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"That's Not Real India": Responses to Women's Portrayals in Indian Soap Operas

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Abstract

This study examined the portrayal of women on Indian soap operas through content analysis. Quotes from in-depth interviews of 100 Asian Indians (50 couples) from five major metropolitan areas, NY, DC, SF, Chicago, and Houston, who watch Indian television (imported from India) via the satellite dish or cable, were used in this study. Researchers uncovered specific themes, such as Portrayal of women, Heterosexual Romance and Intimacy, and Joint Family, and analyzed these themes against the theoretical framework of cultural proximity. The authors explained that the role of Indian women being created in Indian serials did not reflect the image of Indian women the participants remembered when they migrated to the United States in the 1960s. The image of Indian women that was being portrayed was that of a "vamp" or someone manipulative and not family-oriented. Therefore, the cultural proximity of the Indian soap operas was disrupted by the negative portrayal of Indian women to a particular generation of Indian immigrants in the United States. The participants appreciated the image of a modern Indian woman, as long as she still maintained traditional values. Further, these portrayals reminded these participants that they were cultural outsiders in modern India.

Keywords

critical and cultural studies, diasporic identity, gender and media, qualitative research methods, satellite television

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Introduction

Immigrants often maintain connections to their home country in various ways, such as through cultural practices, language, and consuming products like media from the country of origin. Ethnic media[1] consumption among immigrants has received particular attention, because it has allowed immigrants to remain informed about news and events of their home country (Matsaganis, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2011). Among Indian immigrants, satellite television programming from India is extremely popular. Indian immigrants watch these programs to receive information about India, hear their native language, feel a sense of pride about the country, or enjoy Indian music and culture (Somani, 2008). In this study, the authors focused on understanding the popularity of Indian soap operas within a specific generation of the Indian diaspora in the United States. The changes in gender roles in Indian families portrayed in the soap operas were disruptive to these viewers since they did not align with participants' nostalgic memories about India in the 1960s. Thus, the cultural proximity of these media was reduced for participants. Participants drew on their firsthand knowledge of modern India (acquired during their postretirement visits) to evaluate the portrayals of women, and their responses revealed that these portrayals acted as a reminder for these participants that they were cultural outsiders in modern India, because they cherished traditional values that had been displaced in recent times.

Cultural Proximity

Cultural proximity refers to an audience's preference for media that reflects their own regional or national culture (Burch, 2002). This theoretical concept emphasizes the relevance of culture in media engagement. Furthermore, cultural proximity explains why productions from other countries continue to be popular, despite the saturation of the market by Hollywood productions. In addition, this theoretical concept more broadly explains the importance of culture in media choices, domestic or international (Georgiou, 2012; Ksiazek & Webster, 2008; Zaharopoulos, 1990).

Straubhaar (2003) conceptualized cultural proximity as "the tendency to prefer media products from one's own culture or the most similar possible culture" (p. 85). Subsequent studies explored the various dimensions of culture to understand their role in media engagement. Language has often been viewed as central to cultural proximity. In addition, La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005) identified other cultural elements contributing to cultural proximity, such as dress, humor, story-pacing, historical references, values, and norms. They found Brazilian telenovelas were popular among Southern Italians because the programs dealt with Italian immigration to Brazil, a topic that was personally relevant for many Italian viewers. Burch (2002) studied the popularity of the

Ramayana television program with the Indian (Hindu) diaspora, which revealed that the creativity and artistry behind the production contributed to its cultural proximity. Thus, cultural proximity helped explain the engagement of audiences with media that closely reflected their cultural values or lived experiences.

This study, however, shows that at least for one generation of Indian immigrants, those who migrated to the United States between 1960 and 1972, the portrayal of women in Indian soap operas revealed participants' dissatisfaction with the cultural changes occurring in India. This dissatisfaction was not because participants were unaware of the changes in Indian society, or because they first learned of these changes through soap operas. Instead, participants were dissatisfied with the changes that did not match up with the traditional values participants cherished, and viewing the soap operas was a reminder that their traditional values had no place in modern India. Their responses also revealed that they had some contradictory feeling to some changes related to gender roles. The authors investigated the participants' responses to better understand how gender complicated cultural proximity for older Indian immigrants.

Gender and Media Studies

The nexus of gender and media has been explored primarily through media representation and reception studies. In the realm of representation studies, media effects researchers have explored the negative impact of stereotypical representations of women in media ranging from advertisements to films to TV programs. Media portrayals of women have also been analyzed using the critical, cultural studies perspectives to uncover the complex, marginalizing ideologies that underlie negative representations of men and women of color (Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004; Hooks, 1993). Reception studies have focused on understanding women's engagement with media such as romance novels (Parameswaran, 1999; Radway, 1984), magazines (McRobbie, 1991), and soap operas (Ang & Couling, 1985) to discuss the experiences of female audiences, who were previously neglected in audience research. Additionally, feminist media scholars have shown that media reception can be a gendered experience that is often informed by race and class (Bobo, 1988). Research has also shown that portrayals of gender in media inform the reception of media texts (La Pastina, 2004).

In the context of audience studies in immigrant communities, portrayals of women in the media have emerged as an important characteristic related to engagement. In Oppenheimer, Adams-Price, Goodman, Codling, and Coker's (2003) study of audience responses to strong female characters on television, the researchers found that women's responses to female characters were more positive than men's responses. Rojas (2004) explored the responses of immigrant and nonimmigrant Latina women to female Latina portrayals on Univision and Telemundo and found that they rejected the philosophies of female

empowerment presented in these shows and the concept of Latino unity. Durham (2004) explored how South Asian female adolescents in the United States use oppositional readings of media to construct their sexual identities. Grewal's (2003) study of middle-class Indian women in Detroit revealed how they drew on media representations of Indian women in Indian and American media to develop and maintain their bicultural identity. This study contributed to gender and media studies literature by exploring how older male and female immigrants responded to portrayals of women in ethnic media, namely, Indian soap operas to better understand how immigration patterns might shape responses to media.

Indian Diaspora in the United States

To understand Indian immigrants' experiences and the cross-cultural adaptation processes, it is important to understand the notion of diasporas. Diasporas are immigrant communities that attempt to maintain "real" or "imagined" connections (Anderson, 1991) and commitments to their home countries. For example, Anjali Ram (2004) embraces Khachig Tölöyan's (1991) conceptualization of diasporas as "communities that actively maintain links with their culture of origin" (p. 122), while Schiller, Basch, and Blanc (1995) described diasporas as communities of transnationals who "forge and sustain simultaneous multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc, 1994, p. 7). Thus, diasporas are long-term, although not static, communities bound together by issues of separation from their country of origin and feelings of hope about their lives in the host country (Moorti, 2003).

Sandhya Shukla (2003) suggested that diasporas, as hybrid cultures, were a third space between "home" and "new" lands (p. 17). For example, in the United States, Jackson Heights, New York is known as "Little India" (Shukla, 2003). In the early 1970s, Jackson Heights developed into an Asian Indian[2] community as many Indian-owned stores and restaurants emerged within a few blocks in Queens. These stores included food stores, sari stores, beauty salons, record stores, and more, creating a "self-sufficient ethnic community" (p. 84). By creating this Asian Indian community, these Indians were also able to reinforce their cultural identity.

Diaspora studies focus on the construction of identity and community. Immigrants are not always accepted as "complete citizens" of the host country because of political, cultural, and historical differences. Caught between citizenships and affiliations, diasporas exist in a liminal space. This liminal or "third space" becomes a site for the production of a hybrid culture, formed through negotiations with the home and host cultures (Bhabha, 1994). Ethnic communities like "Little India" (described by Shukla) helped in the cross-cultural adaptation process for newcomers in the United States, because they offered ethnic

media and media from the homeland to assist with the adjustment process (Etefa, 2005; Johnson, 1996; Lee, 2004; Reece & Palmgreen, 2000; Yang, Wu, Zhu, & Southwell, 2004). However, depending on the migration period of the diasporic group, not all ethnic media resonated with immigrant audiences.

Transnational Subjectivity

Although participants watched the soap operas as a way of maintaining their connection to Indian culture, they also reported experiencing dissonance when watching the shows. For example, the setting of most soap operas was the joint family,[3] a nostalgic cultural space for the participants who had to abandon this family system after migrating to the United States. However, the ways in which women in the joint family interacted were different from the ways in which participants believed they should interact. Since the participants visited India (although these visits were of varying frequencies and durations), they were aware about the move away from the joint family system, especially in urban India. Consequently, seeing a cherished family structure portrayed negatively exacerbated their anxieties about changes in India and acted as a reminder that the 1960s Indian culture, which they were nostalgic for, had ceased to exist, both in India and even on the screen. Thus, although by viewing the soap operas, participants were able to ''revisit'' the joint family, the joint family dynamics in the soap operas were not enjoyable. Consequently, participants expressed ambivalence about their viewing experience.

This tension that resulted from viewing media from the homeland is further explained using Louisa Schein's (2008) argument that ethnic media texts are intertwined in transnational subjectification, a process that emphasized the complex identity negotiations by diasporic communities regarding cultural allegiances. Schein (2008) argued media that evoke memories of the homeland simultaneously capture diasporic audiences while simultaneously creating anxieties for these viewers by emphasizing their geographic and cultural distance from their homeland. The soap operas reflected contemporary India rather than the Indian culture of the 1960s, which participants idealized. As a result, they were reminded that they were cultural ''Others'' in relation to contemporary India. Furthermore, as part of an ethnic minority community in the United States, they were aware that they remained as cultural ''Others'' in the United States. Thus, they were doubly ''Othered.''

Disapora studies have emphasized diasporic communities are often caught between allegiance to their old and new homes, and Schein's (2008) view of transnational subjectivity points out that diaporic audiences' connection to their native homeland is more complex. The participants in this study were not only cultural ''Others'' in their new homes in the United States, but they also had to grapple with another layer of ''in-betweeness.'' They had to reconcile the fondly remembered India of the 1960s with the contemporary iterations of

India presented in media texts, which was vastly different culture than in the 1960s. Viewing soap operas from India should have evoked nostalgia, because this genre has typically celebrated traditional Indian values. However, for the participants, it also generated anxieties about cultural changes in India because in these modern soap operas women were portrayed as disrupters of the joint family system and sexual beings. This portrayal was not only different from the nostalgic view that participants held of women (devoted to the joint family system and who embodied traditional values of sexual reticence) but also a reminder that the version of India they fondly remembered did not exist. Thus, viewing soap operas emphasized the in-betweeness or transnational nature of the participants' identities by highlighting that they were cultural "Others" in their native homelands too.

Nostalgia

Immigrant communities have engaged with ethnic media because it was important for maintaining transnational relationships and cultural identity (Aksoy & Robins, 2003). Sun (2005) proposed the idea of a "global diasporic Chinese mediasphere" to explain how engagement with ethnic media helped Chinese diasporas develop a collective identity and thereby a sense of community that was based on reaffirming their cultural loyalty to their country of origin.

When the Indian diasporic communities were beginning to form, in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, Hindi movies were also shown in the San Francisco area, New York area (Queens and Manhattan), and Northern California (Yuba City). Distributors showed the films in university halls and public school auditoriums on the weekends, as well as theaters devoted specifically to a full screening of Indian films in Hindi with English subtitles (Fisher, 1980). As Fisher (1980) explained, these films were "a nostalgic link to India" (pp. 63–64). One filmgoer told Fisher, "this film is as boring to us as it must be to you, but you see it was filmed in our home town; the sights are all familiar to us. And it's good to hear the language" (pp. 63–64). Therefore, these early screenings became a way for Indians to leave the mainstream, "wear traditional clothes, speak in Hindi or other regional languages" and join other families to meet and participate "in a ritual of sharing personal and collective memories of life in India" (Punathambekar, 2005, p. 154).

Gillespie (1989) examined the use of the VCR by Asian Indians in a London suburb, who watched Hindi films to stay connected to their country of origin. For the older Asian Indians, "nostalgia" was the key to watching the films (Gillespie, 1989). These parents felt they could "convey a sense of their past in India to their children" (Gillespie, 1989, p. 236). Parents also had specific uses for film, such as linguistic, religious, and sociocultural learning for their children (Gillespie, 1989).

The Indian immigrants studied here did not grow up watching television in India, because television was not introduced until 1959 (Ray & Jacka, 1996) and that was only in a few homes in urban areas. When Indian television became available on the satellite dish, this form of media contributed to the "imagined homeland[4]" that Indians were creating to help forge a connection with India and maintain a memory of India that was quite nostalgic. In the modern Indian soap operas, the image and role of women in particular changed, disrupting the Indian diaspora's identification with their home culture and reducing the cultural proximity of these soap operas for this audience.

Modern[5] Soaps in India

The content and distribution of soap operas, colloquially known as "serials," changed dramatically following the liberalization of India's economic policies in the late 1990s. These policies in conjunction with massive telecommunications growth in the early 2000s opened Indian markets to foreign programming and expanded domestic programming. STAR Plus, Zee TV, and Sony TV, for example, became popular in the early 2000s in part due to their Hindi soap operas.

Until around 2007–2008, a particular subgenre of soap operas termed *saas-bahu* (mother-in-law vs. daughter-in-law) serials, ruled audience ratings. In 2000, television producer Ekta Kapoor ushered in the era of these *saas-bahu* soaps with megahits like *Kanyadaan* (Ceremony in which the parents give away the daughter for marriage) and *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (Because the mother-in-law was also once a daughter-in-law), which were followed by a slew of other *saas-bahu* soaps, all starting with the letter K, leading to this subgenre being called "K-serials" (Munshi, 2012). *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii* (The story of every household), *Kasautii Zindagii Kay* (The criterion of life), *Kaahin Kissii Roz* (Somewhere, someday), *Kahin to Hogaa*, *Kkusum* (Name of the main character in this series), and *Kutumb* (Family) were examples of popular K-serials that were broadcast between 2000 and 2008. K-serials typically focused on family politics and centered on the relationships among women in large joint families (Munshi, 2012). *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, for example, which ran from 2000 to 2008, featured a married woman navigating family politics in her husband's home. These K-serials had dramatic storylines, female protagonists who occupied center stage, and clearly delineated good and bad female characters who also promoted aspirational, extravagant lifestyles via their over-the-top fashion, makeup, and ornaments (Deprez, 2009; Munshi, 2010).

Shoma Munshi (2012) connected the popularity of K-serials to the socioeconomic conditions at the time. In the early 2000s, as India was entering a liberalized capitalist economy, the economic prosperity of middle-class families previously rooted in having stable government jobs, now became tied to jobs in the information technology industry, which were tied to fluctuations in global

markets. Thus, although Indians now had more money to spend, job security was rare. Consequently, the family once again became the central support system and safe space. In many ways, the K-serials, by focusing on large joint families, evoked a sense of nostalgia for preliberalization days when joint families were the norm. Deprez (2009) pointed out that audiences were also able to identify with values celebrated in these K-serials, such as "self-sacrifice for the good of the family, respect for your elders, moral standards and a black and white view of right and wrong" (p. 429).

Despite their popularity, these soaps were widely criticized for unrealistic storylines and glorifying female characters that sacrificed everything for their husbands and families (Joshi, 2001; Stanley, 2012). In addition, the mother-in-law often played the role of the shrew, who was prone to mood swings and subjects the daughter-in-law to numerous indignities and mistreatment. As Namrata Joshi (2001) noted,

> Most soap moms-in-law are given an ambivalent character as they keep swinging from good to bad to downright ugly. In *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, the *saas* [mother-in-law] goes to the extent of accusing her *bahu* [daughter-in-law] of theft and even alleging that she was having an affair. Yet when the son dies she decides to have her widowed *bahu* marry again. However, the contradiction in this positing of women's liberation is obvious—widow remarriage is only toyed with, not executed.... In *Kahani Gahr Gahr Ki*, the action takes the opposite turn as the goody-goody *saas* turns venomous against her Ram-like eldest son and the sweet *badi bahu* [elder daughter-in-law] in yet another Ramayana[6] retold.

Similar to Joshi (2001), Munshi (2010) had also likened the early K-serial narratives to the Ramayana, particularly in terms of the daughters-in-law being scripted to model Sita[7] from Ramayana. Moreover, the daughters-in-law in K-serials often had to protect their families from external threats such as the "other woman" who was presented as independent, working outside the home, and wearing clothes that were "immodest." Thus, the dutiful daughter-in-law represented the ideal Indian woman who must survive against foreign threats that could destabilize cultural values of "parivaar and parampara" also known as "family and tradition" (Munshi, 2012).

By around the mid-2000s, although K-serials were still popular, other soaps were beginning to also gain popularity. Munshi (2012) noted that *Jassis Jaisi Koi Nahi*, the Hindi adaptation of the Colombia telelnovela, *Yo Soy Betty La Fea*, known as *Ugly Betty* in the United States, was one the first such challengers to the K-serials. By 2007, the popularity of K-serials decreased; soap operas that centralized women's social issues became more popular. Examples included *Bidaai* (Farewell ceremony for brides) and *Saat Phere-Saloni Ka Safar* (Marriage-Saloni's journey), which discussed colorism; *Balika Vadhu* (Child bride), which focused on the repercussions of child marriage; and *Chotti Bahu*

(Younger daughter-in-law), which exposed the perils of the caste system. Although tackling socially relevant issues, these soaps continued to have evil relatives who schemed against the central female protagonist. However, the main focus of the storyline now often was the relationship between the husband and female protagonist (Munshi, 2012). *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* (How should this relationship be named), for example, focused on how a couple in an arranged marriage navigated their new relationship alongside everyday family drama. Similarly, *Pavitra Rishata* (Holy relationship), *Banoo Main Teri Dulhann* (Become your wife), and *Saath Nibhana Saathiya* (Keep your promises, fellow traveler) also centralized the relationships between husband and wife.

In many ways, this focus on love after marriage resonated with the lived experiences of many young Indian couples, who were still having arranged marriages, as well as the older generation of Asian Indians used in this study. The move toward depicting modern relationships meant the inclusion of sex and romance. This complicated the cultural proximity of the soap operas that were previously admired for their "clean" content. For example, extramarital affairs, divorce, and intergenerational love stories were now often part of the storylines. *Bade Ache Lagte Hain* (I like you), for example, started trending on Twitter for depicting the first on-screen kiss during prime time ("Ram Kapoor 'kiss-and-tell' trends on Twitter," 2012).

Munshi (2012) pointed out that female protagonist concerns expanded to include her original home in addition to her marital home (examples: *Bade Ache Lagte Hain*, *Sapna Babul ka Bidaii* [Father's dream to marry his daughters]). The early K-serials focused mainly on the female protagonist's marital home. In some cases, female roles have expanded beyond that of mothers-in-law, daughters, and wives, to include career women (as in *Diya Aur Batti Hum* [We are like the earthen lamp and it's wick]), although family and career were often placed at odds (Munshi, 2012). Hindi serials also continued to be the touchstone for determining the latest fashions. These designs became the fashion of choice for weddings in India and among Indian immigrants, particularly the clothing and jewelry worn by female protagonists in these soaps (Munshi, 2012). Thus, even while debates continued about whether the female characters in Hindi soap operas challenged or reinforced patriarchal norms, these soap operas continued to have cultural relevance in India and among a particular generation of the Indian diaspora in the United States.

Research Questions

This study focused on how Asian Indians who have lived in the United States for 40 to 50 years responded to portrayals of women in modern Indian serials. This generation developed their television-viewing habits after moving to the United States in the 1960s (Somani, 2008). The need to stay connected to their culture led the Asian Indian participants to eventually subscribe to the satellite dish to

watch programs from India in real time (Somani, 2008). These research questions investigated how the participants connected with cultural proximity and the role of ethnic media played in their adaptation process.

1. How does a specific generation of Indian immigrants (Asian Indians) understand modern Indian society through watching Indian soap operas?
2. How does this generation of Asian Indians define women in the serials?
3. How does this generation describe the way family relationships are portrayed on the screen?

Participants and Methods

Asian Indians: Migrating to the United States and Current Status

Following the introduction of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965, Asian Indians began migrating to the United States to fill the need for professional and skilled workers (Chandrasekhar, 1982), which arose as a result of programs such as the newly introduced Medicare and Medicaid programs that created a need for scientists and other medical professionals (Prashad, 2000). Indian immigrants were immediately absorbed into the American workforce, and consequently, they attained middle-class status (Dasgupta, 1989).

These Asian Indians first resorted to letters and the phone in the early days to find out what was happening in their homeland. But because of the delays in airmail, it took weeks, if not months, to find out what was happening in India. The phone connection at that time was weak due to India's poor infrastructure, which contributed to substandard landlines. When information about India became available via the satellite dish, this was the first time this particular generation could maintain their connection to India in real time (Somani, 2008).

Most of the participants in this study watched Hindi movies growing up in India, especially since television was not introduced yet. Once these participants arrived in the United States, they watched Hindi movies at the local university theaters in the 1960s. Indian immigrants had a strong sense of ethnic and cultural heritage that eventually became a source of pride and group identification (Dasgupta, 1989). This strong sense of identity is what led to the first Indian newspaper (catering to Asian Indians in the United States) produced in the United States, *India Abroad*. The Indian community not only wanted to stay connected to India but also wanted to stay connected to each other.

Some of the participants in this study were also subscribers of *India Abroad*, the first and largest Asian Indian publication serving the diaspora since 1970. Although it was headquartered in New York, it published five separate editions

(Eastern, Midwestern, Western, Canadian, and European). Stories from around the world and United States were sent to New York.

This generation also listened to radio programs. By 1975, 13 weekly half-hour radio programs catering to Asian Indians aired in New York. The shows included interviews with Asian Indians celebrating the accomplishments in their fields, cultural programs, and musical performances.

For this generation of Asian Indians, media consumption did not stop with television and radio; the VCR became another way for this diasporic group to ingest their culture. By 1980, many movie houses that showed Hindi films closed down in New York and Chicago (Helweg & Helweg, 1990). Many participants in this study preferred watching Indian movies at home on their VCR, where they invited friends to watch movies with them.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, cable television offered public access channels for groups and individuals to make programs about their own communities. This generation of Asian Indians was also ready to spread their community news through electronic media. *TV Asia*, *Namaste Television*, *Darshan TV Show*, *Chitrahaar*, and *Bharat Darshan* were channels or programs that were developed by the Indian diasporic communities around the United States to air on cable. Some participants were consumers of these programs.

All the participants visited India over the years; some managed to go every 2 to 3 years. Others could only go every 5 to 7 years, because it was too expensive to take their entire family. In addition, the participants kept in touch with their Indian family members and relatives, and for some, their extended family had even migrated to United States. As they reached retirement or after their children were married and settled within their own careers, some participants began traveling to India every year, particularly during the winter months. Now, many participants spend their winters in India (December–February), which means they go every year.

All the participants in this study viewed themselves as a racial/ethnic minority in the United States. Some members of this study viewed themselves as Indian Americans, but most just called themselves Indians. No one used the term *Indian diaspora* but understood what the researchers meant if it was part of a question in the in-depth interviews.

Like Gillespie's (1989) study, this generation not only maintained a connection to their Indian culture to reinforce their strong sense of identity, but they wanted to expose their children to Indian culture as well. Some participants spoke their native Indian language at home because they wanted their children to learn their mother tongue. But they found that their children began to speak "Hinglish" (a combination of both Hindi and English). In addition to watching movies on the VCR, these Asian Indians tried to expose their children to Indian culture by taking them to India (when they could afford the travel) and joining Indian groups, which organized cultural programs and performances further exposing the second-generation offspring to Indian culture.

Participants

Cohorts of Asian Indians were interviewed from the following metropolitan areas from 2007 to 2012: Washington, DC; Chicago; San Francisco-San Jose; Houston; and New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island (NY). In all five of the chosen metro areas, Asian Indians were large ethnic populations. Specifically, there were 186,000 and 142,000 Asian Indians in the Chicago and Washington, DC metro areas, respectively. In both these areas, Asian Indians were also the largest ethnic group (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012). In San Francisco-San Jose, Houston, and New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island (NY) metro areas, there were approximately 250,000; 100,000; and 600,000 Asian Indians, respectively (Hoeffel et al., 2012).

Each group from the respected metropolitan areas comprised 10 married couples (20 people per groups). Of the 100 participants, 50 were men and 50 were women. More than half (57%) of the participants had graduate degrees (Master's, PhD, MD, JD), and 99% had a college degree or higher. Each participant was interviewed separately. Couples were not interviewed together, specifically so answers could not be influenced. Most participants had well-established careers or were of retirement age (mean age: 68.1 years). The majority had high socioeconomic status (82% had annual income levels of $100K or higher, and 44% reported annual incomes of more than $200K). Most participants had migrated between 1960 and 1972 (mean year of migration: 1968), with only a few outliers who had migrated in 1973. That is, the participants had been residing in the United States for an average of 42 years as of 2012. Finally, 91% of participants identified themselves as Hindus. Pseudonyms were used only for the participants from Washington, DC.

Participant Recruitment

Snowball sampling was used for participant recruitment. Inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) The couple had to have migrated to the United States between 1960 and 1972 (exceptions for three spouses who migrated in 1973) and (2) the couple must subscribe to Indian television programs from India via satellite dish or cable. The salience of using these participants was twofold: (1) because all participants belonged to the same generation and had similar migration experiences and (2) this generation learned to watch television only after migrating to the United States, and therefore learned their television-viewing habits in the United States. As a result, this cohort eventually acculturated into watching Indian television via the satellite dish, once it became available (Somani, 2008). The value of using these participants allowed the researchers to study a cohort of Asian Indians who experienced the same migration patterns and shared a similar sense of nostalgia.

Methodology

Between 2007 and 2012, in-depth ethnographic interviews were conducted with these five separate cohorts of Asian Indians in the Washington, DC metro area (2007); New York metro area (includes Northern New Jersey and Long Island, NY) (2010); Houston metro area (2011); Chicago metro area (2011); and the San Francisco-San Jose metro area (2012). All the interviews were asked the same series of approximately 45 questions. The interview guide was designed to gain the participants' perspectives about their culture and media habits (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In-depth ethnographic interviews were particularly useful for this purpose, because they were conversations that elicited structured responses (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Areas covered by the questions were participants' media use at various stages in their lives, from their early life in India to their present-day life in the United States. Authors focused on the responses to the following three questions: (1) What do you say in response to critics who say Indian television programming imported to the United States is much too "Western?" (2) How does it make you feel that Hindi movies rarely showed any affection in film, but Indian television today shows much more "affection" in its programs between couples? (3) What kind of improvement is needed in the Indian television programs? All interviews were transcribed and read multiple times by both authors. Patterns discovered in the data became themes for analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Results and Discussion

As India became more modern, women's roles on television changed. Participants knew of the sociocultural changes occurring through visits to India and also through media (after it became available on the satellite dish). However, their dissatisfaction with the cultural changes in contemporary India manifested as interesting, sometimes contradictory statements that were made when participants critiqued the version of India portrayed in Indian soap operas. It is important to note that participants did not view modern Indian soap operas to learn about cultural changes in India; rather, viewing these soap operas allowed participants to express dissatisfaction about the changes occurring in contemporary India.

Three categories were created from the participants' answers. These categories were called *Portrayals of women* (behavior and dress), *Heterosexual romance and intimacy*, and *Joint family*. Participants viewed Indian society as undergoing rapid changes and expressed ambivalence about how the portrayals of Indian women in Indian soap operas did not align with the participants' ideas about Indian womanhood. Some of those ideas were rooted in their nostalgic memories of 1960s India, instead of reflecting modern Indian culture. For example, Mrs. Ramanathan of New York said, "cultural practices are not shown in

Indian television nowadays. They are so westernized[8] [or Americanized].'' Mrs. Sharma, another New Yorker, expressed a similar sentiment: ''Sometimes the focus is lost and they make it too western [American] to think, yes, that's it. Right. Whereas they are not really showing the Indian culture and that's what I feel that it is too western.'' In this instance, when Mrs. Ramanathan claimed the India being shown on screen was not the ''real'' India, she was referencing the India of the 1960s. She idealized Indian culture of that time period for its cultural distinctiveness, an attribute that she knew was on the decline following the opening Indian markets to Western goods in the 1990s. Thus, viewing soap operas reminded her that Indian traditions were being eroded.

According to this cohort, the use of English language and the lack of traditional elements, such as dance styles, did not represent the 1960s version of Indian culture they cherished. For example, Mr. Nandi of DC listed the dance forms that no longer found a place in popular Indian programming: ''Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi, and so many like Kathakali are so many dances, all of them, you know, I don't see them.'' Mrs. Ramanathan also suggested a similar lack of traditional elements by pointing out that an ''American'' dance style had replaced traditional Indian dances: ''I mean western dance, dama dama dama dham you know, nothing classical, nothing Carnatic, nothing.'' Additionally, much of the anxiety centered on how women in soap operas dressed, behaved, fulfilled relational roles within the joint family structure, and expressed their sexuality.

Portrayals of Women

This section on the portrayals of women was divided into two subsections called behavior and dress, based on the responses from the participants.

Behavior: Subservient Versus Assertive. Participants from all five cities believed female characters were portrayed negatively. In Chicago, Mr. A. Sharma said the following regarding the soap *Saas Bina Sasuraal* (In-laws' home without a mother-in-law):

> There is a poor girl, who is being reined on by everybody, and she is taking all the shit and doesn't respond. Who gives her trouble, it could be mother-in-law, sister-in-law, father-in-law, husband and that poor lady is always being the nice person.

Referring to the soap opera *Ram Milaayi Jodi* (Partnership made in heaven), Mrs. Chawla, also of Chicago said, ''they [women] are portrayed as very domesticated, suppressed, subservient, this thing, yet they got a brain underneath that they can outsmart like an ant can kill an elephant.'' Both Mr. Sharma and Mrs. Chawla did not agree with how women were portrayed. They wanted to see an independent, modern Indian woman and were troubled to see the female

character still portrayed as subservient. These two serials depicted women in negative ways, portraying them as meek or calculating. Both Mr. Sharma and Mrs. Chawla were tired of seeing women portrayed in these roles and wanted to see strong, independent women.

However, when women in soap operas were assertive, their characters were not well received either. Mr. Mehta of San Francisco said, "I think, they are getting more independent, more aggressive, more open. They express their views and ideas and feelings and everything." Such a contradiction was interesting to explore, because it reinforced the idea that although modern Indian women were expected to be go-getters and working outside the home was no longer a taboo, women were still expected to be docile or express their views and opinions in limited ways. The authors interpreted this to mean that participants believed that even if Indian women were economically independent, the family still needed to be their priority.

Mr. Mathur, also of San Francisco, expressed this contradiction best when he said,

> But some women come out too much I would say against the Indian values, some of the things they should not be doing it, but they do it. And from there, the people, the children in India they probably learn to be that way and which is kind of loss of character, loss of moral, loss of Indian values.

Mrs. A. Sharma of Chicago, who watched *Saas Bina Sasuraal* (In-laws' house without a mother-in-law) and *Bade Acche Lagte Hai* said, "at this point, I think it looks like as if all women are like vamps." Both Mr. Mathur and Mrs. Sharma also did not agree with how women were portrayed. The "modern" soaps depicted complex female characters. Monteiro (1998) described the women in the modern soaps as "self-sufficient, aggressive and manipulative hussies, who smoked and drank and manifested all the habits of the 'archetypal vamp'" (p. 168). Mrs. Sharma's description was similar.

In Houston, Mrs. Ayachit said,

> They just show the women [as] villains. They are battering their daughter-in-laws and they are making . . . all the time they are showing these big, big conspiracies to kill somebody. That's not real India. And that's like the women . . . I know that women are in every field in India. They are pilots and they are in air force, and they are, not only, doctors and engineers, lawyers, but in every field. So they should really show the real stuff. If they show some real stuff on Indian dramas, I would appreciate that very much.

Mrs. Ayachit could not relate to the female characters portrayed in the soap operas, because the soap operas did not align with her own understanding of contemporary women's roles in India. Mr. Mathur, Mrs. Sharma, or

Mrs. Ayachit were not accustomed to seeing women portrayed as villains or to seeing Indian women suffer from domestic violence on screen. Moreover, according to them, contemporary Indian women were professionals and well respected in society. Cultural proximity was achieved by the inclusion of cultural elements that resonated with the audience members' lived experiences (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005), such as having characters who were Asian Indian and spoke Hindi or television. However, the portrayals of women in Indian soap operas did not correspond with the participants' firsthand knowledge of who they believed to be "real Indian women." This discrepancy created a sense of dissonance for Mrs. Ayachit, who explained that she did not find the female characters in soap operas believable and as a result could not relate to them. All the participants described the women portrayed as completely submissive and perhaps even victims of domestic violence, or aggressive manipulators. These negative portrayals of the women created a discrepancy, which disrupted their cultural proximity to soap operas. This disruption, as Schein (2008) has argued, not only created dissonance, but an anxiety. For these participants, the professionalization of women in modern India was a source of pride, because it showcased the type of progress the participants appreciated: economic independence of women. When the soap operas did not depict the expanded roles for women in modern Indian society, they contradicted the participants' firsthand knowledge about modern India (obtained by traveling to India and maintaining connections with India). Moreover, by showing ongoing gender inequalities, these shows pushed participants to acknowledge persistent patriarchal elements in Indian society, which most likely challenged their ethnic pride, and the limits of their firsthand knowledge about the changes in India. Finally, the participants' negative responses to "assertive" women reveal the ambivalence they felt about gender equality in India. Thus, viewing these soap operas meant participants had to confront the contradictory feelings they had about modern Indian women.

Dress: Excessive Versus Minimal. A similar discrepancy between the participants' knowledge of Indian women and portrayals of women in soap operas was revealed in responses that focused on the over-the-top dress style of the female characters. Mr. Advani of San Francisco expressed his dissatisfaction as follows: "they show them all constantly fully dressed up with their heads draped and walking around the house like they are going to a wedding, which is nonsensical." Mrs. Sankpal of New York echoed Mr. Advani's dissatisfaction. She stated, "all that jewelry and the saris and everybody's living in mansions, and so unrealistic that's why I don't watch those shows, the serials." Mrs. Sankpal described how the people in the serials did not depict everyday wear. This portrayal of how Indian women dressed and how they lived on screen generated anxiety for these viewers because it did not align with their "imagined homeland," and it also did not align with their firsthand knowledge of modern India.

The soap operas' portrayals of Indian families and women as wealthy should have appealed to participants because they offered a counter narrative to Western portrayals of Indians as poor and economically disadvantaged. However, participants critiqued the excessive displays of wealth on the show. Their discomfort with displays of wealth could be traced back to their discomfort with the changes in Indian society. As Mankekar (1998) has explained, in modern India, consumption is a hallmark of modernity, and soap operas mirror and reinforce consumerism. However, for the participants, who migrated decades before the economic liberalization policies of the 1990s opened up Indian markets to foreign goods and encouraged the development of a consumer culture, the consumerism seen on soap operas was not associated with traditional Indian culture (or their memory of India from the 1960s). Interestingly, their discomfort with the consumption of material things by women intersected with literature that women were often burdened with being "keepers of tradition" (Punathambekar, 2010).

The authors learned that modern soaps disrupted the nostalgia for the India this cohort once knew and their cultural connection to it. Even though the homeland was changing, much of this cohort's cultural identity was invested in the India they left in the 1960s. Although participants visited India frequently postretirement, they remained invested in the India they left behind in the 1960s because they believed that to be the real "traditional" India. For them, modern India was seen as a place where tradition was eroded by Western influences and was thus, "not real India."

Participants' responses to the ways women dressed in soap operas provided evidence that this particular cohort wanted their homeland to remain frozen in time or they did not want to accept changes in cultural values (Shukla, 2003). Although participants were aware of the influx of consumerism, their responses showed that being reminded of this change was a source of discomfort. For cultural proximity to be possible, the soap operas would have had to portray cultural values that were cherished in 1960s India, since that was the version of India with which participants felt a deep connection. Modern soap operas, which portrayed the modern value of consumerism, could not achieve cultural proximity for this cohort.

For this cohort, viewing soap operas challenged their understanding of modern Indian women. As India became more modern, women's roles on television changed. With the changes in women's roles, female immigrants, especially, felt a sense of dissonance. For example, women characters were also viewed negatively when they wore American clothes. Mrs. Sircar of San Francisco said, "the way they dress up in the dressing, in the background, it's definitely more western." Moreover, these clothes were considered indecent because they exposed women's bodies. Mrs. Zutshi also of San Francisco said, "like dresses, like they show lot of vulgarity, which is not in our culture when we were growing." The participants lived in the United States for almost five

decades. They were used to seeing non-Indian women dressed in American clothes and their discomfort did not stem from seeing American women in ''revealing,'' modern clothes. Rather, participants found *Indian* women dressed in ''revealing clothes'' in the Indian serials to be problematic. The reason for this discomfort was not that participants had never seen Indian women in ''revealing clothes'' (because participants who had visited India recently had most likely observed Indian women in Western clothes). Instead, the reason for this discomfort can be traced back to Mrs. Zutshi's claim that these styles were promoting vulgarity, which she explained was not part of the India in which she was raised. Through this response, Mrs. Zutshi revealed that soap operas did not showcase the traditional Indian culture she cherished. This argument was further supported by Mr. Massand's (of New York) comparison of American and Indian women's dressing styles: ''I don't like to see an Indian naked girl, but if an American naked girl, you can always see, you won't be able to feel about it, she's naked. It is part of life [here in the U.S.].'' For Mr. Massand, Indian women in revealing clothes were not acceptable. He was not surprised to see Indian women in revealing clothes on screen; rather, he was displeased. That is, the soap operas did not allow participants to engage with their nostalgic version of Indian culture. Showcasing cultural changes, which participants were not enthusiastic about, diminished the pleasure the participants could derive from viewing soap operas.

These responses showed how this cohort faced complex identity negotiations. For example, they felt anxiety about the Americanization projected onto women, as some female characters were expected to constantly negotiate between maintaining tradition and being modern (Punathambekar, 2005). Furthermore, these tensions were bound to the participants' anxieties about how American dressing styles were ''corrupting'' Indian women. Finally, the pleasure that participants derived from watching soap operas was diminished because modern soap operas did not showcase 1960s India, for which participants were nostalgic. Instead, these soap operas showcased modern India, and participants had reservations about the ways in which women dressed in modern India. Their ambivalence about cultural changes occurring in India resurfaced when viewing modern soap operas.

Heterosexual Romance and Intimacy

The participants grew up watching Hindi movies as television was not yet introduced in India. However, there was an absence of images of sexual intimacy in Hindi cinema.[9] Participants explained that modern Indian programming was depicting open expressions of sexuality or intimacy. These participants viewed these portrayals as deviations from Indian norms. Mrs. Bhattacharya of San Francisco said,

> It's kind of we are not used to see it in Indian things, so it is sometimes little uncomfortable, but I don't mind much. It's okay, because I am used to watch

> the English movies, but as we are not used to watching the Indian style or way, it is sometimes, you know, little bit bothers me.

Mrs. Bhattacharya, as well as other, participants were most troubled by the expression of what they considered sexual intimacy. Mrs. Keswani of San Francisco said, "I mean the way they go on their dating, the way they are like hugging and kissing, I mean it was never that open in India." Mrs. Sinha, also of San Francisco said, "because we are not used to seeing things like that. We don't practice sex in the public. That was not our culture in our time."

The modern soaps in India changed how diasporic groups identified with their home culture, especially with the depiction of sexual intimacy in the Indian serials. This generation felt nostalgic for the way sexual intimacy was shown in old Hindi films, since they did not grow up watching Indian television, and the ways in which sexual intimacy was valued in the 1960s in India. Old Hindi films never actually showed public displays of intimacy; it was left up to the imagination of the audience. In the modern soaps, public displays of intimacy reminded participants that the norms they were brought up with did not seem to exist on current Indian television programming or in modern India. Viewing soap operas from India should have evoked nostalgia, but instead feelings of alienation from modern India were reinforced by the public displays of intimacy.

However, some accepted these changes in Indian television's depiction of modern society, as stated by Mr. Sircar of San Francisco:

> I am sort of subconsciously reconciled to the fact that maybe that's the way it is. It may not have been this way 40 years ago but it is right now. We accept so many things, inter-caste marriage or something like that. It's one of those things.

When Indian soap operas were viewed through the lens of cultural proximity, the expression of such dissatisfaction about changes in the home culture became important to explore. These participants valued their ethnic identity and tried to preserve it by building an Indian diasporic community in the United States. They also felt nostalgic for their "imagined homeland" or India as it was in the 1960s. However, when watching Indian soap operas, participants were reminded of changes in Indian women's family interactions and sexual expression, which they found troubling. They felt the changes in India could be resulting in Indian norms for women becoming similar to American norms for women. These older Indian immigrant audiences did not find parts of these soap operas mirroring values they associated with Indian culture.

Joint Family

Participants indicated that they were dissatisfied with the portrayal of the joint family system in Indian soap operas. The Indian diaspora in the United States

formed nuclear families after migrating here. The nostalgia for the joint family grew and was remembered from the time they left India.

Mr. Dharma of DC said, ''Indian television, especially the soaps and all these things, generally speaking, you will see the feud between the families that you will see on the Indian television.'' Mrs. Ayachit of Houston said, ''but one of these serials is shown in, this young girl who marries in Gujarati family and there are so many family members in joint family and everybody is just harassing her.''

The ''joint family'' has been the hallmark of Indian culture (Mullatti, 1995) and the focus of many Hindi movies (Deakin & Bhugra, 2012) and soap operas (Munshi, 2010). Furthermore, support for the joint family system comes from the veneration of the economic success of family-owned companies, such as the Birla and Tata business empires (Mullatti, 1995). For our participants, therefore, the joint family system is symbolic of tradition and like other cultural norms, a source of ethnic pride because it is considered a tradition that engenders success in society.

In recent times, however, in urban areas in India in particular, census data show that the number of individuals per household is decreasing, leading to concerns that joint families are being displaced by nuclear families (Shah, 1998). The nuclear family is seen as un-Indian and focused on individuals rather than the family unit. The reasons for the rise in nuclear families were practical rather than value-laden, with reasons ranging from convenience, demographic coincidences, or relocation for jobs (Shah, 1998). More recent research points out that family structure might depend on additional factors such as economic status, land ownership, and demographics of the head of the household (Niranjan, Nair, & Roy, 2005).

In Hindi soap operas, the joint family was still represented. The persistence of this cultural system contributed to the nostalgia the participants experienced when viewing soap operas, because the India on screen corresponded with the ''traditional'' Indian family structure they cherished. However, the modern Indian soap operas depicted the joint family negatively showing family feuds and quarrels between the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

In DC, another Mrs. Sharma described the image of women she saw in the joint family on Indian soap operas,

> Also in all of drama plays I have seen whatever the good character is suffering throughout the life. There was a Kkusum show, it was very good when they started, and then what happened to Kkusum, she died, her own daughter was against her.

In Houston, Mrs. Mutyala said,

> Some soap operas I saw portrayal of women, well, some of the wickedness is being shown, which I do not like at all. Some women, I mean, some portrayal is showing

> as they are very manipulative. They are very wicked and they are going to the extent of violence.

Mrs. Tripathi, also of Houston, said,

> There is always [a] nasty woman and she is always playing the dirty tricks and there is sister-in-law or the mother-in-law or some woman or whatever, which is basically the main focus in the soap operas. I wish they would get away from that and do something a little bit more constructive.

Mrs. Sharma (DC), Mrs. Mutyala, and Mrs. Tripathi remembered family supporting each other, not being "against" each other. In these Indian serials, women were typically shown as manipulative and played the role of villains or long-suffering heroines. Women were not shown in a positive light, and this depiction was not representative of how the participants remembered or wanted to remember the women in the joint family.

These negative portrayals of women in joint families were problematic because they called into question the legitimacy and success of the family structure. The emphasis on how the negative portrayals of women contributed to the demise of the joint family structure reinforced the idea that successful family structures were predicated upon women behaving in a traditional manner and that "uncontrollable" women were the cause for disharmony in modern families on screen.

Furthermore, although Indian women continue to face domestic violence in India (Fernandez, 1997; Jejeebhoy, 1998; Panda & Agarwal, 2005; Segal, 1999) and abroad (Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996), these participants resented the portrayals of such harassment in soap operas. Rather than acknowledging the ongoing gender violence that occurred within families, these participants chose to frame such instances as unrealistic, such as Mrs. Rathi in Chicago, who said, "sometimes mothers-in-law they behave very badly, which I don't think in this day and age it happens." One reason for rejecting such negative portrayals of the women in the joint family might be because these participants felt a sense of nostalgia for the congenial joint family. The soap operas were laying out a contradictory narrative, by framing the joint family system as a site of strife and gender violence.

Conclusion

The participants were enculturated into their television-viewing habits (Somani, 2008), because they migrated to the United States before television was introduced in India (Ray & Jacka, 1996). Watching Indian television on the satellite dish should have helped this cohort affirm their Indian identity and contributed to the Indian identity they established in their host country. Media engagement

also helped with building a diasporic community, which, in turn, helped these immigrants build their confidence, self-worth, and self-esteem. Viewing ethnic media such as soap operas also helped the participants maintain their connection to their homeland. However, when the content of soap operas changed, the participants' idealized views of India challenged their nostalgia for India. Their diasporic group identity was also called into question.

Given that the programs showcased the complexity of Indian cultural systems, such as the joint family, the authors suggest that the discomfort participants' expressed regarding women's portrayals was because these portrayals challenged participants to accept that their cherished India of the 1960s no longer existed even on screen. Despite visits and interpersonal connections they continued to maintain, participants' cultural values did not match contemporary Indian values and viewing the soap operas emphasized this disconnect. Consequently, participants experienced alienation not just from American cultural life but also from contemporary Indian cultural life.

The participants believed that women were portrayed negatively in soap operas because these portrayals did not conform to their idealized expectations regarding the role of women in Indian culture. The negative depictions of women on Indian soap operas were subcategorized into *behavior* and *dress* under "Portrayals of women." The participants contradicted themselves in that they did not want to see the women in subservient roles but were also not accustomed to seeing the female characters as manipulative, or dismissive of Indian traditions. For them, a positive portrayal involved women who were assertive but still continued to value tradition. As a result, the participants could not relate to all the female characters on screen, which reduced the cultural proximity of Indian soap operas.

Female characters were expected to constantly negotiate their image, maintaining tradition while showcasing modernity (Malhotra & Rogers, 2000). The participants did not want the negative portrayals of Indian women on screen to reflect women in India, such as depicting women scantily dressed, or showing public displays of sexual intimacy on television. They felt nostalgic for the Indian women who still practiced cultural norms that were in place when the participants migrated in the 1960s.

This study contributed to the communication literature of cultural proximity in understanding media engagement of diasporic groups. The Indian diaspora felt nostalgic about the India they left in the 1960s, and cultural proximity of Indian soap operas for participants was reduced, because the portrayals of women did not showcase the traditional India participants idealized or the cultural changes they favored (such as the professionalization of women). Rather, they showed contemporary India, and although participants knew of the changes in modern India, they had mixed feelings about the changes in cultural and gender norms (e.g., they appreciated that women now had economic

independence but not that women were more sexually expressive). As defined earlier, cultural proximity was achieved by audiences when cultural connections were found in the media. Indian culture portrayed on Indian television programs, specifically the portrayal of women in contemporary Indian soap operas, differed from the role of women in Indian society, 40 to 50 years ago. These media portrayals created concerns and anxieties among the participants about the changes in Indian culture and reduced their identification with the women in these soap operas. These Asian Indians' remained nostalgic for ''traditional'' India, a version with which they were reminded they could not longer engage even during trips back to India. These trips back home also made them aware that their cultural values were an uneven match with modern India. For example, consumerism was valued in modern India but not by the participants in this study; economic independence was valued by both modern Indians and the participants; and sexual expression was celebrated in modern India but not by the participants. These modern soap operas reignited this mismatch between participants and modern India, reminding them that in modern India they were not cultural insiders. Being cast as a cultural ''other'' created a sense of ''in-betweeness'' for participants, because they had to negotiate their ''imagined homeland'' with the contemporary iterations of their home culture.

Although the existing communication literature on ethnic media showed that diasporic groups enjoyed ethnic media because of cultural proximity, the responses of the participants showed that over time, changes in the home country culture were reflected in media, and these changes reduced the cultural relevance of these shows for older members of the Indian diaspora in the United States. Studies about ethnic media popularity and cultural proximity among immigrants should thus take into account the changing nature of cultures and explore additional reasons to explain the continued engagement of immigrant audiences with ethnic media. In addition, gender emerges as an important construct for maintaining cultural proximity.

Ethnic media have been found to help in the cross-cultural adaptation of immigrants by helping reduce the stress of acculturation and alienation immigrants might feel as a result of being marginalized in their host country. However, if immigrant groups cannot identify with the images in the media about their particular home culture, these media might further exacerbate their sense of alienation.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study is that it addresses a specific cohort of Asian Indians based on when they migrated to the United States and developed their television-viewing habits. This study does not apply to the entire Indian diaspora in the United States, because later generations would have watched television in India before they migrated to the United States. Later generations would also

have a different sense of nostalgia for India and even a different "imagined" homeland.

Future Study

These Indian programs on the satellite dish were not available to this generation of Asian Indians when they were raising their children. By the time Indian programs became available on the satellite dish, the children of these participants had graduated from college and were married and settled in their own homes. However, future studies could address how Indian programs are being used to maintain Indian culture with grandchildren.

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Notes

1. *Ethnic media* are defined as "broadcast, print, and digital communication channels that serve a particular cultural or racial group. This definition does not impose boundaries such as geographic location, size, scope or ownership" (Johnson, 2010, p.108). The Chicago school's early work by sociologists such as Robert Park looked at the significance of foreign-language media (especially newspapers for immigrant populations) and found that they "preserve(s) old memories [and are] the gateway to new experiences" (Park, 1922/1970, p. 449). However, here the authors are less concerned with the role of ethnic media in the acculturation process and more interested in its role in maintaining ties with home culture. Ethnic media are not necessarily produced by members of a diasporic group, but diasporic populations use media from their country of origin to stay connected with their homeland. Diasporic media refer to media of people displaced from their homeland and may be called transnational media or migrant media; also, diasporic media can be more nation-state-oriented than ethnic-oriented (Georgiou, Bailey & Harindranath, 2007; Johnson, 2010; Kosnick, 2007; Sun, 2005).
2. Asian Indians also refer to Indian immigrants in this study.
3. The "joint family" is when the sons stay with their parents. After they marry, their wives (the daughters-in-law) come and live in the same home where their mother-in-law and father-in-law lives. All the sons and their wives and the children learn to live in one house and learn to get along.
4. The imagined homeland fulfills a nostalgic desire of immigrants "to recreate a lost home" (Anderson, 1992; Moorti, 2003, p. 356).

5. ''Modern'' is used to refer to contemporary conditions, which include current ambivalences in Indian society related to the coexistence of tradition and foreign influences. This version of modernity does not replicate Western modernity, but it also challenges Independence-era versions of nationalism without rejecting the significance of a national identity (Chatterjee, 1997).
6. Ramayana is a Sanskrit epic poem that tells the story of the Hindu God Rama, whose wife, Sita, is abducted. The story Ramayana explores human values.
7. In Indian media, the archetype of Sita functions as a representation of virtuous womanhood, by celebrating gentleness, piety, and faithfulness to husband and nation (Ranganathan, 2010).
8. In this context, ''Western'' means ''American'' because American culture was the reference point of Western culture for our participants.
9. Prasad (1998) and Rajadhyaksha (2003), authors who have written extensively on this topic.

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Henry Rollins' Rhetoric of Atonement: An Apology for Offensive Comments About Suicide

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Abstract

In response to Robin Williams' death, outspoken punk rocker Henry Rollins published an *LA Weekly* column about his disdain for people who commit suicide. His comments about depression were immediately condemned as ignorant and hurtful. In an effort to make amends for his offensive remarks, Rollins delivered an apology that featured all three elements of the rhetoric of atonement: repentance, prayer, and charity. Analysis of Rollins' discourse suggests important implications for the literature surrounding apologetic discourse. This essay questions whether rhetors must explicitly ask for public forgiveness in order to demonstrate repentance and highlights the language of service as a meaningful element of charity.

Keywords

image repair, apology, rhetoric of atonement, Henry Rollins

In the days after Robin Williams' suicide in August 2014, American media celebrated Williams' life and advocated for mental health awareness (Dennis, 2014; Egan, 2014). One of the few voices to contradict this collective outpouring of empathy and advocacy belonged to Henry Rollins, the outspoken punk rocker, essayist, and television personality. Rollins rose to prominence as a member of the hardcore punk band Black Flag and later achieved mainstream success by hosting *Animal Underworld* on the National Geographic Wild

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network and by appearing as a character on the FX network's popular drama, *Sons of Anarchy*. Although audiences knew Rollins as an activist, contrarian, and frequent critic of American culture, his August 2014 comments on the topic of suicide shocked and disappointed even his most ardent supporters (Ozzi, 2014a; Punknews, 2014a).

In a piece for *LA Weekly*, titled, "Fuck Suicide," Rollins wrote that he didn't understand how "any parent could kill themselves" (Rollins, 2014a, para. 7). He noted how "awful, traumatic and confusing" losing a parent to suicide must be for a child of any age (para. 8). He confessed a "disdain" for artists who kill themselves and thus "cancel themselves out" in his mind (para. 14). He noted that around 40,000 people commit suicide every year and then referred to them as "40,000 people who blew it" (para. 17). His piece attempted an inspirational message by closing with statements such as "you gotta hang in there" (para. 18), "Fuck suicide" (para. 18), and "Raw Power forever" (para. 19). The lattermost declaration is an apparent reference to a song by the influential proto-punk band The Stooges, the lyrics of which describe an animating force or energy that's "got a son called rock & roll" and "just won't quit" (Pop, 1973).

Rollins' message offended both longtime fans and casual observers. In an effort to illustrate the extraordinarily negative public reaction to Rollins' comments, *Noisey*, a music website affiliated with Vice Media, ran the headline, "HENRY ROLLINS SAYS 'FUCK SUICIDE,' INTERNET SAYS 'FUCK HENRY ROLLINS'" (Ozzi, 2014a, n.p.). The piece included tweets from people who were more than willing to match Rollins' aggressive and profane language as they expressed their disapproval. Wrote Ella Tabasky (@renegadecop), "FUCK YOU for running your mouth and clearly having ZERO understanding of depression & suicide #Endstigma #sorrynotsorry" (n.p.). Similarly, Johnny G. Graterol (@jgratero) wrote, "Dear @henryrollins: Depression is not a choice, but a condition. Inform yourself a little bit better. With kind regards, go fuck yourself" (n.p.). Such social media messages illustrate the anger and hurt Rollins caused. Numerous news sources, such as *The A.V. Club*[1] and *Spin.com*,[2] ran articles that more fully articulated why Rollins' perspective was insensitive, misguided, and simply inaccurate (Carley, 2014; O'Neal, 2014).

From a public relations perspective, Rollins had a crisis on his hands. His career was built on the trust, support, and attention of his loyal fan base. A decrease in popularity could mean a decline in record sales, an inability to tour profitably as a spoken word artist, decreased readership for his columns and books, and fewer radio and television opportunities. Clearly, some form of *apologia* or image repair rhetoric was in order. Rollins seems to have immediately recognized that his words caused much pain and distress. In an effort to respond to the situation he had created, Rollins apologized for his insensitive and uninformed remarks in a manner that appeared to communicate genuine remorse. More specifically, in the days that followed his "Fuck Suicide" article, Henry Rollins used the rhetoric of atonement to make amends for his

wrongdoing. His discourse was received positively, thus demonstrating how the rhetoric of atonement can help repair one's public image and build public understanding about important societal issues.

In some ways, Rollins' decision to apologize for his offensive remarks conflicts with his established reputation as an outspoken and unrepentant iconoclast. Years before his comments about Robin Williams, while promoting his short-lived talk show on the IFC (formerly the Independent Film Channel) Network, Rollins explained his attitude toward people who might be offended by his opinions on political and social issues.

> But the point I'm making is that if that offends someone, then they can just kiss my a—, and please be offended—get really offended. Put me at the top of your hate list because I love being that—I love being your enemy on that. (Adler, 2007, p. C14)

Here, Rollins' describes himself as unapologetically abrasive. Given his reputation, it is worth questioning why Rollins decided to apologize for his remarks about depression and suicide. The nature and scope of Rollins' apology suggests some things were more important to him than his reputation for disruption. His apology may not have been consistent with his established image, but it honored his relationship with fans and it honored the struggle against depression (both his own and others'). Rollins' apparent concern for his audience also explains why he adopted a rhetoric of atonement, rather than more traditional image repair strategies. Rollins aimed to make amends and relieve the pain he caused, not simply restore his reputation.

Rhetoric of Atonement

The rhetoric of atonement is a subgenre of *apologia* that focuses exclusively on accepting responsibility for wrongful acts (Koesten & Rowland, 2004). Although many theories of *apologia* and image repair examine how rhetors can deny and deflect accusations of wrongdoing (Benoit, 1994, 2015; Ware & Linkugel, 1973), the rhetoric of atonement focuses on how rhetors can meaningfully accept blame for their actions and seek public forgiveness. In this way, the rhetoric of atonement has much in common with Burke's (1970, 1973) notion of mortification, which Brock and Scott (1980) define as "an act of self-sacrifice that relieves . . . guilt" (p. 351).

As a theoretical construct, the rhetoric of atonement borrows from Judeo-Christian notions of redemption and forgiveness to explain how wrongdoers can repair their reputations and be cleansed of their apparent sins. Koesten and Rowland (2004) located the first three essential elements of the rhetoric of atonement in a prayer typically recited on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (Scherman, 1996). These elements are repentance, prayer, and charity. Mortification and public confessional are also essential to the rhetoric of atonement.

Repentance requires an individual to confess wrongdoing and demonstrate remorse. Moreover, a rhetor should explicitly ask for forgiveness. The *prayer* element of atonement requires that the offending individual has reflected on their transgressions and committed to making sure they never commit the offense again. *Charity* requires that the disgraced individual engages in some form of reparation, restitution, or compensation so that some good can come from their wrongdoing. Offending individuals must also present evidence of *mortification*. The fifth and final criterion for the rhetoric of atonement is *public confessional*, which suggests that the apology must be made in a public forum. Ultimately, these five elements are essential for demonstrating true remorse and earning the public's forgiveness. Koesten and Rowland (2004) write,

> In the religious setting, the credibility or authenticity of the prayer—is it real atonement—is assessed by G-d. In the public setting, however, a different standard is needed to distinguish between true atonement for sin and a cynical strategy to avoid guilt. A clue to this test of authenticity can be found in the primary triad of repentance, prayer, and charity that are at the core of the rhetorical pattern. (pp. 73–74)

As an analytic tool, the rhetoric of atonement provides critics a valuable language for identifying and evaluating the crucial elements of apologetic discourse.

To illustrate the rhetoric of atonement, Koesten and Rowland (2004) examined President Bill Clinton's apologies to victims of Cold War–era radiation experiments and to survivors of the Tuskegee syphilis studies. In these messages, delivered roughly two years apart, Clinton publicly admitted governmental wrongdoing; demonstrated an attitude change; established procedures for preventing future wrongdoing; and communicated a sense of anguish, pain, and regret. Available evidence suggests that these messages were well received and served to move the country forward. In addition to making apologies on behalf of the U.S. government, Clinton also made a few personal apologies during his tenure as president. More specifically, he attempted to apologize for his sexual relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. His first two attempts at an apology were failures in part because he did not utilize all elements of the rhetoric of atonement. However, at the Annual Prayer Breakfast on September 11, 1998, Clinton "unequivocally chose a rhetoric of atonement and turned away from traditional apologia" (p. 81). Unlike his first two apologies for the Lewinsky affair, Clinton's third apology explicitly begged forgiveness and demonstrated a sufficient level of mortification.

From the perspective of public figures accused of serious wrongdoing, the rhetoric of atonement is a valuable means for seeking public forgiveness. From a scholarly perspective, the rhetoric of atonement has proven itself as an extraordinarily useful lens for describing a recurring form of discourse. Jerome (2008)

identified the rhetoric of atonement in the actions of National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) driver Tony Stewart, who assaulted a photographer after a race. His strategies helped him earn back the trust of his racing team, his sponsors, and NASCAR fans. Charlesworth (2007) found the rhetoric atonement in Mel Gibson's apology for spouting anti-Semitic remarks during his arrest for DUI. Jones-Bodie (2007) described how a Methodist hospital used the rhetoric of atonement when several infants in their care died of accidental drug overdoses. Ultimately, the rhetoric of atonement allows individuals and organizations to repair their image, but perhaps even more importantly, it fosters public understanding and reconciliation in instances of disagreement and conflict.

A thorough analysis of Rollins' messages contributes to the development of the rhetoric of atonement in several important ways. The following analysis notes that Rollins neglected to ask for forgiveness and analyzes that decision in relation to the criteria of repentance and mortification. His execution of the prayer criterion of the rhetoric of atonement is novel because unlike most other examples of atonement in scholarly literature, Rollins avoided all references to actual, religious prayer. At the same time, by describing his commitment to the idea of service, Rollins offered an all-encompassing demonstration of the rhetoric of atonement's charity criterion that is uniquely consistent with the construct's Judeo-Christian roots.

Henry Rollins' Apology

Upon realizing how badly he screwed up, Rollins issued a series of apologies. The first apology came in the form of a post to his personal website. The message, titled "An Apology," was posted just 24 hours after his "Fuck Suicide" column circulated online. "An Apology" was brief (fewer than 300 words) and direct but promised to address the controversy even more fully in an *LA Weekly* piece that would be published just a few days later. The *LA Weekly* follow-up piece, titled, "More Thoughts on Suicide," echoed and elaborated upon Rollins' initial apology for an even larger audience.

Repentance

After receiving negative feedback for his views on suicide and mental illness, Rollins' rhetoric was characterized by repentance. He used his language to express regret and demonstrate contrition. In the last paragraph of his web post, he wrote, "I am deeply sorry. Down to my marrow. I can't think that means anything to you, but I am. Completely sorry" (Rollins, 2014b, para. 9). Notably, Rollins does not technically ask for, nor does he expect, forgiveness. This was equally clear in the apology that was published in *LA Weekly*: "To those I offended, I believe you and I apologize. If what I wrote causes

you to toss me out of your boat, it is my great regret, but I understand and thank you for your thoughts" (Rollins, 2014c, para. 17). In some ways, Rollins' decision not to ask for forgiveness actually shirks the rhetoric of atonement in favor of self-flagellation or self-isolation. There is some precedent for this rhetorical choice, as NASCAR driver Tony Stewart also neglected to ask forgiveness when he apologized for attacking a photographer (Jerome, 2008). Despite not begging forgiveness, Rollins' statements accomplished a few important goals. First, he acknowledged how much offense his initial remarks about suicide caused. Second, he recognized that he deserved the vociferous backlash. And finally, he confirmed the emotions and perspectives of those he hurt and offended.

Rollins was very deliberate about acknowledging the hurt he caused. In "An Apology," he said, "the article I wrote in the *LA Weekly* about suicide caused a lot of hurt" (Rollins, 2014b, para. 2). He went on to further chastise himself for the pain he caused others: "That I hurt anyone by what I said, and I did hurt many, disgusts me. It was not at all my intent but it most certainly was the result" (para. 3). Such statements communicated the deep sense of remorse that Rollins experienced in the wake of his insensitive and inaccurate comments about suicide.

Prayer

As evidence of his soul searching and self-reflection (i.e., secular prayer), Rollins cited many hours of reading and responding to messages from disappointed fans and observers. He began his blog post by noting, "For the past 9 + hours, I have been answering letters from people all over the world" (Rollins, 2014b, para. 1). He illustrated the magnitude of this activity by noting that "some of them were very long and the disappointment, resentment and ringing clarity was jarring" (para. 2). In "More Thoughts on Suicide," he claimed that he read these letters "for days" (Rollins, 2014c, para. 1). Rollins crafted an image of a cloistered monk, poring over the written words that might eventually lead him to enlightenment.

Consistent with the rhetoric of atonement, Rollins looked inward, to the ultimate cause of his transgression. On his blog and in *LA Weekly*, Rollins suggested reasons, but not excuses, for why he made such ugly remarks about suicide. For instance, after noting that he should have known better because he too has suffered from depression, he wrote, "I get so mad when I hear that someone has died this way. Not mad at them, mad at whatever got them there and that no one magically appeared to somehow save them" (Rollins, 2014b, para. 5). This sense of anger, recognized as a normal stage of the grieving process, is posited as a potential cause of Rollins' aggressive "Fuck Suicide" essay. Read in any other context, such statements might be interpreted as an attempt to justify his actions. However, in the context of his avowed remorse, this rhetoric simply demonstrates the degree to which Rollins has reflected on his

actions. Finally, on the theme of prayer and contemplation, Rollins wrote, "I got several letters thanking me for what I said. However, it was the ones that took me to task that made me think the most" (Rollins, 2014c, para. 16). His message focused heavily on how much thought he had given his wrongdoing.

Charity

Rollins invoked charity by expressing his willingness to change for the better. He communicated an interest in better understanding issues of depression and suicide. His apologetic *LA Weekly* column mentioned all the letters he read and all the work he was willing to do: "After reading carefully and responding as best I could, it was obvious that I had some work to do in order to educate myself further on this very complex and painful issue. I am quite thick-headed, but not so much that things don't occasionally permeate" (Rollins, 2014c, para. 2). Later in the same piece he wrote, "I understand it is my task to learn about this" (para. 15). The reasons for his desire to change are both internal and external. Rollins appeared to be genuinely interested in becoming a better person and he wanted to avoid hurting people with such insensitive discourse ever again. As evidence of his willingness to turn the wrongful act into something positive, he wrote, "I promise I will dig in and educate myself on this and do my best to evolve" (para. 4). In the spirit of charity, Rollins appeared committed to making sure his mistake never happens again.

Rollins dedicated much of his apologetic *LA Weekly* column to the idea of service. His statement, "I serve. That is what I do" is evidence of how he understands his role in society, or, at the very least, his relationship to his fans (para. 9). He mentioned an "ingrained sense of duty" at least once more before closing his *LA Weekly* column (para. 15). Rollins' commitment to service has a religious connotation that works very well with the rhetoric of atonement. Clearly, Rollins felt a strong obligation to better himself and to improve his perspective on the issues of depression, mental health, and suicide. According to Rollins, this sense of obligation is inborn and not merely the consequence of his hurtful words and his tarnished reputation. The following excerpt suggests that Rollins' desire to serve his audience is an integral part of his identity:

> For decades I have talked to and gotten letters from people who tell me that something I did helped them, or saved them from killing themselves, helped them get clean, stay clean or come out. Never once do I really think that I had anything to do with anyone staying alive, but I get where they're coming from. All of them are better than I am and it is them I serve. (para. 10)

According to this account, Rollins has based much of his self-concept on his ability to serve his fans. In addition to operating as an expression of charity, Rollins' notion of service also hints at the anguish he must have experienced

when he so clearly disappointed his core audience. If the above statement about Rollins' history of helping people were not couched in terms of service and charity, it could easily be interpreted as an instance of bolstering, a traditional image repair strategy designed to reduce the offensiveness of a wrongful act (Benoit, 2015). However, when presented in the context of the rhetoric of atonement, evidence of past service is designed to support the promise of present and future service, not merely to bolster Rollins' positive attributes in the mind of an audience.

Speaking of his audience, he wrote, "I feel I have a duty to serve them because they have made me better" (para. 11). Here, the notion of service takes on yet another dimension, as Rollins hints at a reciprocal relationship between him and the public. Ultimately, Rollins' notion of service is a powerful and multifaceted expression of the charity criterion of the rhetoric of atonement. As Rollins describes it, charity is his life's purpose, not a one-time promise intended to repair a broken image.

Mortification

In explaining that he would not attempt to defend the awful remarks he made about suicide, Rollins discussed the suffering he experienced in the wake of public backlash. His "More Thoughts" article in the *LA Weekly* stated, "I cannot defend the views I expressed. I think that would be taking an easy out. I put them out there plainly and must suffer the slings and arrows—fair enough. I won't attempt to dodge them" (para 4). Rollins explicitly uses the word "suffering" to describe his state, therefore invoking mortification. Furthermore, Rollins' apology suggests that the suffering was voluntary and self-inflicted. It was his decision to read angry letters for days. He alluded to the viciousness of the letters by claiming that some of them "had only two words, the second being 'you'" (para. 1). In addition to accepting invective from disappointed fans and angry critics, he volunteered to be the victim of metaphorical violence, stating, "take me to the woodshed as much as you see fit" (Rollins, 2014b, para. 5). Rollins' language suggests a sufficient level of pain and suffering.

Public Confessional

Rollins presented his apology in a public forum. His first apology appeared on henryrollins.com, which constitutes the public space in which he could most immediately express his remorse. Rollins' next message was presented in the *LA Weekly*, which constitutes the largest public platform to which Rollins has regular access. Both Rollins' website and his *LA Weekly* columns are free to the public, thus ensuring that as many people as possible would be able to access his apology. Clearly, Rollins' wanted the public to receive his message of atonement.

Reactions to Rollins' Apology

Numerous music websites, including *Rollingstone.com*, *Spin.com*, and *Pitchfork.com* published articles about Rollins' apology (Coleman, 2014; Joyce, 2014; Minsker, 2014). These articles had a number of things in common. First, the news pieces were usually brief. Second, they were published before Rollins' "More Thoughts on Suicide" piece was published. Third, they relied heavily on direct quotations from the apology on Rollins' website. Fourth, the articles rarely offered any interpretation or opinion of Rollins' mea culpa. Most strikingly, the headlines for these articles focused not only on Rollins' insensitivity and ignorance on the topic of depression and suicide but also on the idea that he had criticized beloved actor Robin Williams in the days after Williams' passing. For instance, the *Rollingstone.com* headline said, "Henry Rollins apologizes for Robin Williams Criticism" (Coleman, 2014). Notably, Rollins' apology never actually mentioned Robin Williams. In fact, even Rollins' offensive "Fuck Suicide" column stopped discussing Robin Williams at paragraph 5 of 19. This deliberate use of a conflict frame was probably designed to attract web traffic, but it also helped draw attention to Rollins' apology.

Dan Ozzi, a writer for *Noisey.com*, was one of the few music journalists to comment in depth about Rollins' apology (Ozzi, 2014b). Notably, Ozzi's piece was published after (and linked to) Rollins' "More Thoughts on Suicide" article from *LA Weekly*. Ozzi, who positions himself as an opinion leader where punk music and culture are concerned, said he planned to forgive Rollins. He wrote,

> So while you're totally entitled to continue believing that Rollins is a total dick who shouldn't be penning columns about subjects he doesn't know shit about (even though he did sing a song about depression having a hold of him before most of you were born), maybe cut him some slack for at least hearing out you, the angry public of the internet, and trying to make his opinion better. I'm personally going to accept it and move on. Mainly because for many who grew up with punk and hardcore, for better or worse, Rollins has been this stubborn, omnipresent figure who occasionally makes a decent point somewhere between the eyeroll-worthy comments. He wasn't trolling on this, his opinion was just thick-headed and misguided. (para. 6)

In this excerpt, Ozzi not only accepts Rollins' apology but further defends Rollins. Thanks to Rollins' prior reputation, and the apparent sincerity of rhetoric, Ozzi suggested that it was best to "move on" from the matter. He even expressed an interest in hearing or reading Rollins' future opinions.

Punknews.org also provided some evidence that Rollins' rhetoric was well received. Arguably, *Punknews.org* readers represent Rollins' most avid fans, the ones most likely to deify Rollins for his work in Black Flag and most likely to consider buying Rollins' next record. In the comments section of a *Punknews.org* article that linked to Rollins' apology, user coffeeandcigarettes

wrote, "I can honestly say that his comments on suicide a few days ago made me lose respect for the guy, but it's never easy to admit to the world you were wrong and apologize so I have to commend him for that" (Punknews, 2014b). Similarly, user miki added, "glad he could say he fucked up." Much of the *Punknews.org* community accepted that Rollins had blundered and cited his apology as a reason for their own willingness to move past the incident. Arguably, Rollins' apology was even more powerful because it appeared to privilege his relationship with fans over his reputation as an uncompromising dissident.

Notably, some *Punknews.org* commenters used the news of Rollins' apology to argue that Rollins' initial comments about suicide were either justified or not that bad. Others attacked Rollins for changing his position. User incomplicit wrote, "Ugh. I wish he hadn't have taken it all back. I disagreed with some of his original piece, but backing down like this just seems like he is having a bipolar swing right before our eyes." In addition to attacking Rollins for changing his initial attitude, incomplicit's comments demonstrate an ironic lack of understanding about mental illness. It is not apparent whether or not the irony was intentional. Although Rollins' apology was not viewed favorable by everybody, such objections seem to be less of a threat to his career and to his sense of self than the initial backlash against his offensive remarks.

The often sensationalistic celebrity gossip website, *PerezHiton.com*, also published a favorable interpretation of Rollins' apology. The site published lengthy excerpts from Rollins' webpage and focused on Rollins' sincerity, noting, "it seems like he's truly sorry" (PerezHilton.com, 2014, para. 9) and, "the fact that this man owned up to what he said, and revealed how deeply sorry he was that he hurt folks with his comments is a legit way of asking for forgiveness" (PerezHilton.com, 2014, para. 20). The *PerezHilton.com* author went on to express respect for the fact that Rollins admitted his fault and issued an apology. Although Rollins' primary goal appears to have been to make amends with his fans, the *PerezHilton.com* reaction to his apology suggests that his rhetoric appealed to casual observers and those not affiliated with punk rock subculture.

In summary, Rollins' apology seems to have been received positively. First, it allowed him to control the conversation. Numerous news websites quoted at length from his apologetic message without delving into the insensitive messages that preceded it and without critically dissecting the apology. Several media outlets expressed gratitude for, and acceptance of, Rollins' apology. Commentary from Dan Ozzi's *Noisey* article, as well as the *Punknews.org* comments section, suggests that members of the punk subculture were ready to forgive Rollins and continue to support his work. The aforementioned article from *PerezHilton.com* suggests that more mainstream web sources also appreciated Rollins' rhetoric.

Implications

Ultimately, Rollins' apology ought to be judged a success. The immediacy and sincerity of his response allowed him to quickly change the conversation about his offensive "Fuck Suicide" article. Rollins' rapid response forced many critics and journalists to discuss Rollins' apology in the very same articles where they discussed Rollins' wrongdoing. From the perspective of anybody with an image to repair, conversations about an apology, and whether it was sincere, are probably preferable to conversations that articulate and embellish an offensive act. Even if audiences had viewed Rollins' attempts at atonement as insincere, at least they'd be discussing an apology and not an offensive tirade against those who suffer depression or those who commit suicide.

Henry Rollins' apparently heartfelt apology for his offensive comments about suicide was a successful public relations maneuver that effectively diffused a difficult crisis communication situation. However, the apology was also much more than that. According to Koesten and Rowland's (2004) criteria for determining the worth and sincerity of an apology, Rollins' words were not merely a crass attempt to repair his image and protect his bottom line. Rather, he used the five essential elements of the rhetoric of atonement—repentance, prayer, charity, mortification, and public confessional—to make amends for his hurtful behavior and achieve some level of public understanding and forgiveness.

Notably, Rollins' apology lacks one important characteristic of the rhetoric of atonement's repentance criterion. He did not technically ask the public for forgiveness. Instead, he suggested that he might be beneath forgiveness and that he may have permanently ruined his relationship with fans. Jerome (2008) located a very similar theme in the apologetic rhetoric of NASCAR driver Tony Stewart, who assaulted a photographer after a poor race performance. In fact, Stewart's assertion, "I don't expect anybody to forgive me, what I did was wrong" (p. 128), led Jerome to challenge the idea that asking forgiveness is an essential requirement of the rhetoric of atonement. Similarly, evidence from Henry Rollins' apology presents support for the notion that an explicit request for forgiveness is a minor detail in secular forms of atonement rhetoric.

In cases of extraordinary offense or wrongdoing, some rhetors appear to believe that it is presumptuous to ask for forgiveness. Still, wrongdoers' public statements about being unworthy of forgiveness have their own unique persuasive appeal. Such rhetoric demonstrates to audiences that the offending individual understands the severity of their transgressions and confirms or validates negative emotions of observers. By refusing to ask for forgiveness, claiming to understand that some readers would inevitably throw him out of their boat, and deeming himself unworthy of absolution, Rollins amplified his demonstration of mortification. By leaving one element of the rhetoric of atonement slightly incomplete, Rollins better met the standards of another. Burke (1970, 1973) wrote convincingly of how intense self-immolation can redeem those whose reputations have been polluted.

The case study presented here reveals a distinctly secular form of the rhetoric of atonement. There are important differences between how Henry Rollins enacted the criterion of prayer or inward-looking reflection and how atoners described in other case studies have satisfied this criterion. When Bill Clinton successfully apologized for his affair with Monica Lewinsky, he satisfied the criterion of prayer by mentioning that he had prayed about the situation (Koesten & Rowland, 2004). When Mel Gibson apologized for his anti-Semitic and sexist remarks, he fulfilled this criterion by claiming to have prayed that the Jewish community would not forsake him (Charlesworth, 2007). While apologizing for causing the deaths of three infants, the Methodist Hospital's spokesperson said the organization was praying for the children and their families (Jones-Bodie, 2007). Dependence on religious prayer to satisfy the criterion of inward reflection limits the accessibility of the rhetoric of atonement to speakers and audiences who are well rehearsed in Judeo-Christian traditions and values. Jerome (2008) noted that Tony Stewart satisfied the prayer criterion of the rhetoric of atonement by discussing his struggle to control his temper, thus providing the only published example of the rhetoric of atonement that does not mention religious prayer.

The image of Rollins poring over letters from fans and critics, internalizing the messages in those letters, and spending days responding to them, constitutes a relatively novel and convincing demonstration of secular prayer. Rollins' willingness to grapple with his conflicting emotions about suicide and depression also serve as an example of nonreligious reflection. Notably, Rollins' messages never use the word "prayer" and never mention a deity. Known to have "no religious or spiritual beliefs" (Rollins, 2015, para. 2), Rollins offered a truly secular form of the rhetoric of atonement.

Henry Rollins' focus on "service" provides a unique addition to scholarly understanding of the rhetoric of atonement. By claiming that his goal has always been "to serve," Rollins expresses his own disappointment in having failed so many people. At the same time, his apparent attachment to service also suggests a commitment to self-improvement and a promise to avoid such hurtful behavior in the future. Although Rollins' claims to service are vague, they are entirely consistent with the notion of charity. Rollins pronounces a deep-seated and persistent desire to serve others. The sense of purpose he describes appears to transcend his immediate goal of adjusting his views on depression and suicide.

Religious belief was not a concern in the "Fuck Suicide" controversy nor is it important to Rollins' persona, but it is a significant element of the rhetoric of atonement, which is a secular and public analogue to Judeo-Christian rituals and ideas. The sort of service that Rollins espouses should be regarded as a secular equivalent to Judeo-Christian constructs such as "servanthood" or "servitude," which suggest a profound drive to serve others.

Conclusion

In the wake of his controversial "Fuck Suicide" article, Henry Rollins effectively communicated all five key elements of the rhetoric of atonement—repentance, prayer, charity, mortification, and public confessional. Public reaction to Rollins' apology suggests that his message strategies were well chosen and well executed. Thus, this case study offers support for the rhetoric of atonement as a valuable tool for analyzing apologetic discourse and as a persuasive strategy for repairing one's public image. This essay has contributed to the literature regarding the rhetoric of atonement by challenging the assertion that rhetors must explicitly ask the public for forgiveness in order to demonstrate repentance and by arguing that discussion of service ought to be explored as an important component of charity.

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1. *Spin.com* is the online home of *Spin* magazine, a rock and roll publication that has been in print since 1985.
2. *The A.V. Club* covers entertainment news and publishes reviews of film, television, and popular music.

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"Payback for Pearl Harbor": Racist Ideologies Online of Karmic Retribution for White America and Postracial Resistance

David C. Oh[1]

Abstract

Immediately following news coverage of the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan on March 11, 2011, anti-Japanese users attributed the disasters to karmic "payback for Pearl Harbor." As Klein notes, social media can legitimate White supremacist discourses, "laundering" them into popular discourse. Likewise, this article argues that Facebook and Twitter were spaces that allowed the movement of White supremacist discourses into everyday culture by coding overt racism. Twitter and Facebook, however, also acted as a space in which White supremacist ideologies were challenged, yet the challenge was limited as it reified postracism. Indeed, both the "payback" posts and "pushback" responses constructed their arguments within postracial logics in order to garner support.

Keywords

postracism, White supremacist discourse, Facebook, Twitter, Japanese tsunami

On March 11, 2011, an 8.9-magnitude earthquake, the most powerful in Japan's recorded history (Soble, Dickle, & Whipp, 2011), shook violently off its northeastern coast, creating a giant tsunami that crashed into nearby cities (Fackler, 2011). The devastation caused by the giant tidal wave led to the loss of 19,300

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lives (''Japan Tsunami Death Toll at 19,300,'' 2012) and the collapse of the local infrastructure and economy (Fackler & McDonald, 2011). Further compounding the natural tragedy, the tsunami damaged a nuclear reactor in Fukushima. Radioactive contamination seeped into nearby areas (Alexander, 2013), creating an enduring crisis.

Shortly after news coverage broke, cyberspace reacted with shock and sympathy but also with morbid satisfaction. Alec Sulcin, a writer for *Family Guy*, tweeted ''If you wanna feel better about this earthquake in Japan, google 'Pearl Harbor death toll''' (Oldenburg, 2011). His indifference was not an isolated case. Dozens tweeted and posted Facebook updates that delighted in the natural disasters and subsequent radiation fears as ''payback for Pearl Harbor.'' Though these instances of hateful rhetoric are arguably marginalized discourses in the cyberarena, cyberspace is also the vehicle for racist discourses to become ''laundered'' into the broader cultural field (Klein, 2012).

The study adds to the paucity of critical research on race in cyberspace, addresses the scholarly gap concerning racist comments on social media (Cisneros & Nakayama, 2015), and contributes directly to Daniels's (2013) call to develop further critical inquiry into Whiteness online, particularly the need to hold onto race while clinging to a ''fantasy of a color-blind web'' (p. 712). I argue that the payback posts adopted White supremacist discourses and moved it into the cultural mainstream through Facebook and Twitter but that a multinational and multiracial social media response challenged *individual* and *U.S. American* ''ignorance,'' thereby avoiding discussions of racism and, thus, reifying the dominant racial logic of postracism. As Cisneros and Nakayama (2015) point out, social media can be a space for old and new racisms to coexist simultaneously.

White Supremacy Online

One of the most troubling examples of the Internet's reproduction of racist logics online is White nationalist websites. White supremacists have found voice, community, and legitimation online (Adams & Rosigno, 2005), using the Internet to espouse ideologies of White supremacy (Meddaugh, 2009). Based on pseudoscientific claims, White nationalist websites use ''reasonable racism'' to create community around anxieties that Whiteness is threatened by multiculturalism (Gerstenfeld, Grant, & Chiang, 2003; Meddaugh, 2009). The sites initiate new members into a broader network of hate groups and sites (Gerstenfeld et al., 2003), and they maintain routine interaction with committed members (Schafer, 2002) that maintain the culture of the White Power Movement (WPM) in everyday ways (Simi & Futrell, 2006). WPM argues for an essentialized view of race that links to racist eugenics (Bowman-Grieve, 2009) with these discourses helping to construct collective identity through a shared sense of superiority that adopts a conspiratorial worldview in which

''White rights'' have been stripped away through an illegitimate and oppressive government (Adams & Rosigno, 2005). Though these ideologies seem farfetched in dominant discourse, the ideologies White nationalist sites espouse are ones that have gained cultural traction (Duffy, 2003).

Traces of WPM are found in White backlash culture, too. White backlash culture is ''legitimated'' discourse that arose in the 1980s in response to White male frustrations at the dual threats of multiculturalism (Giroux, 1997) and feminism (Ferber, 2007). Like WPM, White backlash discourses mobilize solidarity by arguing that Whiteness and masculinity are threatened in dominant culture (Gabriel, 1998), but unlike WPM, its arguments are not situated in essentialized racial eugenics. Instead, it is situated in coded nostalgia, longing for a return to an idealized past, patriarchal and heteronormative family values (Gabriel, 1998; Giroux, 1997) and ''traditional culture'' free of the challenges of multiculturalism (Takaki, 1993). Though it is Whites who typically call for this nostalgic return, race has been discursively removed from White identities as advocates link traditional family values with patriotism and ''freedom'' (Crenshaw, 1997; Giroux, 1997; Lipsitz, 1998). By conflating White advantage with patriotism, its advocates' manifest concerns are the protection of traditional America rather than the protection of White privilege (Crenshaw, 1997).

The explicit rationales of White backlash culture are, thus, expressed as ''color-blind racism,'' which advances racist purposes while denying that race or racism matters in shaping people's life experiences or opportunities (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Ono, 2010). Color blindness, in turn, connects with postracism, which argues that institutional racism is an anachronism, that racism only occurs as individual-level bigotry, and that everyone is equally capable of it (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Temple, 2010; Thornton, 2011). It hides a more sinister purpose, however, as postracism is not only willfully blind to racial oppression and the need for community, but it works to provide cover that allows regressive attacks on antiracist gains (Ono, 2010). On social networking sites, the discourse of postracism is widespread (Grasmuck, Martin, & Zhao, 2009). Perhaps, because Whites have the least diverse social networks (Lewis, Kaufman, Gonzalez, Wimmer, & Christakis, 2008), there is little resistance from members of their social networks when White supremacist discourses disguised as postracial White backlash creep in from the overtly racist margins. One pathway through which this occurs on social media is through posts that articulate discourses of White victimization posted on social media—a discourse to which Whites generally respond favorably (Rauch & Schanz, 2013).

Social Media Deliberation on Race and Racism

Hopes of the Internet as a space for deliberative democracy have generally been overstated (see Downing, 2008). Though carefully cultivated conditions allow for online deliberation (Hartz-Karp, 2014) and though social media have been

a resource for social protest (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012), utopian hopes are technologically deterministic, ignoring the continued role of power and culture in media use (Freedman, 2006). It is not to say that cyberspaces cannot allow deliberation, but, rather, cyberspaces are continuous with users' off-line social experiences, and, as such, online deliberation is not apart from but a part of the social and technological context in which dominant discourses are formed. For instance, Cleland (2014) found that English message boards became a space to conflate Englishness with Whiteness and to reject racially different Others. Especially when users' identities are not known, online deliberation degenerates into arguments that rely on ''putdowns'' to silence opposing views (van Zoonen et al., 2007), and the accrual of social capital in the discussions maintains cultural hegemony (Goode, 2009). In online discussions of race and racism, there is little room to deliberate the merits of a viewpoint but rather to forcefully assert the legitimacy and power of one's sociocultural privilege (Nakamura, 2009).

Facebook and Twitter operate as particular discursive spaces shaped by their technological platforms as well as the cultural discourses users bring into the technology's use. Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin (2008) note that because Facebook is a ''nonymous'' environment, identity play is constrained in favor of the self-presentation of carefully curated images. Users tend to not reveal their ''hidden selves'' nor take on wholly different identities but, rather, they emphasize their most desirable self. Because of the known networks on Facebook and anchored connections to off-line selves, discourse tends to be more egalitarian (Halpern, 2013), and because Facebook and Twitter rely on users for content, they allow for vernacular content from the cultural margins (Howard, 2008). Indeed, people of color frequently use Facebook as a way to articulate opposition to racist marginalization, resist racial silencing, and express markers of ethnic and cultural difference (Grasmuck et al., 2009). This is also true for so-called Black Twitter, a space that allows for signification with hashtags acting as a virtual ''call and response'' that allows African Americans to find community and to reject postracism (Brock, 2012; Florini, 2014).

Though technologies allows spaces for community and challenges to postracism, Facebook and Twitter users' practices frequently reinforce dominant cultural logics, advancing White supremacy and racism (Gilroy, 2012). On social media, insults adhere to cultural logics that reify social domination rather than value difference (Rishel, 2011). Burke and Goodman (2012) found that in English discussions about asylum seekers, the structure of Facebook allowed deindividuation, allowing users to more easily slip into polarizing comments, yet opponents of asylum framed their critique as unrelated to race in order to seem more reasonable, conforming to the dominant cultural logic of postracism. As Grasmuck et al. (2009) found, White Facebook users tend to use few racial signifiers and seldom comment in ways that are racially specific, favoring a ''color-blind'' presentation of race (Grasmuck et al., 2009).

Unlike Facebook, Twitter comments are generally not limited to a user's network; it is publicly visible. When Twitter users send tweets, multiple audiences become singular, leading to "context collapse," meaning that the specific social contexts that guide different conversational norms are lost (Marwick & boyd, 2010). Because of the loss of context, users tend to err on the side of not revealing, not challenging social convention, and being careful in self-presentation (Marwick & boyd, 2010). As Cisneros and Nakayama (2015) point out in their analysis of Tweets about Nina Davuluri, the 2014 Miss America winner, Twitter was a space for old and new racism to exist simultaneously. Overtly racist tweets that disparaged her for being Middle Eastern, Arab, and Muslim were met with responses meant to shame the racist tweeters by drawing upon postracism as a dominant cultural logic. When studying race online, it is important to note that race and racism as powerful social constructs and identities do not dissolve but are enacted in ways that are shaped by the medium (Cammaerts, 2008). It is in this context that I examine how Facebook posts drew on White supremacist and White backlash ideologies in response to the multiple tragedies associated with the Japanese earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster in March 2011 and how Twitter challenged the racialized discourse in cyberspace while at the same time maintaining postracism as the lens through which old racism is fought and new racism is asserted.

Methodological Decisions

Drawing on Kellner's (1995) description of ideological analysis, the article is situated in the larger sociopolitical context of challenges to U.S. exceptionalism marked by the political momentum of the Tea Party, a movement that in some ways resembles White backlash discourse with its calls to "tradition" and cartoonish displays of patriotism that thinly mask racism (Enck-Wanzer, 2011). Because of the discursive nature of the posts, I drew upon the tools of critical discourse analysis (CDA; Fairclough, 2010; van Dijk, 1993a) in combination with critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA; Brock, 2012). The goal of CDA is to pursue normative social justice goals by connecting microlevel discourse to understanding and ultimately correcting social structures (Fairclough, 2010; van Dijk, 1993a). CDA helps examine meanings beneath the surface of manifest discourse to reveal "deep structures" (van Dijk, 1993a). In this way, CDA complemented the use of ideological criticism through tools meant to uncover hidden meaning in language that reinforce racist systems. CTDA, likewise, provides a framework to understand the ways "... the Internet, as a social structure, represents and maintains Western culture through its content and often embodies Western ideology through its design and practices" (p. 53). Simply stated, CTDA is an adaptation of CDA for online environments. It differs primarily in the additional attention paid to the technological channels through which the discourse is structured. Thus, the analysis combines

ideological criticism's work in understanding the ways dominant ideology is articulated, CDA's tools in uncovering deep structures that reify racist systems, and CTDA's attentiveness to discourse that is shaped by the technological form through which it travels.

To examine Facebook posts, I used the now defunct site, openbook.org, which was created to demonstrate the information insecurity of Facebook through searchable terms. The search I conducted was completed on March 15, 2011, 4 days after the Japanese tsunami. Altogether, I gathered 79 posts from 48 Facebook users. I intended to research the Facebook page titled "Payback for Pearl Harbor," but because Facebook users had flagged it, the page was deleted prior to the gathering of data. This was an unfortunate loss, but Facebook posts by users in their own networks are arguably more influential in everyday rituals of use and meaning making. To find Tweets, I used Twitter's advanced search features to include "Payback for Pearl Harbor," "Pearl Harbor," or "Godzilla." I completed the search on May 3, 2014, gathering roughly two hundred tweets, focusing the analysis on 60 tweets most germane to this project. After receiving the posts and tweets, I assigned pseudonyms to all quotes before including them in the analysis in order to maintain confidentiality and to protect users from potential harm. I have left the quotes exactly as they were written to maintain the integrity of the language used in social media spaces.

To make sense of race and racism in the posts, it was necessary to code the posters' races whenever possible. For the Facebook and Twitter users, I made assumptions about the offline race of the user only when they used photographs that appeared to reference themselves, excluding images of identifiable celebrities, cartoons, or other nonhuman photographs. As Zhao et al. (2008) point out, on "nonymous" sites, individuals rarely engage in identity play that transgresses their own identities because they are anchored to people who know them offline. Further, they point out that people of color use Facebook to resist overt racism and postracism; therefore, racial identities can be fairly safely assumed when taking account of users' visible identities and their racial discourses (Grasmuck et al., 2009). Though this provided additional insight, ultimately, what matters is not the race of the user but the function of the discourse in the post or Tweet. It is certainly possible, though unlikely, that a person of color advanced White supremacist discourses under the guise of a White user, but, even if so, the functional work of the discourse would be the same. Because the project is concerned with competing discourses of overt racism and postracism, it is the racialized discourse rather than the race of the user that matters.

"Payback for Pearl Harbor"

Through CDA's focus on understanding the ways discourse reinforces racist structures (van Dijk, 1993a), it was revealed that several Facebook users' delight

in Japan's multiple tragedies replicated White backlash culture (Lipsitz, 1998) and the sense of victimization in WPM (Adams & Rosigno, 2005). They reveled in what they perceived as karmic "payback," which was interpreted as God taking action on behalf of the formerly victimized and morally righteous. By claiming that the tragedies were payback for a past transgression, they marshaled patriotism to delight in Japanese suffering. Second, their belief that the Japanese tragedies were karmic or supernatural retribution evokes discourses of the U.S. as divinely exceptional and of the U.S. as continuing to bear an uncorrected historical wrong.

Patriotic Vengeance

By evoking Pearl Harbor, Facebook users argued that the patriotic response is to not sympathize with Japanese people. As William wrote, "Do I feel bad for japan? Two words … pearl harbor." Brandon, too, posted, "Help Japan? Nah, Pearl Harbor." Consistent with Lipsitz's (1998) argument that White backlash is often cloaked in calls to hyper-patriotism, users mobilized patriotic virtue to call on their friends to not be sympathetic and mocked those who were. For instance, Fred wrote, "Why does everyone feel bad for japan? Doesn't pearl harbor ring a bell?" Bob echoed these remarks, writing, "screw japan they got what they deserve. any remember pearl harbor I do. they killed thousands of americans and would do it again. Kill em all let god sort emm out." These comments point to the racist margins from which delight in Japanese suffering is expressed as patriotic virtue.

Consistent with research that suggests postracism is the dominant way of understanding race (Prashad, 2001), racist animosities like those above were relatively rare and, instead, racist comments were implied through stereotyping. For example, Gabe wrote, "Did people forget when japan bombed us @ pearl harbor? Fuck them they can't drive anyway!" At a casual glance, the latter sentence would not seem to make sense in his blame discourse. By understanding its "deep structures" through CDA (van Dijk, 1993a), it makes sense as a postracial logic that users deny race while reifying racist ideologies. In this context, the stereotype becomes necessary to signify Asian such that the sentence could read "Fuck them; they are Asian!" The use of stereotypes points to racist anxieties against the backdrop of the threat of multiculturalism, globalization, and Asia (see Ono & Jiao, 2008). Thus, given their racial + gender identities, it supports the link between White backlash culture and White masculinity, specifically.

Despite this link, it was not universally the case that racist comments came from White men. Occasionally, White women marshaled their networks to encourage friends to see the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster as long overdue vindication. Though the White men and women's posts were largely similar in content, there is a notable difference in tone. White women's

comments tended to be less verbally aggressive. Janette, for example, wrote, ''id like to say something to all u people talkin about japan and how u feel sorry for dem ... pearl harbor.'' Expressing disappointment with sympathetic U.S. Americans, Rachel wrote, ''Man ppl once I heard America never forgets but I guess we forgot Japan caused Pearl Harbor.'' Sandra, too, posted, ''May be offensive but today I heard that this is what happens when you Bomb Pearl Harbor.'' To demonstrate the difference in tone, Carter wrote, ''Fuck you Japan I'm glad you got hit with an earthquake. That's what you get for bombing pearl harbor.'' His comment is directed aggressively at Japan, while the women's comments are meant to build consensus among U.S. Americans. In both cases, though, White users' animus is consistent with White backlash's use of perceived victimization to mobilize racialized dissatisfaction (Adams & Rosigno, 2005).

Karma/Divine Intervention

The belief in supernatural or cosmic forces working on behalf of the U.S. not only links the divine with an instrumental deployment of patriotism, it also connects to White supremacist ideologies that the (White) U.S. is uniquely exceptional and favored by the divine and that it is being victimized by multiculturalism. The ''deep structure'' in the discourse about karma acting to right the moral wrongs of Japan is to argue that the cosmic scales were tipped against the U.S. until supernatural forces could mete out vengeance. James wrote, ''Fuck japan!!!! ... did everyone forget pearl harbor? ... karma is a motherfucker isn't it.'' Less taunting in her response, Mary also supported the belief in karmic payback. She wrote, ''really i feel so sorry for the loss of life in japan but i also believe in karma. the spirits of all our service men who lost their lives in pearl harbor may have risen. god bless us all for what is to come.'' Although some women used aggressively hateful rhetoric, women like Mary moderated their posts by expressing relative sympathy. In contrast, no men, who claimed karmic redemption, qualified their responses.

While most referenced karma, several others explicitly pointed to a divine being. For instance, Roland wrote, ''Japan bombed pearl harbor, and god gave them a tsunami lol.'' For Jim, he mixed rationales, suggesting the reasons for the Japanese tragedies were because of God's repayment for Pearl Harbor and God's retribution against Japanese femininity/sexuality. He wrote, ''If they didn't bomb pearl harbor this wouldn't have happened. Gods way of telling japanese people there gay.'' Here, it is instructive to draw upon CDA's connection of the micro discourse to macro cultural meanings (Fairclough, 2010). The mixing of explanations might seem to be irrational on a manifest level, but the coupling makes ideological sense when considering Asian men have been feminized and represented as asexual in U.S. popular culture (Espiritu, 2004) and when considering that White backlash culture is not only a response

to the perceived threat of multiculturalism but also to the perceived threat of feminism (Oh & Kutufam, 2014). One manifestation of that perceived threat is to reassert heteronormative masculinity (Kimmel, 2006). Against this backdrop, the linking of explanations connects cohesively to White backlash culture.

For other Facebook users, who cited God's favor, they combined their religious beliefs with racist fervor. Here, the posts reference White superiority more directly. For example, in response to a post by Derek, who wrote, "Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan = Payback for Pearl Harbor? lol," Amelia replied, "its god way of saying theres to many chinese here imam take u out lol." The conflation of Chinese with Japanese reflects a racial essentialism, which transforms all East Asian bodies into a racialized Oriental Other. Her comment about widespread human tragedy also suggests that she views Asian lives as disposable, a common trope in racist representations of Asians as a "yellow peril" threat (Hamamoto, 1994). More overtly racist was Megan's use of a racist slur, writing, "Maybe its payback for the japs and Pearl Harbor?? Who knows what he has instore for Others??" Through her question and use of a racist slur, she connected racism, patriotism, and divine intervention. Although she does not name God directly, the use of the male pronoun "he" and the context of natural disasters would suggest she is referring to a divine power, whom she arguably hopes will act in ways that her government is unable or unwilling in the killing of (racial) "Others."

The purpose of understanding the Facebook posts has been to examine them as sites in which racist discourses in the White supremacist margins of cyberspace creep into the cultural mainstream, tying racism, patriotism, and religion together. The strategic use of patriotic discourse allows "reasonable racism" to persist (Klein, 2012; Meddaugh, 2009) but that same coded patriotic discourse occasionally finds hateful expression in hopes for continued death as well as the use of racist slurs and stereotyping. By claiming "payback for Pearl Harbor," Facebook users provided a "legitimate" reason for delighting in Japanese deaths and for claiming the racist belief in divine favor. Though these discourses resonate in White supremacist discourses, the expression found on Facebook more closely reflect the gentrified form of White backlash culture. That is to say, though White supremacist discourses have animated White backlash culture, it has not done so entirely.

White backlash culture borrows White supremacist fears of a threat to White masculinity, a desire for a return to "traditional" social structures prior to the threats of multiculturalism and feminism, the belief in divine selection, and an argument about patriotic duty, but it does not replicate White supremacist discourses' explicit references to White superiority. White backlash culture has adopted a postracial frame that advances racist agendas without naming race specifically (Gabriel, 1998; Ono, 2010). For Facebook users, ideologies of White as superior are not directly expressed, although the Asian Other as inferior do find expression through putdowns, racial slurs, and racist stereotyping.

It appears that WPM discourses have shifted out of the periphery but not entirely. It has, thus far, not dislodged postracism as the dominant way of understanding racial relations.

"Ignorant and Insensitive"

Through CDA's focus on tying specific discourse to larger social meanings (van Dijk, 1993a), it became apparent that users problematically resisted White backlash discourse by marshaling postracism. Whether commenters angrily denounced the payback comments, expressed disgust for the comments, or mocked the commenters, there was only a single tweet that referenced racism explicitly. Allison tweeted, "Nicely put!! RT"@BenXFD: Godzilla & Pearl Harbor trending?. Nothing like a bit casual racism is there ..." Notably, her comment was not retweeted. Instead, the criticisms either were directed at individual "idiots" or the U.S./Americans while only obliquely conjuring race and racism. In critiques of postracism, the central argument is that racism as systemic discrimination is imagined to be a relic of the past and that race is considered unimportant in shaping people's lives (Ono, 2010). Criticism of the U.S. and individual actors deflect antiracist readings that can connect connotative meanings of the payback posts on Facebook with systemic racism. Further, the argument that individual bad actors were acting like "idiots" shields White privilege from criticism (Foster, 2009). In the multiracial and multinational push back against payback discourses, Twitter users and Facebook commenters avoided referencing race, perhaps as a way to avoid offending or distancing themselves from potential allies, or it could simply be that postracism has become such a dominant framework in social media that it has been fully naturalized (Grasmuck et al., 2009). Regardless, the posts ultimately reified the racial status quo by advancing postracism as the lens through which resistance was mobilized even while repelling more virulent forms of racism on the cybermargins (Cisneros & Nakayama, 2015).

Postracial Counterattack

Tweets that advocated "payback for Pearl Harbor" had all been removed by the time data were collected. Attempts to publicly shame payback Twitter users were apparently successful. However, the remaining Tweets were not antiracist, either. Instead, they reinforced postracism as the dominant cultural logic. This was reinforced further as people of color were prominent in humorously arguing for their generalized disappointment in humanity. Asad, a self-identified Canadian, wrote jokingly, "Seeing all these people saying the earthquake was payback for pearl harbor makes me not want to live on this planet. Next rocket to mars plz." Cody, an African American man, similarly tweeted, "Let's see, Godzilla, Katrina, Pearl Harbor are trending. Stay classy, Twitter.

#Dumbasses.'' A premise of CTDA is that discourse is shaped by the technological structures through which it is articulated (Brock, 2012). The use of the hashtag, in this case, allowed Cody to call others into postracial community, suggesting that Twitter's ability to create antiracist community that resists postracism is more ambivalent than the existing literature suggests.

For most others, they did not respond with humor but with frustration and mounting anger. Adrian, an Englishman, wrote, ''Starting to dislike Twitter. Godzilla trending yesterday and Pearl Harbor today. Pathetic ignorant cunts.'' It is notable that men's criticism of the payback users was expressed in masculinist terms. Masculinist discourses are those that advance men's interests in a patriarchal social order (Miriam, 2007), and they include values such as competition, control, and conquest (Butterworth, 2012). Perhaps because understanding and empathy are gendered feminine in the West, users felt it necessary to use aggressive masculine language to express their frustration at the ''ignorance'' of users, particularly as virtual public spaces are often dominated by ''putdowns'' (van Zoonen et al., 2007). Vice, a blog based in Brooklyn, was retweeted 124 times after posting, HEY IDIOTS: THE TSUNAMI IS NOT PAYBACK FOR PEARL HARBOR http://bit.ly/g7A3ju.'' Likewise, Alan, a White man, tweeted, ''OMG Fail. You dumbfucks a huge earthquake is_not_ payback for Pearl Harbor! http://i.imgur.com/Pp4oA.jpg.'' Others insinuated that making the link between the Japanese tragedies and Pearl Harbor revealed the payback posters' ignorance and gendered *oversensitivity* to perceived historical wrongs. Bill, an African American man, posted on Facebook, ''some ignorant motha fucka gone say japan deserved what they got for pearl harbor. That's fucked up, it's been 60 years get over it.''

Women like Audrey, a White Tokyo resident, also used masculinist language by exerting violent control and domination. She said, ''I want to strangle any and all people making Godzilla or Pearl Harbor 'karma' references.'' I want to see the life leave them.'' Her comment was atypical, however, and perhaps informed by her lived investments in Japan. More commonly, women tweeted shaming discourses. Kristen, a White U.S. American, wrote, ''1st Godzilla jokes, then comparing to Katrina, now Pearl Harbor. Some people disgust me! heartless bastards #endit.'' Likewise, Ashley tweeted, ''Death toll in Japan is up to 10 k and people are still making 'That's payback for Pearl Harbor' jokes. Attempt @ humor FAIL. Shame on you.''

Tweets that attempted to dominate and tweets that attempted to shame both exerted power but were gendered articulations by users. In either case, however, Twitter users avoided naming racism as an animating force in their arguments against payback messages. Instead, their criticisms were rooted in a postracial logic. Instead of arguing explicitly against White racism, they argued that the posters were ignorant or insensitive. The racial status quo of postracism was then leveraged to demonstrate superiority. In other words, they claimed superiority by putting down White supremacy. As payback Twitter users

constructed the Japanese Other as inferior, postracial Twitter users constructed the payback Twitter users as an inferior White Other. This fits a common construction of working-class Whites in popular culture as "White trash"—ignorant, racist, macho, patriotic, and God fearing (Price, 2012). The portrayals scapegoat "other" Whites in order to relieve middle-class White guilt from their complicity in sustaining racism (Price, 2012).

Payback Against the United States?

One of the most common responses was to directly challenge the posters' historical amnesia, regarding the U.S. military's response to Pearl Harbor. Gabe, a Black man, who identified as explicitly not U.S. American, posted on Facebook:

> I don't doubt there are some educated Americans around. However judging by some of the comments on facebook, they're in the minority . . . You know how Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and killed 2,400 people? And how the US got no revenge in any way and totally didn't kill 200,000 Japanese civilians?"

Derek provided counterideological discourses that challenged U.S. hegemony but that did not explicitly take an antiracist position. Thus, again, postracism was advanced as racism was ignored in favor of criticisms of the U.S.'s willful forgetting.

Perhaps because discourses of patriotism have become entangled with White backlash, Bill, a Black man, saw expressions of (White) U.S. American victimization as troubling. He wrote:

> Something that really has pissed me off . . .. I read a few post of some folks (no names . . . we don't need a FB war to break out) and they are saying Japan is getting payback for Pearl Harbor! How insensitive, ignorant, and just plain stupid can one be! I mean they did get A-bombs dropped on them, for one, and now they (innocent men, women, and children) are in a living nightmare . . .. SMGDH [Shaking my God Damn Head]!!!!!

However, his critique was, at most, a coded challenge to White racism with words like "ignorant" arguably indexing racism. His manifest language, too, fits with postracial logics, which require individuals to avoid discussions of racism lest they be accused of "playing the race card" (Lipsitz, 1998).

U.S. American Twitter users also shared similar sentiments. Shelton, a White man, tweeted, "Payback for Pearl Harbor? you mean the bombings of #Hiroshima and #Nagasaki weren't enough?" Bryan, a White man, wrote, "Here's why we have a hard time around the world. here are some of fools saying EQ was payback for Pearl Harbor http://bit.ly/fBfTIh." Like other Twitter users, he linked payback comments with ignorance and shame by

association. Notably, his shame was directed at U.S. American ignorance, rather than White racial ignorance. Emma, a White woman, tweeted, "Payback for Pearl Harbor? Are people that idiotic? I guess they didn't hear about the A-bombs we drop over there. Pretty sure we're even." Sophia, a White woman, on the other hand, aggressively used a gendered insult to mock as she used the hashtag #douche, tweeting, "All you asswipes talking about the Japanese earthquake being payback for Pearl Harbor ... Did you conveniently forget about Hiroshima? #douche."

For some users, their critique was not leveled against specific Facebook and Twitter users, who made payback comments. Rather, they directed their criticism against the U.S. and its military intervention and foreign policy. Lydia, a self-described Lebanese woman, tweeted, "Are ppl actually saying that #Japan earthquake is payback for Pearl Harbor? Wonder what payback #US will get in the future then." Her comment was retweeted eight times, resonating with at least some of her followers, who believe current U.S. action deserves future karmic retribution. Similarly, Floyd, a White American man, wrote, "If the Japan earthquake is karmic payback for Pearl Harbor, what sort of karmic hell is the US due to suffer?" Gordon, a White man, took a similar tact but used the logic of the payback posters to sarcastically suggest that the U.S. has also received payback. Gordon tweeted, "Since ppl are saying that this earthquake is god's payback for Pearl Harbor, I guess Hurricane Katrina and 9/11 were payback for Hiroshima." In this way, these posters worked to deconstruct the coding of patriotism and divine favor found in the White backlash discourses.

Criticisms made by members of Asian diasporas crystallized around a similar refrain, namely, that the U.S. has already exacted military revenge. Heather, for example, posted on Facebook:

> To thoughs people who keep saying Japan got what it deserved cause they are atheists i hope "god" smit[e]s them with the rath of "your stupid go die in a hole" -_-. Also the fact that its 'karma' for pearl harbor. Well then we are all going to die for our 'karma' from the atomic bombs we threw.

From her use of the pronoun "we," it can be assumed that she identifies as U.S. American while engaged with racial difference. Her construction of a serious, displeased face "-_-" represents familiarity with East Asian uses of emoticons. This suggests that her identity is drawn from multiple sites, domestically in the U.S. and transnationally in Asia. Like Heather, Bart, whose race is unknown, used the same emoticon. He pointed out that not only did the U.S. pay back the attack on Pearl Harbor but that it has committed other moral atrocities. Bart asked rhetorically, "Why is this Pearl Harbor is related to the tsunami crap still going around ...? Guess people don't know about the Iraq, Trail of Tears, Bay of Pigs, Vietnam, and that whole slavery shit that happened a

while back. Forget about that fuckers ... tsunami=pearl harbor? really? -_-" What emerges, though, is opposition that only implies racism as a cause for the payback discourses. This suggests that opposition to the payback discourses operate within the confines of postracial cultural logics, at least in its manifest expression.

These posts, while fending off the challenges of the White supremacist margins do not provide space for critical antiracist views, thereby reifying postracism. In the multiracial and multinational coalition that coalesced, nearly all responses slipped into personal criticisms that ignored global power and dynamics of racist hierarchy and that engaged in "color-blind" discourse that inadvertently advances a racist status quo (Ono, 2010). Though the comments represent a more sympathetic and humane point of view, the responses point to the limits of deliberative democracy in Web 2.0 and the inability to move beyond dominant racial and cultural logics.

Conclusion

It is nearly trite to talk about racism on Facebook and Twitter. Its pervasiveness has become something of an Internet truism. Though it might be argued that there is nothing particularly novel about the ways Internet discourse emerged following the Japanese tragedies, it is the very ubiquity of online racism that makes it worthy of analysis. What is important to understand and what gives these posts and tweets greater social significance is the location from which these discourses are coming and the platforms through which they were articulated.

Extending Cisneros and Nakayama's (2015) conclusion that overt racism based on explicit difference and postracism based on color blindness coexist in social media spaces, this project elaborates the circuits by which these discourses travel (see Figure 1). White supremacist discourses, in this case, first initiated as a response to elite discourse in news (van Dijk, 1993b). It provides the symbolic material to articulate racial meanings into the cultural terrain. White supremacist discourses that lie in the cultural margins are activated and laundered through social networking sites (see Klein, 2012). The laundering results in the coded language of White backlash discourse that advances while somewhat disguising its White supremacist functions. Though it is unclear whether users are aware of the racist location of the discourses, it resonates with the racial logic of some users and circulates through their social networks as vernacular discourse. Unlike van Dijk's (1993b) model of elite racist discourse in the news, however, racism originates primarily at the site of the vernacular to advance marginalized racial logics. Connections between White supremacist discourse, White backlash discourse, information laundering, and social networking sites has, heretofore, not been made, so this project contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the interconnectedness of these discourses and communication vehicles in sustaining overt racism.

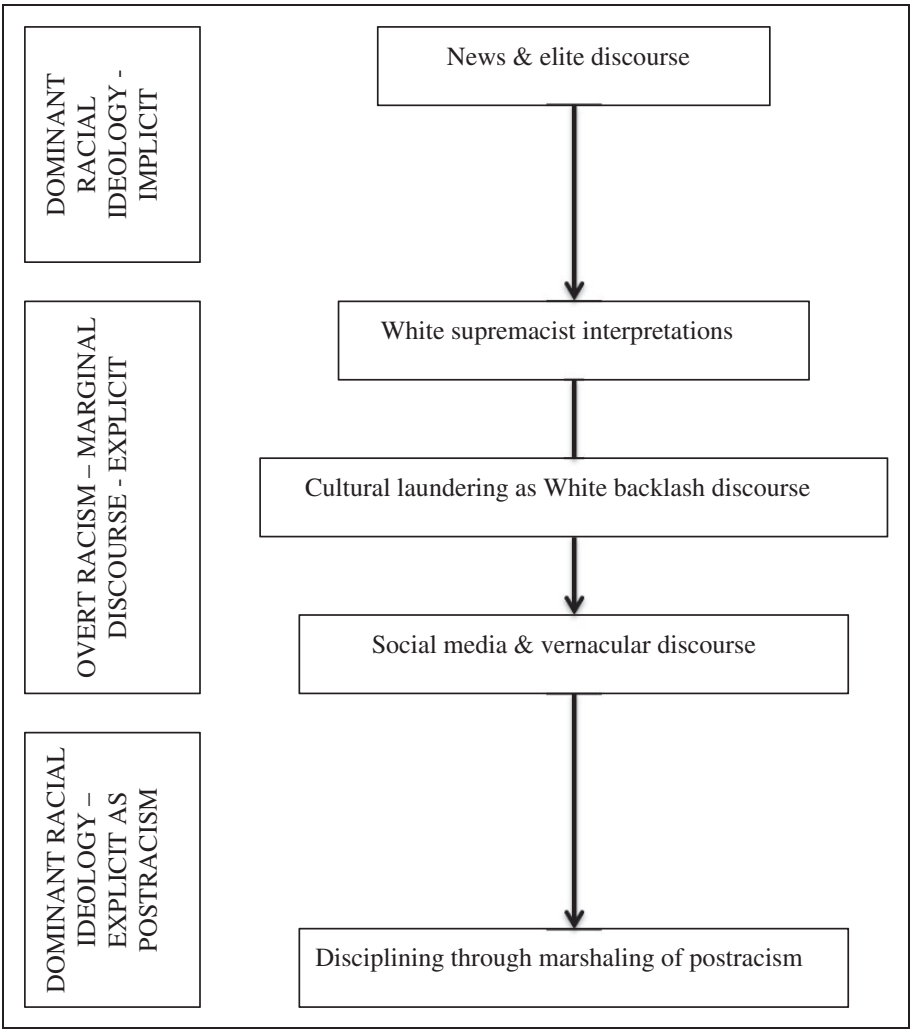

Figure 1. Sustaining White supremacy.

In addition, like the work of Cisneros and Nakayama (2015), this project examines the interaction of postracism. Furthering their work, I examined tweets that have remained a few years after the initial tragedy, thus I am able to uncover the remaining traces and the discourses that ultimately prevailed. What remains were legitimated tweets that articulate postracism, the prevailing racial logic, especially on social networking sites (Grasmuck et al., 2009). The championing and winning out of postracism demonstrates that discourses that support it were successful in shaming or creating enough flak for the users of

White backlash discourse to largely result in their removal. Users marshaled the dominant cultural logic of postracism in order to shut down the marginal cultural logic of White backlash. In so doing, they claimed their moral authority as color-blind nonracists and reinforced the hegemony of postracism. So, it is not quite precise to state that overt and postracial discourse coexist in social networking sites, but, rather, postracial discourses enter as a challenge to White backlash discourse, disciplining it back into the cultural margins. Lest this be interpreted as solely beneficial, it should also be noted that antiracist discourses that challenged White backlash discourse were also removed and remained unseen, pushing counterhegemonic, antiracist discourse to the cultural margins, too. While Facebook and Twitter allow for marginalized vernacular discourse to move into the cultural center, these discourses are disciplined back to the margins (1) when users have publicly visible profiles and (2) when their messages reach a broad audience who popularly select dominant postracial logics.

Further work should be conducted to advance this understanding of social media as a site for the interaction of overt racism and postracism. Additional research should also further complicate the conclusions of this article by analyzing other important axes of difference. For example, what happens when overt sexism and racism interact simultaneously with postfeminism and postracism as dominant responses? With the growing use and reliance on social media, it is more necessary than ever to address questions such as this in order to create opportunities for an intersectional antiracist multiculturalism to find a foothold.

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From the Alleys to City Hall: An Examination of Participatory Communication and Empowerment among Homeless Activists in Oregon

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Abstract

From September 2013 to April 2014, an independent collection of homeless men and women planted their own tent city, Whoville in downtown Eugene, Oregon. Over these 8 months, they fought with the city for more housing for Eugene's growing homeless population, initiating a citywide dialogue on the marginalization of the homeless. The purpose of this study is to analyze how the homeless tenants of the Whoville community used participatory communication to achieve their long-term goals in sustaining a working camp and also carrying on with their plans after the government intervened. Drawing on seven interviews with camp tenants, highly involved volunteers, board members, and articles from the Eugene Register Guard, I examine the dynamic of participatory communication in sustaining this movement. What components of participatory communication helped these activists form a community and then mobilize the surrounding community? I argue that two key strategies, applicable to other situations of homeless resistance, emerge from the themes found in these interviews: (a) Whoville's strategy to unite as a physical community, forming a public, collective identity in the greater Eugene community and (b) invoking a collective vision for better housing which mobilized both Whoville and citizens at large to rally to this vision.

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Introduction

From September 2013 to April 2014, an independent collection of homeless men and women planted their own tent city, Whoville, on a busy intersection in downtown Eugene, Oregon. Over these 8 months, they fought with the city for more housing for Eugene's growing homeless population, initiating a city-wide dialogue on the marginalization of the homeless. A force of Eugene police officers shut the camp down on April 4, but the former tenants did not scatter. Instead, Whoville tenants had already spoken and mobilized so many Eugene residents during the 8-month sit-in, that several steering committees were already working on a large, permanent homeless sanctuary, funded by several hundred thousand dollars in donations. More than a year later, April 2015, Whoville is now renamed as The Nightingale Health Sanctuary, has a volunteer board which is actively seeking to buy land for the sanctuary with a $400,000 community donation, manages a smaller, temporary camp (this time around, sanctioned by the city), and regularly meets with city leaders to raise more funds and support.

The U.S. economic depression in 2008 sparked the Occupy Movement throughout the United States, as a protest against the weakened U.S. economy (Agarwal, Bennett, Johnson, & Walker, 2014). Occupy was the largest class-based economic protest seen in the United States in decades. The Whoville movement began as an offshoot of the Occupy protest in Eugene and, as such, uses class-based, rights-focused rhetoric that identifies many of the same institutional grievances which prompted Occupy.

Much of the literature on homelessness in the United States centers on how *external* powers, such as government programs, shelters, and social workers, can help the homeless. What sets Whoville and other tent cities apart in this conversation is that *internal* forces of power, originating from the marginalized themselves, brought about sustainable change for this population. Self-action and self-efficacy are also central to the understanding of the term participatory communication and, as such, this article is a study of participatory communication as enacted within Whoville.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how the Whoville community used participatory communication to achieve their long-term goals in both sustaining a working camp and also carrying on with their plans after the government intervened. I argue that two key strategies, applicable to other situations of homeless resistance, emerge from the themes found throughout these

interviews: (a) Whoville's strategy to *unite* as a physically situated, activist community, thus forming a public, collective identity in the greater Eugene community and (b) invoking a demand or collective vision for better housing that mobilized and incited both Whoville and citizens at large to rally to this vision. The rest of this study untangles how these *internal* two strategies were formed, drawing from my observations on the group's usage of participatory power and participatory communication.

Drawing on seven interviews with camp tenants, highly involved volunteers, board member, articles from the Eugene Register Guard, and several fliers about the marginalization of the homeless in Eugene created by Whoville supporters, I examine the dynamic of participatory communication in sustaining this movement. On a theoretical level, what participatory strategies did tenants seem to gravitate toward to keep the camp together? What does their conception of empowerment say about participatory communication in the context of homelessness in the United States? The interviews show that the tenants of Whoville understand empowerment to mean, among other things, belonging to their group, that the act of bonding together in a common vision itself is empowering. In this sense, having arrived at this publicized claim to their patch of land was an act of empowerment, a crucial component of participatory communication. Effectively, this study shows the self-guided and self-directed component of participatory communication is a successful strategy for social progress in tent city movements in the United States.

A Brief Sketch of Whoville and Homelessness in Eugene

Whoville's visible presence in the town of Eugene was a critical part of the group's emerging identity. Consider the importance of the following description.

A soaking cardboard sign read "Right to sleep." It was duct-taped to a fence with a dozen or so other signs reading "Whoville," "Sleep is a human right," etc. Beyond, a colorful span of tents surrounded a tent kitchen, a campfire pit and outhouses. This scene was typical of the Whoville camp between August 2013 and April 2014 (Pietsch, 2014). Placed at the corner of two major Eugene arterials, Broadway and Hilyard, hundreds of vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians passed by the signs and tents each day. Whoville representatives were frequently videoed, interviewed, and photographed by Eugene's local media (*The Eugene Register Guard,* 2014; Pietsch, The Eugene Register Guard, 2014). Most individuals in the camp were either people in their 20 s or 30 s or older, in their late 50 s and 60 s. The majority of people were White, many of whom had drifted into Eugene from nearby Oregon towns, such as Roseburg or Salem. Many people hung out in big groups inside the kitchen tent and the individual tents, smoking, drinking, and listening to music on their phones. Four of the five younger women I met were pregnant, often partnered with an older homeless man in his 50 s or 60 s. While I never stayed into the night, several participants told me

the camp grew quite noisy each night and into the morning, as people became more drunk, high, and could turn up their music with less citizens, traffic, and businesses operating nearby. I was never able to confirm the use of hard drugs in the camp but saw alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana consumed and traded quite frequently. Several interviewees told stories of people using the camp to recover after being beaten, robbed, or let out of a hospital after surgery (many were homeless before these incidents). Almost all the tents had a bike or two stacked outside and many people kept a pitbull tied up outside their tent during the day. A continual stream of visitors, largely church staff with prepared food, trickled in and out of the camp at all hours. The main fire pit was in constant use by people working in the kitchen tent; camp members had organized shifts for making communal meals and washing dishes. Other people were responsible for taking out the trash and solving disputes. This description comes from my frequent research trips into the camp, as well as interviews with participants.

Whoville representatives came to every city council meeting. The city issued a first warning to vacate in January, then extended this, then issued another one, then extended that one (Dutcher, 2014). Just after the first warning in January, people began posting cardboard signs, by the dozens, reading "Whoville, right to sleep" all over town. I myself stumbled across a long trail of tiny notes written on used snack wrappers, reading "Right to Sleep," along east 14th avenue in February, 2014. I picked up each piece of the (somewhat sticky) cardboard for two blocks and read each note. Several contained longer sentences explaining the impending action from the city and asking people to support Whoville.

At a panel for homeless speakers (mostly from Whoville) at a church on March 8, 2015, several homeless advocacy groups in Eugene offered leaflets on a table outside. I discovered Whoville had sparked the creation of a small, monthly newspaper, *The Eugene Occupier*. Another flier from Lane County Health and Human Services stated that 1,751 homeless were counted on a census day count for homelessness on January 30, 2013. Of the 1,751 people counted, 1,102 were without shelter, 261 were living in transitional shelter, 388 were staying in emergency shelters, and 108 couples or single parents had children living on the street with them.

Lastly, more than a year after the first major shutdown of the camp in April 2014, the original Whoville movement has grown to include the Nightingale Health Sanctuary steering committee, which hosts a new website actively taking donations for the sanctuary, a $400,000 donation for a permanent health sanctuary, a monthly newspaper for homelessness, a 30-person, city-sanctioned tent camp, open until April 2015, and board members hold weekly visits to churches and businesses to mobilize the community. These facts give some context with which to understand the following analysis of empowerment and participatory communication.

Participatory Communication and Empowerment

Scholars in multiple fields of social science began using the term "participatory" in the 1980s to refer to a developing new theory in the field of development work (Armstead & Cancian, 1991; Brown, 1993; Kanji, 2009; Servaes, 1989; Servaes, Jacobson, & White, 1996; Servaes & Lie, 1997). Rooted in self-empowerment, cultural identity, subverted power structures, and grassroots thinking, the term is considered as a response and critique to modernization theory and dependency theory, both of which drew from macrolevel, top-down, one-way flows of development assistance (Servaes et al., 1996). The term "participatory" is linked to multiple social science terms, such as "participatory action," "participatory approach," "participatory communication," or "participatory action research." Participatory communication refers to a dialogic, self-managed approach in the communication of a project, where multiple stakeholders hold equal power in the decision-making process. In the context of development and relief work, it often means consulting and allowing a native demographic to lead, design, guide, and manifest a project that holds their best interests at heart.

> The most developed form of participation is self-management. This principle implies the right to participation in the planning and production of media content . . . One of the fundamental hindrances to the decision to adopt the participation strategy is that it threatens existing hierarchies. (Servaes, 1989, p. 21)

A key mechanism of understanding participatory communication is understanding empowerment (Kanji, 2009; Rowlands, 1995). Empowerment is one's ability to have control over the decisions that affect one's life. According to Kanji, empowerment is how one garners the ability to assert power in a relationship of unequal power. As such, one of the main questions in the Whoville survey was, "What does empowerment mean to you?" Rowlands writes of empowerment for an individual existing on three plains:

Personal. "Where empowerment is about developing a sense of self . . . and capacity, and undoing the effects of internalised oppression" (Rowlands, 1995, p. 87).

Close relationships. "Where empowerment is about developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of the relationship and decisions made within it" (Rowlands, 1995, p. 87).

Collective. "Where individuals work together to achieve a more extensive impact than each could have had alone. This includes involvement in political structures, but might also cover collective action based on cooperation rather than competition" (Rowlands, 1995, p. 87).

Further, an additional goal of participatory communication is it seeks a voice for the voiceless as part of subverting the existing power structure (or hierarchies, as Servaes says).

The Machine They Rage Against: The Hierarchy and Hegemony of U.S. Cities and Police

To discuss the idea of "empowerment," one must also discuss what one is "empowering against." Homeless resistance struggles against a hegemony of the proper public sphere—the sphere that is discursively constructed by state power, which relegates who is welcome in the city's public spaces and who is not. Feldman (2004) argues that cities normalize housed citizens when they use their hegemonic power to rule against activity by the unhoused (p. 3). Cities in the United States end up "othering" homeless people by forming ordinances that explicitly ban them from using public spaces.

> An ideology of public space as "owned" by a normatively enshrined "we" of home-dwelling citizens is both cause and effect of the punitive homeless policies, which these scholars note, beyond simply targeting the problem of homelessness or street disorder, become part of a broader pattern of hegemonic identity construction. (Feldman, 2004, p. 3)

Feldman's comment on hegemonic identity construction correctly nails what is wrong with both compassionate responses to homelessness and punitive responses; both responses assume a definition of someone operating outside the boundaries of a "normal identity." Further, both responses to homelessness assume a power structure in which the hegemony (Eugene City Hall, Eugene Police Department, and Eugene citizens giving aid) has more power and more resources than those outside the norm.

> It is time to pry homelessness loose from its usual frame as a social problem and to see the state and sovereign power as deeper causes, not as superstructural with respect to society. (Feldman, 2004, p. 15)

Feldman's ideas on the state as a cause of homelessness translate easily onto other discussions of tent cities. Similar to Whoville, a tent city in Chicago in 1995 set up on a piece of land, lasted almost a year, was taken down by the city, and the angry, ousted tenants formed a loud social movement that eventually ended in the city building more low-income public housing (Wright, 1995, pp. 37–68). The tenants of Tranquility City, faced with the same constrictive ordinances as Whoville tenants, challenged the city's hegemony. In both situations, homelessness becomes an issue framed as an outcast minority fighting to be defined and treated *differently* by the state hegemony, asking for inclusion

in the definition of the public sphere as *citizens*, to use Wright and Feldman's terms.

In erasing certain usages of the physical public spaces of a city, Mitchell (1997) argues cities are ultimately annihilating the homeless (p. 305). Mitchell lists seven instances in the 1990s where city council members intentionally passed ordinances banning sleeping in public (Santa Cruz, Phoenix), loitering in a parking lot (Atlanta and Jacksonville, 1993), or begging from people in cars (Cincinnati, 1995; Mitchell, 1997, pp. 306–307).

In another example, Feldman uses an ordinance against sitting on the sidewalk, enacted by Seattle in 1993, to show how state power constructs the definition of "proper citizens" and "unwanted citizens."

> A vision of the upstanding citizen is established in opposition to the bare life of the homeless street-dweller and panhandler, who are viewed as physical blockages preventing the achievement of a unified public space in which consumer goods and consumers move unobstructed. (Feldman, 2004, p. 42)

Further, in ruling against certain types of unwanted behavior, the city of Seattle is also reinforcing its own identity (hegemonic identity construction) as a legislative body that holds power over others. Servaes' ideas on empowerment and participatory communication orient well within this idea of state power making mandates, which privileges some and leaves others *needing* to empower themselves against the state, as their present lifestyle has trespassed on that state power.

Research Question 1 (RQ1): In the context of living in relationship in the camp, what does empowerment mean to those living in Whoville? Do they consider Whoville a self-managed solution?

Tent City Movements in the United States

The Whoville movement is one of the many similar, past protests by homeless around the United States. In the past 25 years, several major city governments built low-income housing in response to protests from homeless activists. This happened in Sacramento in 2009 (Middleton, 2014), Atlanta in 1990, Chicago in 1992 (Wright & Roberts, 1994; Wright, 1995), Portland, Oregon, in 2001 (Mosher, 2010), and Eugene, Oregon, in 2013 (Heben, 2014). Each study documents a common narrative: A band of homeless begin protesting their municipality's lack of housing, build a voice for their situation with the media and government, and then work with various agencies to come up with permanent housing. A common thread through these five case studies is collective empowerment and identity building.

> Such political action was possible, it is argued, because the encampment provided privacy, safety and autonomy and functioned as an identity building device, where

> those who are typically marginalized or forced to succumb (in shelters or hospitals) to institutional control were able to establish a sense of independence and self-respect and ultimately to gain a sense of political empowerment. (Wright, 1995, p. 37)

One study tracked and qualitatively assessed the progress of a tent city movement in Portland, Oregon, in 2001 (Mosher, 2010). A band of eight people began marching with their shopping carts through the streets, demanding a legal place to sleep because the city shelters were at capacity. Their protest began much like the Whoville protest and ended with the city creating a permanent tent city downtown for the homeless.

> The young community formed a system of democratic governance that gave rights and responsibilities to the safety of each resident. With a food preparation area, portable toilets, a storage tent, and a heated "security" tent, Dignity Village became a relatively hospitable alternative where weary people could rest. (Mosher, 2010, p. 1)

One aspect missing from the conversation on homelessness is a study of the interpersonal dynamics and interpersonal dialogue between residents of tent cities. What sets Whoville and other tent cities apart in this conversation is that internal forces of power, originating from the marginalized themselves, brought about sustainable change for this population. In terms of participatory communication, what specific dialogue takes place?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What components of participatory communication helped these activists form a community and then mobilize the surrounding community?

Method

The qualitative direction of this question could best be explored through the method of interviews with Whoville participants. An interview can help reveal the finer details of what this shelter means to residents. The strength of talking with a person at length is that the researcher can create a detailed, local perspective (McCracken, 1988). The interview guide I used can be found in the Appendix.

Gathering Interviews

I located four willing participants living in one of the postcamps that formed after the major shutdown of Whoville on April 4, then reinterviewed two of this group 4 months later, in September 2014. Ten months later, in February 2015, I conducted four more interviews with board members, volunteer supporters, and attended a panel where several former Whoville tenants and Whoville supporters spoke to a church congregation.

The interviews with Nora and Brian took place in late May 2014 and were each about 40 minutes long. The interviews with Mick and Sarah took place in early June 2014 at the same camp. All names were changed to respect the anonymity of the tenants. Both interviews were about 30 minutes long. I also studied several issues of *The Eugene Occupier*, which formed as an outgrowth of the Occupy Movement but now primarily is printed to bring attention to homeless issues in Eugene. All the interviews were recorded with the participant's consent. The institutional review board department of the University of Oregon also approved these interviews.

Data Analysis

Three-step, line-by-line open coding was used to analyze the data, which involved breaking down the information, comparing it, and placing it into categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Pontius, 2008). For each coded theme, participant quotes were organized by labels, resulting in subcategories. Through three-step coding, I sifted out four major themes apparent within their dialogue.

Results

A predominant theme among the tenants of Whoville, the volunteer supporters, and the board committee was that occupants of the tent camp have a strong need to belong and matter to the group, as well as care for their friends and partners within the camp. Participants were unanimous in saying that Whoville was a space of belonging for people who felt marginalized, preyed upon, and left with no place to sleep. In this sense, it was the interpersonal relationships and the acceptance and care inherent in those relationships that many participants felt was the most important to them.

Theme 1: A Relational Need to Belong and Care

Participants repeatedly made references to a need to belong when explaining what Whoville meant to them and why Whoville had been sustainable: Every interviewee, supporter or tenant, used the word "family" at some point to refer to how they felt about the others in Whoville (Table 1).

> We support each other. We are all family, said Sarah.
>
> This is the family I thought I'd never have again. It's being able to help people instead of hurting people, said Mick.
>
> Some place, I can tell, 'Hey bro, I'm going home' And I can believe it too. When it's time, I can say, 'Hey, I'm going home.' That's pretty important to believe. (Brian, personal communication, May 23, 2014)

Table 1. First Theme: A Need to Belong and a Need to Care.

Open codes	Properties
Need to protect/possess other Whoville members	Need to be safe
Stressing the importance of caring or feeling for others	Stories of compassion/concern for other Whoville members
	Stressing the importance of sharing resources with others
	References to self-pride "we all have abilities"
	Reinforcing group identity/the products of being united "we don't ever go hungry"
	Talking and dwelling on human rights

> It was a community of homeless people that would help homeless people in many many different ways; many ways of just feeling a part of something, like there is something more than just the alley way every night. There is actually a kitchen when you wake up. People unite that you would never imagine would unite. (Mick, personal communication, May 25, 2014)

A second component within this theme was participants expressed an overwhelming need to protect and care for others within Whoville. It was clear that belonging to the group gave people a specific urge to look out for their friends within the camp. Participants made repeated references and told stories that emphasized this need.

> People die from freezing. They lose their toes from frostbite. There's people we know that's happened this winter to. He almost died this winter from pneumonia from being in the rain. Lost—some of these people need caregivers. We watch out for each other. We don't see people for a day—we got out looking for them. Have you seen so and so? (Sara, personal communication, May 23, 2014)

> Okay, I got handicapped people in here. I got mentally ill people in here. The department services in town have sent people to Whoville because we've worked together and helped these people, not to take them and put them somewhere and make them take pills and shit. (Mick, personal communication, May 25, 2014)

> Those two right there, she's pregnant. They're just waiting for that right paperwork, the right thing to happen. And that tent gives them that security of knowing they're going to have a place next week. (Mick, personal communication, May 25, 2014)

Another example of this theme of belonging is that, in every description of Whoville, participants said "we" when referring to their daily activities. Participants used "we" when referring to even the most mundane activities, such as resources found in the camp. Nora references many of her individual actions as actions of the group.

> We're all trying hard to stick together and make it successful for us. But it's hard when we don't have a stable place where we can be. We talk about what's going on. We ask where people want to move. We try to get people's opinions and ideas for the situation on hand. (Nora, personal communication, May 25, 2014)

> All we wanted was to do proposals for rest stops so we had places to rest … The community is freaking awesome … You have to be united as one. That takes a lot of time and attitude. (Mick, personal communication, May 25, 2014)

It is clear participants saw themselves as part of the group, as they used the term "we" dozens of times throughout the interview. The repeated usage of "we" fits well into the theme of "needing to belong" as the continual repetition of saying "we" points to an underlying belief that this individual is close with someone else who does the same things, needs the same things, and uses the same things. The usage of "we" implies a greater suggestion that this person is not alone in their everyday activities and that this person feels the need to express this by collectively summarizing many of their personal activities as if done in one big group. There is a strong sense of belonging and identity in such word choice.

At least three other major studies of tent cities found that "group identity" played a crucial role in the functioning of these communities (Heben, 2014; Mosher, 2010; Wright, 1995). Portland's Dignity Village and Chicago's Tranquility City members all held tightly to idea that they *belonged* together. The creation of this bond or identity is helpful for negotiating for more power within the public sphere of a city; in all three situations, formerly scattered individuals used their group identity to successful advocate the dominant power of their city for a new housing community. This particular finding helps affirm and further the idea of a group identity as a meaningful, helpful product of participatory communication.

Theme 2: Suffering in the Hope That Whoville Will 'Pay off'

A common refrain in each interview was the concept that the individual wanted to "better themselves" or "better" the lives of other homeless (Table 2). This theme challenges the stereotype of the homeless as only focused on the present day (Loehwing, 2010). Each participant, when asked about his or her long-term goals, said they were staying with Whoville physically because they were

Table 2. Second Theme: Suffering in the Hope That Whoville Will "Pay off."

Open codes	Properties
Idea that Whoville will pay off, their work at uniting will pay off	Wishing/working toward a better housing future for others
The importance of uniting for the common goal of building a better housing	Rationalizing why Whoville needs to happen
	References to "improving or bettering themselves"
	Anger that more is not done for all the homeless
	Talking and dwelling on human rights

committed to gaining a permanent homeless facility for Eugene's homeless. This finding flies in the face of the common stereotype of the homeless as present-centered minds, as Loehwing notes in her critique of the documentary Reversal of Fortune (2010).

> We're trying to do something for the homeless community. We're not just here to have a place to crash for ourself. We're trying to build a community for 60 to 100 people. We can build little huts, maybe have a community garden. Basically, we want a home, kind of place. We say, 'hey, we're going home,' (Brian, personal communication, May 26, 2014).

> I want transition and change so this doesn't happen to other people. Everyone has a reason why they are here. I'd like to see everyone have a home. Someone might want to stay in tents. That's our long term. A tent space. 'Put your tents on land for six months'. I'd like to see everyone have a safe place and stability. (Sara, personal communication, May 23, 2014)

> Some people fell away because we can't find a place to settle the fuck down and make a home. Keeps it all together for me is I think we can do better for ourselves than lying under a fucking dumpster all night. I really think I can do better for myself. That's why I'm in (Brian, personal communication, May 23, 2014).

Notice that participants speak of the success of Whoville in the future tense. Every participant repeatedly stressed that their life in Whoville would come to solve the problems of their fellow homeless citizens.

> My long term solution is really to get everybody into some kind of housing. I really want to get property and do like … build their own Conestoga hut or shack, love shack, whatever you want to call them. And move forward in their lives to get on to better housing. (Nora, personal communication, May 23, 2014)

Where participants did not really see the immediate self- management success of Whoville, what they did see was how their long public protest could pay off to make a better long-term housing situation for many.

> That's what the future is, that we foresee. Ours is just something personal. We're still sponsoring Whoville. This is just our heart's desire. There's so many out there. There's so many out there. You see 16 years old having babies—nowhere to go. They're confused. Mamas—they need love, they need hugs. (Sara, personal communication, May 23, 2014)

Other studies of tent cities also comment on the strength of having a future goal (Heben, 2014; Mosher, 2010; Wright, 1995). Both Wright and Mosher find the activist nature of fomenting homeless resistance means tenants spread a vision to others and to the hegemony of what they want; what their vision is. Similar to the findings in this study, Wright found that Tranquility City tenants were intentionally advocating and disturbing the city for better housing conditions. This presents a potential answer to the critiques raised by Loehwing on mainstream culture's focus on the cliche, present-centered homeless person. "Characterizing homelessness as a present-tense predicament not only legitimates exclusion but also calls into question the possibility or productivity of resistance against it by asserting the primacy of meeting the needs of the homeless body" (Loehwing, 2010, p. 398).

The findings of this study and other studies demonstrate both the power of having a vision and correct the misguided notion of the homeless as disorganized, in-the-moment people.

Theme 3: Difficulty Responding/Living Within Orders From Non-Homeless

Participants often talked about responding to orders from law enforcement, the city, or passersby. In fact, much of their daily life was in response to the laws put in place by the city, such as no trespassing laws. Eugene city codes do not allow for sleeping in public spaces, forming the first hegemonic obstacle for the homeless. If it is literally illegal to sleep on most public or private property, this creates an immediate power inequality for those without shelter, as evidenced in the work on other anti-homeless laws in U.S. cities (Feldman, 2004; Heben, 2014; Mitchell, 1997; Mosher, 2010). Other scholars have already noted how legislative bodies create legal structures within the public sphere that create huge obstacles for those outside "the norm." This third theme really fits with the other studies done on homeless tent cities, in that they struggle against a common, hegemony of city councils that systematically ban the spaces needed by the homeless (Mitchell, 1997, pp. 306–307). Consider the third largest theme, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Difficulty Living Within Orders From the Law and Non-homeless.

Open codes	Properties
Difficulty with regulations	Fear of law enforcement
Fear of people in power	Problems with orders from non-homeless
	Fear of sexual/physical street violence
	Difficulty living within the accepted "system" (e.g., some people only want to sleep outside)
	Fear of injury/death
	Feeling betrayed by law enforcement

Two questions on the interview guide asked participants how they defined empowerment and if the participant felt empowered in his or her life. Their stories often reflected the power dynamics of living on the streets. Participants made constant references to police violence, street violence, and the difficulty of surviving outdoors.

[Norah is narrating what happened on the actual morning the largest camp was shut down, in April.]

> They came in, 50 cops deep, you know. I know they couldn't even go arrest people who had warrants because they were so busy with Whoville. It was rude and disrespectful the way they treated us, the way they lied to us … Everything I owned went—I put it in my bike cart. (Nora, personal communication, May 23, 2014)

[Brian is narrating how a Eugene police officer told the Whoville camp to leave one of the many new camps they formed after police shut down the larger camp on Broadway and Hillyard Streets in April.]

> Everybody else was already gone for the day, bikes and all that. He said if you are here tomorrow, I don't write tickets, I take people to jail. It was a direct threat. In other words, if you're here tomorrow, you're fucked …. That's the biggest cop I ever seen in my life. He was fucking huge, man. He was a monster. (Brian, personal communication, May 24, 2014)

Here, we see the constructs of hegemonic power working against homeless individuals; the challenge to achieve basic daily functions where the government has made it illegal to sleep, urinate, or loiter in many parts of the city. In what Feldman calls an exclusion from the public sphere, the city of Eugene sets itself up as the dominant force in the lives of the homeless, creating a power dynamic that values police, business owners, and housed citizens as more *worthy* (Feldman, 2004). This theme shows most clearly how Whoville tenants clash with the rules of the public sphere and the hegemonic identity of those with more

power. As Servaes points out about the nature of empowerment, it tends to be born from oppression from a higher power.

> He's a business owner here that really don't like us. Yesterday, I had an issue with one of my, one of the kids that just comes in and out of camp. Needs a place to stay for a bit cuz people steal from him, beat him up and stuff… This guy [business owner] comes out and bugs him. He comes out and accuses him of peeing in the corner. Not knowing the guy's mentally handicapped. (Mick, personal communication, May 25, 2014)

> You're always looking over your shoulder. How can you sleep? If you are a single female, which I was for many months out here, tell me how safe you feel when you go to sleep? When they are predators all around you? (Sara, personal communication, May 23, 2014)

As minorities, participants are in a subverted position of power, with the dominant hierarchy interceding for its own interests.

Theme 4: Identity as a Goal and the New Whoville

This theme reflected an emerging collective identity for Eugene's homeless as evidenced in interviews with volunteers for Whoville, opinion letters to the main city newspaper, the *Eugene Register Guard*, a homeless-oriented publication *The Eugene Occupier,* and several pamphlets created by two more (housed) activist groups that formed in response to the Whoville movement, Food Love Rainbow and Homeless Wisdom Circle.

> There is a growing awareness in Eugene about how traumatic it is to be without shelter, and that social services are unprepared to deal with cascading environmental and economic crises. No one of us has a solution, yet together we have the heart and imagination to discern a way forward. (leaflet, Homeless Wisdom Circle, March 8, 2015)

I called this theme "identity as goal," in that the community of Eugene began to see the homeless in a different light or with a different identity. The homeless identity was *expanded* as more people validated and legitimized the steps taken by Whoville. This new identity emphasizes that homeless people are part of the Eugene community, are struggling, and as fellow members of "our" community are therefore deserving of resources and help.

> I'm trying to create an ethos some churches would want to embrace. We begin to be unified. It's an overarching social position. As long as we have homeless among us, we seek to find them homes. We can end homeless in our county. Even though that

> may be ludicrous or irrational, it's still the direction we are leaning. We want everyone to be sheltered safely. Businesses could house 4 to 12 people. (Board member, personal communication, March 3, 2015)

Instead of scattered, voiceless people, who sleep in dark corners or by themselves down at the river, Whoville forced the community to see a demographic that had a *name* and a visible location of *many people sleeping* in a group.

> What Can the UO do for the Unhoused? ... In November, the Philosophy Department at UO hosted a community roundtable on what the university could do to help address homelessness ... here are some of the ideas that were introduced ... participant observation with people who are homeless by social scientists or advanced social science students to assess myths about the homeless, document relationships with the police and other authorities. (*The Eugene Occupier*, p. 3, Winter 2015)

The following opinion letters were published in *The Eugene Register Guard* or *The Eugene Occupier*. They reflect an emerging awareness and re-conceptualization of the Whoville identity.

> If homeless people had somewhere they could set up camps without fear of being arrested or forced to move every day, they could more easily deal with their waste materials. The main thing advocates for the former Whoville and other homeless-related groups want is decriminalization of homelessness and the right of people to sleep undisturbed. Adequate homeless housing would be nice but, given Eugene's city government's reluctance to legalize homelessness, such housing is just a pipe dream. (Hiatt, S., letter to the editor, *The Eugene Register Guard,* 2015)

> A poster I saw driving on Southwood Lane this morning read "Homelessness is not a crime." I am a health-care provider and an advocate to the underserved who has observed this and other signs of the Whoville community advocating for adequate housing and other rights. (Clifford, C., letter to the editor, *The Eugene Register Guard,* 2015)

> "Let's hope by next year's count we have more permanent housing and fewer unsheltered in our community." (One Night Homeless Count, *Eugene Occupier,* p. 2)

The idea of a shifted community identity for Whoville is confirmed when one considers how Whoville began and where it is today. What began as a 50-person encampment constantly in trouble with Eugene law enforcement today holds much more legitimacy and economic resources. In mobilizing the support of hundreds of citizens, Whoville attracted a following greater than itself, which

deepened its resources and political clout. Today's Whoville (now called the Nightingale Health Sanctuary) has inroads in community money, city-sanctioned ground, political representation, and multiple social groups willing to support it (such as churches).

Whoville's identity today is now associated with these many resources, demonstrating one more facet of the success of participatory communication. As part of participatory communication, the support of the community was entertained and threaded into the Whoville decision-making process, helping strengthen the overall thrust of the movement.

Analysis of Results

These four themes answer the original question raised in this study: What strategies did Whoville tenants use to form a movement using participatory communication?

Considering the final mobilization of the community to Whoville and homelessness, the first strategy was the group's ability to form a singular identity. The group's dialogue around Theme 1 "The Need to Belong" and Theme 4 "Identity as Goal" gave them a voice in the community, as many churches and nonprofits could identify a single group with a somewhat clear goal. Giving themselves a group name also gave them an identity within the city council meetings, police meetings, and so on. Theme 1 shows how this identity was formed through the daily work of relational and community maintenance. Through bonding as a group, Whoville gave itself a place in the public dialogue which had not existed prior. The strategy of forming a group identity is also helpful for negotiating for more power within this social landscape; uniting as a group sent a clearer message to the public that homelessness is not an isolated, occasional occurrence to a handful of people. Rather, through uniting, Whoville gained a public space in this social landscape, which challenged the existing power structure, protesting the government's laws on sleeping on public property. Just like Tranquility City in Chicago, Dignity Village in Portland or the forced occupation of Atlanta's Imperial Hotel in 1990, Whoville tenants used the power of a group identity to challenge what Feldman and Mitchell term "the public sphere," which uses legislation to rule against or annihilate the use of public space for homelessness (Feldman, 2004; Mitchell, 1997; Mosher, 2010; Wright, 1995). Rejecting Eugene's old, hegemonic order of who can use public space for what, Whoville created it's own, *new* identity as goal, rebelling against the old definition of homeless identity. This *internally* formed empowerment also body checks the same problems Loehwing raises in her critique of *Reversal of Fortune,* in which the homeless are expected to change their present-centeredness because of an *external* form of aid.

The second key strategy used by Whoville was forming a specific, collective vision of what they wanted; better low-incoming housing and a safe, legal space

to sleep in public. This strategy also engages the problem of present-centeredness raised by Loehwing, in that it became very clear in multiple interviews, that Whoville tenants were *specifically* looking to the future as part of their collective vision for change. Similar to Wright's findings in Tranquility City, the use of a collective vision motivated the group to continue fighting, even when the present conditions were not favorable (Wright, 1994, 1995). So a second recommendation for a successful strategy for homeless resistance is the articulation and pursuit of a long-term vision. To further the idea of challenging the hegemony's prescribed definition of the "public sphere," Whoville's persuasive campaign to the Eugene community, newspapers, and city council propelled this vision to a greater audience, challenging the definition of "public sphere" to a greater group of people. Here, Feldman's identification of the government as a prohibitive, hegemonic body is attacked in its right to define the usage of public space in the face of a rebellious, different *vision* for the use of public space (Feldman, 2004).

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

One suggestion for future research is to broaden the study to include more Whoville tenants and more people in the community who supported them (such as activists, lawyers, and pastors). Interviews with the city council and law enforcement could also add to a deeper, more thorough analysis of the same strategies. Another idea for future research would be to visit several tent cities across the United States and observe the commonalities in identity—building and group—building among them, in order to coalesce a more comprehensive examination of the questions asked in this study. Finally, the recommended strategies from this study can be applied to similar situations for tent cities in the United States. As the economy shifts in the next few years, many more towns may see similar protests for housing among the homeless.

Conclusion

The original research question of this study asked about the participatory strategies used by members to sustain this movement. In summary, one successful strategy was the ability of the group to bond under a common name. This single act of creating an identity led to (a) heightened awareness in the community and (b) a recognized voice in the media, city council meetings, and law enforcement choices. The second successful strategy was that Whoville members seemed to have a common vision that camping out "illegally" would bring attention and action to the plights of hundreds living on the streets. The strategy of creating a common vision motivated the group to stay together in spite of the circumstances and mobilized hundreds of other citizens to their cause.

Appendix

Interview Guide

1. How would you define Whoville?
2. What is Whoville to you?
3. How long have you lived at Whoville?
4. What brought you to Whoville?
5. If someone is living in Whoville, would you say they are homeless?
6. How would you describe your present living situation?
7. The city of Eugene has been posting notice to vacate signs in the camp for the past two months but the deadline to vacate keeps getting pushed back. How do you feel about these events?
8. How did Whoville begin? Talk about how Whoville formed. Who led that?
9. Were there any particular reasons you picked this location?
10. What keeps Whoville going?
11. Are there any unspoken rules in the camp?
12. Tell me the story of how you came to stay here?
13. Some people are calling Whoville an "empowered" tent city because it has functioned on its own for so long. What is your definition of empowerment?
14. This is a broad question, but are you empowered in your life right now? How?
15. What are your future plans for housing?
16. What is your solution for Whoville? What do you want to see happen?

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To "Feel" and to "Understand" Political Struggle: The National-Popular Rhetoric of Podemos

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Abstract

While communication scholars who have invoked the Gramscian concept of hegemony have approached it primarily as a designation for cultural stability and domination, there have been fewer calls for its closer consideration in relation to human agency in the process of social change. Receptive of these calls, in this article, I develop an alternative to the dominant reading of the concept to show its productiveness in the analysis of a political group's rhetorical situation. I claim that such a conceptualization advances the discussion toward a dimension of rhetorical intervention that passes from an oppressive to an emancipatory understanding of hegemony. I take as my case study the national-popular rhetoric of Podemos, a recently formed political party in Spain, which, in the context of the recent economic crisis, is building hegemony by successfully synthesizing public sentiments and intellectual involvement against austerity policies.

Keywords

Podemos, Gramsci, hegemony, national-popular rhetoric, catharsis, war of maneuver, war of position

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While communication scholars who have invoked the Gramscian concept of hegemony have approached it primarily as a designation for cultural stability and domination (Biesecker, 1989; Cloud, 2006; Condit, 1994; DeLuca, 1999; McKerrow, 1989), there have been few calls for its closer consideration in relation to human agency in the process of social change (Aune, 1994, 2013; Zompetti, 1997, 2012). Receptive of these calls, in this article, I develop an alternative to the prevailing reading of the concept to show its productiveness in the analysis of the rhetoric of an emerging political formation.

I claim that my conceptualization advances the discussion toward a dimension of rhetorical intervention that passes from an oppressive to an emancipatory understanding of hegemony, thus moving it from a framework of critique of domination to one implying an active reshaping of social relations. I intend to reactivate a *constructive* sense of hegemony by examining the transition of an emergent social group from a condition of subordination to a collective political actor with potentials to exercise hegemony.

In order to exemplify this perspective, I take as my case study the rhetoric of Podemos, a recently formed political party in Spain, which, in the context of the recent economic crisis started in 2008, is working toward hegemony by successfully building a collective will. Podemos is a Spanish political party developed as a ramification of social movement Indignados. It was funded in early March of 2014 by a group of intellectuals and activists who have interpreted the popular rage and frustration against crisis measures. Podemos represents an antiausterity project that aims at constructing a social pact against poverty and social exclusion by addressing issues such as social inequality, the private debt of families, and reforming the taxation in order to redistribute wealth across society.

Within only few months after its constitution, the group gained considerable media attention after its surprising success at the 2014 European Elections, as it obtained 1.25 million votes and five seats in the European Parliament. Currently, several political opinion pols consider Podemos as the potential winning candidate for the general national elections in November 2015 in Spain ("Podemos seria," 2015). In this regard, taking into account the historical situatedness of a Gramscian perspective according to which people's praxis becomes a powerful historical force only in particular historical conjunctures, my analysis explores the favorable rhetorical situation formed by the organic crisis in Spain and Podemos's strategic discourse.

In order to advance my argument, I first contextualize my Gramscian approach on rhetoric in respect to the existing body of critical scholarship, and then I develop a framework of analysis building on Bitzer's rhetorical situation (1968) in and by which Podemos operates. So, as to provide an elucidation of my understanding of national-popular rhetoric embracing an emancipatory hegemony, I will compare it and contrast with the notion of vernacular rhetoric (Ono & Sloop, 1992).

The rhetorical situation of Podemos's national popular provides a historically situated analysis of the tension between structure and struggle, "objective" and "subjective" conditions (Aune, 1994). Accordingly, I consider the Spain's crisis as the structural terrain that constrains and enables Podemos's rhetorical endeavor. In order to show how Podemos rhetorically builds a collective will, I examine its anti–*La Casta ethos*, the process that turns common sense into *logos* and its *pathetic* capability to transform a-politicized social sectors into a "people."

From Oppressive to Emancipatory Hegemony

In this section of the article, I provide arguments for a conceptualization of a Gramscian or national-popular rhetoric understood as hegemonic—rather than counter-hegemonic—which employs Bitzer's (1968) rhetorical situation as a prism for a materialist reading of the intersection of social historical conditions and rhetorical interventions. Then, in order to situate it among existing and competing conceptualizations, I will describe national-popular rhetoric in juxtaposition to vernacular rhetoric.

While he never explicitly dealt with rhetoric, Gramsci attributed to persuasive communication the power of shaping the social order by producing the social and cultural basis for a common field of meanings (Williams, 1977), by alternatively raising or sinking consciousness (Cloud, 1996), or by disciplinizing social groups via the enforcement of a dominant grammar (Ives, 2004). Indeed, Gramsci, Hoare, and Smith connect the problem of establishing cultural hegemony and an accepted language in the practical operations of power:

> Every time that the question of language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore: the formation and enlargement of the governing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national-popular mass, in other words to recognize the cultural hegemony. (1985, p. 180)

In the specific domain of critical rhetoric, scholars have been certainly receptive of the value of a Gramscian approach to rhetoric in order to link communicative practices and dynamics of power, as well as to build on his practically oriented philosophy (Thomas, 2010). However, while critical rhetoric literature has consistently recognized the constructive and constitutive value of "praxis" (e.g., Charland, 1991; Hariman, 1991; McKerrow, 1989; Ono & Sloop, 1992; Zompetti, 1997), most authors according to Gunn and Treat (2005) tend to operationalize Gramscian concepts, such as hegemony in "negative" ways, as a tool for ideological critique (e.g., Artz & Murphy, 2000; Cloud, 2006; Gencarella, 2010).

Such a conceptualization of hegemony could be defined as negative because by concentrating on the reproductive aspects of the notion, it tends to "negate"

the possibility through hegemony of radical and progressive social change, therefore reducing it to a resource mostly employed for social criticism rather than social activism. While criticism and activism are indissolubly linked, the abovementioned literature tends to emphasize resistance to hegemony and "freedom from domination" rather than achieving emancipation through hegemony, understood as "freedom to pursue other power relations" (Mckerrow, 1991, p. 75).

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) in their discursive interpretation of hegemony indeed suggest a propositive hegemony based on the construction of a collective will. Such a project would imply an articulating process, which consists in the "construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning" (1985, p. 113). While their reading considers the revolutionary potential of constructive and alternative hegemony via discursive practices, it leaves unclear the role and placement of human agency in their framework.

In my view, a more significant advancement in the sense of a rhetorical approach to hegemony-as-emancipation is provided by Zompetti (1997, 2012), who advocates an approach to Gramscian rhetoric that privileges praxis oriented by a *telos* that goes beyond "critical deconstruction or simple demystification of power relations" (1997, p. 80). In his analysis of Occupy Wall Street (2012), he also claims that in specific historical conjunctures, a hegemonic project combining Gramscian rhetorically informed strategies such as war of maneuver and war of position may be successful.

Equally significant is Aune's perspective about the mediating role of rhetoric in hegemonic projects. In line with his take, I assume that applying a rhetorical analysis to Podemos means interrogating the tension between "the structural limitation upon the available means of persuasion" and "social struggle" (Aune, 2013, p. 15). The most prominent affinity between this particular line of rhetorical criticism and Gramsci can be found in the embracement of a similar sense of history: Both advance a dialectically humanist perspective that assumes that "people make history" but within a framework of social and structural confines. Gramsci solves this tension between structure and struggle (Aune, 1994) by the creative potential of praxis (Greene & Hiland, 2014), which in this study is exemplified by the rhetoric operating in a historically determined rhetorical situation.

According to the materialist approach of Cloud (2009), understanding the efficacy of a rhetorical situation entails a constant interception of a given rhetorical practice with the limits and possibilities provided by the social relations that contain it in any given historic moment. Similarly, Gramsci argued that significant social or political phenomena take place only when the particular configuration of social relations operating in a given society in a given époque meets the formation and intervention of particular political subjects and organizations.

Such a view represented Gramsci, Hoare, and Smith's (1995, p. 15) way to navigate between voluntarist and determinist debate on historical agency as well

as his sense of historical contingency of political action. As Morera (1990) observes, Gramsci's historicism does not try to deny historical causality but rather aims at providing a sense of the complexity of historical dynamics "that takes into account the open character of that [historical] process" (p. 115). The preoccupation for a historically situated analysis reflects what Thomas (2010) considers as one of Gramsci's philosophical cardinal points: immanence, which represents Gramsci's consistent effort to avoid metaphysical and transcendental laws and categories in the analysis of human vicissitudes.

In this sense, the materialist and contingent logic as expound above can be viewed from the prism of Bitzer's rhetorical situation by developing his idea of rhetoric as a mode of action, which is generated by the convergence of the orator and the social contextual conditions of possibility:

> A complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence. (1968, p. 3)

Rhetorical exigencies and constraints can be, and often are, tied to materialist concerns, such as the material pressure exerted by antiausterity policies. A materialist reading of such circumstances implies incorporating dialectics (Cloud, 2009) as a logic that governs the relations between the orator and his or her social situation as well as the idea that the rhetorical exigence mentioned by Bitzer emerges from concrete social needs because as Marx and Engels notice "language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men" (1968, p. 18).

When tying this particular reading with a hegemonic plan of a political group such as Podemos, we need to consider Gramsci's sense of historical contingency of political action, in other words, an opportunistic and favorable intersection of the social historical conditions that create an "exigence" and effective rhetorical constrains. The attention for the contingent moment is crucial for a rhetoric that, informed by Gramsci's historicist kind of analysis, considers the historical specificity of a given political project. Accordingly, in the next section, I will inaugurate my rhetorical analysis by exploring first the context in which the "exigence" and the "urgency" of the rhetorical situation emerge.

Critical Times and Podemos's Window of Action

Following my reading of the rhetorical situation, I will treat in this section the recent political and economic crisis in Spain as an "organizing exigence" (Bitzer, 1968, p. 6) expressed at the social, political, and ethical level, which constitutes the scenario in which Podemos's discourse emerges and operates. Indeed, Podemos developed out of the massive antiausterity rallies that took place in

2011 in Spain, a country that seemed to embody the most dramatic aspects of the 2007–2008 crisis. As we shall see, such a context provides the stage on which Podemos exercises its "constrains": a *logos* gradually developing from common sense, an anti–La Casta *ethos*, and a *pathos* deriving from the construction of "the people."

While for Gramsci's historicism, no two historical moments are the same and different historical contexts require different strategies, he is also interested in "historical translations" (Thomas, 2010), which implies being able to draw conceptual parallelisms between distinct events in order to be able to learn from history. In this sense, there is a significant analogy between Gramsci's examination of postwar 1929 crisis and the current political-economic downturn in Spain. In both cases, the difficulty of generating political consent, the persistent criticism against the political class, the fear of populism, and the skepticism toward the parliamentary system have sided economic recession. Crises for Gramsci, Hoare, and Smith should be understood as systemic, recurrent, and fluid phenomena rather than a catastrophic collapses of the capitalist system. However, when severe, crises become "organic" and "may weaken the link between state and civil society" (1971, p. 210) as well as the mechanism through which consent is produced, which, in turn, weakens hegemony.

Undeniably, in the case of Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's government, the crisis became "organic" in the sense that the state has not been capable of harmonizing the conflictive and diverse interests of civil society. That caused in turn a crisis of the principle of authority and hegemony, as the very existence of mass mobilizations such as the ones generated by antiausterity social movement Indignados and Podemos confirm.

According to Gramsci et al., hegemony combines a "coercive" component—predominately operating on the terrain of state—and a "consensual" component, predominantly operating on the terrain of civil society (1971, p. 129). In this sense, the tendency of the Spanish government to repress protests and adopt austerity measures has significantly weakened the hegemony of the ruling group by diminishing the "consent" moment. For instance, the 2012 *Reforma Laboral* has substantially worsened workers' labor conditions, by facilitating lay offs and diminishing their negotiation capabilities at the level of contract bargaining. Second, the government passed a package of new laws named *Seguridad Ciudadana* (qualified as *Ley Mordaza*, "Gag law"), which de facto prevents citizens from exercising basic rights such as manifestation of dissent.

The weakening of hegemony facilitated both the emergence of new worldviews such as one of Podemos as well the group's synthesizing of two Gramscian political strategies: war of position and war of maneuver. Those two notions reflect Gramscian historicist approach that differentiates between the struggle in Western Europe and during Russian Revolution. Drawing analogies with changes in warfare, he considers how the single insurrection or maneuvering against the state could not work in Western Europe because of the development

of civil society as a hegemony site. Thus, Gramsci encourages in the West a "war of position" as the process of weakening the bourgeoisie's influence over civil society, before trying to seize state power.

In the case of Podemos, the transition from the antisystem politics of its original movement, Indignados, to the current seeking political dominance reveals the incorporation of "movement" to the existing war of "position." In fact, while Indignados aimed at positioning itself in the Spanish political landscape working on the construction of a critical consciousness, Podemos targets state power ("Podemos seria," 2015). As Zompetti (2012) argues, "It is precisely when the hegemony is fragile, weak, and prone to crisis" (p. 12) that can make a war of maneuver effective.

Podemos's combining of war of position and maneuver in turn leads to a political activity that acts upon the "integral state" (Gramsci et al., 1971, p. 244), that is, an intervention at both civil and state level. Such an integral struggle explains its ambivalent nature, which comprises the official form of a political party and the content of a grass roots movement: As a party, it aspires to "seize state power" and politically represent and mediate the interests of its constituencies; as a movement, it aspires to build a direct democracy environment that actually defies institutional politics; as a party, it has equipped itself with an organizational structure meant to organize action as a coordinated social body; as a movement, Podemos is continuously and fluidly shaped by constant discussion, local assemblies, and the preponderance of horizontal communication among citizens.

In conclusion, the origins of Podemos are to be found in the "exigence" defined by the context of the recent organic crisis and the consequent social mobilization of people. This paved the way for Podemos's entrance in the political scene by (war-of-) positioning itself in the political map through the generation of a sustained critique against the traditional political class and by "moving a war" that aims at conquering the state. After this excursus of the particular historical conjunctures that defines and makes possible the sense of urgency felt by Spanish social strata, I next examine Podemos's national-popular rhetoric as rhetorical "constrains," employed by the political group.

National-Popular Rhetoric

The historic specificity that has generated Podemos's contingent opportunity consists of a conjunction between "objective" historical circumstances and "subjective" interventions. After having discussed the context of the Spanish organic crisis as the "objective" context, in this section, I consider national-popular rhetoric as the "subjective" account of how rhetoric can be utilized as a hegemonic asset to reorganize dominant social relations by creating a collective will.

For Gramsci et al., the "national" and the "popular" elements are not synonyms but actually distinct aspects united in a dialectical relationship.

The "national" was used polemically to incite traditional apolitical and book learning intellectuals to function organically to their community of reference, such as a nation or a class. The "popular" element, on the other hand, refers to the theoretical and practical need to involve the "masses" in this political project. Thus, the idea of national-popular front combines together the necessary social and historical conditions that can mobilize people and the intervention of "organic" intellectuals. Those are intellectuals linked to a particular class or group who develop and promote an ideology that can help compact different social groups as well as systematize their common sensical views into a collective will, that is, as a collectively "operative awareness of historical necessity" (1971, p. 130) that leads toward a radical "moral and intellectual reform" (p. 132) of a given society.

In Gramsci's thought, national popular stands in specular ways with the idea of passive revolution and its more specific manifestation, trasformismo (Morton, 2007). The conceptual distance between national-popular and passive revolutions consists of the way in which people is involved in the political process. The idea of passive revolution needs to be understood in the historically specific dialectics between revolution and restoration, which, due to its unstable equilibrium, can manifest in different forms such as trasformismo. Thus, while trasformismo describes the tendency of subjects of a politically defeated party to be incorporated inside the winning party, creating a progressively larger social and political base for the ruling group, national popular aims at forming a united front, that is, an alliance among vast subordinate segments of society.

Such a national-popular front represents a superior dialectical synthesis of its distinct components. In fact, both elements, that is, "intellectual" and "popular," go beyond their own limits in the national-popular synthesis. On the one hand, popular common sense sublates from being "spontaneous philosophy" (1971, p. 422) and "chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions" (1971, p. 422), to a revolutionary "good sense" (1971, p. 323), a new conception of the world that tends to gradually approach the argumentative form of Aristotelian logos. On the other, the intellectual by operating as a "constructor, organizer, permanent persuader" (1971, p. 5) becomes organic, which means to feel and understand the struggle: "The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned [. . . .]. One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation" (1971, p. 418).

As we can see in this passage, the concept of national popular for Gramsci expresses the rhetorical synthesis between people's capability to both "feel" via *pathos* and "understand" via *logos*.

In the transition from "traditional" to "organic" intellectuals and from "common" to "good sense," Gramsci envisions a plan for subaltern classes to develop its social struggle as well as their need to develop a particular kind of

consciousness. Such a plan involves the objective of not simply countering existing hegemony but replacing it entirely. He notices how almost systemically any movement emerging from the lower strata tends to be characterized by the absence of what he defines "state spirit" or the preoccupation to produce long-lasting changes that can establish an alternative hegemonic order: "The subaltern classes, by definition are not united and cannot unite until they are able to 'become a "state"'" (1971, p. 52). Gramsci believed that a struggle of a determinate social group should always aspire to extend its victory beyond its social and make itself a "state" thus reaching political hegemony, the condition for the formation of a "collective will" (Golding, 1992).

The idea of national popular as a project that goes beyond a group's social boundaries resonates with the notion of vernacular rhetoric and allows me by juxtaposition to define national-popular rhetoric. National-popular rhetoric shares with vernacular rhetoric an interest in linking language, sense of community and identity construction, and aims at producing through communication a collectively shared field of meanings and practices, as the primordial condition for its emancipation (Ono & Sloop, 1992). However, while vernacular discourse focuses on a community self-understanding (Hauser, 1999), national-popular rhetoric, informed by state's spirit, refers to the phase when such a community goes beyond its social boundaries and embraces a hegemonic project.

Thus, while aligning with vernacular rhetoric's project of capturing transitional, extemporaneous, subaltern, unstructured, and noninstitutional rhetorical practices, this article tries to interpret the rhetoric of another transitional moment. Rhetorically wise, that moment consists of a social movement's development from vernacular and contradictory common sense to progressively higher moments of elaboration and actualization of a hegemonic project, which turns chaotic fragmentary common sense into a relatively more systematic *logos*. As already mentioned, such a passage involves dealing with a question of power "constructively" rather than defensively, thus moving from "resisting oppression," toward ways to actively "assist liberation."

Thus, in juxtaposition to vernacular rhetoric, I define a national-popular rhetoric as the rhetoric of a historic specific movement, which, operating in the context of an organic crisis, is in the process of building a collective will. This process aims at representing larger sections of a given social formation rather than its original own community and therefore has exceeded the necessary stage of self-understanding and self-centering provided by vernacularism. Whereas in vernacular rhetoric language is primarily understood as a way to express the particular right to existence of a given community/group/movement, national-popular rhetoric expresses the discourse aspiring to transform the lived experience of that specific group into generalizable (good) common sense, as the pivotal principle of a new alternative social organization.

Strategically, the transition from vernacular forms to national popular ones can also be identified in the achieved combination of war of position and war of

maneuver. While vernacularism mostly implies a rhetorical (war of-) positioning within civil society, national popular, in a determinate opportunistic moment of hegemony crisis, adds to that a move from a particular location in the civil society, toward the expansive area that links civil society and the state—the previously mentioned Gramscian "integral state" (1971, p. 267)—and aspires to seize political power.

In conclusion, the national popular translates into a discourse that, instead of asserting a community's idiosyncrasies as a legitimate and particular way of living, assumes that in its "particular" there is a "general" that can be extended to the rest of society, in order to "establish the conditions for its own existence as universal principles and as a worldview" (Gramsci et al., 1995, p. 353).

The National-Popular Rhetoric of Podemos

The crisis in Spain (and the way it was dealt with) ultimately created an "exigence" and a sense of "urgency" that was capably addressed by Podemos in the following ways: first, through an *ethos* based on a moral reform against a corrupted La Casta (the caste), the name given to the ruling political class; second, through a process that aims at turning sentido comun (common sense) into more systematic *logos*; and third, through a *pathos* that builds on the a construction of a *la gente* (the people). While the three rhetorical elements are indissolubly linked to one another, for the sake of exposition, I will try to analytically isolate significant aspects of each.

A National-Popular Ethos: La Casta

The moral and political authority of Podemos mainly derives from its capability to semiotically dispute any possible sign of association with La Casta, which is defined as:

> a fundamental component of the political class that runs the country. This is people not representing the citizens but butlers of financial capital. La Casta is a minority that rules against the majority's interests, living in of a shameful condition of privilege. (Iglesias, 2014e)

Based on such an understanding, Podemos intends to eradicate La Casta because it morally and politically failed its own people. In this regard, the ethical superiority of Podemos as *alter* of La Casta is rhetorically constructed by producing binary oppositions, as the party clearly exposes in its Manifesto: "fraternity and solidarity" against "egoism and greediness"; "public spending to ease social inequalities" against "austerity policy"; "transparency" against "corruption"; popular "jeans and shirt" against institutional "suit"; "rational and common sensical arguments" against "politicians' fuzziness" (Plaza Podemos, 2014).

In this confrontation, the apparent demise of the Spanish political class under Podemos's pressure is used to establish a teleological narrative that depicts the former as an inherently regressive force doomed to be overcome by history:

> The fact that the forces of the regime are so worried about us means that we are getting it right. La Casta is realizing that the bargain is ending and because of that they react agonizingly. Such behaviour must be considered as the past for this country because it's necessary to build something new based on common sense, respect and political responsibility. (Iglesias, 2014d)

In the process of antagonizing such an oligarchic regime, both elements of "national" and "popular" gain definition. On the one hand, intellectual and academic professors such as Podemos's leaders Iglesias, Monedero, and Errejon present themselves as intellectually and competence wise superior opponents by the scholastic rhetoric of the better argument. On the other, as it will be explained later on, two key aspects of the popular element, that is, common sense and the construction of a people, derive from the opposition to La Casta framed as a ruling minority. As Gramsci et al. would put it, Podemos's *ethos* intends to construct "an intellectual-moral bloc which can make politically possible the intellectual progress of the mass" (1971, p. 332).

A National-Popular Logos: El Sentido Comun

In a letter preceding the foundation of Podemos, a group of intellectuals urged people to "Make a move. Convert indignation in political change" (Iglesias, 2014a). It was an exhortation to sublate the rage and frustrations for the existing conditions into a new common sense, or sentido comun, that can only be produced by the citizenry because:

> When normal people, with normal needs and normal lives assume that politics is not about privileged individuals with suits but a question of everyday life, then politics becomes a question of popular common sense and things can change [. . .], the common sense is what turns a social majority of people into a political majority and the key is to orient popular common sense toward change. (Iglesias, 2014c)

In this passage, Iglesias uses common sense to reposition the political process from the "powerful" to the *demos*, from elite interests to the one of normal people.

Sentido comun rhetoric represents another manifestation of the synthesis of national and popular elements because it implies the intellectual translation in political terms of immediate material needs of everyday life of "normal people." Echoing Marx's (1974) concept of general intellect, Podemos advances the discourse of a collective effort that generates a communal knowledge. This rhetoric does not equate "common sense" with *logos* but rather describes the process how

contradictory and chaotic common sense becomes gradually systematized into a relatively more coherent *logos* by intellectual intervention. That is exemplified by *Plaza Podemos* (Podemos's square), a highly interactive web 2.0 platform created to host debates. Plaza Podemos welds together Ono and Sloop's (2002) binarism between "civic" (p. 12)—as "the larger community" (p. 13)—and "vernacular discourse" (p. 13), the smaller localized community.

Plaza Podemos constitutes a space that emerges from the particularity of a specific community but aims at a national commonality. It is a kind of proletarian public sphere in which people of different demographics, levels of instruction, and geographical areas are working together in order to create open documents, regulations, and policies for the newly founded political party. In this arena, there are currently close to 100 discussions engaged with questions such as how to incorporate ecological or gender issues into the program, secularizing politics, or whether Podemos should abide to any specific ideology.

Plaza Podemos inherits from Indignados movement a participatory method for developing the electoral program, which is then elaborated by a team of intellectuals defined as "synthesizers," the ones who try to sublate common sense into argumentative logos. The logic that links the "synthesizers" and regular members follows the principle that Gramsci et al. defined as "democratic centralism":

> A continual adaptation of the organization to the real movement, a matching of thrusts from below with orders from above, a continuous insertion of elements thrown up from the depths of the rank and file into the solid framework of the leadership apparatus which ensures continuity and the regular accumulation of experience . . . " (1971, p. 189)

Such a democratic centralist confirms Podemos's will to sublate rather than rejecting the "real movement" originating from Indignados.

Plaza Podemos also constitutes a kind of public that converges around particular issues and aims at establishing an unconstrained arena for rational critical discourse, which, in a contest of ideological liquidity, unites people with "peace and bread rather than ideological factionism" (Iglesias, 2014b). As one of its supporters claims:

> We replaced the ideologically based positioning such as left and right of the old 1978 regime with "common sense" of the people dialectically opposed against La Casta. Now the diffused feeling consists of saying "I am not left or right but I am citizen and I have rights to education, health, home a job." We replaced ideology with common sense. (Garzon, 2014)

In this passage, the author makes explicit the transition envisioned by Podemos from a politics that relies on ideological abstraction to common sense, as a

practical conception of the work organically emerging from concrete popular needs as a collective will.

Another way in which Podemos rhetorically mediates sentido comun is through tertulia politica, which in Spanish refers to the idea of a community of people meeting for political discussions. In this sense, the two main front men of Podemos, Pablo Iglesias and Juan Carlos Monedero, gained public attention with the web or TV tertulias called *La Tuerka* and *Fort Apache*, which denounced the Troika policy, the deeply rooted corruption, the housing bubble, and the incredible disparity between bank and regular people bailouts.

Podemos's preference for audio-visual media as a campaign tool, as opposed to the daily press, reveals a commitment to vernacularism and common sense but also an important message about their national-popular program. Thus, whereas traditionally in Spain daily press is characterized by low readership, and is fairly elitist on both content and linguistic forms, Podemos engages its audience via traditionally more popular media such as TV and Internet. In this sense, Fort Apache and La Tuerka represent two forms of tertulia política that use mediation to promise a kind of passionate political immediacy. In fact, in a political environment in which La Casta seems to be removed from the people because too drawn by its greed, Podemos promises an "immediate" mediation of politics: vernacular, fraternal, and antielitist.

The introduction of a such a new language in La Tuerka is also linked to the intellectual project of what Gramsci defines as "integral journalism," which "is not only intended to satisfy the immediate needs of its public but intended to create and develop those needs in order to extend gradually the area of interests of its public" (Gramsci, Hoare, & Smith, 2000, p. 179). Integral journalism is a pedagogic project of capitalizing on both the common sensical standpoint of the "masses" but also raising theoretical awareness so that the "the public find the difference in the apparent identity and identity behind apparent difference" (p. 181).

Thus, to summarize, a context in which Madrid's politics, Europe's politics, and global politics seem exceedingly far, ethereal like the financial economy that has led Spanish people to this crisis, Podemos appears as common sensically proximate, locally and grassy rooted via its local assemblies and Plaza Podemos. Podemos speaks a language that capitalizes on the social proximity of citizenry and stands as a promise of substantiation of the polity. As already mentioned, sentido comun, in its approaching *logos*, is popular and intellectual at the same time as it exemplifies "good sense," a kind of enlightenment force that aims at replacing "Darkness and ignorance of the ancien régime with social justice and progress."

A National-Popular Pathos: La Gente

While the anti-La Casta rhetoric previously mentioned already provides a powerful emotional appeal for Podemos's followers, in this section, I would

like to focus on one significant productive outcome of that pathetic aspect: the definition of la gente. In this sense, according to commentators (Fernández-Albertos, 2014), one distinctive trait of Podemos is its constituency. Along with frustrated voters of the institutional left, Podemos has reappropriated a section of the electorate abandoned by traditional parties: the "absentees." This specific portion of society is the one most painfully experiencing the precariousness of working conditions, unemployment, and general frustration of not being able to reach "generational expectations" on well-being: under 40 years old, a-politicized, precarious workers, or unemployed. In fact, Podemos's slogans such as "when was the last time you voted with excitement?" (Iglesias, 2014b) reveal its objective to target the disenchanted portion of voters that prefer abstention.

However, the pathetic intervention of Podemos goes well beyond the emotional persuasion to vote, as it embodies the productive power of populism. If for Laclau (2005) the populist construction of a "people" represents "the political operation par excellence" (p. 153), that process inevitably tends to simplify the social and political field, which is reduced into the confrontation of two factions: the "people"—mobilized and organized by Podemos—and the "institutionalized other" (p. 117), La Casta.

Thus, in this particular case, the merit of Podemos consists of having discursively constructed a "people," its political "interlocutor"—Podemos—and its political alter—La Casta:

> There are two groups, the ones above us who live in prosperity and the one below. The one below needs to be aware of its condition, otherwise we are all screwed. Democracy cannot be exercised only every 4 years, with a voting slip [. . .] That is not democracy. Democracy depends on the people, you, going on the streets defending your political power against them. The power is on the people's hands. If we the people do not exercise it, they will exercise for us and there is no democracy. (Iglesias, 2014e)

This passage reveals how Podemos aims at mobilizing "people" through its politicization.

Moreover, the discursive leverage on "fraternity," the catalyzed and polarized antagonism against La Casta, and the "solidarity" among "decent ordinary citizens" (Iglesias, 2014a) created a powerful sense of identity among the people gathered around Podemos (Charland, 1987). In this sense, the almost obsessive reference to La Casta rhetorically serves as a "negative bonding" (Sennett, 1980, p. 28), which refers to the mechanism of interpellating a rejected presence, such as La Casta, in order to capitalize on that antagonism as a cohesive factor: "By knowing them, we know what we want" (p. 28).

Thus, Podemos's national-popular rhetoric focuses on a Burkean (1969) sense of identification but without neglecting persuasion, as the addressing of La Casta is intended to mobilize Podemos onlookers rather than La Casta itself

because "We need to become a people and as a people we need to become aware of our power" (Iglesias, 2014d). In my view, both negative bonding and identification rhetorically express the Gramscian transition of Podemos from rejection of existing hegemony to a level of assertion of its own project. In fact, instead of complying with the language and *modus operandi* of the Spanish political class, the group rhetorically instrumentalizes it in order to expand its social basis in order to eventually replace La Casta.

Again, the way la gente is interpellated synthetizes the two elements of the national popular. On the one hand, Podemos as the converser of the people is capable of elaborating on popular images, needs, and emotions—as Iglesias exemplifies by the way he opens his interventions by saying "we like to dream," and "dreaming is beautiful" (2014b). In a recent speech in Madrid, Iglesias argued that the Spanish people "need to be treated with respect and be appreciated for the insights derived by their common sense" (Iglesias, 2014d).

On the other, la gente is also rhetorically invoked by Podemos as an agent of Kantian publicity, a public that is mobilized for matters of public concerns. This represents the rationale that supports the postideological and partially postclass appeal to the "people" (the people vs. La Casta represents a mythic and simplified kind of class antagonism). This is in my view symptomatic of a hegemonic project that trades the immediate vantage of ideological sectarism for a possible future much larger social body, which reflects Podemos's objective of becoming the expression of "collective will."

Wrapping up, Podemos uses its national-popular rhetoric in order to address its own public (the vernacular moment) but also to organize it into a political force, to elaborate its weltanschauung and to extend its social or political project to the entire society (national-popular moment).

People Make History

From the perspective suggested in this article, Podemos has been treated both as a product and producer of history, because "every political movements creates a language on its own [..] Introducing new terms, enriching existing ones, creating metaphors" (p. 127), which would be then exported to a larger social experience (Gramsci et al., 1971). In line with his historicism, the goal was to operationalize a Gramscian approach on rhetoric that helped us explore the historically conjunctural circumstances in which the intervention of Podemos could provide the adequate rhetoric and the necessary sociological imagination to go beyond the apparent historical necessity of capitalism and its hegemonic establishment in Spain.

I tried to frame such a connection between rhetoric and the construction of new hegemony by understanding Podemos's agency in terms of a rhetorical situation in which the Spanish organic crisis, by weakening hegemony, produced a historical contingent opportunity to build a collective will through rhetorical constrains such as sentido comun, la gente and la casta.

Those constrains were organized within a strategic combination war of position and war of maneuver. In fact, Podemos, inheriting Indignados sustained critique of the system, was able to forge a critical consciousness that penetrated the social fabric of Spanish civil society, thus positioning itself in such a way to allow the successive maneuver to seize political of power.

Thus, if Podemos provided a vocabulary of motives to the Spanish crisis, I think I contributed with this article to give a Gramscian theoretical lexis to understand the multilevel struggle of this political formation. Accordingly, I showed how, in its project to establish an alternative political hegemony, Podemos rhetorically goes beyond its vernacular idiosyncrasies in order to propagate its worldviews and actively shape social organization as a political hegemon.

In the end, what emerges from such an illustration is an account of a political force that, in a global scenario of political impasse of left-wing politics, via a populist *pathos*, a morally polarizing *ethos*, and a common sensical *logos*, has shown the capabilities to successfully feel and to understand political struggle.

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