemning ("Filthy as fuck. Yuck" and "As a woman myself, I find this disgusting") to grateful ("thank you . . ."; "appreciate your power of rhetoric") to grotesque ("at first glance i thought she sleep sharted"; "yep totally thought it was poop . . ."). The diverse nature of the comments, as well as the reach of the original photograph and ensuing Instagram controversy, indicates that the embodied subject has immediate and lasting discursive effect.

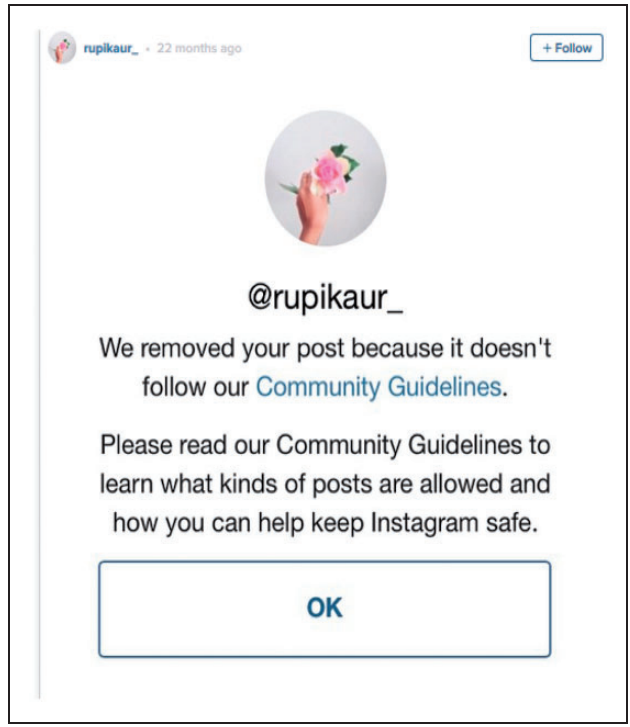

Figure 3. Instagram referenced their Community Guidelines as the reason for Kuar's post being removed.

Kaur (2016), who worked with her sister on the photo project, wrote about her *period.* collection, "we menstruate and they see it as dirty. attention seeking. sick. a burden. as if this process is less natural than breathing…" (https://www.rupikaur.com/period/). Kaur's emphasis here on the material body, and the natural processes of the body, fall into the context of the grotesque. By pointing to the interpretation of menses as "dirty" and "attention seeking," Kaur highlights the simultaneous discipline and erasure of women's bodies. Other commenters to her Facebook post agreed, writing: "People are more disgusted with periods than rape or how women are treated like sexual objects and abused. And there's something wrong with that"; "Why don't we discuss CENSORSHIP instead and question why THIS was censored but sexualised girls and women, violence, humiliation, abuse are frequently not?"; and "What the 'ew yuck' crowd seems to have missed is that 'ew yuck', when scaled up, results in the kind of society where women on their period are deemed unclean and impure. Menstrual blood is no more disgusting than any other bodily fluid, and a lot less harmful to health than some."

Kaur's awareness of the "ew yuck" audience is meaningful in an era when lawmakers seek to discipline women for their bodily processes and resultant bodily fluids.

In most of the legislative bills prior to 2016, state lawmakers rhetorically and physically attempted to separate the processes of women's bodies (menstruation, reproduction, miscarriage, and abortion) from the physical body. For example, many lawmakers transpose *the function* of women's bodies with their actual, physical bodies, and then use that as an excuse to legislate those possible functions (menstruation, miscarriage, and pregnancy). Arduser and Koerber (2014) suggest that between 2010 and 2012, Republican political rhetoric attempted to "split [women] apart as their reproductive and sexual capacities became separated from their status as free citizens and affiliated with all that is in need of restraint or regulation" (p. 122). They argue that such rhetoric splits women in order to regulate their bodies "for the good of the nation" (p. 125). They cite Rick Santorum in his discussion of women's bodies and women's sexuality as something that must be controlled or contained as representative of legislative fear of the excesses of women's bodies. According to Shapiro (2010), the fear of the uncontrolled female body remains such a powerful tenet of Western culture that it can even impact women's self-understanding. Menstrual blood, therefore, can be a useful grotesque protest tool to push back against the anti-woman legislative agenda.

One function of the grotesque protest is to remind people (and politicians in particular) that women are not separate from their bodies. A recent Georgia state bill (HB1) attempting to criminalize miscarriage is an example of political rhetoric that attempts to regulate bodily fluids. The bill would "require proof that a miscarriage occurred naturally," and if no such proof could be offered, the woman would face felony charges. The bill's language constructs women as separate from their bodily processes—that they could, for example, control whether or not they miscarry early in pregnancy. In response, a call went viral for women to mail their representatives and governors their used tampons. The first mention of such a tactic was made on February 24, 2011. Jill Filipovic drafted a letter on the website *Rewire* (https://rewire.news/about-us/), excerpted below, that she offered to women to share with Georgia Representative Bobby Franklin, who authored the first of several such bills.

> . . . As I'm sure you know, more than 50% of fertilized eggs–Georgia citizens! — naturally don't implant, and are flushed out of the body during menstruation. I am personally concerned that my own murdering woman-body may have flushed out some human beings, and I may have flushed them down the toilet without knowing that I was disposing of Georgia citizens in such an undignified way . . . To that end, I attach a picture of my latest used tampon. I am preserving this tampon, as well as all of my other tampons, pads, feminine hygiene products and soiled panties from my current menstrual cycle, so that the Georgia State Police can come collect them as evidence . . . (Filipovic, 2011, para. 2–3)

Hyperbolic and focused on the Republican ideology that women cannot be trusted with their own bodies, Filipovic expresses confusion and fear about her body. Hyperbole seems to be a necessary aspect of grotesque protest strategies and tactics, and Devery Dolman of the website *Tiger Beatdown* (http://tigerbeatdown.com/) perfects the technique in her February 25, 2011 blog post about the same Georgia bill:

> I need your [Rep. Franklin] help. I need your Uterine Investigatory Crime Unit and every bit of biological lady-part know-how your degree in Biblical studies and Business Administration from Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia, can bring to my case . . . I think there is a killer inside me. The killer is MY UTERUS. Help me stop it before it kills again . . . I can't take this uncertainty any more, so if it's okay with you, I'd like to start sending you evidence right away. There's still a bloodstain on our mattress pad, I have a bunch of old period underwear, and I'm happy to bag and send you my tampons next week if the killer strikes again. Usually I go through an OB Super once every 2 hours the first couple days so there will be ample material for your lab to analyze to determine what in the hell is going on here and to help bring the relevant parties to justice . . .

Both Filipovic and Dolman engage the grotesque—they use menstrual blood via used tampons and old period underwear to point to the clear underlying assumption of such legislation—that women cannot be trusted to inhabit and make decisions about their bodies. By engaging hyperbolic rhetoric, they highlight how ridiculous such legislation would be in day-to-day life. The *Tiger Beatdown* editorial team followed up this post with a recommendation about how to proceed with the grotesque protest in keeping with legal requirements.

> Many of us have been stirred by Devery's unswerving commitment to finding the killer within. Although, sadly, US law prohibits us from sending unsolicited, used tampons and pads — don't do it! Don't do it or you will GO TO JAIL, REAL TALK . . .

These letters were reblogged and reposted widely. However, it was not until 2016 that a Twitter hashtag caught on and went viral. #periodsforPence is the hashtag for women responding to similar legislation from Texas, and to legislation drafted by Indiana Republican state representative Casey Cox and approved by, then governor of Indiana, Mike Pence. From a variety of different sources, women such as Ele Chupik, and the anonymous "Periods for Politicians/Periods for Pence" (2016) Facebook page calls on women to report their periods to the governors' offices as they could easily be "a miscarriage without knowledge" (Periods for Politicians). Because it is alliterative and therefore catchy,

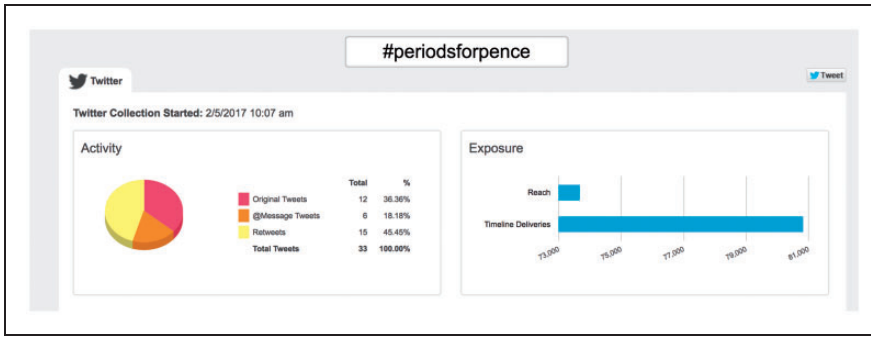

Figure 4. February 14, 2017 Hashtracking report on #periodsforpence (TweetReach, 2017).

#periodsforPence went viral with over almost 95,000 likes and 3,000 Facebook shares. On Twitter, the hashtag has a reach,[3] as of February 14, 2017, of 73,000 and a timeline delivery of 80,000 (Figure 4).

The call for women to mail government officials their tampons, pads, period underwear, and in one case, a stained mattress pad utilizes the same grotesque protest method that Kaur displayed in her *period.* photography collection. When combined with hyperbole about women sarcastically claiming that they cannot in fact understand their own bodies, the grotesque tactic marks a humorous and useful way to protest laws that might otherwise land women in jail for having a monthly menstrual cycle.

Transgressive Fluids and Forms: Semen, Tissue, and Urine

It is not just women's bodies that are implicated by these discursive constructs. In fact, Texas representative Jessica Farrar introduced a bill to regulate "masturbatory emissions," calling for a $100 fine for "emissions outside of a woman's vagina, or created outside of a health or medical facility," which "will be considered an act against an unborn child, and failing to preserve the sanctity of life" (Dart, 2017). Although news coverage of the bill is careful to point out that it is "satirical," grotesque protesters (and some members of the legislature) emphasize the function of multiple types of bodily fluid in reproduction (and to highlight the absurdity of solely zeroing in on menstruation).

Recently, a Satanic Temple (TST) grotesque protest was dubbed "Cum Rags for Congress." The official spokesperson for TST and director of its Detroit location, Jex Blackmore, used social media to advance #CumragsforCongress by prompting people to send socks filled with semen and tampons to the Texas

Figure 5. Jex Blackmore's Facebook post (left; Blackmore, 2016b) and Tweet (right; Blackmore, 2016b) from December 1, 2016 encouraging people to send "used condoms and cumrags to Governor Abbott's office" in Austin, TX and "Bury your #abortion."

governor Greg Abbott under whose purview rules about fetal funerals were finalized. Beusman (2016) reported:

> Having mailed a ejaculate-covered sock to Texas Governor Greg Abbott, along with a handwritten note that says, "These r babies. Plz bury," Blackmore is publicly encouraging others to send Governor Abbott semen-encrusted materials of their own (or, for those wary of sending bodily fluids through the mail, items coated in non-seminal but semen- esque substances).

In a Facebook post (see Figure 5; left), the Detroit, Michigan-based Blackmore wrote:

> Be wary of apathy! Texas and Indiana mandate their citizens bury abortion remnants! This is an attempt to establish the legal precedent of fetal personhood. Take action! Send your used condoms and cumrags to Governor Abbott's office . . .
> Note: Sending bodily fluid via postal service may get you in trouble, so do this at your own risk. However, feel free to supplement with gooey lotions and shampoos . . . the point is still valid. (Jex Blackmore, 2016a)

What prompted Blackmore to create #CumragsforCongress (see Figure 5) is the rule from the state of Texas she references. The regulation, Title 25, §§

1.132–1.137 of the Texas Administrative Health Services Code, published December 9, 2016, amends Texas's current rules governing the proper disposal of "special waste from healthcare-related facilities" for embryonic and fetal tissue only. Health-care providers are now required to dispose of fetal and embryonic tissue using methods typically used to dispose of human bodies—by burial or by cremation. The new rule was established four days after the U. S. Supreme Court struck down two provisions of another Texas anti-abortion law, House Bill 2 of 2013 ("HB 2")—outlawing abortion after 20 weeks.

To situate TST's and Blackmore's #CumragsforCongress, it is important to recognize the context of the burial rule on embryonic and fetal tissue. Anti-abortion activists, Daleiden and Merritt, unsuccessfully pursued a common strategy in anti-abortion campaigns—the use of fake body parts passing for fetal tissue to convince their audience of cruelty and general disregard toward infants. Interestingly, this strategy shares many of the traits of grotesque protest, including Blackmore's #CumragsforCongress. The suggestion that fetal tissue would be bought and sold is vulgar and meant to solicit contempt for the practice. Daleiden and Merritt clearly endeavored to expose the purported practice as vulgar and, in turn, offer their own grotesque protest strategy. Fernandez (2016) reported that Daleiden and Merritt were indicted on record-tampering charges for manufacturing fake information (footage of a physician at Planned Parenthood discussing the sale of fetal tissue and remains for profit) with the intent to defraud Planned Parenthood. As a result of the video, numerous Congressional and state investigations were launched and found no evidence of Planned Parenthood or any physician connected to the organization illegally selling fetal tissue.

When it became apparent that the video was largely debunked, Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine maintained the same rhetorical anti-choice strategy (Ludden, 2016). DeWine stated, at a news conference professing to share a new discovery about abortion practices, that "Fetuses from abortions are being cooked and then put into landfills and mixed in with all other garbage that's out there" (as cited in Ludden, 2016, para. 8). His use of the word "cooking" seems to refer to the process by which all medical waste is steamed in order to sterilize it. By qualifying abortion waste as something different than typical medical waste, he was able to spark a grotesque protest against abortion providers. Instead of stalking patients in front of clinics, protesters also began harassing clinicians behind the clinics, where medical waste is picked up. In the midst of this controversy, a number of state legislatures began to push through anti-abortion policy focused on medical waste like the Texas rule.

Blackmore's political activism works to operationalize the privilege that many Christian and religious organizations claim in such health-care issues (i.e., employer or employee birth control coverage, women's health-care screenings, and abortion). However, activists across the spectrum of these issues, as evidenced by the faked Planned Parenthood videos and the rhetoric of anti-choice

politicians, use grotesque protest as a transgressive method to achieve their ends, gain attention, and equalize differential political power relations. Differential political power relations are a key aspect of activist strategies and one they rely upon to craft effective hyperbolic rhetoric.

In grotesque protest, hyperbole, sarcasm, and humor are commonplace in social media responses to political activity. To paraphrase Thorogood's question, ''In what ways might pee jokes be political?,'' Andy Borowitz (2016) provides an answer. In the 2016 American Presidential election, Donald J. Trump won the electoral college and became President of the United States. A report surfaced about him shortly thereafter in which he allegedly either watched or participated in a golden shower.[4] His unpopularity with the American people is unprecedented, and social media users deployed a variety of grotesque tactics to protest his presidency. Immediately after the report surfaced, Twitter users adopted #PEEOTUS as a hashtag used to replace #POTUS, and a number of users edited memes of the president's ice bucket challenge, changing the color of the water to yellow (Figure 6).

Figure 6. User-edited photo of Trump's Ice-Bucket Challenge, tagged #PEEOTUS (badtux99, January 11, 2017).

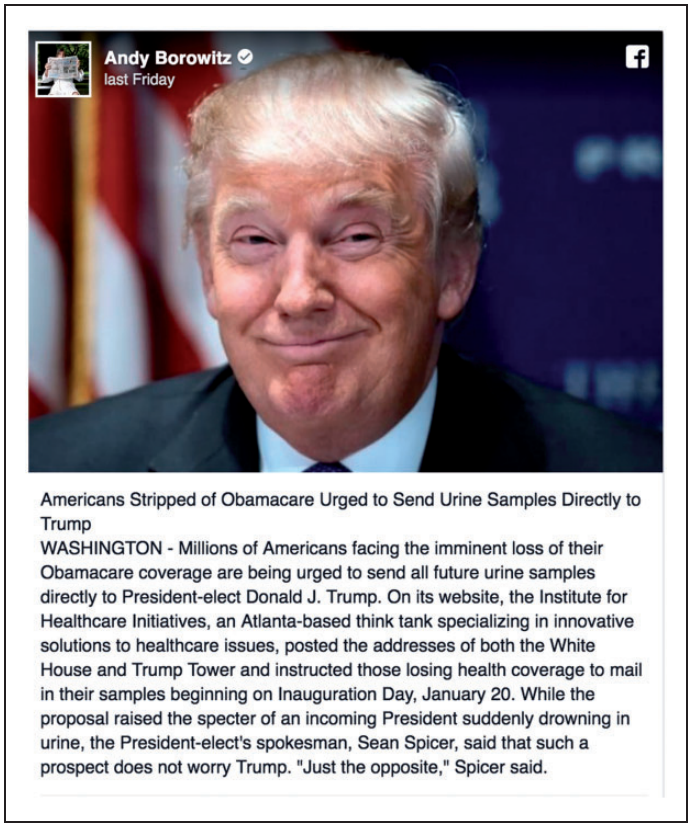

Figure 7. January 13, 2017 Andy Borowitz calls for Americans to send urine samples to President Trump (Borowitz, 2016).

Urine seems to be inextricably associated with the office of the 45th President, Donald Trump. Recently, Andy Borowitz used a grotesque tactic to protest the Republican campaign to repeal the ACA (Figure 7).

Commonly paired with the hashtag #PEEOTUS is the hashtag #SCROTUS, a suggested repurposing of #POTUS in social media users scramble to find a way to refer to President Trump without using his name and without assigning him the legitimacy of the office. An offshoot of the #NotMyPresident campaign, #SCROTUS uses the body in order to mock, in order to undermine, and in order to deauthorize the possibilities of the 45th President being respectable as President. #PEEOTUS and #SCROTUS both use bodily fluid or genitalia to mock, destabilize, and publicize private parts and activities we are socialized to hide. And with a timeline delivery count of 3,783,576 as of February 22, 2017,

this grotesque protest has proliferated as a transgressive act enabled by social media.

When Bakhtin defines the grotesque body, he refers to it as "transgressing its own limits" (p. 26). Here, transgression might be read not only as excess or multiplicity but also as a productive act of resistance that trespasses social norms. The call to use bodily fluids in public protests transgresses commonplace assumptions that bodily functions are private. The grotesque protest work here functions as excess. The excesses of the body are generative because they open space and demand attention. In the same way that menstrual blood serves as a tool for grotesque protest, so too does semen, or the appearance thereof. It is not just reproductive fluid, however, that functions as a tool for grotesque protest. Recently, bodily fluids of many types have been used to respond to the larger political landscape in the United States.

Grotesque Conclusions

What these grotesque protests accomplish is bringing attention back to the body—our bodies—through social media. The inventional strategies associated with social media grotesque protests make available differently structured audiences and participants. The body functions as a communicative act for protesters and legislators alike. By drawing into focus the actual fluids—the actual bodily processes—as the medium for communication, grotesque protesters are not only educating, they are also co-opting the discursive construction that seeks to either vilify or erase women's and individual's agency. In other words, the grotesque protests use the body's fluids to show humanity's similarities and body fluids' purposes in attempts to equalize differential political power relations.

Strategically, what these cases highlight is the apparent and simultaneous vulgarity of both trying to legislate, sanitize, and control bodies and expose what is attempting to be legislated, sanitized, and controlled: the body's fluids and tissues. Although legislative attempts to control and to sanitize bodies have increased since 2010 in the United States, there has also been some progress to maintain, for example, *Roe v. Wade* and women's rights to choose what they do with their bodies. In fact, the fetal burial rule in Texas resulted from the U.S. Supreme Court striking down legislation in that state that attempted to bypass the rights afforded to women by *Roe v. Wade*. In the last half decade or so, grotesque maneuvers have been used to protest legislative actions aimed to sanitize (Kaur; Blackmore) and control women's (Blackmore; Filipovic; Chupik) bodies (Borowitz). Grotesque protests originate in and provide a method to destabilize differential power relationships. The grotesque allows protesters to embody an agency that both reacts against the enforced cleanliness and purity of women's bodies and reminds legislators that men's bodies are involved in these processes as well. The grotesque protest provides a positively vulgar platform

which decries the enforced sanitation and simultaneous control of the body. Grotesque protest uses bodily fluids to make a powerful parallel counter statement, asserting first that attempts to legislate women's bodies will never account for nor will they conceal the functions of the body; and second, the more powerful the attempts to sanitize the body, the more unsanitary the bodily displays through grotesque protests.

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1. In September 2015, Republican members of Congress attempted to shut down the federal government because they could not defund Planned Parenthood. Additionally, defunding Planned Parenthood has been included in ACA Repeal Legislation in 2017.
2. As of July 18, 2017, there were 18,466 shares.
3. The number of people who have seen any tweet or post regarding a hashtag.
4. A golden shower involves one human urinating on another human being for sexual gratification (https://urbandictionary.store/products/golden-shower).

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Author Biographies

Kristin Marie Bivens is an associate professor of English at Harold Washington College—one of the City Colleges of Chicago where she serves as the faculty chair of the Institutional Review Board. Her current and forthcoming work appears in *Harlot*, *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *Kairos*, and *Health Communication*. Additionally, her current and forthcoming work will appear in two edited

collections: *Methodologies for the Rhetoric of Health and Medicine* (Routledge, 2017) and *Interrogating Gendered Pathologies*.

Kirsti Cole is an associate professor of Rhetoric, Composition, and Literature at the Minnesota State University. She is the faculty chair of the Teaching Writing Graduate Certificate and Master's of Communication and Composition programs. She has published in *Feminist Media Studies*, *College English*, *Harlot*, *In the Library with a Lead Pipe*, and *thirdspace*. She is the editor of two collections: *Feminist Challenges or Feminist Rhetorics* (2014) and *Surviving Sexism in the Academy: Feminist Strategies for Leadership* (2017) from Routledge Press. She has chapters appearing in collections focused on mothering, transgressive feminist rhetoric, the rhetoric of civility, feminist leadership in shared faculty governance, and labor in writing studies.

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Wedding Reality TV Bites Black: Subordinating Ethnic Weddings in the South African Black Culture

Lindani Mbunyuza-Memani[1]

Abstract

Black South Africans generally celebrate two types of weddings, one white and the second 'traditional.' This article uses the political economy theory and draws from multimodal critical discourse analysis to examine the televisual representation of these two types of weddings. Analyzed here are 10 episodes of two South African wedding reality programs, *Our Perfect Wedding* and *Top Billing Weddings*. The analysis reveals that South African wedding reality television programs displace cultural diversity and stay within the strategy of reproducing sameness by dominantly focusing on white weddings. From this perspective, 'traditional' weddings are backgrounded. In addition, natural black hair is erased as the shows consistently feature brides with chemically processed or store-bought hair rather than the brides' own natural hair. This article argues that white weddings and White feminine looks are normalized as attractive, while blackness is either erased or represented as inferior.

Keywords

representation, reality TV, weddings, culture

[1]Southern Illinois University Carbondale, USA

Corresponding Author:
Lindani Mbunyuza-Memani, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Lincoln Drive, Carbondale, IL 62901-6632, USA.
Email: lindani.memani@siu.edu

Introduction

South Africans largely celebrate weddings when the weather is beautiful and bright in the summer months (November to January). In the Black culture, there are two types of wedding ceremonies, the white and the 'traditional' or ethnic wedding. In this article, I use traditional and ethnic interchangeably to mean a wedding event that hinges on ethnic beliefs that are understood to have been practiced by the Black culture over a period without being wiped away by the influence of the European culture. Using the word 'traditional' wedding is also an attempt to stay close to the everyday language used in the Black society to differentiate between the two types of weddings. In general, Black South Africans refer to the ethnic wedding as a traditional wedding. These traditional or ethnic weddings are premised on African cultural beliefs and traditions in which the wedding party and guests generally dress in ethnic clothes rather than the more European dress code that is associated with white weddings such as white bridal gowns and suits.

The reason Black South Africans also celebrate a white wedding rather than just the ethnic ceremony is a result of cultural contact between Black and White people. Sustained cultural contact between these groups happened when the British from the late 1800s colonized South Africa. It is during the colonial period that Black people were introduced to Christianity and church or white weddings. As such, compared to 'Western' cultures, white weddings are relatively new in the Black South African culture as these only began in the 1930s (Erlank, 2014). I use 'Western' to refer to the broad category of developed countries that include the United States and European countries such as the United Kingdom.

Before colonization, it is understood that the common practice was customary marriages (Erlank, 2014). Customary marriages are commonly concluded among family members, and unlike civil unions, customary marriages are not officiated by priests of government officials.

Theoretically, this article is underpinned by the political economy theory. By using this theory, this article investigates the production and representation strategies of two locally produced television wedding reality shows *Our Perfect Wedding* and *Top Billing Weddings*. Writing about the production practices of media organizations, Chávez (2015) has argued that the media tend to stick to uniformity rather than deviate and risk losing audiences. In addition, scholars such as Hunter (2013) have also argued that the media reproduce what has worked elsewhere to ensure profits. This reproduction of sameness negates cultural differences (Chávez, 2015). Guided by the political economy theory and drawing from a multi modal critical discourse analysis approach, this article investigates how South African wedding reality programs navigate cultural differences in locally produced shows. This is an important focal point given that South African audiences have for a long time been exposed to foreign

produced wedding reality TV shows such as *Whose Wedding Is It Anyway?, Destination Weddings*, and *Big Fat Gypsy Weddings*. In these international versions, focus is on planning a lavish white wedding.

Given the media's production practices in which "producers copy the format of successful European shows and frenetically scan U.S. channels for ideas about attention grabbing plot twists" (Murray & Oullette, 2004, p. 1), what do we learn about the production and representation choices made in locally produced reality TV shows? This article grapples with these choices paying attention to the weddings of Black people, the largest racial population group in South Africa.

Literature Review

This literature review is divided into three sections. The first section deals with literature on reality television, while the second delves deeper in the subject by surveying literature on wedding reality television shows. The third section provides an overview of research conducted about media representations around issues of race and ethnicity.

Reality Television

There is a wealth of literature on reality TV. As a genre of television, reality TV includes an expansive range of programs such as entertainment, drama, information, and documentaries in which participants are seen to be "real people" (Hill, 2005, p. 2). In addition, the people are portrayed as if engaged in real-life activities (Palmer, 2004). Other scholars have noted that the programs are a mix of marketing, real life and entertainment (Murray & Ouellette, 2004). The broad and expansive nature of reality TV has made it hard for scholars to define what reality TV actually is (Bignell, 2005). However, research indicates that reality television is growing in part because it is cheap to produce (Bignell, 2005; Hill, 2005; Weber, 2011).

According to Hill (2005), reality TV emerged in the United States in the late 1980s to early 1990s and made its way to the United Kingdom in the 1990s. Also see Raphael (2004) who adds that reality TV programs emerged at a time of subdued financial prosperity with distributors looking for cheap programming (p. 124). However, given its recent emergence in South Africa, there is scant literature on reality TV and its function in this postcolonial and postapartheid setting. For this reason, while scholars know about reality TV and its functions, literature is concentrated in developed countries of the global north (European countries and North America) rather than emerging economies such as South Africa. For instance, whereas programs such as *Big Brother* aired in the late 1990s, it was not until 2001 that South Africa had its first season of the same program but with local participants. By 2001, Germany was already in its second

season, and it would take another 2 years before *Big Brother* would be broadcast across the African continent (Bignell, 2005).

The program format of reality television shows makes it easy for the shows to be exported and copied (Hill, 2005). For example, following the success of shows such as *Big Brother, Survivor*, and *Come Dine with Me* in the United States and the United Kingdom, these shows were exported to South Africa and reproduced with local participants. In fact, reality television shows "rely on original programs begun in one nation, which are repurposed to fit new markets or those that follow the same concept with slight modifications" (Weber, 2015, p. 6). Either way, reality TV programs tend to follow the same format (Bignell, 2005) and reinforce values about certain people and their identities (Weber, 2015). The seeming ease of reproducing reality TV programs fits well with the political economy notion of producing sameness.

Reality TV has potential to turn people into instant celebrities and blurs the line between what can be considered an ordinary person versus a celebrity (Turner, 2006). In part, this recognizes the role reality TV plays in the production of celebrities. The intersection of celebrity culture and class is well noted in research. For instance, Tyler and Bennett (2010) argue that "celebrity produces and sustains class relations" (p. 375). Celebrity therefore works as a class discursive identity (Wood & Skeggs, 2011), an important element in this study since one of the programs analyzed is a celebrity reality show in which culture and class exist in tension as this study will show. The latest form of reality television programming to emerge in South Africa are locally produced wedding and dating shows.

Wedding Reality TV

Wedding reality TV is a subgenre of both reality TV and wedding media. In both areas, there is growing research dominated by studies conducted about United States and the United Kingdom. As a television subgenre, reality weddings have recently become integrated into to the media scene in South African homes. In contrast, wedding reality television programs have been part of the U.S. television staple for many years.

In wedding reality TV, programs focus is on couples, their families, friends, and people providing wedding services. In the U.S. and U.K. contexts, there are various popular reality wedding television shows some of which have been academically analyzed. Examples include analysis of the wedding reality program, *The Knot* by Engstrom (2008) in which she found that the cost of the wedding and achieving wedding perfection through consumption is emphasized. Similarly, in another wedding reality show, *Say Yes to the Dress*, cost is displaced and explained away as important to achieve bridal perfection (Engstrom, 2012). Overwhelmingly, weddings have been found to be underpinned by excessive consumption (Ingraham, 2009) with the same excessive spending emphasized on wedding media (Engstrom, 2008, 2012; Sgroi, 2006; Stephens, 2004).

Race and Ethnicity in Media Representations

Media representations help to introduce and normalize beliefs about ways of living, defining what is important and attractive. Representations of race and ethnicity are one way in which audiences' beliefs about themselves are either normalized, disrupted, or affirmed (Milkie, 1999). This study connects media representations with portrayals of race and ethnicity.

There has been some work done in South Africa about the representations of Black people in the media although most of this work focuses on magazines. Work by Laden (2003) argues that consumer magazines worked to represent Black South Africans as consumers in the new democracy, an emergent middle class of Black South Africans.

Beyond general consumer magazines, most of the work published about women's magazines focuses on issues of beauty and class. In these studies, scholars have noted an oppressive representation of Black women whose appearance is constructed from a narrow White feminine ideal. In other words, magazines targeted at Black women have been found to predominantly showcase Black women whose features are similar to those of White women. These are Black women with a thin body type, a light skin complexion, and straightened hair (Pilane & Iqani, 2016). This means that White looks are privileged above those of Black people. In other words, Black women who have white feminine features are represented as being above those who do not, something that extends beyond media representations. For example, Molebatsi (2009) states that the Population Registration Act of 1950 provided privileges to people whose appearance was proximal to those of White people.

This finding about oppressive media representations has been a consistent issue in research about beauty in South Africa (see studies by Gqola, 2016; Masina, 2011; Molebatsi, 2009; Wilton, 2015). The oppressive media representations are tied to consumerism and class logics as the whiteness ideal is portrayed as achievable by purchasing products. This connects self-expression in the form of self-representation to class and self-inflicted symbolic violence guided by the media. The notion of symbolic violence goes back to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power explained as the cultural domination in which those dominated accept the dominance. People subjected to cultural dominance accept the dominance as something normal. This is like what Galtung (1990) has called cultural violence defined as a psychological process that is all consuming and relies on brainwashing to make violence feel right (p. 291).

In her analysis of evening television shows, McRobbie (2004) notes a similar symbolic violence targeted at women under the guise of correcting their appearance. For instance, McRobbie (2004) explains that in 'make over shows,' women endure ridicule from 'experts' who teach self-doubt and work to transform women's appearances. By participating in the shows, the women reproduce the dominance and accept the symbolic violence as something normal and well intentioned.

Similarly, in the South African context, to achieve the standardized appearance normalized as beautiful, Molebatsi (2009) states that Black women use of dangerous chemicals to transform their appearance. Findlay and De Beer (1980) have long noted a practice of lightening the skin through bleaching products with disastrous effects on the Black skin. In participating in skin lightening and hair straightened to achieve a White feminine look, women are engaged in a form of violence toward themselves as individuals and on the cultural group level. However, Gergen (1991) has also argued that in a postmodern world the body is fragmented as people make choices about self-representation, something the author also notes as a "dilemma of identity."

The issue of media representations of Black women has been subject of study in other parts of the world including in the United States with similar findings. For instance, Byrd and Tharps (2014) have written that to be considered "feminine" Black women had to adopt features prescribed beautiful by White people, features including "long straight hair" since "dark skin and kinky hair were considered ugly and inferior" (p. 14). Cuvier (1833) had long asserted the superiority of White people in terms of beauty and intelligence, mocking Black people and their features particularly skin color and "woolly hair" (p. 50). As such, the brainwashing about beauty standards expands to media representations of natural Black hair.

Hair is seen to be an important part of the beauty package. Wolf (2013) states that "the mass media have made hair an important part of fashion and beauty" (p. 25). However, Hooks (1992) has found a general absence of natural Black hair in the media. Hooks (1992) argues that this erasure of natural Black hair has led Black people to place great importance in straightened hair rather than their natural hair. Hooks (1993) also writes of the "obsession" Black women have with hair, in part because for a long period an assumption prevailed "that straight hair was better and it took less time and effort to manage" (p. 85). Similarly, Thompson (2009) stresses that the emphasis on flowing hair as beautiful, negatively impacts Black women's ideas of beauty.

In South Africa, perceptions and representations of Black hair are no different. Hair in the South African context has been a debated issue of Black identity (Tate, 2007). For example, Stone (2007) narrates a story of Sandra, a girl raised by White parents but refused "white" education in part because her hair texture was not straight as that commonly associated with White people.

These media representations of Black women are consistent to the general treatment endured by Black people under colonization and apartheid. Specifically, about gender, Pelak (2005) writes of the material legacies of colonization and apartheid that continue to oppress women. Also, Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani (2017) write of the triple oppression of race, gender, and class experienced by Black women under apartheid rule. As this study will show, in contemporary South Africa, it is still the values of White people that are represented as superior and attractive, a point long argued by Said (1993).

This study is located at the intersection of inherent White people's values that are tied with practices of a global and neoliberal world and how these interact with the local Black culture of South Africa. In other words, what do we learn from the production and representation strategies adopted by producers of local reality wedding television programs. Based on the production choices, how is the local culture represented in the television shows? This study grapples with these questions.

The Political Economy Framework

Theoretically, this study draws from the political economy framework, specifically as it relates to communication. Mosco (2009) defines political economy as the "study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources, including in communication resources" (p. 2) Other scholars also explain that political economy relates to how economic and sociopolitical practices interact (Wasko, Murdock, & Sousa, 2011).The political economy theory is useful to understand issues of not just media production but also issues of distribution, power, and culture (Biltereyst & Meers, 2011).

Similarly, Griffin (2015) has written of the complicated relationship between production and consumption process particularly since there is often a binary process underway with producers being those with power, while those who consume are at times located at the margins. The production and distribution practices are underpinned by the desire to minimize risk while maximizing profits has also been noted by Deery (2015) particularly regarding reality television. On the lowest level of abstraction, what is produced and distributed embed ideologies that are intended for the consumption of audiences.

What is also significant in political economy is the issue of grabbing and maintaining audiences. To capture and keep audiences, TV programs compete across genres (Chávez, 2015) but also within the same genre of for instance wedding programming. In the context of wedding media in South Africa, the locally produced wedding shows emerged to compete with foreign (U.S. and U.K. shows) already broadcast to audiences. As such, the two shows analyzed here have emerged as artefacts competing for a share of the audience in a space already occupied by other wedding reality TV programs.

Since the South African shows are locally produced that raises questions about the extent the shows represent the cultures of Black South Africans in the context of weddings. For instance, do the South African programs show diverse representations of Black cultures and appearances or do representations cohere to an ideology that considers the dominant culture that represents values and practices of White people as attractive and superior as argued by Said (1993) and (Chávez, 2015), a binary between inferior Black and superior White? As Chávez (2015) argues, the political economy of television results in

homogenous representations of people across different cultures leading to ''erasure'' and ''suppression'' of difference (pp. 7–9).

Using the political economy theory, Chávez (2015) argues that in the end, television programs ''negatively impact'' people (p. 13), although it may benefit businesses by minimizing profit losses by sticking to what works or has worked elsewhere thus enabling the reproduction of sameness leaving very if any space for diversity (Griffin, 2015).

The political economy theory, then, will make it possible to address the question of wedding representations in the Black South African society by two locally produced television programs. Contextualized in reality TV, this study draws heavily from the notion of producing and distributing sameness as articulated by Deery (2015) and how production choices displace cultural differences (Chávez, 2015).

Research Question and Method

Drawing on the literature discussed above and using a multimodal critical discourse analysis, the aim of this article is to evaluate how *Top Billing Weddings* and *Our Perfect Wedding*, two South African wedding reality TV programs, represent weddings. The question this article investigates is this: Given the political economy of the media that reproduces sameness, what production and representation strategies do producers of local television reality programs adopt and how is the local culture represented in the television shows?

Discourse is multimodal and is not reducible to just words (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Rather than analyze language, scholars also pay attention to visuals and the ideologies embedded in images. As such, multiple-criteria decision analysis reveals how words and visuals are used to shape peoples' interpretations and ideologies and in turn, how people contribute to constructing ideologies through discourse. Griffin (2015) also argues that interrogating representations must be done by analyzing images and verbal messages.

This article uses Machin and Mayr's (2012) and Van Leeuwen (2008) strategy of analyzing media texts by focusing on what is foregrounded/backgrounded in both words (lexical) and images (iconographical) to expose what is erased or included. Erasure and backgrounding are similar (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Van Leeuwen, 2008), and both indicate inferior treatment or ''othering'' when something else is placed on the foreground rendered visible and important. This strategy examines how the political economy of the programs shape decisions made that lead to representation strategies of weddings and brides in what is produced and distributed to audiences.

To further provide a comparative analysis regarding the representation of the two types of weddings in the reality programs, this study pays attention to time allocation and words used to refer to each wedding type. Time allocation helps to evaluate what is considered important or unimportant. Extensive time

allocation means that something is considered crucial, whereas limited time allocation suggests that something is considered insignificant. The analysis of time allocation also makes it possible to identify outliers in the representations.

Ten randomly selected episodes of equal number from the two reality programs, *Our Perfect Wedding* and *Top Billing Weddings* are analyzed. All five of the *Top Billing Weddings* episodes are available on YouTube, while the episodes of *Our Perfect Wedding* were recorded for analysis. All 10 episodes were broadcast between October 2013 and November 2016. Episodes of *Our Perfect Wedding* are an hour long, while *Top Billing Weddings* average between 5 and 10 minutes of broadcast time.

These programs are the only two wedding television reality programs broadcast in South Africa. *Top Billing Weddings* features weddings of celebrity couples from different racial groups, while *Our Perfect Weddings* largely showcases the weddings of Black South Africans who are not considered celebrities. I discuss the findings here.

In all episodes of *Top Billing Weddings*, couples are first featured ahead of the white wedding engaged in fun activities and talking about how they met. In the scenes that follow, couples are often shown getting ready for the wedding, during and immediately after their exchange of vows. Scene after scene, viewers are treated to what has become hegemonic of white wedding preparations in this show including interviews with bridal gown designers, shoe designers, grooms' suit designers, and wedding planners, a sort of infomercial to advertise their services. These scenes are interspersed with displays of consumer excess through medium and tight camera shots of glittery décor elements set on tables, exquisite cakes, and interviews with other celebrities (with subtitles that mention their statuses) as if to justify the celebrity status of the couple.

In the case of *Our Perfect Wedding*, the show also adheres to the generic format of reality TV shows but works to include moments of conflict and disappointment as brides' plans crash. Interestingly, in the celebrity version, *Top Billing Weddings* nothing ever goes wrong, couples even have time for other activities such as horse riding, and brides are always in a relaxed mode and mostly surrounded with a few people whose presence is justified such as white wedding gown designers helping the bride into the gown and providing last-minute adjustments. Anything that goes wrong in the *Our Perfect Wedding* show is dramatized through brides acting out their frustration and anger on screen, a representation absent in the celebrity version.

Culture and Social Class: Displacing Blackness

The analysis illuminates a pervasive treatment of Black people's 'culture' via ethnic weddings as disposable. Based on the extensive amount of time allocated and the discursive features of the two programs, it is the white wedding that is predominantly positively represented. The ethnic wedding on the other hand is

constructed as a disposable and inferior event and occupies very little televisual time. This is in both *Our Perfect Wedding* with its hour-long episodes and in *Top Billing Weddings* with its brief episodes that average 8 minutes. For example, in the *Top Billing Weddings* episodes featuring Gugu, the groom and Letshego, the bride lasting 7 minutes and 3 seconds (07:03) and another showcasing Siya, the bride and Akhona, the groom spanning a little under 7 minutes (06:55); there is no audio or visual representation of these couples' ethnic weddings. In these episodes, the ethnic wedding is completely erased.

This finding indicates that in these *Top Billing Wedding* episodes, a show that features celebrities, the ethnic wedding is wiped off consistent with the political economy orthodoxy of displacing local and non-Western cultural practices. Machin and Mayr (2012) and Van Leeuwen (2008) refer to this absence as 'exclusion' or what Chávez (2015) has termed cultural erasure, an end result of the political economy of television. Also, Machin and Mayr's (2012) and Van Leeuwen (2008) argue that something that is deemed to be inferior is excluded in visual and verbal representations, evidenced by these *Top Billing* episodes.

The erasure is like what Galtung (1990) conceptualized as ''cultural violence'' in which people are brainwashed to accept something other than their own practices. In this setup, it is as if associating celebrities with African cultural activities would dislodge their celebrity status and set them on a downward economic spiral. The binary created is that of a superior, indelible, and universal white wedding versus an inferior disposable traditional wedding. In other words, the ethnic wedding is represented as an event that has negative implications for celebrities. The ethnic wedding is therefore synonymous with what is inappropriate for celebrities. Wood and Skeggs (2011) discuss that the celebrity identity attaches itself to a higher social class, something of an expectation. From this perspective, the representation of celebrity weddings demonstrates that for the celebrity 'class' status to remain intact what does not fit the presumed higher class identity and in this case the ethnic wedding must be discarded. This also illustrates that it is those social activities that can be repurposed, reproduced, and redistributed with ease (the white weddings) that are fed back to society as attractive events of glamour and higher class. A person's value is thus measured through class (Skeggs, 2009). The celebrity status of the couples is examined through their social class made visible in the programs via the heightened consumption signified through wedding décor elements, venue, and other wedding paraphernalia.

It is interesting to note that in all the analyzed episodes of the noncelebrity version, *Our Perfect Wedding*, the ethnic wedding is represented, albeit backgrounded. In an episode featuring Ratanang, the bride and Wanda, the groom there is one audio reference to the 'traditional' wedding. The word 'traditional' is mentioned as a bridge between scenes. That is, between the white wedding and the final segment of the show. As the couple walks off the camera frame after the white wedding, Tumi, the presenter says, ''the bride and groom go off to change

into their traditional outfits.'' Seconds later, the audience is shown the couple dancing while in ethnic clothes. The entire representation of the traditional wedding with the couple in their ethnic clothes receives a total of 1 minute and 19 seconds of airtime in an hour-long episode.

This 1 minute and 19 seconds includes the final interview with the presenter, which is conducted while the couple is still in their ethnic garb. During this interview, there is no mention of the 'traditional' wedding or clothes worn as is the case with for instance, the white bridal gown. It must be noted that when a couple celebrates both weddings, the two events occur sequentially with the white wedding ceremony celebrated first and later followed by the ethnic wedding. It is for this reason that episodes of *Our Perfect Wedding* conclude with the couple in ethnic clothes (see Figure 1).

While the episode featuring Ratanang and Wanda is representative of the sample of *Our Perfect Wedding* episodes analyzed, like the celebrity version, there is one episode that is an outlier, suggesting tension in the representational mode of this show. In this episode showcasing Thandiwe, the bride and Mfanafuthi, the groom, the show spends about 4 minutes (04:00) focusing on the bride's ethnic *Zulu* garb. In this episode, a woman introduced through subtitles as a 'traditional designer' explains the *isiZulu* garb that the bride will wear. She talks about each piece of clothing and accessories taking care to explain what each item means in the Zulu culture (see Figure 2). *Our Perfect Wedding* is predominantly targeted at the Black audience. Yet, the show generally ignores the very culture of its audiences and the Black participants who appear in the program.

Audiences are bombarded with the white weddings in ways that subordinate and displace certain African cultural practices in the form of ethnic weddings. What is represented as important and attractive are practices that are a legacy of

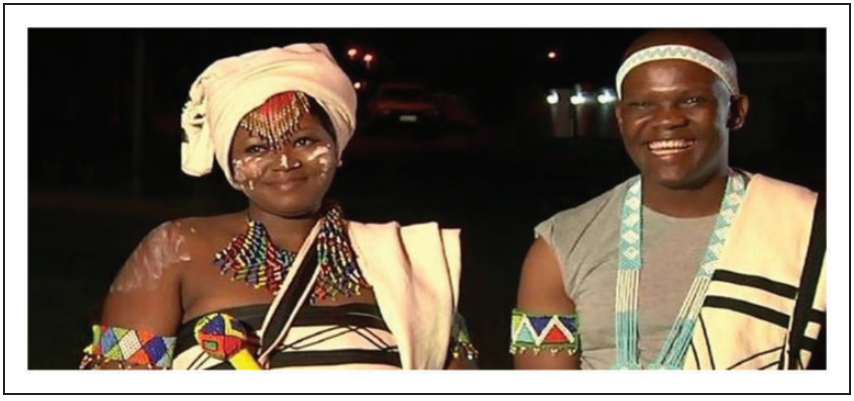

Figure 1. Ratanang and Wanda.

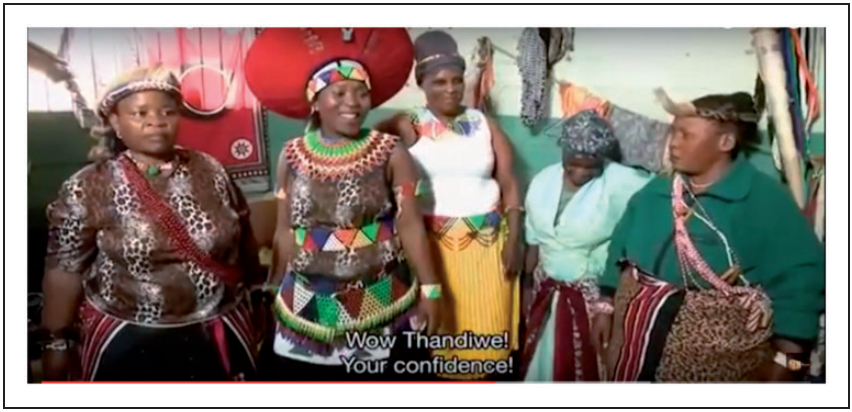

Figure 2. Thandiwe, second from left flanked by the women who helped make her clothes.

colonization. This is like the argument by Said (1993) who states that the values of colonizers continue to be treated as better and to be preferred by people in previously colonized countries. Embedded in these texts is the treatment of practices copied from White people as if better and more important. In this way, the wedding reality TV shows bite rather than celebrate blackness. The point is that the representation of 'traditional' weddings is marginal and does not compare to the airtime given to white weddings. The amount of time spent showcasing white weddings and the way in which these weddings are represented reinforces the idea that white weddings are fun, attractive, and better.

Although the production and representation strategies of the two shows cohere to popular foreign TV shows and thus displace the local culture, there are complications with this arrangement. The complication arises where weddings of celebrities with cultural royalty are represented as discussed in the following.

Culture and Social Class: A complication

The cultural erasure discussed above is complicated by the inclusion of and extensive focus on the ethnic ceremony in at least two *Top Billing Weddings* episodes. The visual and lexical inclusion of the traditional wedding in *Top Billing Weddings* is a recognition of the 'royal' ethnic lineage and higher social standing of certain celebrities. For example, in two episodes of *Top Billing Weddings*, one featuring Siyolo, the groom and Criselda, the bride, and the second showcasing the wedding of Khulubuse, the groom and Fikisiwe, the bride, there is a connection to ''superior'' ethnic lineage that works to justify the inclusion of ethnic weddings in varying degrees (see Figures 3 and 4 for these couples).

Figure 3. One of Siyolo and Criselda's ethnic wedding photograph included in the program.

Figure 4. Fikisiwe and Khulubuse.

Regarding Criselda and Siyolo's wedding, the time spent talking about the couples' white wedding clothes amounts to 1 minute and 12 seconds in a 10:02 minute episode. In comparison, the amount of time spent talking about the couple's 'traditional' wedding gear totals to zero. However, the audience is

treated to still photographs of the couples' ethnic ceremony (in these images, the couple is dressed in ethnically inspired garb—see Figure 3). The images are not discussed but are included as b-roll material during the introductory segment as the couple narrate their love journey (the story of their first meeting offering tit bits about their relationship and how they relate to each other). In addition, Siyolo is verbally referred to as a "son of a *Xhosa*[1]chief" to justify not just the inclusion of the images (since this is not usually the case) but also the couples' outfits that depart from the usual white bridal gowns and tailored suits dominant in the program. Siyolo's father is not interviewed in the television program.

The next outlier via Khulubuse and Fikisiwe's wedding is even more interesting. The entire 7 minutes and 45 minutes (07:45) of the broadcast focuses on the couples' ethnic wedding to the complete erasure of the white wedding. Khulubuse is the South African president's nephew, while Fikiswe is the niece of the Swaziland[2] King. President Zuma, Khulubuse's uncle is interviewed and so are three of his four wives, Nompumelelo, Gloria, and Thobeka Zuma also introduced through subtitles as "President's wife."

In addition, many other celebrities (actors, actresses, and musicians) are interviewed. On the bride's side of the family, Prince Sgombeni is also interviewed and talks about the cultural artefacts of the wedding. In fact, the entire episode moves between interviews and dancing. The social and cultural level of the interviewees and the couple being married as well as the extensive focus on cultures of the couple function to emphasize the superior cultural and social importance of the couple. This is particularly obvious in a show that predominantly showcases white weddings. This means that for the traditional wedding to be portrayed on television, it requires cultural justification that hinges on the cultural royalty of the couple. In voice over narration, the word "royalty" is mentioned three times to stress the higher social standing of the couple and their families. Noteworthy, interviewees and the voice over talk of "two nations coming together" through the wedding and a "strengthening of country ties." It is therefore possible to argue that the extensive focus and singular representation of the ethnic wedding is because of the couples higher social standing not just as celebrities but also as perceived cultural and national icons. The entire wedding appears as a lecture on culture (Zulu[3] and Swati,[4] the cultural identities of the couple). In a voice-over narration, it is mentioned that "dances and traditions were learned and swapped as families exchanged gifts" suggesting something of a cultural educational process in which ethnicity is foregrounded. The celebrity wedding becomes a key moment for justified deviation. Even with the deviation that includes a focus on culture, the celebrity status of the couple is safeguarded by the repetitive mention of their royal status.

Evident in these episodes is class laddering via royal statuses. What this means is that even with celebrities, there is a social class hierarchy that operates

to differentiate between celebrity levels. In other words, celebrity is not a homogenous identity or class. For example, the ethnic wedding of a son of a Chief is included through still photographs flashing in the background for 22 seconds. However, the couple connected to a higher level of 'royalty' in the form of a country's President and King is represented engaged in an ethnic wedding for the entire duration of the program. This illustrates that within the celebrity group, there is a conformist fulfillment of ranks structured within this higher social class. The two couple's connections to cultural principles warrant attention to their ethnic weddings, the only departure from the reproduction of sameness and the dominant television representation that portray celebrities participating in white weddings. This means noncoherence to the political economy logics of erasing the local culture warrant a higher social class and a tie to cultural royalty. In other words, while culture and class are generally represented as dialectical opposites that do not coexist, in a higher social class achieved via cultural importance, culture and class are shown to mutually coexist.

Class is used as a constant, whereas cultural lineage is a disposable feature. In other words, representational choices are stabilized by class. A couples' class justifies how and which wedding will be showcased. Celebrities who are not tied to ethnic royal lineage are homogenized, while the royals complicate the representation calling attention to ethnic lineage, thus warranting recognition of the couple's 'powerful' ethnicity and lineage. Class therefore becomes a prime currency to produce weddings befitting celebrities.

Black Bridal Looks

This analysis is based on bridal images or what I call the hegemonic bridal look that illustrates symbolic violence against Black brides. Focusing on hair is not a suggestion that beauty is reducible to hair; however, scholars have argued that hair has become one way in which beauty is coded in the media. Wolf (2013) states that hair has become a big part of the beauty package. Whether by accident or intentionally, predominantly *Our Perfect Weddings* and *Top Billing Weddings* feature Black women whose idea of beauty seems to be rooted in whiteness specifically regarding hair (see Figures 5–8).

Machin and Mayr (2012) state that in conducting iconographical analysis, some of the questions to be asked include how people are represented and what beliefs are communicated through the representation. In these bridal images, it is as if 'natural' hair is ugly and 'un-bride-like' and or that a bride with 'natural' hair is failing to be a beautiful bride. As such, blackness is either ignored or whitewashed. In other words, there is symbolic violence against Black brides by the wedding media that teach brides the proper bridal look by consistently showcasing Black brides with unnatural hair.

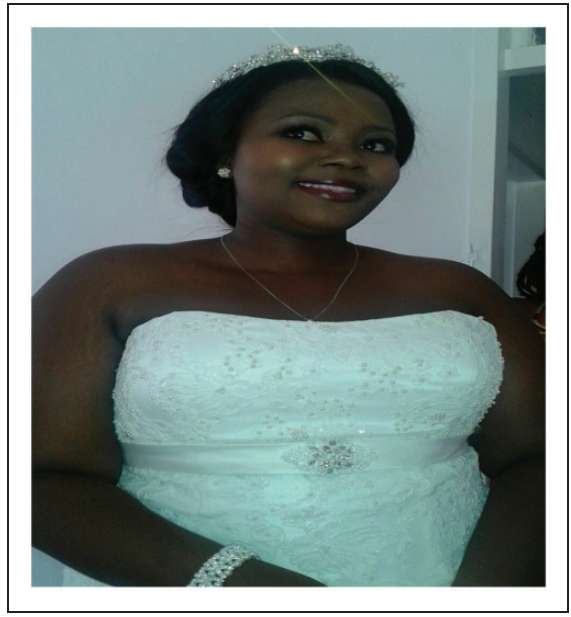

Figure 5. Ratanang (Our Perfect Wedding).

Figure 6. Criselda (Top Billing Weddings).

Figure 7. Aletta (Our Perfect Wedding).

Figure 8. Siya (Top Billing Weddings).

The stable televisual representation of Black brides with fake hair is consistent with the Hooks' (1992) assertion that there is a general absence of natural Black hair in the media. The bridal images sampled above emphasize the practice of spending money to 'fit into' the constructed and normalized beauty standard. The reality television's political economy agenda constructs Black looks as inferior and in need of white correction via consumerism. Through their participation in these shows, Black brides act as neoliberal subjects functioning to stabilize Black looks as inadequate and in need of white improvement. This representation coheres to the oppressive treatment of Black people dating back to colonization and apartheid where blackness was criminalized.

The notion of a diverse and fragmented body in a postmodern world (Gergen, 1991) may be used to challenge and defend the brides' self-representational choices. Gergen (1991) argues that the self is dynamic, fluid, and fragmented. However, what the bridal images analyzed here illustrate is that the fragmented self and ''dilemma of identity'' (Gergen, 1991) largely relates to Black looks. In other words, it is blackness that fragments. As the pieces of the Black identity fall away during the fragmentation process, what emerges is an identity that is underpinned by white femininity, at least in relation to hair. Black brides assimilate themselves to white looks, a process that is connected to consumerism to suggest that blackness is connected to frugality and ugliness in wedding spaces. The notion of a fragmented self and self-representation therefore function to justify the erasure of natural Black hair and elements of the Black identity.

Through this stable representation of brides that assimilates itself to white looks, the programs safeguard the hegemony of how brides and women in their daily lives ought to showcase their beauty. There are three simultaneous processes in action. The first is the perpetuation of consumerism that is tied to class and that works to emphasize a hegemonic beauty standard. The second is the erasure of Black bridal 'natural' looks. The third is the inferior construction of Black women's beauty that communicates the belief that to be beautiful, Black women must be whitewashed. As such, the TV shows, in capturing the imagination of women, collapse consumerism and a hegemonic a bridal look together such that both function as indicators of beauty. In this regard, South African audiences are deprived of the opportunity to experience cultural diversity and to see beautiful Black brides with looks that are not underpinned by emulating white femininity.

Conclusion

This article has examined the production and representation strategies of South African reality wedding TV shows. Drawing from the political economy framework and a multimodal critical discourse analysis, the article has argued that there is evident cultural and symbolic violence to which the African culture and Black looks are subjected. The production choices evident in the representations

demonstrate three interrelated issues. First, there is positive representation of values and practices that are underpinned by whiteness. This is evident in the superior representation of white weddings as if universal and normative, a form of cultural violence in which Africans themselves participate. Second, and still with cultural violence, while the white wedding is tied to a higher social status and normalized as better, the ethnic wedding is represented as a disposable feature of blackness. In wedding of noncelebrities, although not a discursive feature, the traditional wedding is stabilized through repetitive inclusion. The inclusion of this type of wedding with people who are noncelebrities suggests a class-based strategy in which the African culture is associated with those in the lower social classes. On the second level, the erasure of traditional weddings in the celebrity television program illustrates a conflictual relationship between class and culture. In this arrangement, culture and class are represented as if they do not coexist.

Erasing the African culture in the higher class is complicated by cultural royalty as people with significant cultural lineage are associated with ethnic weddings something not done for other celebrities. As such, whereas White people's values and practices are stabilized irrespective of class, the African culture is represented as requiring justification for inclusion depending on cultural royalty in instances of people with a higher social class.

In very similar ways, Black feminine looks are also subjected to symbolic violence. Hair, specifically, is rendered inadequate, whitewashed, and standardized. Such action is indicative of symbolic violence toward Black women whose hair is being erased, a violence in which Black women embrace. This is because Black brides seem to accept a version of bridehood that downplays their Black features and assimilates itself to whiteness and sameness.

By choosing to produce shows that feature Black brides whose idea of beautiful hair emulates white feminine looks, the shows conform to the representational mode that homogenizes women and in the process, also disallows racial difference. As such, these TV programs construct an image of Black bridehood that hinges on representing Black looks as if inadequate and in need of white correction, an illustration of deeper politics of racial inequality in which White looks are represented as superior and attractive.

The political economy of these programs is clear: Profits should be maximized irrespective of cultural ruin and whatever does not work to increase profits or does not fit generic scripts should be largely ignored. Save for a few complications, it seems that the representation of weddings in South African reality television predominantly exposes audiences to what audiences have long been exposed to through "Western" imported wedding reality TV shows such as *Whose Wedding Is It Anyway, Destination Weddings*, and *Big Fat Gypsy Weddings*. Although Black South Africans celebrate two types of weddings, fundamentally, the discourse of reality wedding television displaces blackness.

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Notes

1. *AmaXhosa* is an ethnic group of people predominantly found in the Eastern Cape region of South Africa. Historically, chiefs had the important role of leading their communities, resolving disputes among other roles. These roles have been displaced by the presence of modern courts and elected representatives casting chiefs in a more celebratory than practical role.
2. Swaziland is an African country close to South Africa.
3. *AmaZulu* are an ethnic group of Black South Africans predominantly found in Kwa-Zulu Natal, a region historically known as Natal. *AmaZulu* are the biggest ethnic group, and their language is the most widely spoken in the country. This group of people is known for having a deep appreciation of their culture and for stubbornly speaking their language, while other ethnic groups such as *AmaXhosa* are generally teased for translanguaging between *isiXhosa* and English.
4. *AmaSwati* are found in Swaziland, a former British colony, a country led by a King in Southern Africa that borders South Africa and Mozambique.

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Author Biography

Lindani Mbunyuza-Memani holds a PhD in Mass Communication and Media Arts from the Southern Illinois University. She teaches courses in media, culture, and communication and is interested in issues of representation, activism, and social change.

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Making the Virtual Rounds: The Use of Blogs by Health-Care Professionals

Casey Scheibling[1], James Gillett[2], and Gordon Brett[3]

Abstract

In the "Health 2.0" era, digital media has altered how health care is conducted and how patients consume medical information. This article explores the reasons why health-care professionals create their own blogs and how they use blogging as a component of their work. We examine interviews with medical bloggers ($n = 83$) featured on "Grand Rounds," a weekly medical blog forum or "carnival," to interpret the ways in which blogging is incorporated into their everyday lives. In performing a qualitative thematic analysis, we develop five themes that help capture what blogs mean to these health-care practitioners. The uses of blogs speak to articulating and reestablishing a professional reputation, connecting with patients informally, writing for therapeutic reasons, negotiating institutional constraints, and promoting community and health-care reform.

Keywords

blogs, digital media, health care, health communication, virtual community

[1]Department of Sociology, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
[2]Department of Health, Aging, and Society, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
[3]Department of Sociology, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Corresponding Author:
Casey Scheibling, Department of Sociology, McMaster University, Kenneth Taylor Hall, Room 627, 1280 Main St. W., Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, L8S 4M4.
Email: scheibc@mcmaster.ca

Introduction

In modern democratic societies, media technologies are used to document and share meaningful aspects of everyday life (Durham & Kellner, 2006). Over the past 20 years, the use of media to represent lived experience—known also as *self-chronicling*—has intensified with the proliferation of opportunities offered through Internet access (Gillett, 2007, p. 28). One such opportunity is the ability to create a blog, which closely resembles an online diary in how it provides a virtual space for personal writing (Hookway, 2008; Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005; Rettberg, 2014). But what is more, blogs are also interactive; they possess features that allow communication with others and have been used to develop communities based on interest or affinity (Miller & Shepherd, 2004; Wei, 2004). This capacity to share information widely across geographic space through blogs and other online media is becoming a valuable asset for professional development and networking.

In the world of medicine, web-based tools are increasingly being utilized. The terms *Health 2.0* and *Medicine 2.0* (Hughes, Joshi, & Wareham, 2008) now describe online activities at the intersection of health care and digital media in North America. This landscape is marked by significant changes, not just in technology but also in the relationships between and among medical practitioners and patients. One point of entry into the exploration of Health 2.0 is a weekly online forum called *Grand Rounds*. Like conventional medical rounds, this community brought together on a weekly basis a group of health-care bloggers who shared what they determined to be the best online content available on a certain topic. The information or links they discovered would be summarized on their own blog and shared with members of the network. Often, there would be a discussion among the members about the weekly Grand Round that is presented. The topics were typically related to providing medical care or commenting on health-care delivery, including how information is accessed and what this means for patients and physicians.

Online health-care forums like Grand Rounds represent an expanding network in which individuals from different professions, specialties, interests, levels of education, and geographical locations share their perspectives on their work through blogging. As will be explained, most empirical research on health information online examines digital media use by patients, rather than medical practitioners. This study will therefore balance a body of literature largely focused on patient use of the Internet and its impact on the doctor–patient dyad. By focusing on medical workers' own explanations, we gain insight into why they keep blogs, and how blogging affects their professional lives. In what follows, we first review the literature on Internet use by patients and doctors. Then, we describe our theoretical approach and methodology. Last, we present an original qualitative thematic analysis of interviews that illuminate the use of blogs by health-care professionals (HCPs).

Literature Review

In recent years, a number of web tools (blogs, forums, podcasts, wikis, etc.) have surfaced to personalize health care, disseminate health information, and promote health education online (Hughes et al., 2008). It is estimated that 35% of the U.S. adult population—or, one in three American adults—have gone on the Internet to seek out health-related information (Fox & Duggan, 2013). Studies of Internet use have found that the loosening of institutional control over medical knowledge may encourage individuals to take a more involved approach to their physical well-being (Hardey, 1999). Having access to e-mail, websites, and online support groups is seen to increase the capacity for patients to make informed decisions about their health (Kalichman, Benotsch, Weinhardt, Austin, & Luke, 2001; Sharf, 1997). In addition, the Internet also provides a space for patients to write and share "illness narratives" (Hardey, 2002, p. 32) and for community development among individuals with similar health problems (Fox, 2001). Clearly, a much broader range of health knowledge and interpersonal support is now at our fingertips thanks to the expansion of the World Wide Web.

While the majority of research on the Internet and health care is about patients, there is a growing interest in web use by HCPs. There are a number of surveys and meta-analyses of existing studies that demonstrate how Internet use among physicians is increasing (e.g., Brown, Ryan, & Harris, 2014; Cooper et al., 2012; Masters, 2008; von Muhlen & Ohno-Machado, 2012). While the exact numbers are unknown, it is estimated that over 250,000 HCPs are using Web 2.0 tools in the United States (Hughes, Joshi, Lemonde, & Wareham, 2009). Research shows that seeking and verifying health information is a main reason why physicians go online (Casebeer, Bennett, Kristofco, Carillo, & Centor, 2002; Hughes et al., 2009). The Internet can indeed be considered to facilitate and extend the basic duties of a physician: to keep up to date with medical research (Chew, Grant, & Tote, 2004) and exchange ideas with peers (Hillian, 2003; Hughes et al., 2009). Blogs, in particular, are said to have transformative potential for health-care delivery; they can used to form support networks for physicians and patients, incite discussion about health and policy, and provide another forum for consultation (Cohen, 2007; Miller & Pope, 2010). Discovering such possibilities has led to forecasts that online social media will play an increasingly central role in medical professions.

Other studies have looked more closely at what HCPs think are the advantages and disadvantages of Internet technologies (e.g., Chew et al., 2004; Morris-Docker, Tod, Harrison, Wolstenholme, & Black, 2004; Norum & Bergli, 2005). On the one hand, some physicians find social media to be beneficial for sharing knowledge, collaborating with peers, and constructing an online persona or brand (e.g., Alpert & Womble, 2016; Kovic, Lulic, & Brumini, 2008; Lewis & Dicker, 2015; Panhani, Watson, & Partridge, 2014). On the other hand, there

is also notable concern among clinicians that information about health and medicine online is inaccurate, which can create tensions between doctors and patients (Hart, Henwood, & Wyatt, 2004; Hughes et al., 2008; Levy & Stombeck, 2002). Underlying this worry is the view that the Internet's decentralizing capabilities has contributed to a general skepticism and demystification of medical expertise—known as "deprofessionalization"—that may disrupt the status and autonomy of medical practitioners (Broom, 2005, p. 320; Hardey, 1999, p. 832). This skepticism, in the United States at least, should not be viewed as superficial. Historical polling data suggest that public trust in physicians has declined sharply over the past half century (Blendon, Benson, & Hero, 2014, p. 1570). In light of these opportunities and anxieties, it is worthwhile to further investigate how HCPs feel about digital media and its effects on contemporary health care.

There are few qualitative studies that look specifically at medical blogging. First, there is Hillian (2003) who examined the use of patient weblogs by doctors and concluded that they can "be an effective and efficient tool for exchanging information between patients, providers, or between a patient and his/her provider" (p. 333). More recently, certain scholars have asked HCPs directly about why they keep medical blogs or social media profiles. Walden (2013) interviewed naturopathic physician bloggers and found that blogging allows them to build credibility and increase public knowledge of alternative medicine (p. 245). Also, Panahi, Watson, and Partridge's (2016) respondents appealed to blogs because they provide ample space for writing and the ability of cultivate online discussion (p. 102). These studies provide a starting point for our examination of blog use by HCPs. We continue this line of inquiry by asking the following questions: Why do HCPs keep a blog and how do they position their blogging within the Health 2.0 terrain? Analyzing accounts for blogging will build upon our current understanding of the way medical workers are motivated to use the Internet as a component of their work and personal lives.

Theoretical Approach

With the massive growth of the Internet in the past 20 years, digital technologies are increasingly embedded into our social spaces and interactions (Altheide, 2014; Couldry, 2012; Hine, 2015; Miller & Slater, 2001). These forms of computer-mediated communication are highly participatory and decentralized, thus diverging from how mass media is traditionally produced and consumed (Altheide, 2014; Couldry, 2012). Not only are there more media formats now than ever before, but our use of these tools is also fundamentally reshaping how social life is lived (Altheide, 2014; Cerulo, 1997; Miller & Slater, 2001). Media production is no longer the exclusive domain of profit-driven corporations; it is now something that most people can easily create themselves, which may result in greater democratization. According to Coleman (2005), blogging, specifically, "is a source of nourishment for a kind of democracy in which everyone's

accounts counts'' (p. 274). Yet, other communications scholars refute such ''utopian'' views toward new media development (Garnham, 1993, p. 254). Fuchs (2006), for instance, is less optimistic about the democratic and emancipatory potential of blogs. He cautions that ''there is no automatism in the effects of blogging'' in the sense that it will necessarily produce greater civic mindedness (p. 57). This is because blogs are inescapably interconnected with various cultural, economic, political, and technological structures. While blogs can be considered to be personalized and alternative media, they nonetheless remain influenced and constrained by broader social forces.

Applied to the current research, medical blogs help shape and are shaped by the institutional discourses and regulations of health-care organizations. They are also bound up with the ideologies of ''deprofessionalization'' (Broom, 2005; Hardey, 1999) and medical skepticism or ''mistrust'' (Panahi et al., 2016, p. 100) that have come to characterize our eHealth era. We therefore conceptualize medical bloggers and their blogs as socially embedded in the contested Health 2.0 landscape. To understand the reasons why HCPs are interested in keeping a blog, it is necessary to analyze their individual accounts and how these accounts connect to the contexts and expectations of Health 2.0. The motivations and explanations of bloggers are examined as reflections of social actors in a particular role (professionals in the health-care industry) negotiating the benefits and risks of online communication with respect to that role.

Data and Methods

Grand Rounds—The Best of the Medical Blogosphere

Grand Rounds (http://getbetterhealth.com/grand-rounds), founded in September 2004, was a network of health-care bloggers (also called *med-bloggers*) that shared a weekly summary of notable contributions made to the medical blogosphere. This digital compilation is an example of what is referred to as a *blog carnival* (Morrison, 2013). Blog carnivals are weekly online discussions among bloggers with similar interests. It is a type of online community of practice in which bloggers join together to share information on a regular basis. With Grand Rounds, the topics of the blog summaries varied from week to week with a chosen blogger, or blogger group, taking responsibility for compiling content from the Internet. The topics included: doctor–patient encounters; a profile of a particular person involved in medicine; experiences in medical education; commentary on a new scientific discovery; and, theorizing and debating various aspects of health-care delivery. The last compilation of Grand Rounds was posted on March 13, 2012 shortly before going on an indefinite hiatus. In total, there were roughly 200 weekly carnivals among members of the Grand Rounds.

The data for this article are gathered from a series of interviews with medical bloggers (n=83) that were conducted by the network itself and posted on Grand Rounds between November 17, 2005 and July 24, 2007. Those who were interviewed tended to be well-known and highly active medical bloggers—such as "Kevin, MD" and "Medpundit"—whose blogs have been profiled in other studies (e.g., Cohen, 2007). Interviews asked bloggers to discuss what was unique about their own blog, the reasons why they started to blog, and the significance of this practice for this work. Hence, the focus is more about motivations for blogging and less about particular medical or health-related topics. In treating these interviews as data, we were able to extract important insights not simply about *what* HCPs blog about but more specifically *why* they blog.

While dated, analyzing this sample of interviews is still relevant for a number of reasons. Namely, there is little qualitative research that explores the purposes for which physicians use the Internet (Hughes et al., 2009) and, to our knowledge, there have been no studies that take the Grand Rounds forum as a dataset. Furthermore, scholars have demonstrated that blogging remains popular among HCPs over the past 10 years. For instance, the physicians in Panahi et al.'s (2016) recent study expressed that blogs were their second most preferred online platform after Twitter (p. 102). Also, in their extensive review of 951 health-related blogs found online, Miller and Pope (2010) note that 49.8% of the bloggers worked in health professions (p. 1515). Since blogs continue to be used frequently by HCPs, we believe that the rich data found in the Grand Rounds interviews warrants examination and can be used toward gaining a better understanding of the reasons for medical blogging.

Methods

Since we did not perform these interviews ourselves, we are conducting a "secondary data analysis," which is the practice of reusing qualitative data that was independently collected by others (Glaser, 1962; Heaton, 2008). While secondary analysis often refers to using data from other scholarly research, it can also be performed on other types of accessible data—like online interviews. In the methodological literature, there are particular recommendations about how and when to use a secondary analysis. Of chief importance is assessing the comparability of past and current research. Explained by Glaser (1962), "If the data are comparable with respect to population, situation, and variables, then the social scientist merely analyses it according to the specific operating problem" (p. 72). We believe that because of an equivalent focus on asking HCPs about the reasons why they blog, the interview data from Ground Rounds can be effectively analyzed to answer our research question. Since these interviews were not borne out of academic research, we treat them comparably to online documentary data. We are more concerned with examining the narrative accounts as provided by the respondents than the questions they were asked.

We take a "constant comparative" approach to data collection and coding (Johnson, 2000). We use this technique because it is particularly well suited to interpreting personal narratives or interviews, as demonstrated by other qualitative studies of physicians' Internet use (e.g., Hughes et al., 2009; Walden, 2013). We began by performing some preliminary online searches and found Grand Rounds to be a hub for medical bloggers. Digging deeper into the forum, we discovered that they conducted interviews with their members. Because of the striking relevance to our research question, we took these interviews as a purposive sample to analyze. Upon archiving and organizing the data, we began coding the interviews using an open and inductive method. Simple keywords (e.g., "privacy," "patient interaction," "information-seeking," etc.) were first used to label the content of bloggers' responses. After reviewing and comparing the frequency of these initial codes, we then developed a final set of more detailed categories that described patterns from across the interviews.

Once the interviews were coded, we were able to perform a qualitative thematic analysis. Simply put, a qualitative thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This type of analysis places less emphasis on the quantification and generalizability of findings and is more appropriate for the development of thick analytical descriptions. Performing the analysis allowed us to refine and replace our original codes and focus even more narrowly on the reasons for blogging and the "functions" of blogs for physicians (Walden, 2013, p. 241). In so doing, we were able to determine the most prevalent themes in interview content with respect to our research question about how and why HCPs use blogs. We derived five overall themes that help explain how these HCPs account for blogging. By drawing on a number of reflections and opinions, we provide some valuable insight into the intentions of medical bloggers and their relationship to the health-care system.

Analysis

(Re)establishing Reputation

As mentioned earlier, once private and institutionalized medical information is now widely available online and this newfound accessibility may be encouraging a "deprofessionalization" of health professionals. Some patients no longer rely on, or uncritically accept, the advice given to them by doctors and choose to explore second opinions on the web. Because a large number of HCPs are wary about misinformation on websites, they go online to expose contradictions, critique "bad science," or defend certain therapy and product recommendations. These practices may be answering calls from various medical organizations, such as "ASCO," who urge physicians to "take advantage of the greatest opportunity

to disseminate credible information and influence both our peers and our patients'' (Lewis & Dicker, 2015, p. 768). Med-bloggers frequently explain that they started writing blog posts because most people without medical degrees are simply unable to properly interpret and understand health writing. Expressed by Dr. Emily De Voto (The Antidote), ''It really does take a certain amount of critical understanding of science to separate the wheat from the chaff, not to mention putting findings in context.'' Therefore, HCPs use their blogs to inform readers about what is credible and, in effect, reinforce their authority as medical experts.

A number of bloggers also express a desire to personally assist patients in navigating the potentially overwhelming and confusing information about health care. For example, Graham Walker (Over My Med Body) states: ''How many people are probably going to see the Medicare Part D Walkthru? Not many. But I keep doing it, hoping that it maybe helps a few people make sense of it.'' These types of blogs can perhaps improve relationships between doctors and patients. As Fard Johnmar (Envision Solutions) states, ''because of the information available on the Internet, patients are entering into partnerships with their physicians where they are playing a larger role in the their care.'' However, these actions also constitute an attempt at *re*-professionalization; they reestablish HCPs as the necessary intermediaries of medical and lay knowledge. On this topic, Dr. Jon Mikel Iñarritu (Unbounded Medicine) explains:

> The issue is whether the information is right or useful, and whether you know how to apply that information. There's a solution to this problem: have professionals write about their field, and explain it in plain language – not a specialized blog, but one ''readable'' to anyone. (Dr. Jon Mikel Iñarritu, Unbounded Medicine)

It is in this capacity that medical bloggers can assert their reputation and reaffirm trust in their expertise. In certain respects, these insights are comparable to findings on naturopathic doctors who turned to the Internet to help rebuild individual credibility (Walden, 2013). While much academic research and popular discourse has emphasized the destabilization of the role of doctors, the channels of dialogue that the Internet opens may also counterbalance these effects by providing HCPs with new ways to develop a professional identity. Thus, Health 2.0 technologies create problems of, but also provide solutions to, deprofessionalization.

Interacting Informally With Patients

The ability to engage in new forms of interaction across space and time is perhaps the most obvious opportunity that the Internet affords. While web tools, like blogs, are not replacing face-to-face encounters, they do have the potential

to enhance doctor–patient communication (Cohen, 2007). By providing a space to interact casually and share personal writing, online media can improve doctor–patient relationships by "humanizing" the physician (Alpert & Womble, 2016, p. 830). In other words, this practice of entering into trusting and open conversations "increases the human sensibilities of both patient and doctor and heightens the quality of their interaction" (Mechanic, 1998, p. 286). In this context, HCPs can use their blogs to communicate informally with patients, which in turn provides readers with a richer and more intimate understanding of their physician's identity and personality.

How this new doctor–patient relationship is navigated varies by blogger. Some, like Dr. Charles (The Examining Room of Dr. Charles), explain how their patients have reacted to their blogs: "I've learned that my readers – the patients – can be quite amazed and indeed frightened that there is a regular, opinionated, and sometimes judgmental person behind each white coat." Others express worry over being discovered by patients. In reference to the use of a pseudonym, "MedPundit" says, "[it's] because I don't want a knowledge of my personal beliefs to be an inhibiting factor in my patient relationships." By contrast, several bloggers openly mention their blog to patients and believe that they have experienced professional gains from online interaction:

> Some of my patients are aware of it, and we discuss it during patient visits. Some patients have even found me via the blog and switched to me as their primary care physician. There seems to be a demand for physicians who understand the Internet's role in patient health information today. (Dr. Kevin Pho)

For many, the appeal of blogging is in its function as a platform for communication. In support of the potentialities of Health 2.0, some HCPs view this online technology as an unobtrusive, voluntary way to meaningfully connect with their patients: "Blogging is a way to welcome readers into the conversation, when they want to, on their terms" (Dr. Enoch Choi). Welcoming readers into dialogue allows doctors to better familiarize themselves with their patients and also to talk about their own lives. Moreover, some declare that blogging has directly improved doctor–patient relations: "I'd like to think that even the doctor-patient relationship has gained a Band-Aid as people express their experiences with the healthcare world, even if that healing is in homeopathic doses" (Dr. Charles, The Examining Room of Dr. Charles). The candid and collaborative nature of blogs then is believed to have positive effects on health-care delivery. While many doctors already have strong ties to professional peers, social media use can provide HCPs with closer connections to those they serve. Put concisely by Alpert and Womble (2016), "A physician's online presence also offers patients a glimpse into what it might be like to interact with the doctor in the examination room" (p. 829). It would appear that med-bloggers are interested in

using the Internet to present themselves and communicate in honest and informal ways, in effect defying norms of being wholly impersonal.

Blogging as Therapeutic

In popular culture and much social research, clinicians are often portrayed as objective and stoic despite the many emotional aspects of their work (Nettleton, Burrows, & Watt, 2008). To address or alleviate some of these conflicting expectations and emotions, HCPs may turn to blogging. Life writing can indeed improve the mental and physical health of physicians by providing emotional equilibrium, self-healing, and reducing social isolation (Shapiro, Kasman, & Shafer, 2006). These benefits of blogging are referenced in many ways by the HCPs in this sample. For example, Dr. Allen Roberts (GruntDoc) says that he started his blog as a way to "blow off some steam" and Dr. John Crippen (NHS Blog Doctor) describes his blogging experience as "enormously therapeutic." Similarly, "PaedsRN" uses his blog, in part, to communicate "the kinds of mixed-up feelings" that medical workers have. Others even claim that writing about your feelings is not only personally cathartic, but it can also help raise awareness of mental health issues. As Dr. Deborah Serani explains, "I am open about my own experiences with depression, and I think bringing that personal piece to my blog lets others see that they don't have to be ashamed." Blogging is therefore considered to be a constructive way to express and promote the expression of a range of emotions.

Many bloggers note that "venting" or "cathartic" posts are written during or following an upsetting event in the workplace, such as an interpersonal conflict or a loss of a patient. Typically, doctors fear that emotional responses to patients will be seen as unprofessional in public medical contexts (Nettleton et al., 2008) and this expectation can become a source of private anxiety:

> Often I have to suppress my emotions in the course of my work and I find this one of the more difficult and unhealthy things that I do . . . Surgeons aren't meant to sit in a treatment room cuddling a tiny baby with tears in their eyes . . . They're meant to be made of steel. Or at least, that's what we're encouraged to believe. ("Barbados Butterfly")

Such suppression seems unreasonable given the extremely challenging nature of many health care professions. Blogging is said to provide some much needed solace under times of occupational duress: "I think every healthcare worker feels the enormity of their task and the impossibility of perfection. We need to have an outlet, some cathartic 'generativity' that helps us remember why we enlisted in this often heartbreaking field to begin with, or at least allows us to poke fun at ourselves" (Dr. Charles, The Examining Room of Dr. Charles). Hence, for many HCPs, blogs serve a therapeutic function in their lives; they read and

write them as a way to find personal and interpersonal comfort amidst various forms of stress and pressure.

Describing and Negotiating Constraints

It is necessary to recognize that health-care blogs are particularly constrained by ethical and institutional obligations. It is common knowledge that doctors are held to a strict responsibility to not divulge intimate or identifying information about patients. In a number of cases, the online personal writing of med-bloggers becomes subject to organizational regulations or screening. These bloggers must negotiate telling their story and telling the ''right'' story. In this sense, writing is not an unrestricted process; it must align with particular social and institutional expectations. When HCPs talk about why they blog, many describe not just the benefits but also the challenges of using social media.

It is not surprising then that many med-bloggers adopt pseudonyms. ''MedPundit'' admits, ''I didn't want to embarrass my employer with my views.'' Anonymity is often a means to maintain candor and ensure protection, especially if writing vitriolic pieces about their job. Regardless of any disclaimers to the contrary, med-bloggers feel that they inevitably represent their employers, and express trepidation at the thought of readers conflating their opinions with that of the company they work for. Ethics are also heavily considered when writing posts about patients. Anonymity does not exempt HCPs from ethical standards of their workplace, resulting in a tension between autonomy and morality:

> I exhaustively reviewed ethical standards for what doctors are ''allowed'' to say, and feel that all medical bloggers should be careful and follow the implied rules. But to let lawsuit fear creep into the realm of reasonable self-expression is to have lost the last vestige of freedom. Doctors are still brave enough to deliver babies, to do their best to find cancer early, to remove ruptured appendixes despite the fact that we all get sued eventually, probably multiple times in our careers. We must certainly be brave enough to have a public voice, whether in the form of letters written to the editor about our deranged healthcare system, or as semi-obscure words describing the hour of a fictionalized patient's death as shared on medical blogs. (Dr. Charles, The Examining Room of Dr. Charles)

Many of these concerns about how personal privacy, attitudes, and conduct will be perceived by patients and employers, resonate with other studies on physicians' views toward online media (e.g., Alpert & Womble, 2016; Panahi et al., 2016).

Sometimes, however, medical organizations are supportive of blogs and recognize their utility. Upon discussing her blog with her clinical director,

"Tundra PA's" writing was incorporated into the company's recruitment website because they felt it accurately reflected their work life. In other cases, employers become aware of blogs independently:

> The people in charge of my program know about my blog; about 10 months ago they spoke with me about it and asked that I make sure that I am meticulous about privacy issues. The fact that they knew about the blog and that the head of the program had read it was a little disconcerting, even though I've never said one word about the program. Just knowing that you're being watched is enough to make you think twice before you write something that refers to a real patient. (Dr. Sam Blackman, Blog, MD)

This excerpt shows how organizational circumstances affect how HCPs blog and what they can write about. Balancing blogging with professionalism becomes even more complex when one considers how med-bloggers reflect and represent not only an employer but also the broader discourse of contemporary medicine. This is often characterized as burdensome and restricting the possibility to be self-expressive. In this way, private opinions and public service can sharply collide:

> With Donorcycle, I wanted to be able to kvetch and laugh at absurdities and such. I didn't think anyone outside of a few TCs would be interested in what I had to say. Then I got some comments from people that were negative. Being sensitive (no, really), I started to think that maybe I had more of a responsibility to keep organ donation in a good light for all the nonmedical people who read the blog. Every time organ donation gets bad press, people say no to donation. And every time they say no, someone dies. ("TC," Donorcycle)

With multiple bloggers reporting being suspended because of the content of their blog, anonymity and self-censorship become profoundly important. The interviews in our sample demonstrate that these dilemmas profoundly shape how HCPs use the Internet. Negotiating these constraints is a part of the med-blogger's writing process and a reason why they blog the way that they do.

Promoting Community and Reform

By engaging in regular online communication, bloggers can create strong bonds with one another. Many acknowledge that through writing, commenting, and collaborating, they are part of a "virtual community" (for a review of definitions, see Fuchs, 2006). Members of other blogging groups—such as "mommy bloggers"—have described how feelings of support and solidarity can stem from being involved in such a community (Lopez, 2009; Morrison, 2011). It is common for med-bloggers to write about the trends, trajectory, and relative

well-being of their online group. Because personal blogs often incite self-disclosure and statements of empathy, the blogosphere can provide compassion and communality not found elsewhere on the Internet.

There is a general sentiment that the development of an influential online community can be an asset in prompting medical reform. However, a major debate surrounds the question of what type of medical blogging is useful. With the various styles, themes, and genres within the group, there are contentions that some kinds of blogging are more beneficial than others. One clear division is between what we call "daily" blogging and "medical issues" blogging. "Daily" bloggers—like "KeaGirl"—use a blog to "chronicle [their] day-to-day events." They emphasize the value in doctors shedding light on their own interpretations of work experiences. Their position is summarized well by Niels Olsen (The Haversian Canal) in stating: "we, the millions of little reporters, by looking a little closer to home and reporting our observations, can add enormous value to the Internet one little bit at a time." These writers believe that giving readers access to the context and untold meanings associated with even the most mundane tasks is an important endeavor. Everyday posts are considered a way to demystify health care for patients and promote supportive interaction among practitioners.

On the other hand, the "medical issues" bloggers are concerned primarily with politics, policies, and social change. They typically regard such casual and observational blogging as trivial. These individuals express that med-bloggers should be more concerned with increasing their quantity of readers and developing a collective identity in order to effectively provoke change at an institutional level. Dr. Chris Rangel, for instance, is described as using his blog to "agitate for reform":

> The other thing I'd like to see is for a medical blog to make that quantum transition from entertainment source to advocate. . .In the end, physicians, healthcare workers, patients, and healthcare access and quality will all be on the losing end of these decisions unless we act now to become a major player in the game.

Hence, for this faction, online dialogue and a supportive virtual community is not enough. Med-bloggers should be using their presence *on* the Internet toward broader changes *off* the Internet. With social media becoming a popular conduit for group mobilization and activism, it is likely that even more HCPs will use the Internet for political engagement in the future. Other research has indeed found that HCPs go online to connect with government officials over issues of social policy and public health (Alpert & Womble, 2016, p. 830). By now, it should be clear that many HCPs write blogs for different reasons that range from personal and informal expression to professional and political interaction. While disputes over the essential purpose of medical blogs persist, a number of bloggers believe that blogging can and should be used toward promoting medical reform.

Discussion

Blogs are just one feature of a movement in which Internet technologies have been integrated into many health-care practices. The effects of this Health 2.0 phenomenon include the changing meaning of patienthood, subsequent shifts in the doctor–patient relationship, and a demystification of expert knowledge known as ''deprofessionalization.'' There have been limited qualitative investigations into how HCPs feel about these changes and why they choose to use online tools. Our work has sought to illustrate some of the motivations for medical blogging by drawing on HCPs' own words. Through a thematic analysis of interviews featured on the Grand Rounds forum, we found that most bloggers describe the benefits and complications that the Internet offers to the health-care industry. Their own uses of blogs speak to articulating and reestablishing a professional reputation, connecting with patients informally, writing for therapeutic reasons, negotiating institutional constraints, and promoting community and health-care reform.

While the Internet may be rife with inaccurate writing about health and medicine, medical bloggers mention that they are interested in correcting misinformation even if only through informal conversations. This practice of verifying and fixing content may also be motivated by an interest in publicly asserting medical expertise. Bloggers have explained how Internet access poses both threats to and opportunities for their professional development. On a more personal level, many express that they write blogs because it is a cathartic experience. Yet, in their reflections, they acknowledge that workplace regulations can often inhibit self-expression, and consequently, the therapeutic aspect of writing. As medical organizations become more attuned to web tools, blogs and other social media kept by physicians are likely to be subject to even greater institutional surveillance and appropriation. This would further constrain possibilities for personalized Internet use such as life writing and interacting informally which, as this study has shown, are some of the very reasons why doctors choose to go online. By moving in this direction, improving public trust in physicians and the quality of the doctor–patient relationship will remain a challenge. But that does not mean that HCPs will not face this challenge head-on. Based on these findings and projections, HCPs will continue to have a complex and ambivalent relationship to digital media, but they will also continue to adjust to the ever-changing Health 2.0 landscape in creative and meaningful ways.

Conclusion

Before concluding, it is necessary to address some of the limitations of this research. As outlined earlier, this study makes use of secondary data, which means that we did not ask our own questions to medical bloggers directly. Doing so would have provided more opportunity to probe participants about

certain topics and to follow-up. In addition, our decision to collect data in this manner means that our study lacks external validity. our sample of bloggers, and their responses, cannot be used to represent the medical blogger community at large. With that said, we have tried to mitigate these issues to the best of our ability. We treated the interviews as documentary data—or, narratives—and employed appropriate methods for coding and analysis. Also, since most studies of Internet use by HCPs are survey based, analyzing any form of qualitative data about personal opinions and experience is still a valuable and uncommon endeavor. The excerpts provided in this article are reflections from HCPs on their work, their communities, and their lives that are seldom expressed in other types of popular discourse.

There are several other reasons why this research is timely. First, web-based tools are being used by an increasing number of physicians (Hughes et al., 2009). While calculating rates of use is worthwhile, it is also beneficial to look deeper into the meanings that these tools hold for HCPs. Understanding the intentions for why medical workers go online can help to inform effective medical education and health-care delivery in the future. Second, demonstrating how and why HCPs connect with others online can promote public health. Research has shown that when patients have effective communication with doctors, they tend to take a more proactive approach to managing their well-being, which results in better physical health outcomes (Stewart, 1995). Last, in light of our findings, our study also points out the need to acknowledge HCPs as emotional actors who desire a space for informal self-expression and conversation. With the growth of online technologies continuing to blur the lines between work and personal life, it is necessary to pay attention to how people feel about these developments and the ways they facilitate or complicate everyday practices.

As the era of eHealth moves forward, more forms of digital media will be integrated into the delivery of health care, and it will be important for social scientists to continue this line of inquiry. Future research should be directed toward the uses of and differences between other forms of social media—especially Twitter, given its popularity among physicians (Alpert & Womble, 2016; Panahi et al., 2016). While Twitter can provide greater reach and readership, it is also far more textually limiting than blog platforms. Therefore, HCPs may be drawn to Twitter more for networking and less for personal writing. In addition, it would be fruitful to examine the development of online networks created specifically for medical professionals, such as Sermo (http://www.sermo.com) and Doximity (https://www.doximity.com). By looking into these communities, many of the exploratory themes from this study can be expanded. Why were these websites created and how are they used for interaction, professionalization, and health-care reform? Moreover, because these groups are more private than blogs and exclusive to licensed physicians, are they able to mitigate issues of misinformation and institutional constraints? Finally, studies can also further explore the following: What patients and health-care organizations think about

the online presence of physicians; how media platforms can be developed to best address the needs and concerns of HCPs; and whether or to what extent med-bloggers have influenced health-care policy changes across the globe. With their capability to redefine so many aspects of the health-care industry, it remains crucial to understand the ways in which and the reasons why medical professionals and their patients make use of the Internet.

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Author Biographies

Casey Scheibling is a PhD candidate in Sociology at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. His dissertation research examines a burgeoning community of North American men who write online parenting blogs—known as ''dad bloggers.'' He is currently the recipient of a Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2016–2019).

James Gillett is an associate professor jointly appointed in the Department of Sociology and the Department of Health, Aging, and Society at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. His work on health and media has appeared in peer-reviewed journals such as the *Journal of Communication Inquiry* and *Media, Culture & Society*.

Gordon Brett is a PhD student in Sociology at the University of Toronto in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. His research interests are in sociological theory, cultural sociology, and the sociology of the body. His current projects involve incorporating embodied cognition into theorizing practice, gender, and social change.