Colloquy

Volume 16 Spring 2022



A Journal of the Department of Communication Studies
California State University Los Angeles

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Editorial Statement

This issue of Colloquy highlights the achievements of Communication Studies students at California State University Los Angeles while providing a forum for scholarly discussion and innovation. The journal aims to represent a variety of scholarship by students that represent different types and levels of academic thought. Writing styles vary with students' experiences in life and with scholarly work. The journal is written and edited by students both on the university campus and at the California State Prison in Lancaster, and is supervised by faculty advisors. Typically, the membership of the editorial board changes with each issue. Editors aim to ensure that articles appearing in the journal are checked for consistency in style and general clarity in writing. Owing to the breadth of theoretical, methodological, and rhetorical approaches within the purview of communication studies, the editors subscribe to a general ethic of inclusiveness, and they endeavor to treat all essays with this ethic in mind.

Essays in this and earlier issues of Colloquy have been presented at national and regional conferences, including the National Communication Association (NCA) Convention in the U.S., and the Western States Communication Association (WSCA) Conference. A version of Rasha Hanouche's article in the current issue received Top Student Paper Award at the 2022 WSCA Conference.

The editors wish to thank all who contributed to this volume, especially the authors and the faculty who solicited materials and mentored students. The latter include Dr. Angela Cooke Jackson, Dr. Kristina Ruiz-Mesa, and Prof. Sarah Black. Thanks also to Dean Lena Chao of the College of Arts & Letters for providing funds to produce the issue. Thanks also to David Olsen (Chair) for his advocacy to continue the publication of the journal.

Colloquy is permanently funded by a generous endowment made possible by the estate of Daniel Robert (Rob) DeChaine. Dr. DeChaine was a long-time faculty member in the Department of Communication Studies, a passionate supervising editor of the journal, and beloved by his fellow students and faculty.

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A Constant Experience of Firsts: An Autoethnography

Alejandro Ambriz

This essay is an autoethnography, a subjective, storytelling piece about some of the experiences about identity formation and race that have significantly impacted who I am, and how these experiences assisted me in addressing past trauma. To this day I grapple with what it means to be the eldest in a Mexican family and the roles and responsibilities I was assigned at birth. The first to go to school not knowing a lick of English, the first to spend long nights with my parents on homework while they were baffled that I didn't know how to do it if I went to school, first of many. But beyond the roles of translator, document reader and student, there existed a role I longed to escape for so long. In Mexican culture, the men are resourceful, brute, and embrace traditional male beliefs like not shedding tears and hugging another male. My father is like this, and the fact that I am not like him made me sad until I decided I didn't want to be that way, and that I had a choice. It is throughout the course of my life and because of my loved ones that I broke free from the shackles of toxic masculinity that encapsulate so many of us. This is a personal matter that I still deal with today, but one that has improved considerably over my twenty-three years of life. I can honestly say there were parts of me that fit that role and maybe still in ways I have to learn, but life is just a constant experience of firsts.

The first time I truly remember crying over something significant was when my grandmother from my mother's side passed away. I was six and learning about death for the first time. A tender woman, loved by all the people in her small village of Villa Jimenez, Michoacán in Mexico. Tatum (2000) states, "Critical life events, such as entering kindergarten, losing a parent through death, separation, or

divorce, or the onset of puberty, may all serve as catalysts for a shift in how we think about ourselves"(p 9). This abrupt change in my life affected me more so after the funeral ended and it was time to begin the post grieving process. Everyone shed tears and expressed their sentiment, the women more than the men. My uncle would say, "Son, it's okay to be sad but you don't need to cry, *los machos no lloran por nada*," My mother would always say otherwise and constantly encourage me to talk about how much I missed my grandmother. Unfortunately, I was so overcome with grief and sadness that suppressing my emotions seemed easier than expressing them. She has always been adamant about sharing our feelings and when other loved ones passed away when I was older, she would constantly ask how we felt about that. She was visibly sad and would cry, and expected me to be the same but I never was. It was always 'there's nothing to do about it, they're gone and we need to accept it.' My father never really asked me how I felt about it or if I wanted someone to talk to, which I now acknowledge as not intentional. It's impossible to know how to comfort someone if they were never taught to. These stark differences in my parents' attitudes only left me more confused about understanding how to feel. The complexity of emotions continues.

My first encounter with a racist person is one that I have yet to forget, and for a while I 'made my peace with it' until I realized there was nothing to make peace with. This person purposefully acted a particular way because of the color of my skin and I didn't need to forgive and forget. I was about eleven years old when we lived in a condominium composed of primarily white people. At times I would ride my bike around the block and it was during these bike rides that I got to meet Richie. Richie was a polite and outgoing kid, a nice presence to have around. Richie's dad was the manager of the condominiums and had previously spoken to our family when we first moved in. A real serious fellow but also polite, or seemingly so. Richie and I rode our bikes together frequently and were friendly with each other, something his dad was not so comfortable with I later learned. Whenever I took Richie back to his condo, his dad would never greet me and would often mutter something to him as he would go into the garage. At that time, I didn't think too much of it, but I would feel uncomfortable sometimes.

One day I went to drop him off when his dad was outside their condo. He told Richie to go inside, that "it was enough, there's no need to hang out with the wetback kid" as he shook his head towards me.

Wetback is a derogatory term used specifically toward Mexicans without legal documentation, so I found it bewildering why he would say something like that without knowing if I was legal or not. Even if I wasn't, there was no need for such a thing, less in front of kids. He never said a word to me and that was the last time Richie was allowed to hang out with me. While he had never been unpleasant to me, that memory really stuck with me and it would be years until I was able to fully comprehend these types of moments. Contrary to my grandmother's death, I didn't cry. More than anything I felt uncomfortable, uncomfortable at that man's dislike toward me and people with my complexion. N. Nguyen (2019) says it best:

> Racism is more than just a belief of superiority over another ethnic group. Its expression from a belief to action not only has a devastating effect on the emotional well-being of victims of racism and changed their behaviors, but also has an economic impact on communities through crimes and loss opportunities

In the following years, I actively avoided talking to white people and making friends of that complexion. I slowly began to see the microaggressions and preferences the white teachers had toward certain students. The way they would speak to their parents in comparison to mine on back-to-school nights, the academic expectations and more. Though I became more aware of these topics at a younger age, it was not until college that I felt I had the necessary resources to learn more on race issues.

Some events force us to grow up rather quickly. I was nineteen when I got into my first car accident with two of my friends in the car with me. Around 8 pm, my friends and I left a mutual house to drop them off. My mistake was taking my car out when I had only just gotten it and was in the process of getting insured. As I made a left on Woodley Avenue, a black BMW crashed into the back of my car at over 50 mph, trying to beat a yellow light that I was halfway through. It destroyed the back right wheel in the process. I skirted off to the side of the road, spun halfways, and by the time I gained control of the car I was on the opposite lane near a gas station. In a daze, I tried to process what had just happened. It's kind of funny because often in ethnic families when something happens to us, our first thought is 'oh man my parents are going to kill me'. So, you can imagine how bizarre it felt seeing everything spin, confused, and concerned not only for myself but my

friends as well. On top of that, I was muttering to myself how screwed I was and how mad my parents would be.

I was so angry with the BMW driver because he was reckless and speeding unnecessarily. He had his mother and partner in the car with him, and he was speeding. The only thing that stopped me from going to him and yelling was my friends and the fact that I needed pictures of the accident. I quickly learned about insurance procedures, met my first lawyer, and attended my first chiropractic appointment. My car was wrecked and it took about three months to receive the money for the car as the guy's insurance deemed it his fault. Though it was an accident and I was not being reckless, it was hard looking at my friends for a while. I felt guilty for placing them and myself in this situation, and this consumed me for some time. I couldn't help but take blame for this inconvenience that occurred to them. Every time I had an appointment or got a call from the lawyer, my stomach churned.

My parents were very serious with me for some time, but were concerned as parents should be. A few days had gone by without any serious talks with them until they decided I had enough time to process the accident. It was a straightforward talk; I was foolish for wanting to take the car out without insurance. Them talking to me was supposed to make me feel better, but failed to do so and things were serious for some time. The phrase ‘I’m not mad, I’m just disappointed’ wasn’t one that needed to be said because it was in their expressions. It wasn’t until after that I was able to accept the circumstances and truly move forward to a better mental state.

Getting in trouble is probably one of the worst feelings, not because I got caught, but because of how I feel while sneaking around. Parents are supposed to be understanding people with an abundance of advice, yet often they are not approachable. Every time a major incident such as the car crash occurred, it was long lectures and punishments. There was no form of positive reinforcement, no kind words. My relationship with my parents has long been the pinnacle of my life's challenges, one that has gotten much better but not without its struggles. One cloudy day in January a few years back, I announced to them that I had withdrawn from the University of California, Merced, where I was pursuing a journalism degree. To say they were flabbergasted would be an understatement. In their minds they couldn’t comprehend why I would want to abandon two and a half years of work to start over. It was

impossible to explain my emotions to them and how I felt about this significant decision because they were not a priority.

Ethnic families hold education to a high degree and my family is no exception. My feelings were not as important as graduating and obtaining a degree, and this ensued long conversations where many things were said from both sides. Once they understood I still wanted to pursue a degree in higher education, they were more supportive of my decision. I don't want to say they treated me better but essentially, they did. My suggestions were now words of advice, my decisions were less debated, and my privacy was more respected. Realistically, this was the first instance in which I actually stood up for myself. There was a solid chance that they could have taken it the wrong way and our relationship would have returned to something similar to the past, however they accepted the desire I had to leave one institution and transfer to a different institution to pursue a different degree.

For most of my short life, I connected my identity largely to the people around me without thinking twice about why. Every significant event, including these, were slowly chipping away at this idea and my change in degree paths was the culminating event. It was as if I had created a new identity for myself. The self I became afterward was able to properly communicate thoughts and feelings. Coming from a family that is not necessarily emotionally available, this new change in my persona was more like a sigh of relief. Identity is a lifelong endeavor that includes discovery of the new (Tatum, 2000).

Through this autoethnography, I have reflected on particular occurrences in my life that have altered how I see myself on my life path. It is about how experiences change us in ways we don't notice and how it is necessary to reflect consciously on memories. "We privilege subjectivity, personal voice, and emotion in ways that encourage complex and fragile renderings of culture and cultural practices" (Holman Jones et al, 2013, p. 14). Emotion, something scarcely addressed in Mexican culture, is key to a healthy life. Breaking down and reconstructing feelings and memories of my life allowed me to see my relationship with loved ones, especially my parents take a new form. To understand myself, it was necessary to reflect not on why certain things happened, rather what came of them. Change is necessary, it is the only way to progress and properly address the issues in life. I've had to go through many first experiences that shaped me for the better and to this day, there are still many firsts to experience. By opening up about these

events, I hope to encourage more dialogue and reflection in others about past and current predicaments they may not know how to address. Processing the trauma is the first step toward healing.

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Returning Power Back to System Impacted Communities: A Critical Theory Approach to the pervasive power of CDCR

Allen Burnett
Tin Nguyen

Abstract

While individually serving sentences of life without parole, the authors of this study have spent the majority of their adult lives housed inside California's maximum-security prisons. As formerly incarcerated system-impacted communication scholars, we posit that it is imperative to gain a complete understanding of the social and cognitive impact of incarceration on society's system-impacted citizens. We observed that an effective method of examination and supporting the muted incarcerated community begins with recognizing and uplifting their narratives of both struggle and success. A critical theory approach will allow us to analyze the dynamics of the power distribution, and the decision-making process of the California Department of Correction and Rehabilitation (CDCR). We will then assess how the literary prison publication, "Words Uncaged," potentially balances the power of the Institution, and provides voices to the muted incarcerated community.

Key Words: *critical theory, decision making process, emancipation, life without the possibility of parole (LWOP), Progressive Programming Facility (A Yard), Rehabilitation*

Everyone in the prison yard knew what was going to happen this morning when the yard opened. The gun towers prepared their block and tear gas guns, and strapped on their Mini-14s. The General Population (GP) prisoners for the same reason were congregating at the handball court at the far end of the yard, away from the central gun tower, against the dividing fence line between the North and South Yard. That day the handball court against the fence line was more crowded than the usual few handball players. As the Correctional Officers released the Sensitive Need Yard (SNY) prisoners, also known as protective custody prisoners, a wave of GP prisoners made their way over the fence and began their deadly assault. One poor SNY prisoner, desperate for survival, dropped to the ground and laid still, hoping that the GP would overlook him. But like a pack of wolves, the GP prisoners pounced upon him.

This paper begins by assessing the decision-making process of the CDCR through the lens of Stanley Deetz's critical theory of communication in organization. According to Etana (2014), University of Colorado communication professor Stanley Deetz conceptualized the idea of critical communication theory to bring balance to corporation and human interest (p. 4). Deetz states that he is most "critical of decision-making processes that are narrow and biased that are filled with values that have not been carefully examined" (Griffin, 2014, 4:21). In the corporate world, Deetz believes that we, as a society, tend to give the power and control to top management, due to their association with the shareholders. He further states that with control, top management does not necessarily make decisions that are good for the organization or society, even though they believe their decisions are good according to their values and views. However, to be effective and productive, decisions need to include the viewpoints of others (Griffin, 2014).

In regards to the California prison system's decision-making process, it should not preclude its primary stakeholders, the prisoners, for the result of a unilateral decision with potentially dire and sometimes fatal consequences. By utilizing a critical theory approach, this paper will not only analyze the California prison system's power, ideology, and hegemonic culture, but also, the emancipation and resistance of the

marginalized. In a YouTube video, it explains that power is pervasive, the foundation of the critical approach. Ideology has two parts: 1) it "shapes who we are and how we act" (Andonaque, 2020; 2:40) hierarchy is a must for the function of the organization. Hegemony is dominance over marginalized people through reconstructing marginalization as the norm. Emancipation is when the marginalized, through knowledge and education, recognize their own potentials and values; resistance is when they rise above their plight and voice their interests. Therefore, this paper will demonstrate by permitting the system impacted persons (incarcerated persons) to have a voice, like through Words Uncaged (WU), they are able to satisfy the ultimate goals of critical theory - emancipation and resistance - which will benefit not only themselves, but also, the California prison system as a whole.

The paper will begin with a concise history and description of WU. It then will discuss the definition of stakeholders and the concept of critical theory. In that section, the CDCR and prisoners' power distribution structure will also be delineated. Discussion on collaboration and WU will end the section. The second half of this paper will contain the methodology, with the description and process of the interviewees from a qualitative perspective. The paper will end with its finding and discussion, where the authors analyze and evaluate the data. Furthermore, throughout this paper, we will utilize the term "system impacted person" instead of prisoner, because we believe that the term "prisoner" has a negative connotation to it. We want a more neutral aspect when identifying an incarcerated system impacted person. However, at times we will use "prisoner" to keep quotes or paraphrases in alignment with the authors we cite.

Words Uncaged (WU)

In 2015, California State University Los Angeles' English professor Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy started collaborating with system impacted persons from the California State Prison-Los Angeles County to conceptualize and implement WU. The author of this paper, Mr. Allen Burnett, is one of WU's founders. WU has given voices to system impacted persons throughout the California prison system. Voices that were once suppressed by the CDCR administration and even by the system-impacted persons' own peers are now expressed in narratives, opinions, and creative projects. WU gives a platform for prisoners to share their stories without reprisal nor retribution from CDCR or their peers. As stated on the WU website, "the wall that once divided us,

maybe breaking down where our humanity remains" (wordsuncaged.org). WU's first prison journal, *Human*, obtained recognition when it was presented to Governor Jerry Brown and Oprah in the following years. Since then, WU has expanded, in addition to the Words Uncaged Prison Journal, to include the Word Uncaged Working Group in Prison Pedagogy & Cultural Representation, the Words Uncaged Lecture Series, Prison by Prisoners Public Art and Storying Exhibition, and Words Uncaged in the Classroom.

On March 11, 2020, WU was featured in USC Annenberg Media, which highlighted the story of Leimert Park native, Tobias Tubbs, who through WU, "has gone from prisoner to published" (Novato, 2020)**,** and from serving a sentence of Life Without the Possibility of Parole (LWOP) to a freeman in October of 2018. Novato states that WU helps prisoners not only to reflect on their harsh and painful life experience, but also to come to terms with them (Novata, 2020). Tubbs was one among numerous success stories who had participated in WU. Not only does WU assist system-impacted individuals in their transformation, but it also gives them a voice in an oppressive environment, where voicing one's opinions or concerns may result in swift, brutal, and often deadly consequences.

Literature Review

From the standpoint of the average system-impacted person, the decision-making process in regards to the facility that they are housed in is far from their reach. In other words, they have no say in the decision-making process that dictates their daily life. Therefore, it is appropriate to approach the decision-making process of the California prison system from a critical theory perspective. In this section, we will first explain critical theory. We then will apply critical theory to the prison system, discussing the barriers that prevent the average system impacted person from engaging or participating in the decision-making process. Last, we will provide tentative solutions to overcome these barriers, thus, completing the elements of critical theory.

Stanley Deetz: Critical Theory of Communication in Organization

Prison as Stakeholder

Before explaining the critical theory of communication in organization, we should analyze if a system impacted person can be considered the stakeholder of the prison system. In general terms, the normative stakeholders in an organization are the shareholders, employees, consumers, contractors, competitors, the local community, and citizens. Thus, we may categorize system-impacted persons as local communities or citizens, but it would make more sense if we utilized a form of criteria that may define system-impacted persons as stakeholders of the prison system. Darryl Reed (2002) discusses the barriers that organizations face in developing countries from the perspective of critical theory. Reed (2002) provides a variety of criteria to define stakeholders, and they are as follows:

> (a) being necessary for the survival of the firm (quoted Stanford Research Institute, 1963, cited in Freeman, 1984);
>
> (b) being influenced by or influencing the achievement of the organization's objective (quoted Freeman, 1984);
>
> (c) bearing risk through some form of investment (quoted Clarkson, 1994);
>
> (d) having a contract (quoted Cornell & Shapiro, 1987);
>
> (e) being in a relationship with the organization (quoted Thompson, Wartick, & Smith, 1991); and
>
> (f) having a claim based on the existence of an exchange relationship (quoted Hill & Jones, 1992) (p.168).

From the criteria that emerge from these various sources, system impacted people meet the requirements to be defined as stakeholders. For example, system-impacted people are necessary if the prison system is to survive, or they are in a relationship, in a sense, with the prison system. A and E. Reed (1999), again, states that a stakeholder is a person who is "directly affected by the activity of the firm" (p. 467).

Critical Theory of Communication in Organization

The basic concept of critical theory is centered around power and control of which power is pervasive, and is not distributed evenly, where management possesses most of the power if not all. It derives from the idea of domination from the traditional hierarchy perspective. Steve May and Dennis K. Mumby (1999) stated that through critical analyses, most

organizations have been found guilty "of economic exploitation of workers and have created social and environmental harm" (p. 85). But before we continue, we will provide a brief history of the derivation of critical theory.

According to Tricia L. Hansen (1993), the origin of critical theory is largely derived from the Frankfurt School, on which Marxian ideas have great influence. Marx's main concern was the imbalance of power between the capitalists and laborers. He conceptualized that we, as a society, can eliminate "these inequitable relationships" to bring about "the possibility of emancipation" (p. 8). In other words, there needs to be a balance of power between the two groups. One cannot wield all the power while the other is being oppressed. Ventriss & Kuentzel (2005), argued about the limitation of public participation in environmental issues and stated that Jurgen Habermas' influential theory of communicative rationality "envisions a more diverse and inclusive form of discursive democracy that draws on more sophisticated reading and debate among a broader array of stakeholders…" (p. 525). Therefore, the ultimate goal of critical theory is democracy, inclusiveness, and open negotiation, allowing all stakeholders to voice their creativities, concerns and opinions in the decision process from a macro perspective.

Now from a micro perspective, Deetz believed in the balance of corporate and human interest, and that this is possible if all stakeholders have a voice in the decision-making process. However, he also recognizes the current situation in today's corporate world. Deetz & Mumby (1990) discussed the dynamics of the relationship between power, discourse and the workplace; they also discuss that the discursive struggle about organization practice as well as the struggle over economic issues contributes to the configuration of power of the organization. In the article, they delineate the rise of managerial capitalism, where management, through association with shareholders, wields power that is in their own best interest and not necessarily in the interest of other vulnerable stakeholders such as employees, consumers or society. Through ideology and hegemonic ideals, management is able to exercise its power and control of the stakeholders by their own consensus. Deetz (1996) further warns that it is concerning when the ideology and hegemonic ideals lead to "false consciousness, consent, systematically distorted communication, routines, and normalizations which produce partial interests and keep people from genuinely understanding, expressing, or acting on their own interest" (p. 191).

Thus, in a sense, management becomes the dominant force in organizations. Deetz and Mumby (1990) also stated that among all the stakeholders' interests, there are no prerequisites that place one's interests to be predominated; yet, managerial interests have arbitrarily taken precedence over the interests of others (p. 30). Moreover, because management is the one who possesses all available information and is capable of making rational decisions, the power of decision lies in their hands (p. 36). Management wields the power; in short, they are the decision maker.

However, if management makes decisions in the interests not only for the organizations, but also for the interests of all stakeholders, then there should not be an issue. It is when the values and interests of management are in conflict with that of the stakeholders' or are harmful to the stakeholders that management's decision power should be scrutinized. In this, Hansen (1993) states that critical theory formulates three tasks that must be satisfied for there to be some form of social change that may afford a more equitable representation of all stakeholders' interests. These tasks are (1) understanding (insight), (2) critique, and (3) education (p. 6). To accomplish these three tasks, the marginalized (1) must have insight into the forces of the organization that shapes their reality; (2) they must question the legitimacy of the consensus of the organization, and (3) possess the knowledge that would allow them to freely participate in the decision-making process without any restraint (p. 6).

In other words, there must be some form of emancipation and resistance. In the case of emancipation, it is when the marginalized or subordinate recognize that things need to change, and resistance is when the marginalized or subordinate make their stand, raising their voice and actively participating in social change. Thus, critical theory's ultimate goal is to reclaim the balance of power between the management and the stakeholders, opening the possibility of negotiation of power. In the next section, we will analyze the power struggle in the California prison system in regards to its decision-making process and oppression of the system-impacted persons' voices.

California Prison System Decision-Making Process

The information in this subsection is drawn from our personal knowledge, which includes a combined 50 years of imprisonment in the

California prison system, and housing in multiple maximum security state prisons throughout the State of California. Therefore, allow us to begin with the dynamic of power in the California prison system. The dynamics of the power struggle within the California prison system are extremely intense. From the administrative level to the prisoners' level, there is a constant play of politics. Who runs the prison's yards, or who makes the decisions on the yard are minor battles - sometimes all-out wars - that are part of the everyday life of the average system-impacted persons, who bear the consequences of the decision maker above them: the Administration and the Key Holders (shooter callers). For instance, in the early 1990s, the Administration decided to divide the General Population (GP) into two categories. The GP yard will consist of system-impacted persons who do not need protection and the Sensitive Needs Yard (SNY) for those who do. They figured that this would reduce the violence, drugs, and gangs. Nearly three decades later, this program that they had decided to impose on the system had failed miserably. From these SNY facilities, there was not only a continuation of violence and drugs but also, these facilities had generated more prison gangs, from the Deuce-Five, Independent Rider to the GBG. During these years, because of this decision that was made by the CDCR's management, countless system impacted persons were battered, assaulted, raped, and even killed. It created and generated an ongoing war between the GP and SNY system-impacted persons. It did not reduce violence, drugs, nor gangs but, on the contrary, it did contribute to their proliferation. To date, the CDCR terminated the SNY program, (this information is public record). Consequently, this makes us wonder: had CDCR allowed all the stakeholders, including system-impacted persons, to voice their concerns, would the SNY program have been such a failure? Thus, below, we will concisely delineate the distribution of powers of two main decision-makers in the California prison system: the Administration and Men Advisory Council (MAC).

The Administration (Correctional Staff)

The California state prison is a hierarchical organization. All the wardens of every prison report to the Secretary of the CDCR. In any particular prison, the Warden is the head of that prison. From there, the Associate Wardens (head of a division) report to the Warden, and the Facility Captains report to the Associate Wardens. And then the Lieutenants report to the Captains, Sergeants to the Lieutenants, and the

Officers to Sergeants. Last, the system-impacted persons report to the Officers. Therefore we can conclude that the communication channel, thus, the decision-making process, is a vertical structure called centralization, or what Joan V. Gallos (2006) called a "vertical distribution of decision-making power and authority" (p. 570).

From this perspective, the Warden takes his/her order from the Secretary of CDCR; however, besides that, according to Brandy L. Blasko (2013), there are very limited outside agencies interfering (p. 24). In her research on how prison staff come to make their decisions ranging from the daily routine to parole board recommendation, Blasko states that with little intervention, the warder of the prison virtually has absolute power, they're the captains of the ship. Therefore, the Warden of the prison is confident in his/her power to control his/her prison (p. 24).

At the micro-level, the individual prison perspective represents the entire California prison system's distribution of power at the macro level. Thus, an example of the Warden's decision power (collaborating with the prisoners) is the development of Facility A, Progressive Programming Facility (PPF), at California State Prison-Los Angeles County; also known as Lancaster State Prison. Throughout California's 35 prisons, there is no other prison yard like PPF which we will discuss in depth in the next section. PPF is a yard with limited racial segregation, gangs, drugs, and prison politics, where a prisoner may choose a friend outside his race and not be concerned about the prison politics or being assaulted; in short, he can be himself and work on his own transformation while taking advantage of opportunities on the PPF for rehabilitation. In the early 2000s, this was made possible because the Warden at that time chose to think outside the box, and allowed the primary stakeholders (system-impacted persons) to be part of the decision-making process. As a result, Facility A was created, which is a successful program that continues to this day. Now, let's discuss below the system-impacted persons' decision-making process.

The System-Impacted Person

Like the Administration, there is a chain of commands within the system-impacted persons' decision-making process. Unlike the Administration, the system- impacted persons' decision-making process is violent and deadly. In general, and also dependent on race and prison

gangs, every yard has a key holder. What this means is that he holds the key to the yard within his race; he is their shooter caller. The key holders normally take their order from the leaders of the prison gangs who control the entire California prison system. They normally are housed in the Security Housing Unit (SHU). From there, the key holders will have their lieutenants, and they will have their soldiers who enforce the politics of that yard, namely the key holder's decisions, with brutal force. If someone refuses to comply with the Administration's policies, he will normally be placed in Administrative Segregation (Ad. Seg.), also known as "the Hole;" however, if he refuses to comply with the prisoners' policies, there will be holes put in him. Harsh words, but it is a sad reality. That is the difference between the two decision makers in any given yard. In an article about the system of Racially Organized Prison Politic (ROPP), and how it controls a prisoner's daily life through indoctrination, maintenance, and structural support, Richmond and Johnson (2009) noted that if a prisoner does not abide by the rule set by other prisoners, there will be violence and mayhem upon that prisoner (p. 572).

Moreover, there is a formal structure for the prisoners' powerhouse, and it is called the Men Advisory Councils (MAC). The MAC is a liaison between the Administration and GP. Every communication and decision that the Administration made or will make is conveyed to the GP via the MAC. For instance, each building on a yard has four representatives from each race, the Whites, the Blacks, the Hispanics, and "the Others" (p. 572). From them, they will vote in the Executive MAC Body, which will generally meet with the Administration. There are usually four to five executive members representing each race for the whole yard. However, the majority of the MAC consists of lieutenants or loyal soldiers of the key holders of each race. A question arises then: why such a culture of masculinity?

We are living in a culture that breeds masculinity. As young boys grow up, they are taught that "boys don't cry," or "tough it up". As men, that same masculinity becomes toxic. According to Terry A. Kupers (2005), the dynamics of the prison system play a huge part in intensifying the culture of toxic masculinity. He stated that the standard of contemporary American and European culture is the "real man" standard, which is based on domination, and hierarchy control over others (p. 716). In prison, toxic masculinity is heightened. As Kupers (2005) stated: "It erupts in fights on the prison yare, assaults on officers,

the ugly phenomenon of prison rape, and other hypercompetitive, sometimes violent, interactions" (p. 714). Thus, the distribution of power in regards to decision-making is one of centralization based on an extremely toxic masculinity.

Collaboration and Emancipation

Collaboration and Facility A, Progressive Programming Facility (PPF)

Let's begin this section by looking at environmental conservation. Although opponents have drawn divided lines they have sworn not to cross, through the process of collaboration, there are reports on numerous successful cases. For instance, the collaboration of the Great Bear Rainforest controversy. In that conflict, members of the industry of timber, environmentalists, and the community were able to work out their differences in favor of harmony through effective principles of collaboration. According to Phaedra C. Pezzullo and Robert Cox (2018), these principles are as follows:

1. Relevant stakeholders are at the table.
2. Participants adopt a problem-solving approach.
3. All participants have access to the necessary resources and opportunities to participate in discussions.
4. Decisions are usually reached by consensus.
5. Relevant agencies are guided by the recommendation of the collaboration, (p. 319).

We now apply these principles that the industry of timber and environmentalists successfully utilized to the prison system. Due to the security of the prison, not all the principles above can be met; however, four of the five principles for successful collaboration are noticeable and can be satisfied. Facility A can be utilized to demonstrate success in collaboration when all the stakeholders have a voice. In Hannah Fuetsch's (2017) article, she discusses the success rate of the PPF in regards to prisoners' transformation, and its nonviolent atmosphere. The PPF is a yard where prisoner participants may rehabilitate themselves without the distraction of drugs, gangs, violence, and prison politics. They do not have to live their life in a constant stage of survival, fearing

the consequences of prison politics. She refers to prison politics "as the extreme racial segregation found in most prison" (p. 463). Because PPF is an integrated environment, the system-impacted persons are allowed to associate among different races without dire consequences. Without the stress of prison politics, system impacted persons are free to pursue their transformation by participating in positive programs that are offered to them, such as self-help classes, education, art, and drug programs.

Facility A, PPF, is what happened when the Administration allowed their primary stakeholders at the table, adopted a problem-solving approach, decisions come from consensus and all agencies follow the recommendations of the collaboration. Even the MAC of the PPF consists of men that represent the GP as a whole in the interest of the facility, and are not motivated by prison politics, gangs, or races. As Fuetsch (1999) states, "a group of inmates who decided they did not want to participate in 'prison politics' created PPF" (p. 463), a positive environment that is not only safe for the prisoners to pursue their transformation, but also, according to a Correctional Lieutenant, a safe environment to work in (p. 465).

Emancipation and Words Uncaged

The ultimate goal of critical theory is emancipation for the marginalized, and to have their voice heard. As mentioned above, Hansen (1993) states that critical theory has three tasks that must be satisfied, and they are understanding, critique, and education. Emancipation is reached when these tasks are met. Therefore, emancipation in critical theory is "the ability to reflect critically on social practices and to understand them for what they truly are apart from their ideological representation" (p. 4).

Although Words Uncaged is not an embodiment of emancipation, thus, critical theory, it is in a sense resistant, which is a prelude to emancipation. Novata (2020) quotes Dr. Roy, who said that most men in prison committed their crimes at a very young age; they were exposed to various destructive elements such as drugs, gangs, and hateful ideology that rendered them powerless over their own identities. Through writing for Words Uncaged (WU) they are regaining some control of their identities. According to Novata's article, WU now has approximately 1500 participants statewide. Therefore, reviewing WU from the perspective of critical theory, one element and concern that is

crucial to critical theory according to Deetz in Hansen's article is that the possibility of one form of discourse may be replaced by another in the name of emancipation (p. 14). Therefore, Deetz & Mumby (1990) suggested a perpetual critique that does not favor any one discourse, "but rather indicates how any discourse is necessarily the product of an arbitrary structure of interest" (p. 44). Words Uncaged can be this vehicle for perpetual critique, giving voices to those who are not only marginalized by the California state prison administration but also, by their own peers.

Methodology

There is limited research offered by formerly incarcerated system-impacted persons surrounding incarceration and its social impact. As system impacted Communication scholars the motivation for this research derives from the desire to add to the discourse around incarceration through the lens of critical theory of communication.

Autoethnography and Qualitative Research

According to Carolyn Ellis (2004), autoethnography is defined as a form of qualitative research in which the author uses self-reflection and writing to explore anecdotal, and personal experiences to connect this autobiographical story to a wider cultural, political, and social meaning and understanding.

The value of using the autoethnography method for this paper is an opportunity for us, the authors of this paper, to contribute with our own experience to the study. Our experience derives from a combined 50 years of incarceration housed at multiple institutions inside CDCR. We both had original prison sentences of Life Without the Possibility of Parole; then, after spending decades in prison, our sentences were commuted by Governor Brown and Governor Newsom. Moreover, we spent over ten years on the PPF before finally being released. Our combined experience will complement and support the personal qualitative semi-structured interviews by acting as a bridge to qualify and substantiate claims made by the participants, which in turn, connects the prison coculture with the outside community.

By choosing qualitative research, it enables us to gather first-hand accounts from system impacted participants (men who are incarcerated and are formerly incarcerated) allowing them to share their personal experiences capturing the nuances that would otherwise be overlooked by quantitative statistical numerical data thereby nullifying the intended scope of this study.

Participants

We have decided to select participants that had/have been incarcerated for at least ten years, and the rationale behind this decision is that these participants have experienced several changes within the CDCR. Furthermore, they had been in multiple prisons, where they had adhered to multiple administrations and prison cocultures.

Demographics

The participants for this study are a mixed demographic, consisting of African American, Asian, Latino, and White participants, with ages ranging between 30 and 54. In terms of gender, the participants are one woman and several men. With regards to the education level of the participants, they range from a high school diploma to two participants holding Doctoral Degrees.

The semi-structured interviews will be conducted via zooms, collect phone calls, and in person. The duration of the zooms, collect calls, and in-person interviews will last between 15 and 30 minutes individually. There is no agreement for compensation for the participants' contributions; all contributions are done voluntarily. All participants will be advised that their interviews would be archived, and portions of the interview will be documented for this study.

Apparatus

The apparatus used to conduct the semi-structured interviews consist of two personal Laptops: an Acer Chromebook 315, and Lenovo ThinkPad, and a survey questionnaire. The survey questionnaire consists of non-traditional, open-ended questions to encourage personal narration from the participants.

Survey Questionnaire for Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated Participants

Depending on the participant's narrative, the interviewer will use his discretion to decide which questions will be asked, in order to elicit a comprehensive narrative from the participant. The following are potential survey questionnaires for the participants:

1. Were you incarcerated?
2. What was your original sentence?
3. How long were you incarcerated?
4. How many institutions were you housed in?
5. Share about your experience?
6. Share about any social barriers you may have experienced?
7. What is the organizational structure/decision-making process of CDCR?

   Ex. hierarchy or delegation-vertical or horizontal?
8. What about the structure/decision-making process of the prison yard, the GP?
9. What is the MAC?
10. Who do they consist of?
11. Can the average Joe/Jane be on the MAC?
12. Does the average Joe/Jane have any say-so (voice) in the decision-making process? For instance, do they have a voice in what happens in the yard, both from an administrative level and prisoner level?
13. During your incarceration, did you feel like you had a voice in the decision-making process at your institution?
14. Were you in control of your choices?
15. What or Why is Facility A, the PPF different?
16. Do the prisoners on the PPF participate in the decision-making process? (the average Joe of the facility, do they have a voice?)

17. Who created Facility A?
18. How is WU effective?
19. How did WU impact you, personally, and your institution?
20. What did WU provide for you that you had not experienced in other institutions?

Additional questions for non-incarcerated participants:

1. How long have you been working inside the institution?
2. When did you first recognize the change in the prisoners participating in WU?
3. What is the idea behind WU and why is WU important?
4. Share about how WU has impacted you? …….

Findings

In addition to most of these participants having spent at least two decades inside a maximum security prison, they had successfully been involved in rehabilitative programs and released from prison through the Parole Suitability Hearing process. After conducting the interviews, there was one notable common theme that continued to appear, and that was that the system-impacted participants felt that they did not have a voice while incarcerated, but that they only began to change their way of thinking and behavior once they identified their voice.

Tommy Yackley (Yackley), recently released from prison three weeks prior to this interview, and after serving thirty years of his Life Without the Possibility of Parole sentence, stated that "in the beginning, I never felt like I had a say in my decisions". Yackley described his experience as "being told what to think and how to behave." He said that as a result, he became more ingrained in antisocial behavior while incarcerated. When discussing the MAC, he stated that "the keyholders placed who they wanted in the MAC positions for selfish reasons." He also shared that "the average Joe was quickly reminded to get back in their place usually with violence, for speaking up for themselves". When asked in regards to WU, he stated that he was impacted by WU, and after reading some of the writing submissions, it motivated him to change his life. Once he began that process of change, he eventually developed his own identity and voice. [1]

Next, I had the pleasure of interviewing Jon Trevor Grobman (Grobman), via Zoom, on April 27, 2021. Grobman was released from the Progressive Programming Facility in 2018 after spending thirteen years in prison, his second prison term. Grobman's original sentence was six consecutive 40 years, plus 192 to Life sentences.[2] He was housed at two prisons prior to his time on the PPF. After some initial conversation, Grobman began to share with me his experience. He stated, " there were a lot of social barriers in place designed to dehumanize us, discouraging us from talking to correctional staff". He went on to further explain:

> It is a system of control, minimizing us into believing that we were not worthy of human interaction. We were never trusted [when talking to staff], so we couldn't have a normal conversation with authorities who were already looking down on you, which created those barriers affecting people psychologically before they come home.

Sharing his personal feeling impacted by these barriers, Grobman stated:

> I felt isolated, I was miles away from my family in Southern California--finding ways to overcome those barriers and maintain normal relationships was hard in a system designed to degrade people so you don't know how to have a normal relationship, and those brief interactions with the correctional staff made you feel worthless.

Grobman began working in the administration program office in 2009 for the Facility Staff, Captains, Lieutenants, and Sergeants. He stated:

> That experience enabled me to be treated a little better and have a bit of influence. I developed a voice but there was always a separation between authority and people incarcerated. I didn't feel like I was in control of major decisions but I was in control of what I wanted to do with my life like how you wanted to be treated by how you treat others.

When asked about WU, Grobman described WU as benefiting the general population by breaking down social barriers between different groups. For example, the Average Joe who was not involved in any of

the prisoner-led programs, like Men For Honor or the Paws for LifeK9 Rescue, felt isolated and excluded. However, Words Uncaged provides all prisoners with a platform and opportunity where they can express themselves.

Grobman went on to describe the structure of CDCR as "Top Down". He explained that "the needs of the Keepers outweigh the needs of the people being kept". He highlighted the fact CDCR has a 13 billion dollar a year budget, and that the system is designed to benefit the Correctional Officers' career and the needs of the CDCR. The Directives *come down* from the Head Quarters and the Institutional Heads where Wardens disseminate that information to their administration. For instance, is an emergency directive to transfer all inmates who have minimum custody points to a newly opened facility. These Directives do not consider the system-impacted person's needs, and CDCR's concern is they just need bodies. In these instances, the system impacted person has no say so even where to serve out their sentence. These instances add to their shared understanding of worthlessness and powerlessness in their own lives.

With regards to the MAC, Grobman suggested that the MAC is different at every institution, and though the MAC's role is a liaison between the prison general population and staff, there are instances where the MAC is controlled by the keyholders. Grobman admitted that he was once a part of the MAC committee, and he pointed out that, although the MAC has a specific role when it comes to staff and system-impacted person relationships, it is "stymied" from making big decisions due to the longstanding social barriers. From our own personal experience as formerly incarcerated, there were countless occasions where a MAC member would be assaulted by the very community they represented for an accusation that the MAC member was "working with the police." It is self-inflicted examples like these that partially limit the roles of system-impacted persons in their own decision-making process, and as Jon Grobman eloquently pointed out, "stymie" the MAC to raise only issues for the population like shower access and phone calls. Clearly, these rights are invaluable to the system impacted person but are also an indication of the limits they place on themself. Grobman, in his last comments about the PPF, described it as "different" from other facilities because the people there have rare values of making a better life, and garnering their freedom.

Former incarcerated participant Thaisan Nguon (Nguon) was interviewed on April 23rd, 2021. [3] Ngoun stated that he had served twenty years of his sentence at six different maximum security prisons. He stated that during his incarceration, he felt he was not in control of his choices. He explained that his decisions were limited to the institutions where he resided. This was, in part, due to the culture of the particular institution he was housed in. He gave an example of having to attend the recreational yard activities every time they were offered, or be "faced with criticism, condemnation, and even disciplinary action from my peers". He described the organizational structure/decision-making of the prison yards as "survival of the fittest, only the strong survive. Top to bottom hierarchy." Nguon included that the MAC serves as an intermediary between the prisoners and administrative officers, and the MAC normally consists of a representative of each subgroup including ethnicities and gang groups. These representatives must be approved by the "shot callers"/keyholders. He also explained that the average Joe on the facility cannot run for the MAC position, and they have no voice in the selection process. Nguon further explained that the PPF is different because the men there have a voice in the decision-making process and can actually run for the MAC, and if they lose in the election, they still maintain agency to bring up issues to the elected MAC.

With regards to Words Uncaged and its personal impact on Nguon, he shared that:

> It gave me my voice back. I was able to express myself without being censored. It allowed me to reclaim identity, better yet, add to the construct of my new identity as a changed person. Other men in my institution availed themselves to WU and that allowed the culture in our institution to shift in a more positive direction. They had a platform to be vulnerable in the storytelling of their truths.

Thaisan went on to further explain that WU is a platform for progressive men to feel accepted in their expression of self. He said that WU continues the plight of transformation through artful forms of language expression.

Jeff Stein (Stein) was interviewed on April 20, 2021, and his original sentence was seven years to life plus three years of

enhancements. He served a total of ten years and six months. [4] During his prison term, he was housed at four separate institutions. He also felt that he had no voice in the decision-making process at those institutions or in his rehabilitation. According to Stein, "I felt there were barriers put in place by staff and prisoners." When asked about his ability to choose, Stein shared that he was always responsible for his choices, and added "given the available choices." Stein went on to describe the personal impact of WU as providing a voice connecting him to the outside communities; it gave him "hope that I wasn't dead to society. WU gave me a platform to lift my voice, which was very humanizing. It changed the culture at the facility in a good way".

On May 2, 2021, I sat down to Interview Marcus Jones via zoom conference. The entire meeting lasted 27 minutes. During our conversation, Marcus shared with me that he was arrested at age 15 and was sentenced to 25 years to life plus one year for a gun enhancement. [5] "I served 22 years, seven months, three weeks, and seven days," he remembered. From age 15 to 37, Marcus had been housed in a total of seven institutions including juvenile hall and prison. When asked about his experience, he shared that he felt like he was a pawn, where he moved around to different institutions, told when to eat, where to eat, and what type of jobs to work. He explained that he had no say so over his life. When asked about his decision-making process, he shared "I had say in the everyday negativity I was involved in". He admitted that it was not until he was transferred to Lancaster's PPF yard that he changed. He shared that his change developed once he began facilitating self-help classes like Men for Honor's Personal Development, G.O.G.I, AA, and NA. Prior to that, he felt like he didn't have many choices, adding that he enjoys helping people.

With regards to WU, Marcus said that he was not a part of WU, but he "experienced it by proxy." He described the WU as being enlightening and giving men the freedom to express their creativity through writing, through art, to express their thoughts, and tap back into their inner selves. Marcus went on to share that that allowed men to be vulnerable and shed their masks.

Marcus described the structural organization of the prison yard as a "pecking order," and a "totem pole". He shared that the structure began at the "higher up" (key holders) with instructions, and impacted whoever received information, resources, and even privileges. According to Marcus, the structure of the prison yard impacted the MAC; he

explained that at some institutions the MAC was only about self as opposed to being an intermediary for the population. He also suggested that the average Joe was subject to "the pecking order" and could not campaign for a MAC position without first being nominated by the keyholders. He also added that the average Joe had no decision-making ability.

Dr. Tiffany Lim is the Founder and Director of The Center for Engagement, Service, and The Public Good at Cal State Los Angeles. For the last six years, Dr. Lim has also been at the forefront of the first-ever in-person prison Bachelor of Arts program at California State Prison Los Angeles County. Dr. Lim stated that she began working inside the prison in 2015, the year she began the BA program. She described the prison's structure as a hierarchy where the men did not have any say so about their choices. She also shared that the men did not even get to decide which courses they wanted to take in the BA program, or what to major in. She acknowledges that there are complications with the structure of the prison system; on one hand, CDCR wants the BA program to run effectively, yet the institutional needs of CDCR outweigh the personal needs of the participants in the program. They could be transferred in the middle of the school semester and be sent to another prison, because of a change in their custody. Or a job assignment can disrupt the participants' opportunity to go to school. Dr. Lim described WU as a program that promotes a culture of higher education and disrupts the stereotype of what a prisoner is. She explained that the letter exchange program WU conducted with the grad students helped both parties. For the men inside, it gave them a chance to be a part of something positive and to be heard. Grad students got to learn about the people inside prison from them.

Dr. Lim now has eleven of the participants in the BA program released from prison. She said there is a significant change in the men. According to her, they are more evolved than a lot of individuals that have been free their entire life. They display self-confidence, and capability while making decisions and holding themselves accountable. They found their voice.

On May 5, 2021, I was able to conduct a 15-minute telephone interview with Jesus T. (Jesse). His full name is not used here due to Jesse being currently incarcerated; thus, an Institutional Review Board approval is required. Jesse called from California State Prison-Los Angeles County. Jesse was 17 years old at the time of his crime and was

sentenced to 50 years to life. He has served a total of 12 years at the time of our interview. During his incarceration, he served time at three different maximum security prisons. He explained that he was not in control of his decisions. According to him, CDCR and the culture of the prison dictated his decisions. He said there were consequences for everything, and he went along with the flow, oftentimes he had to do things he didn't want to do. He shared that at one point in his incarceration, he justified a lot of his behavior, because he felt that he would never get out of prison, and when he witnessed his close friend shot and killed in the prison yard. This is when he decided he wanted something better for himself. He transferred to Lancaster to the PPF yard. When asked about the WU program, Jesse said it affected the yard; it gave the Yard a voice, and that was something for everyone to be proud of. He went on to say the men felt validated and finally recognized. He also said that the people who participated in WU inspired other people in different prisons. WU personally impacted Jesse, stating that he also submitted writings to WU. For him, writing became an outlet for him to express himself in a positive way. He stated that now he has a voice, and it feels good.

On May 6th, 2021, I interviewed Marcus McJimpson (McJimpson) by telephone. McJimpson was originally sentenced to two Life Without the Possibility of Parole sentences plus two years. He served a total of thirty-two years. He was housed in eleven different maximum security prisons including two terms in the Secure Housing Unit (SHU). [6] When I asked him about the social barriers he experienced, he shared that he could not talk to correctional officers, or prisoners from different races, because there were consequences: “if you were talking to an officer people would think you were a snitch”. He added that he kept to himself a lot to avoid problems or getting hurt. With regards to decision-making, he stated that in the early part of his incarceration he felt like he had no voice in the decision-making process of the institutions he was housed in, or with his personal rehabilitation. He said his choices were limited to the environment he was living in. He added he was living in fear of victimization if he made decisions that went against “what was normal of the yard”. McJimpson also shared that the organizational structure of the prison yard was Top Down Vertical with shot callers (key holders) dictating people's lives. With the issue of the MAC, he said it has been his experience that the MAC was not a fair representation of the prison yard. He said that the people who get in the MAC position usually get it for the “wrong reasons; movement to stay

out of their cell, to run drugs it's selfish and never for the right reason". He said the average Joe prisoner cannot get into a MAC position. With regards to the voting process, "the election is never fair or transparent".

McJimpson shared that once he transferred to Lancaster's PPF, he was able to make "better conscious decisions," of which he accredited WU as having a tremendous impact on his life. He shared that he participated in the letter exchange program with the college students. He said, "it brought back my social skills. I learned how to talk to people again, I am able to open up".

Daniel Whitlow's (Whitlow) interview was conducted by questionnaire. Whitlow was incarcerated as a teenager and sentenced to Life Without the Possibility of Parole. He served a total of 22 years and was housed at 4 different maximum security prisons. [7] Daniel shared that he did experience social barriers during his time in prison. He said that when he first entered prison he was reckless, immature, and insecure. He described his behavior as destructive, combined with his self-resentment and suppressed grief. He created social barriers that affected the way he communicated. He stated: "The social barriers that had trapped me—the walls I put up to protect myself from scrutiny, vulnerability, and self-honesty."

With regards to decision-making, he stated that he felt like he never had any input or say so about his rehabilitation or the institution. He also shared that he felt alienated. When addressing the question of choices, he shared the following:

> Yes and no. Yes, certainly as I got older, because I became accountable for my decisions and had a deeper perspective on what was important in my life…No, because as a prisoner in an institutionalized environment, many of my decisions had to be within the framework of the carceral system.

With respect to WU, Whitlow offered that WU gave him the opportunity to help others through his words, thoughts, and creativity. He stated:

> WordsUncaged represented the first time I was able to become a peer leader and contribute to something that was much larger than myself with the intention of helping others. My institution benefitted from WU

> because the program brought new resources, opportunities, and hope to a population that is constantly starved for those things.

He expressed that the engagement he felt increased, and he became a valued member of that "social space" and was able to contribute through conversation and creative expression like creative writing and music which he said: "Being a member of that social space settled and strengthened the foundations I had needed to bolster my own growth".

I met with Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy (Dr. Roy), the Founder and Director of Words Uncaged, on the outdoor roof deck of his home in Highland Park around 5:00 p.m. From the top of his home, we could see the greater part of East Los Angeles and the relentless 5 Freeway traffic.

Dr. Roy began volunteering inside prisons in 2013, and he has volunteered in five maximum security prisons. [6] He decided to create Words Uncaged after reading writings from the men at Lancaster prison. The writings were so impactful he felt that they needed to be shared with the outside community. According to him, it was the only way that the people in the outside community would be able to understand the impact he felt, was to experience it directly from the men. He believed that if people could share his experience as a volunteer inside a maximum-security prison, it would change the way people thought about prison. There were challenges; at the time there was no filming allowed inside the institutions, and you couldn't bring people in and out of the prison, so he said the only option was writings.

When I asked Dr. Roy what he believed WU did for the incarcerated community, he said it allowed them to hear their words and show their humanity. In terms of the outside community, WU validated the participants by making them real. He noticed that the men took pride in their work even in the texture of the book, as he stated: "They felt good about themselves to see their words on paper—it encouraged their self-worth". When asked about voice, he shared that, "on a personal level it was important for the men to have their work produced, socially and politically it was good for the participants to be able to represent themselves and ultimately to become their own advocates as it gives them a voice in their own lives". He talked about an experience with two particular individuals, Travielle Craig and Tobias Tubbs, and he said that both of these men said something similar with regards to their writing

being produced, and put in the hands of the general public. Both said they felt that they were heard for the first time, and they felt that someone was actually listening.

I delved a little deeper about the idea behind WU, and he said he wanted to recreate the experience that he had after he met the men of PPF. He said that he saw a tremendously wrong injustice, and he wanted to do something about it. I asked him if there was any organization that he mirrored, and he referred to Foucault, whose political theory was empowering voices for prisoners. This was the framework for WU, but he also saw what Foucault was missing; he never went inside the prison; the question then became how could you empower imprisoned voices if you have never been inside a prison. The people inside the prisons are the best advocates for themselves.

Dr. Roy pointed out something that was very valuable in terms of outside organizations coming into the prison system; they feed off the prison culture, meaning they are making their money from people being incarcerated. I then asked Dr. Roy about the MAC, he went on to describe the MAC as gatekeepers. He shared that he was naive to the ways that the MAC operated within the prison culture. His goal was to do away with the top-down traditional structure in the organization, and have everyone involved feel that they have an equal voice in WU. However, because of the vertical structure that existed within the prison system, this equal voice idea was in conflict with the top-down ideology. He described the MAC as institutionalized, a character that they had inherited from the way that the prison system is run.

He described the CDCR's organizational structure as vertical, a military type of organization, but the guards have a tremendous amount of power, and oftentimes the guards choose not to listen to the top. If the top says to run programs, the bottom simply says we are short staffed. We cannot run programs, and they literally control the keys and the gate; they are the gatekeepers.

He sees the most significant change in the new participants of WU is that they have begun to take pride in themselves and show maturity. The PPF is different from other yards. These other places are traditional prisons like Calapatria where you have a strong culture of antisocial behavior but you are beginning to see the emergence of pro social activity. In closing, Dr. Roy shared about the future of WU and its personal impact as he said, "one thing that Words Uncaged wants to do...

our most important goal is to put ourselves out of business. Words Uncaged expanded my consciousness and that was reciprocal."

Discussion & Limitations

As we stated above, there is a constant common theme to these interviews, and that is the system impacted participants felt that they did not have a voice, especially in regards to the decision making that impacted their daily life. The rules and regulations, and most (if not all) decisions in regards to the function of the institution are made by the administration, starting with CDCR Headquarter to the Wardens, and enforced by the Correctional Staff, according to Grobman. However, this limitation of the system-impacted person's voice is further oppressed by their own peers, from the MAC and keyholders. As most of the system impacted participants stated, the role of the MAC is to be the voice of the population; however, the MAC are an extension of the keyholders, serving only their interest and the interest of the MAC, thereby shifting the voice and the needs of the general population. According to Richmond & Johnson (2009), it is a "peer-imposed system of power that guided daily behavior" a power system that maintains the "security," and "protection" of the system impacted person, but in reality a means to control others (p. 566). For if not learned and abided "by the rule of the prison, violence and mayhem would rule their individual prison experience" (p. 572). As our participants all stated in their own ways, system-impacted persons have limited agency in decision-making in their daily personal life.

Critical theory allows us to examine and identify these destructive ideologies maintained by both the administration and MAC to keep the status quo; however, with this knowledge and a willingness to critique and educate, we are able to work toward emancipation and resistance, actively participating in social change. WU defies the hegemonic ideologies of the California prison system by giving the power of voice and decision-making back to the general population through writing, art, and other forms of self-creativities and expressions. Dr. Lim praises WU as a program that promotes higher education and disrupts the stereotype of what a prisoner is. Stein states that it gave him a platform to raise his voice and feel humanized. Jessie explains that WU became a positive outlet for him to express himself; it gave him a voice. Nguon eloquently stated:

> It gave me my voice back. I was able to express myself without being censored. It allowed me to reclaim identity, better yet, add to the construct of my new identity as a changed person. Other men in my institution availed themselves to WU and that allowed the culture in our institution to shift in a more positive direction. They had a platform to be vulnerable in the storytelling of their truths.

Lastly, Dr. Roy ends with "one thing that Words Uncaged wants to do...our most important goal is to put ourselves out of business". From these testimonies, WU in its own way satisfies critical theory's ultimate goal, a balance of power, and correlates with what Deetz (1996) stated: "You think out of the box precisely by bringing ideas together that don't allow dominant ideas to continue to dominate" (p. 199).

There are a few limitations to the paper. First, as we are system-impacted persons ourselves, the paper may be affected by our own bias. Second, all of our incarcerated, system-impacted participants are males and no women. Third, the system-impacted participants are from the PPF yard; therefore, it does not represent the mentality of the whole California prison system. Fourth, the poll of participants is under ten individuals, thus, too small a sample to represent the perspective of the general population. Ultimately, the study is qualitative in nature; thus, it is very subjective. However, to remedy these limitations, future research can be of quantitative studies, with a larger sample size that include both system impacted male and female, and the researchers should be nonincarcerated. Moreover, from a critical theory approach, would implementing the PPF program throughout the entire California prison system benefit all stakeholders, including our communities? To end this paper, we would like to leave our reader with a quote from Richmond & Johnson (2009): "The values held by a nation are reflected in their treatment of prisoners" (p. 567).

Endnotes

[1]In 2018 Governor Edmund Jerry Brown commuted Tommy Yackleys' Life without Parole sentence allowing him to appear before the Board of Parole Hearings in 2019.

[2] Jon Grobman sentence was recalled in 2018 he is currently the Director of Programs for Paws for Life K9 Rescue.

[3] Thaisans' Life without the possibility of parole sentence was commuted by Governor Edmond G. Brown in 2018 at the time of this interview he was home for approximately one month he is currently studying at Cal State Los Angeles.

[4] Jeff Stein was released from prison in 2018 and is currently at the time of this interview working towards completion of his Masters Degree at Cal State Los Angeles.

[5] Marcus was released in January 2019 and is working as a mentor, helping people.

[6] On September 13, 2019 Governor Gavin Newsom commuted McJimpson's double life without parole sentences allowing him to appear before the Board of Parole Hearing. On June 24, 2020 Mcjimpson was released from prison and became an integral part of the Paws for LifeK9 Rescue program.

[7] Daniel Whitlows was resentenced under the United State Supreme Court Decision in Miller v. Alabama (2012). His life without parole sentence was reduced allowing him the opportunity to appear before the Board of Parole Hearings where he was found suitable and released in February 2020. Daniel is a graduate student from Cal State Los Angeles.

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How Prisoners Use Communication and the Affordances of Cell Phone Technology to Support Cultural Organizations: A Phenomenological Study of Racketeering in Prison:

James Cain

Abstract

This study applied critical ethnography to cultivate a clear perspective of prisoners who import contraband using cell phone technology from within California's Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). The in-depth interviews provided insight into a proliferate problem, specifically how prisoner/co-researchers covertly employed verbal and non-verbal forms of cell phone communication features, as well as the employment of internal and external actors in their importation (e.g. smuggling) of drugs and cell phones to support cultural organizations of identification (e.g. their gangs). As an incarcerated communication scholar, I currently exist in this hard-to-reach, geographically isolated cultural space which offered me rare, even Covid-19 inhibited access, to the site, scene, and actors enabling a level of trust with my co-researchers and their history of involvement in this deftly, secretive practice. The research sampling strategy for this report

consisted of inclusionary criteria of prisoners who have collectively served almost a half-century in California's dens of despair. I learned the co-researchers employed social shaping to a multiplexity of cell phone affordances, or features in their arrangement and importation of contraband—all as work to support their individual cultural organizations' goals for power, control, and financial sustainability within the carceral setting and community alike. It appears the co-researchers were motivated to take risks for lengthier sentences as signs of organizational commitment, identification, acceptance, esteem amongst team peers, personal solvency, and to be recognized as facilitators of their organizations' durable sustainability. All achieved through the power and the rhetorically persuasive, culturally political mandate to "put in work," and concertive control, a collaborative, accomplished effort of importations.

Key Words: *agents, cell phones, contraband, cultural organizations, importations*

Introduction

The delicate balance of keeping the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations (CDCR) 32 prisons secure from clandestine cellular communication with citizens in the public sector has created an exigence for corrections officials. Exigence: is defined as "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (Bitzer, 1968).The problem is that prior to 2009, jamming of unauthorized phone signals from inside state and local prison facilities had been illegal. "The Communications Act of 1934 stipulated that only the federal government [was] permitted to interfere with radio communications…including cellular traffic" (Beiser, 2020, p. 67). As a result of the act's stipulation, an uninhibited multiplexity (the multiple-use of features) (Boase, 2008, p. 1237) of cellular communication has resulted in the manipulation of *actors'* (i.e. gang affiliated/associated members, and prison employees) in support of criminal activity in prison. One of many examples of prisoners using cellular technology to commit criminal activity is the non-fictional account of Jared Johns, a 24-year-old U.S. Army Veteran from Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

In 2019, Mr. Johns became the victim of a 'catfishing scam' by two prisoners in South Carolina's Lee Correctional Institution. Apparently, the prisoners had used a variety of cell phone features in their attempt to extort money from Mr. Johns, after his recent exchange of messages with whom he believed to be a young woman he had met on the social media dating site Tinder, and about to turn 18 in a couple of weeks. Shortly after the exchange, Johns was contacted by a man who identified himself as a police detective (actually a prisoner), claiming the girl's outraged parents called him contending Johns had attempted to rendezvous with their underage daughter. The supposed detective gave Johns a number to contact the parents to resolve the matter, and when he had texted the supposed girl's mother, received a return text conveying that if he did not send $1,189 to cancel their daughter's phone contract—as her punishment, they would turn the matter over to the police. Minutes later, afraid of going to jail and having to register as a pedophile, Johns wrote a suicide note to his young sons and family reading, "I'm sorry, I've messed up—I love you all—this isn't what I wanted. Tell my boys I was a good man. Love Jared". Shortly after writing the short note, Johns shot himself. Later, the prisoners were discovered with the aid of a prison

snitch, charged with blackmail and extortion, and each sentenced to an additional ten years (Beiser, 2020, p. 67).

The sadness of Mr. John's story has been unimaginable for his sons and family and yet nearly identical stories of prisoners exploiting citizens continue to this day. For context, "at least 442 service members across almost every branch of the armed forces…have been conned out of more than half a million dollars by prisoners" (Beiser, 2020, p. 67). Nevertheless, catfishing as well as countless other crimes occur as a result of prisoners' use of cell phones to commit crimes from prison. How cell phones are smuggled into the hands of prisoners is part of this study.

During 2018 and 2019, tens of thousands of cell phones were confiscated in U.S. prisons (Beiser, 2020, p.67) while countless others had been flushed down prison-cell water closets, or discarded in some manner preemptively to avoid disciplinary action. According to CDCR's Title 15 Rules and Regulations, confiscation of cell phone contraband is subject to a 3006(a) 115 disciplinary action resulting in the "…exclusion of privileges (i.e. conjugal/and or in-person visits, yard/dayroom recreation), and even denial of parole upon appearance before the gauntlet that is The Board of Parole Hearings. In 2010, former President Obama signed a law making possession of a phone or a wireless device in a federal prison a felony, punishable by up to a year of extra sentencing (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2010). Most, if not all states including California have similar laws which make possession of a cell phone in prison a felony.

In a previous study, the author conducted in-depth interviews of three prisoners who had applied interpersonal communication and cell phone technology to the development of relationships with women in the public sector. The purpose of the research was to understand how prisoners used interpersonal communication and cell phone technology as means for social exchanges with women: intangible resources (e.g. friendship, love, marriage), as well as tangible resources (e.g. J-pays for canteen, quarterly packages, and cell-phone cards). The current study expands the phenomenological paradigm to gain an understanding of how prisoners use cell phone technology to arrange deals for drugs and cell phone deliveries (e.g. importations) with organizational members (e.g. actors) from within the public sector. Moreover, the study is concerned with learning and understanding the chain of communication taking place during the *route*—from the point of purchase to the delivery—between

the study's co-researchers and *actors*—free as well as incarcerated. Additionally, this study focuses on the communication taking place on and inside prison property (e.g. "the drop"), between the study's organizational gang-affiliate and gang-associate, including that which takes place during the distribution and sales of contraband to prisoners. All in efforts to support prisoners' cultural organizations of identification (e.g. racketeering).

The significance of this study is not only the ongoing occurrence of this phenomenon, but that on August 5, 2009, The U.S. Senate Commerce Committee approved legislation (S 251) which allows state prison officials to petition the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for installation of jamming devices which would likely mitigate these and other crimes from occurring in the first place. The 2009 (S 251) legislation has created a rhetorical situation for prison officials, enabling them with the agency to seek waivers for overriding The Communications Act of 1934. A Rhetorical Situation, according to Bitzer, is necessary prerequisite to discourse and resolution involving three constituents; the "exigence," "the audience to be constrained," the "constraints which influence the rhetor and can be brought to bear upon the audience." The process for accomplishing this simply requires facility officials to file 'notices of intent' with the FCC, followed by consultation with public safety and commercial licensing officials concerning ways systems can be installed without creating interference outside prison facilities. Once approved, "public safety and commercial licenses then have 30-days to inspect the jamming system to ensure they have been installed correctly to avoid any interference" (TELECOMMUNICATIONS REPORTS, 2009) with cellular communication outside of the prison. The FCC would then need to weigh the availability of all other technological options in addition to jamming—as avenues toward preventing the exigent use of cell phones from prison.

The purpose of this study is to understand how prisoners use verbal and non-verbal interpersonal communication and cell phone technology as means of financially supporting cultural organizations of identification. The importance of this study is learning the essence of prisoner / co-researchers' lived racketeering experiences—essentially the facilitation and importation of contraband from the context of their incarcerated life worlds. The objective of this study is to analyze motivations for racketeering while revealing an exigence resulting in more dangerous

prisons, exploitation of impressionable youth, as well as dangers to the public. I am optimistic that upon analysis of the results, a scholarly audience will have a clear perspective of the pressures prisoners face as a result of cultural prison politics, and required *work* contribution to their prison cultural organizations sustainability, all while establishing prison social identity. And yet although this legislatively approved path to cell phone jamming technology in prisons is onerous, their ubiquitous use and threat to prison and public safety far outweigh rhetorical efforts for resolution of this detrimental exigence.

To understand the phenomenon of racketeering by prisoners, an analysis of the ethnographic as well as existing data will help provide a clearer perspective of ways the studies prisoner/co-researchers communicatively secured and sequentially orchestrated importations of drug and cell phone contraband using cell phone technology in efforts to financially support individual affiliation and association with prison cultural organizations. The following research question (RQ) will be posed in this study.

RQ 1: How do prisoners employ interpersonal communication and cell phone technology to generate illicit revenue for cultural organizations?

Literature Review / Rationale

A literature review of prisoners' use of communication and technology was conducted to determine which variables to include in the analysis. The following variables were retained: The Importation of Cell Phone Contraband, Cell Phone Contraband, Importation of Drug Contraband, Internal and External Agents, Prisoner Affiliates/Associates of Gang Organizations, Institutional/Public Safety, and Cell Phone Jamming. Subsequently, for a combination of the aforementioned variables, a hypothesis is formulated for further analysis. The hypothesis for the study was inspired by the research summarized below.

Importation of Cell Phone Contraband

A growing body of research findings reveals that correctional institutions are entrenched markets for contraband (Guenther, 1975; Kalinich, 1986; Kalinich & Stojkovic, 1985). The importation of cell phone contraband specifically refers to the smuggling of portable cell phone devices into correctional institutions. Historically, portable cell phone technology has existed since approximately 1995. The importation of cell phone contraband is known to have occurred through prison institutional mail

(i.e. contained in prisoners' quarterly packages), tossed over prison fencing (van der Laam, 2012), and today perhaps even delivered by drones. What appears inherently obvious is that the coordination of importations (i.e. from the community to the prison) requires "communication with [internal and] external agents" (Van der Laan, 2012, p.136). The driving forces of importation are at least twofold; demand for technology to communicate with family and friends, as well as technology utilized for illegal activity (Fishman, 1991; Kalmich, 1986). Blackburn, Fowler, Mullings, & Marquart (2011) point out that "Correctional officers and inmates can generate income from the illegal sale of phones" (p. 3). In 2017, the CDCR reported the discovery of 13,195 cell phones, and another 11,715 phones in 2018 (Sawyer, 2020, p. 5).

Cell Phone Contraband

Demand for cell phone technology by prisoners in the CDCR has driven a "desire to maintain communication beyond facility walls…with increased privacy compared to available inmate calling service plans" (e.g. institutional landlines) (California Council and Technology, 2012; Cappola, 2014; Government Accountability Office, 2011; Shaffer, 2014). What appears to be inherently obvious is that the coordination of deliveries of cell phones in prisons requires "Communication with external agents" (Van der Laan, 2012, p.136). Plus the delivery of cell phones into prison facilities can be a lucrative way of supplementing a correctional officer, staff, or contractors' gross monthly income, as the market could fetch $1,000 to $2,000 per phone depending on the cell phones *affordances,* or features (Gibson, 1986). Marquart et al. (2001) found relationships between prisoners and staff sometimes result in *pro quo* exchanges, and even exploitation of contraband. Prisoners frame their personal cell phone experiences in a number of ways. The Communication Studies undergrad-scholar and ethnographer in this study has previously researched ways prisoners have utilized cell phone affordances (Gibson, 1986) and interpersonal communication with females in the public sector in their social exchange for tangible (e.g. $, green dots, canteen $, and quarterly packages) and intangible (e.g. friendship, love, romantic relationships) resources. While evidence exists that some prisoners use illicit cell phone technology to maintain contact with family and peers (Seinnick et al., 2013), there is increasing evidence which points to a continuing routine of activities amplifying criminal behavior through communications with old or new contacts while in

prison" (Van der Laam, 2012, p.138). Farrel et al. (2011) contend this to be a "key" (e.g. keystone crime hypothesis) which unlocks a prisoner's potential to facilitate or even encourage criminogenic behavior.

Importation of Drug Contraband

Research findings also reveal importation of drug contraband into correctional settings is the result of well-established marketplaces (Guenther et al., 1975). Irwin et al. (1970) explain the market for drugs is a "response to the deprivation of imprisonment" (Jacobs, 1977; Sykes, 2007, p. 632), while also a highly desirable method for escape from the miserable reality of incarceration. The monetary motivation for drug importation has been attributed to "the discrepancy between street and facility costs of [drug] contraband items and the potential profitability of engaging in a contraband market" (p 632). The CDCR reports the discovery of contraband in its 32 prisons as exorbitant. For example, in 2017 28.83 pounds of heroin; 91.77 pounds of marijuana; and 43.55 pounds of methamphetamines were discovered. In 2018, 30.8 pounds of heroin; 131.9 pounds of marijuana; and 44.22 pounds of meth were found. However, CDCR's findings do not reflect total imports and in fact are only a percentage of what has actually been imported, sold, or used by prisoner populations.

Internal & External Agents

Previous research conclusively points to deliveries of cellphone and drug contraband as requiring the coordinated efforts of prisoners and agents for "the delivery of contraband" (van der Laam, 2012). Worley & Worley (2018) explain internal as well as external agents exploit entry and exit points of prisons as points of delivery. Van der Laan (2012) contends that "communication with old or new contacts (agents) while in prison presents an accentuated cause for concern" (p. 632), especially by prisoners with intent to facilitate illicit importations of cell phones and narcotics. Worley & Worley (2016) explain that internal and external agents may even consist of "correctional officers, staff, visitors, and contractors entering and leaving facilities daily, serving as potential contraband delivery sources (p.632-633). Moreover, they learned from a survey of 501 officers in Texas, that when the officers felt "a lack of support from their supervisors, perceived ongoing officer-inmate misconduct among coworkers, or did not view their job duties as being dangerous [they] were more likely to self-report activities involving the distribution of contraband" (Worley & Worley, 2016, p. 633). Worley,

Marquart, and Mullings also found evidence of quid pro quo exchanges in the initiating of relationships between employees and inmates. They explain these relationships may have been "used to exploit staff into supplying contraband" (Marquart, Barnhill, & Balishaw-Biddle, 2001, p. 633). Blackburn et al. (2011) explain "Correctional officers and inmates can generate income from the sale of phones" (p. 633). And as a result of the available, sophisticated affordances of modern cell phone technology, they have become attractive commodities snatching between $1,000 and $2,000 a piece (Fox, 2006, p. 6). In short, without the aid of internal and external agents facilitated through cell technology, importations of illegal contraband would likely cease.

Prisoner Affiliates / Associates of Gang Organizations

Previous research has found evidence that criminal organizations (e.g. gangs) using cell phone technology from within prisons are responsible for "drug trafficking, money laundering, victim and witness intimidation, terrorism, and facility escapes" (Fox, 2006, p. 6). Through cell phone technology, prisoners are able and more prone to continue in criminal activities without fearing detection (Fox, 2006, p. 6). Farrel et al. (2011) reveal cell phones as the potential "key that unlock[s] a prisoner's potential to facilitate crimes or encourage criminal behaviors" (p. 632). Criminal incidents within prisons are ever-increasing among those serving time within our prison system (Fox, 2006).

Institutional / Public Safety

Existing research explains prisoner access to cell phone technology is an existential risk to prison safety and security while also posing a risk to public safety (California Council on Science and Technology [CCST], 2012; Coppola, 2014; Government Accountability Office [GOA], 2011; Shaffer, 2014, p. 631). Revelations of cell phone contraband reveal detrimental implications for corrections officials and scholars interested in "advancing policy and research in areas of prison safety [and] security (Gromman et al., 2018, p. 631). CDCR prisons provide access to inmate call service plans, however, calls are expensive "ranging from U.S.$0.26/min to U.S.$14.00/min" (Gromman et al., 2018, p. 631) making communication with actors outside institutions expensive in addition to being monitored by correctional staff. Most recently, however, in March 2021, inmate service plans were reduced to 2.5 cents per minute for local calls (CDCR).

Cell Phone Jamming

Previous research reveals an evolution in prison security procedures which is able to combat importations/trafficking of cell phones and drugs that support criminal organizations. The ubiquity of cell phone presence in all U.S. prisons was an unforeseen issue for corrections officials prior to the beginning of the new millennium. Most available data on prisoners' access to cell phones reveals risks posed to correctional institutions and to public safety (Gromman et al., 2018). The extortion plot by prisoners housed in a South Carolina Corrections institution against U.S. Army Veteran Jared Johns, and the resulting suicide tragedy, is merely a single example of the dangers extending beyond prisons as a result of cell phone accessibility (Boase, 2008). Combating the problem of cell phone use in prisons has been difficult as the jamming of cell phone signals had previously been prohibited as a result of The Communications Act of 1934. However, detection has not been illegal since 2009 (Fox, 2006). In fact, as of August 5, 2009, "The Senate Commerce Committee approved legislation…that allow[s] states to petition the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to operate wireless jamming devices in correctional facilities" (Senate Panel Approves Prison Cell Phone Jamming 463314, Aug. 5, 2009, p. 1).

Consequently, the senate panel made adjustments to the bill which made the jamming process a bit cumbersome. First, before jamming systems may be installed, prisons and jails must file a notice of intent with the FCC, while then "consult[ing] with public safety and commercial licenses on ways a jamming system can be installed to minimize interference" with official communication inside, as well as public communication outside the perimeter of correctional institutions (Telecommunications Report, 2009, p. 28). Second, once a waiver has been approved, "public safety and commercial licenses [then] have 30-days to inspect the jamming system to ensure they are installed correctly to avoid any interference" (Telecom Reports) Third, the FCC will need to consider technologies other than jamming—all prior to approval (Telecom Reports). In spite of the creation of legislation for waivers enabling the installation of jammers, California prisons, like Lancaster State Prison, have foregone the installation of jammers allowing dangers to persist. On the basis of the aforementioned variable data, it is hypothesized:

H1: Prisoner gang affiliates and associates are more likely to be the facilitators of contraband importations, using cell phone technology as

means of financially supporting their organizations of identifying sustainable ends.

Theoretical Lenses for the Study

Organizational Identity

Philip K. Tompkins and George Cheney (1983) developed Organizational Identification Theory to explain the formation of organizational identities and their effect on organizations. Scholars have figuratively compared organizations to "…political systems, cultures, and networks" (Littlejohn, 2002, p. 283). This study applies organizational identification to inform scholarly understanding of the relationship between prisoner gang affiliated/associated structures of organizations, and the implicit "power, control, discipline, [and] identification [of] organizational enthymemes" (Monroe, 2002. P. 2). An Enthymeme is a syllogism based on probabilities, signs, and examples, whose function is rhetorical persuasion…accomplished through the joint efforts of the speaker and audience" (Bitzer, 1968, p. 98).

In effect, the syllogistic reasoning probability of severe discipline if or when an organizational member does not *put in work* is based on signs and examples of non-compliant members being severely beaten, stabbed, or even killed. Putting in work" is a mandatory role in most maximum security California prisons requiring contribution to the prison cultural organization, resulting in enhanced identification with organizational teams, and the organization alike. The probability of discipline when a member does not *contribute* to the sustainability of the organization is political rhetorical devices reflective of the hierarchies' power and ability to control, or how power operates. Thompkins and Cheney (1985) illustrate "organizational power [as] the ability or capacity of a person to control the contribution of others toward [achieving] a goal" (McPhee & Tompkins, p. 180).

Cultivating organizational identification within hermetic environments like prisons enables members to cope with demands while motivating them to act in the interest of the organization (e.g. being resourceful with cell phone technology, organization of actors for the importation of contraband) (Barker, 1993(a); Sundstrom, Demeude, & Fulrell, 1990). Self-managing teams are also vital organizational structures mitigating the need for tall hierarchies (Orsburn et al., 1991). For example, when self-managing teams pool their resources (e.g. financial resources, cell phone/drug connections, and knowledge of actors able to facilitate

importations), agency, and efficacy, they are able to coordinate financial resources for supplies and ultimately delivery of illicit resources (e.g. contraband) (Barker and Tompkins, 1994). The intensity of this process requires everything to work seamlessly. In a sense, this is where "team peer pressure (concertive control) becomes the dominant form of control" (Barker & Tompkins, 1994). There are extreme expectations of unified identification, and for the teams' behaviors to reflect the organization's rules and norms (Barker & Tompkins, 1994). When there is any "dis-identification" with the team, the risk of disciplinary measures will likely result. Thompkins and Cheney (1983) refer to elevated levels of identification as the "powerful force of control in [a] self-managing environment" (p. 226), q process described as "concertive control," the accomplishment of goals together (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985, p. 226). Germaine to this process are heightened levels of identification. With this, cultural organization team members, with "longer tenure," (e.g. time in the gang/prison) (Barker & Tompkins, 1994) are expected to teach younger, new team members about the importance of identification (e.g. loyalty) with the gang-organization and teams, and their responsibility to contribute to the organization's cohesion, sustainability, and ultimate long term durability. Organizational identity predicts that members will have higher levels of identification with teams within organizations than with the organizations themselves (Barker & Tompkins, 1994, p. 1).

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Social Identity Theory was developed by Henri H. Tajfel and John Turner (1979) in the late 1970s. Their theory is concerned with the manner individuals define their identities in relation to the social group in which they identify (Littlejohn, p. 1781). Smith (1999) and Turner (1975) describe SIT as a form of self-relevance where previously non-existent acceptance is now defined by their affiliation / or association with the group. SIT is also relatable to ways prisoners identify with their cultural organizations (e.g. gang), while also expandable into the area of competing hierarchies. In this sense, the group a prisoner belongs to may compete for positive aspects of identity through controlling resources on the yard, vis a vis successful importations and sales of contraband.

In prisons, when the threat of one group controlling the cell phone/drug trade poses a threat to a competing group, "the effects of identification increase" (Cooper & Fazio, 1986, p. 1782). As "the history of tense relations" (Ducket & Mphuthing, 1998, p. 1782) relating to the

"competition for resources" increases (Cooper & Fazio, 1986, p. 1782) the political structures also tend to increase (Islam, 2002). A prisoner could, in the context of increasing their social standing, independently reach out or network with affiliated (or associated) group members through verbal and non-verbal forms of communication and a multiplexity of cell phone features to arrange, purchase, and deliver contraband. Tajfel & Turner (1979) would likely view this scenario as a "motivation behind identification [with an] organization" (p.1782). Swan (1983) might argue this to be an act of uncertainty reduction, in which a prisoner seeking esteem from his group thinks outside the box through risky importations of illicit resources. For this study, social identity is a good fit for understanding why prisoners are willing to take risks which threaten their very future for opportunities of parole and freedom.

Affordance Theory

James Gibson (1986) developed Affordance Theory to explain how the perceived utility of an artifact is derived from environmental stimulus. He conceptualized affordance as the relationship between an actor's utilization of an object based on the perception of its most effective use. Within the framework of affordance is the concept of its construct. A less sophisticated construct could be as simple as the effective use of available features to frame an experience. For example, a prisoner might frame their cell phone experience through an interpretation of its utility, although not necessarily create uses through their personal interpretation (Schrock, 2015). Ball-Rokeach (1985) suggests that perception of utility is developed in relation to goals" (p.1233). American Historian David Nye (1997) exclaims, "Technology may be seen as a way for elites to control the masses" (Baym, 2010, p. 28).

Nancy Baym (2010) discloses the communication affordances perspective "privileges [neither] technological determinism [nor] social construction" of technology (p. 1233), and instead "highlights micro-level interactions between social and technical actors" (Neff et al., 2012, p. 1233). However, when technologies like cell phone mediums are new there is a natural tendency to explain the consequences of their uses as technologically determined (Baym, 2010, p. 24), when in fact in the "social construction of technology…people are primary sources of change" (Baym, 2010, p. 24), both in developmental affordance and uses of technology.

Moreover, Baym (2010) expresses that when technologically deterministic and social construction of technology flow bilaterally, they result in a social shaping orientation (Baym, 2010, p. 24). Faraj & Azad (2013) suggest the affordances theory as a communication technology concept "is broader than buttons, screens, and operating systems of mobile devices" (2013, p. 255). Schrock (2015) adds, "features are also constantly in flux on platforms such as Facebook" which complicates assumptions of the theory's technological affordance perspective (p. 1229-1246). Gorgin (2006) tends to agree with Schrock, by adding, that cell phones should be viewed primarily as a technology maintaining, "as much as technology shapes social phenomenon, social happenings shape technology (p. 171). So, while a cell phone's technological affordance may shape a prisoner's ability to arrange drug deals, route to and eventually inside the prison industrial complex, it is the technological affordances which actually enable the shaping of affordances like encryption, texting, Google Earth, and other technological features.

Methodology

This study is conducted using the qualitative phenomenological in-depth interview procedure used by M. Englander (2012) as the means for exploring the affordances of cell phone technology; the purpose is to understand how prisoners serving decades in the CDCR achieve social and organizational identification through resourcefulness to arrange the importation of contraband in their financial support of cultural organizations. This procedurally respondent style of interviewing was used and made popular by social scientist Paul Lazarsfeld (1944) in his research of media effects utilizing open-ended survey questionnaires. Lindlof & Taylor (2019) tell us that "critical ethnographers engage with life worlds inhabited by disenfranchised, forgotten, and stigmatized groups" (e.g. the incarcerated). In qualitative communication research, critical ethnography is a preferred method of exploring real-life applications of modern critical theory (Madison, 2012). This study's group sampling strategy included the application of criterion sampling of two male prisoners with the inclusionary criteria of having arranged importations of contraband through the illegal use of cell phone technology for the illicit purpose of raising revenue for their cultural organization. The prisoners at the time of their interviews were in their 30s and late 40s. The interview questions included a variation of closed-ended, open-ended, specifying, interpreting, and probing questions.

The protocol strategy for conducting this research study included scheduling co-researcher interviews around their schedules so as not to interrupt work or "Paws for Life K9 Rescue (PFL) canine training obligations. I recognize the importance of being sensitive to a prisoner's program, or daily routine, which for most well-adjusted prisoners is all important, even monolithic. According to psychologist and pro-vice chancellor of Deakin University, Joe Graffam (2018), "It is common for prisoners to have become 'dependent' on strict routines and rules" (p. 1). Quite simply, any deviation from one's program (e.g. like a depth interview) can be a source of annoyance and even dysphoria because often a program is all that a prisoner has which cannot be taken away from them.

The field site for the interviews was within the Facility-A yard perimeter on the afternoon of Monday, October 5, 2020. I anticipated aspects of protocol to be inhibited by the logistics of arranging interviews with my co-researchers due to a restrictive modified program of housing unit yard rotations due to CDCR's stay-in-cell measure to protect incarcerated populations from the Covid-19 epidemic. My solution for navigating the short window of opportunity with my co-researchers required effective use of the allotted 3-hours of designated recreation time. Assistant Professor of Communications, Dr. Cynthia Wang (2013) suggests "…the amount of time over which one has agency" could be conceptualized as 'temporal capital' (p. 2). I maximized the personal efficacy of temporal capital by accomplishing two complex interviews during Facility A5's short 3-hour window of stipulated yard recreation time. For meteorological context on the day of the interviews, a steady south-westerly breeze persisted at approximately 30 knots creating containment problems with accumulating data.

The logistics for procurement and management of resources necessary for conducting this study were solely limited to the time and effort of a single ethnographer, the short commute from the 6' x 10' cell 227 in A5 where I am housed—across the tier to the steel grated stairwell to the dayroom below, to the rotunda, and out to the facility's yard site and the concrete picnic table #1 for the first interview on the north-section of the facilities yard. Upon completion of the first interview, I traversed south to a bench bordering the facility's baseball field. There were no costs incurred other than the time vested in conducting interviews of the co-researchers, pencil leads, and standard white paper. In short, there was no need for grants, a budget, or a system to manage the project's accounts.

For anonymity, the study's sample of interviewees are referred to as co-researcher-s—C1 and C2.

The first interviewee was co-researcher 1 (C1), a 48-year-old Mexican, Apache Indian, and Filipino male who began his sentence of 25 to life for 2nd degree murder with a gun enhancement in 1995. I selected C1 because of his previous use of cell phone technology to arrange deals for the purchase, delivery, and importation of contraband as support during his affiliation with a Southern Mexican gang. I believe as a result of his experiences that a vast reservoir of data could be unearthed for this and perhaps future studies. The now middle-aged, yet very physically fit Mexican (multicultural) interviewee grew up in Los Angeles, becoming a gang member in his early teens preparing him for a gang-affiliated life with some of CDCR's most treacherous felons. Throughout our 43-minute interview, while sitting at the #1 picnic table, C1 thoughtfully engaged my questions while shaded by a wide-brimmed sombrero-type hat and dark sunglasses. Notwithstanding, he clearly articulated responses to my questions, and openly expressed emotions, validating his powerful memories of arranging highly complex routes of delivery through varied forms of communication and cell phone technology, while later expressing regret for the many people he harmed as well as for the self/organizational interested financial rewards which resulted from his illicit deals.

The second interviewee was co-researcher 2 (C2), a German-American who had begun his sentence of 15-years-to-life for 2nd-degree murder beginning in 2007. I selected C2 because of his previous use of cell phone technology to arrange deals for the purchases, delivery, and importation of contraband in support of his association with a notorious white gang in prison. How he navigated the complexities of these arrangements while staying safe is of great interest to this study, and should be a story that is filled with meanings that some may relate to. Although the facilities yard is a semi-public site, it is a familiar one and busy enough with perimeter yard traffic that we had adequate privacy to conduct the interview. Our interview was uninterrupted and went off with complete success.

Analysis & Findings

The findings from the depth interviews revealed answers to the study's research question, while also providing support for its hypothesis. The study's research question: How do prisoners use

communication and cell phone technology to generate illicit revenue for prison cultural organizations? Both of the prisoner co-researchers detailed importing contraband resources using varied forms of verbal and non-verbal communication with cell phone technological features as means for operating illegal businesses as support for their identified cultural organizations' financial sustainability. The study's hypothesis states: Prisoner gang affiliates/associates are more likely to facilitate importations of contraband as a result of the affordance of cell phone technology, as viable means for supporting social and organizational identification ends. From the study's purely descriptive/interpretive phenomenological findings, it is clear the co-researchers' affiliated and associated identification with their respective cultural organizations is evident in their motivations to further practicable organizational goals. The following results from the interviews provide context for the study's findings while contributing to a relatively obscure area of inquiry by revealing how once contraband is in the control of gang members of the organization, it becomes a liquid-able resource through which cultural organizations exert power, maintain control, sustainability, and ultimately result in an increase of identification for its members. The following findings are within the paradigm of the father of modern phenomenology, Edmund Husserl's (1964) perspective on essences, or in this instance, the lived experiences of a gang-affiliated, and gang-associated prisoner.

Co-researcher One

My first co-researcher described his program in prison openly and with clarity. His days while using cell phone technology began when he woke up: checking messages on his cell phone; surveilling the external and internal environment of his surroundings by way of the narrow windows at the front and rear of his cell. He would then wash his face, brush his teeth, enjoy a cup of coffee, and then wake up his celly in the process of gathering contraband in his possession (e.g. cell phones/drugs) to "send it out" to other organizational stakeholders (e.g. members of his gang), all prior to reporting to his work assignment as an ADA worker in Salinas State Prison—a notoriously violent level IV prison in Monterey County. Once reporting to work, he walks to the dining hall for breakfast and remains away from his phone till 9 P.M. Until then, he enjoys recreation in the yard including: basketball and working out, or activities in the dayroom—all depending on whether his building falls on the allotted yard rotation day. He said, using his cell phone "depended on when the

floor officer secured the bar-lock"—a secondary locking mechanism which locks the tiers in addition to the already locked doors. He explained that minimizing the risk of using his phone meant taking the precaution of only using it only at certain times, thus being discreet and mitigating suspicion from officers working in his housing unit. He told me, as he leaned forward glancing to the right to acknowledge a passing acquaintance, "having a cell phone was a necessity to my program and ability to make deals for my gang" and despite the occasional sociability with transient prisoners, never missed a beat in our interview.

My co-researcher told me he was able to purchase a cell phone with money received from family and friends. He said once he acquired a cell phone, it opened near unlimited opportunities for arranging and implementing plans for an illegal business (e.g. importations). He explained, "I would get involved in certain deals where we (e.g. himself and members of the cultural organization—gang) would pool money to buy drugs and phones—usually having people (e.g. societal gang members) buy phones off the Internet." As the interview continues, C1 expresses himself in a quite spirited manner; glasses now removed, analogic codes in full affect—verified by his shimmering eyes and coinciding with kinesics—the non-verbal hand gestures coinciding with the account, illustrating, "We imported three kinds of phones. Phones purchased on the internet for $20 sold for $1,500, $50 phones sold for $2,000, and $100 phones sold for $2,500." Accordingly, he went on to share, "We'd arrange deals for 50 at a time [including chargers], as well as arrange lucrative deals for heroin, methamphetamine, and weed depending on the client(s) [needs]."

Additionally, C1 clarified that importing such a significant amount of contraband required the assistance of 6-10 gang-affiliated actors. Leaning forward once again and with significant effect in his facial expressions quietly explained, "The delivery process worked like this. I would call somebody (e.g. a fellow gang member in the public sector) who would take the cell phones and drugs we'd arranged, and they'd deliver them to friends who were friends with *free staff* workers in the prison. The prison staff member would then bring the cell phones and drugs into the prison—it was a network." C1 went on to explain, it was his influence over the neighborhood he had come from which helped facilitate each process in the route—thus making the entire transaction possible. He said, "The little homey's (e.g. gang idiom for younger gang members—or agents for the purpose of this study) were anxious to help

me accomplish the deals I needed to get done. Plus, they were getting a cut". At this point, I was unclear what a cut meant denominationally however, felt prodding might distract the flow of the interview so I proceeded with the interview. So far, I notice social identity influencing C1's need to bolster his identity with the gang thus exerting the social power of his influence as the gang's yard "shot-caller" to achieve organizational goals within the prison. It is also apparent, through the resourcefulness of these individual interactions using cell phone technology, that he appears to be building self-identification with the organization. It is also becoming clear how the creation of revenue is vital to the existence and relative health of the organization.

My co-researcher described the organizing of external, societal gang member agents in the facilitation of deals for contraband as somewhat of a fishing trip. He said when he called his neighborhood homies, he would inquire which of them were doing well in their own illicit businesses in the community. "I'd say, let me get their number so we can do business." He expounded, "Doing business with successful [illicit] business entrepreneurs in his gang meant the ability to arrange successful deals more reliably—and at competitive rates. He told me communication during these dealings involved the use of explicit language to eliminate distorted, or misunderstood communication. However, he said language also depended on who his celly was at a given time. In these cases, he explained, "I'd communicate by texting—so my celly wouldn't know my business." When I asked how many people he would need to communicate with using his cell phone—to arrange for the contraband to make it into the prison, he looked down and then off into the distance as if calculating his conversations—then responding, "It would usually require contacting 6-10 people over the cell phone to get each load into the prison—and every one of these people would get a cut." I once again avoided the specificity of "a cut" as I did not want to distract from the interview flow, therefore, we continued.

My co-researcher told me that on many occasions the interpersonal communication he used over his cell phone, during the facilitation of routes to and inside the prison, was discreet. Many interpersonal communications included expressions as simple as, "Thank you; it landed, and payment is there." The unified business and communicative efforts of arranging such risky deliveries of contraband reveal a Gestalt orientation, a common ideal within Social Identity Theory. Gestalt is a unified pattern which cannot be discerned simply by the sum of its parts.I

notice at this point of the interview, that most of C1's identification with his prison cultural organization is confined to identification with select members within his group, as evidenced by discreet communication while certain cells are present, as well as how he has chosen only certain confederates for his route to and inside the prison.

My co-researcher describes the delivery of contraband and communication between himself and prison-free staff (e.g. free actors), including the transportation of contraband by "mules" as, "well-coordinated and tedious." He explained, the importation of contraband by free staff actor's inside the prison, would include, "leaving it where mules could pick it up"—often delivered/and or dropped in laundry or trash carts, which move almost uninhibited within the prison industrial complex. He said, "The people we coordinated with were able to communicate over cell phones with phrases like, "this is where it will be."

C1 also shared an extraordinary story about prisoners, working on housing unit roofs, and delivering cell phones and drugs down plumbing vents. He said there were times when during extended "lockdowns" access inside buildings was too risky—requiring innovative and alternative methods of delivery. He told me, "deliveries by inmate roofers—down vents only worked if they (e.g. prisoners in cells below) were homies, reliable, living in corner or end-cells, and competent enough to retrieve [contraband] from the drains" He described this communication process as taking place through the air-ventilation system, while the retrieval process requiring one of the homey/organizational members to flush a homemade hook (i.e. fashioned-hook out of a sturdy paper-clip) down the water closet (e.g. toilet), snagging the line attached to the contraband (contained inside of a zip-lock), then retrieving the contents pulled through the drain and out of the toilets trap. Once the contraband has made its way into the cell and hands of my co-researcher, word is then communicated by way of cell phone, exchanged discreetly among organizational members, and then sold/distributed to pre-arranged clientele (e.g. predominantly members of other cultural groups, or races other than members of my co-researchers gang) with the help of the organization's porters in the housing unit, yard crew/trash pick-up workers, or other members with access to the co-researchers housing unit. Essentially, the process of C1 achievement of social/organizational identification, results in the degradation of *out-groups* through financial exploitation and addiction.

My co-researcher described the importation of contraband as an established business requiring cell phone technology. He had a set clientele and a reputation among his group and organizational leaders. He told me that becoming an organizational member that arranges importations of contraband is a process—"a progression where once the gang [hierarchy] began to see how resourceful I was, they would allow me to make these deals—but only with their permission". He explained that: "Status within the gang goes up with reliability [of the deals]". He describes this process as reciprocal, explaining, "You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours". He went on to elaborate that every deal made by organizational members is subject to a 1/3 tax. He said: "They [hierarchical leaders] expect 1/3 [of all profits]". Not only this but "they expect you to teach others—this is an unwritten rule". He describes this as a grooming process where "we had to pick the right guys so we'd all prosper".

My co-researcher describes himself during these times as "mostly content—but not happy". He said that his organizational objective was to make money. He also explained:, "I treated people like objects"—totally negating their human worth as perhaps someone's son, father, brother, or even friend. When I asked how he was able to manage to negate people's identities and his own feelings, he explained that he was able to justify himself "by talking interpersonally with like-minded people (e.g. organizational members) who did the same thing". He said: "It was more about the value, the more value [to the organization], the more acceptance I felt". As he reflected on all the wreckage that had resulted from his racketeering in prison, I asked him how he now views himself and the resulting wreckage of his business ventures. He fiddled with his hands a little bit, seeming to search for the appropriate words. Looking down almost ashamedly, he told me, "Man, I was a vicious person. I had no guilt, but now I feel a sense of guilt. I negatively affected so many lives, but now I see the ripple effect". He told me that the other day he ran into one of the guys that had been in Salinas with him during those times. He told my co-researcher: "I was fearful back then because I got into a cell fight with one of the homies over drugs". My co-researcher explained that getting in a cell fight will get you a *mission*—meaning participants would likely be required to beat up or stab someone—which would likely result in an extended prison term, or even a life sentence. My co-researcher speaks of feeling overfilled with sadness concerning his part in this as he was one of the organizational members, as a shot caller, who was responsible for getting other members more time.

My co-researcher tells me now: "I want to say how adversely I affected [so many] people. [Today] If I could just help one person in here understand [the harm of racketeering with cell phones], I could take this [problem] off the streets"—referencing the incredible harm racketeering causes to people, families, the community, and younger generations simply emulating their elders.

Co-researcher Two

My second co-researcher detailed his program and history of cell phone use in prison chronologically and effortlessly. His typical day began with checking his messages when he woke up; having a cup of coffee; and then walking to the dining hall for breakfast. When the Salinas Valley State Prison yard opened where he was housed, he would attend "mandatory morning and afternoon yards—to be present and accounted for" with the fellas in his white cultural organization of the association. My co-researcher told me he acquired a cell phone through a purchase from a fellow inmate explaining: "It is extremely important to have your own phone for loading money on yours or someone else's account and having a cell phone just made it easier". He said his association with the organization (e.g. a white gang) in charge of his yard and most of the other general population yards in the state of California required its affiliates and associates to "put in work—somehow". In other words, each prisoner identifying as white is expected to contribute in some way to the organization. In a calculated explanation coordinated with validating non-verbals, he articulated, "If you're not the guy handling money, then you're the guy sharpening knives; if not him, then you're going on *missions*—to regulate, hurt, stab, or kill someone".

My co-researcher explained his association with the organization developed into arranging drug deals and reaching out to the public sector as an evolving necessity. He said external arrangements predominantly involved the acquisition of heroin for its addictive, condensed, and lucrative qualities, while also explaining the purchase of *Wax*—a T.H.C. hash-oil concentrate, as well as marijuana—all depending on his prisoner clients' needs. He explained while sitting on the ground leaning against a bench caressing the albino Pit Bull terrier next to him: "For me, this [racketeering] was beneficial, and at the time I preferred to handle my work in this way". He added, from the position of a stakeholder: "The most important thing was being productive and producing income for the *brothers*"—(e.g. the organizational hierarchy on other yards and facilities). He told me: "I was trusted by *the old man*" (a brother and

hierarchical member), a somewhat mysterious figure and apparent leader of the notorious prison organization. So far, I notice access to cell phone technology as deterministic for my co-researcher's ability to receive, load, and send financial resources in his transactional facilitation of drug deals. I also see his pursuit of these arrangements as social constructions of technology resulting in the conflation of social shaping (Baym, 2012).

My co-researcher explained the delivery process of contraband, including importations into the prison required between four to six external and internal agent actors. The actors included: drug dealers; purchasers; deliveries to prison visitors (e.g. the primary mule importing drugs via balloons); prisoners who visited and swallowed balloons during the visits—and then regurgitated the balloons upon returning to their cells. The balloons are then transported by a porter or prison support services prisoner (e.g. trash, laundry retrieval worker, kitchen worker) to my co-researcher's cell. He told me every step in the delivery process is carefully choreographed with interpersonal communication over cell phone technology, while each agent is compensated for their part in the route.

My co-researcher told me communicating with agents during the routing of contraband involved discreet interpersonal communication as well as the use of a texting feature on his cell phone. He said: "Communication was always discreet by using short maxims like: we got it; it's here; or, they have it now—basically beating around the bush"—in case the signal was being monitored by prison officials. He went on to explain how some arrangements involved overt texts to avoid potential distortion of miscommunication—using his cell phone's "double-ended encryption feature secured through an app function". Once the drugs were retrieved from a drop or delivery, a corresponding exchange was handled with a call during the route and oftentimes "a meet and greet, or a handoff to a visitor (e.g. the mule) on their way into the prison".

My co-researcher described himself as "a senior associate"—a term for a prisoner calling shots in the absence of organizational hierarchy in the yard. He said: "I was given approval by the old man to run the yard". He contends keeping the old man in the loop meant he had free reign to operate imports as well as run a business on the yard as long as he, and others given approval, sent a 1/3 cut of net profits to the old man. The income produced for organizational hierarchy as well as its facilitating affiliates/or associates created financial sustainability for the

organization—but also at the cost of prisoner addiction and an even more dangerous prison culture.

Once the contraband is in the control of my co-researcher, the drugs are then distributed through pre-arranged clientele as well as a solicitation process. He told me: “I had a good idea of who needed what and could make whatever they needed happen”. He explained that communication within the prison worked by texting building to building and cell to cell with non-verbal communication like, “I’ll try to send it [drugs] with a kitchen worker—because they are always coming and going to buildings, the yard, and kitchen. Quite simply, their movement is without suspect and part of the normal routine of prison operations”.

My co-researcher told me that arranging drug deals for delivery into the prison enhanced his credibility and standing as an associate of the organization. He said: “I made a lot of money for them—always for the yard whites and “the fellas”—an idiom denoting the cultural organization's leadership—including the old man”. He elaborates: “The brothers were also well compensated for their support (e.g. help with work)”. He told me: “I helped with their mission to earn money”—thus enhancing the durability of the team members of the organization. At this point, it appears clear that social identity, identification with his white brothers, as well as cultural organization hierarchy (e.g. the fella’s, including the old man)—with the organization work in unison to protect his social standing as well as identification as an associate and yard representative of the organization.

My co-researcher told me after seeing all this play out, he felt he was serving a dual purpose. He said: “I was in prison and needed a survival technique. This, despite my co-researcher being 6’6”, likely 260 lbs, and appearing very fit, explained that it was, however “very stressful—a seven day a week job—going to yard three times a day, putting off schooling (e.g. college) to orchestrate and fulfill the goals of the (organization) yard”. He went on to say: “Salinas Valley Prison was a very stressful and dangerous environment”.

C1 told me he was able to manage feelings of stress through his friendship with an Asian shot-caller named, “Sonny” in his yard. He said that Sonny was his *road dog*—as they worked out together, walked and talked, and he also gave him advice. He went on to say: “Most stresses and worries I could discuss with him.” Plus, he added, being able to text or vent with a few friends helped—without discussing the details of his

prison/racketeering-related stress. My co-researcher also explains relying upon self-talk explaining: "I was my closest advisor".

Reflecting on all this, he matter-of-factly explained with a straight face: "It [racketeering] served a purpose. I helped people destroy themselves by providing [access to] their drug of choice. But given the opportunity, I'd never do it again". Like my first co-researcher said: "It served a utilitarian purpose—my survival". My co-researcher recalls selling drugs did cause conflict and tension with the southern Latino gang in his yard—but that he and other associates were able to attenuate these issues with sit-downs—interpersonal communication/resolution and the cross-cancellation of debts.

At the end of the interview, I asked my co-researcher if he would like to include anything we did not discuss. He explained: "Once, a white guy on the yard thought it was in his best interest to lose a couple of balloons (e.g. drugs), later surfacing in conversation with a group he had sold some to. They said he was (secretively) selling drugs at a discounted rate". C1 told me: "The guy ended up being stabbed 70-times—and lived, but is now handicapped and walking with a cane for the remainder of his life". With eyes wide and engulfed in sincerity, he emphatically declared: "Burning the fellas will never work out well".

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the phenomenon of racketeering in prisons. Specifically, it focused on how prisoners accomplish illicit business enterprises through verbal and non-verbal forms of communication and cell phone technology; on how the internal and external organizational members and prison employee actors facilitate deliveries and importations of drug and cell phone contraband; on the distribution and sales of contraband by affiliated/associated organizational members to support of their cultural organizations of identification; on speculation regarding why jammers are not being implemented; on the dangers of racketeering to prisoners, the public sector, and its impact on the ultimate victim: California taxpayers.

The findings, gathered through the use of in-depth interviews, as well as existing data, reveal startling revelations concerning not only the cellular communication processes by which the co-researchers were able to accomplish all this, but also prison officials' relative apathy toward an exigence which directly impacts prison and public safety alike. I found the co-researchers' desire for cell phone technology was not only a

surreptitious means for bypassing the bulwarks of the Salinas Valley institutionally monitored phone system, but as deftly covert technological means for arranging complex, profitable racketeering operations through "communication with external agents" (Van der Laan, 2012, p. 130-145). In addition, it appears the co-researchers' motivations for running illicit businesses in prison are consistent with patterns contained in Social Identity, Organizational Identification, and The Affordances of Technology Theory.

In spite of the study's micro-sampling strategy limiting the conclusiveness of perhaps a meso or macro sampling of organizational affiliates/associates, there appears to be a strong relationship between the study's research question, the study's findings, previous research, as well as support for the study's hypothesis prediction. The research question asked "How do prisoners employ interpersonal communication and cell phone technology to generate illicit revenue for cultural organizations?" helped move the variables: cell phone/drug contraband, importations of contraband, facilitating internal/external agents, cell phone jamming, institutional/public safety forward to actually identifying the study's cultural organization C1-affiliate and C2-associate as facilitators of racketeering operations in prison. I also found support for the study's hypothesis predicting that prisoner gang affiliates / associates are more likely to facilitate importations of contraband as a result of the affordances of cell phone technology as viable means for supporting social and organizational identification ends. The study's findings reveal C1's social shaping of cell phone technological affordances as means for increasing social acceptance/higher levels of social identity including esteem amongst cultural organization peers, and financial stability while increasing identification with his organization and its goals for financial longevity, continued power and control over its members and prisoners consumers outside of the organization. Likewise, it appears C2's social shaping of his cell phone's multiplicity of features resulted in his ability to "put in work" for the organization—thus adhering to the organizations political mandate, making money for the organizations affiliated brothers, himself, and other associated brothers on the yard, while also increasing his personal social standing as a successful importer of contraband/illicit business operator for the organization—thus helping to maintain organizational power and control over its members as well as other cultural organizations (or races) on the yard. These findings seem to be consistent with Tompkins and Cheney's (2002) assumption asserting that "each person identifies with targets [or goals] within the

organization that they feel promote the interests of the organization most effectively" (Littlejohn, 2002, p. 1781), yet may not necessarily mean identifying with the organization itself. I also noticed study parallels with Social Identity Theory assumptions proclaiming that "identification… based on group membership [is likely] imbued with positive aspects" (Turner et al., 1987, p. 1781). Likewise, I found Affordance Theory's theoretical assumption concerning causality of the socially shaping one's experience through cell phone technology as fitting for this study as cell phones are merely technologies requiring socially constructed motivation(s). In short, I found these organizational, social, and technological distinctions helpful in moving the study forward.

Each interviewee reported using cell phone technology to arrange importations of drug and cell phone contraband as liquid-able resources for supporting their respective cultural organizations. Yet, while cell phones are primarily technologies, their variety of features allow for socially constructed flexibility—which relates to the Affordances Theory. Put simply, the interviewees expressed framing their experiences through personal interpretations of their phones' utilitarian affordances. For example, co-researcher one used his cell phone direct contact verbal and texting affordance capability, while co-researcher two reported employing a multiplexity of cell phone affordances including: direct contact, texting, voice mail, encryption apps, and a global earth app-option—all as features for assisting in their running of illegal businesses in prison. These technological attributes connect to Baym's (2010) Affordance Theory which states that"people are the primary sources of change in both technology and society". In effect, each co-researcher shaped their individual social realities to meet desired goals.

Essentially years of clandestine verbal and non-verbal forms of communication and cell phone technological affordances were the mediums transforming contraband into workable tender to support their cultural organizations of identification. Enabling nearly instantaneous and relatively seamless metamorphosis from existing simply as affiliated and associated organizational members to elevated states of nobility amongst fellow members/peers, as they furthered their organizations' durability and ultimately long-term sustainability.

Furthermore, each interviewee expressed identification with the power and controlling demands of their organization as motivation for starting their businesses with the assistance of internal and external self-managed teams and groups. They each reported business deals requiring between

6-10 people/actors operating under the "heightened intensity… [of] team peer pressures dominant form of control" (Barker & Thompkins, 1994, p. 225). All with the end goal of supporting targets for the organization (e.g. solvency, and control of illicit resources/the yard), protecting and enhancing their self-concept—all while earning a cut for their part in each importation. This relates to Organizational Identification Theory in that "Self-managing teams…assume total responsibility for their area of accountability"—regardless of their role in each operation (Barker and Tompkins, 1994, p. 225). Also evident are "self-motivations behind the need for identification and the co-researcher's fluidity between social [and organizational] identities" (Littlejohn, 2002, p. 1782). This is to say that, while identifying with the objectives of the organizations, self-enhancement, and preservation of perceived identification are vital to the study's organizational affiliation and associate co-researchers.

Equally prominent is the way in which the co-researchers' existence in these hermetic cultural spaces are controlled by way of a team's identification through organization enthymeme. Littlejohn's (2002) definition of enthymeme as "a rhetorical device used to involve audiences in the advocates reasoning process" (p. 297) could also be expanded into the area of teams in which members are controlled by "probabilities, signs, and examples…inferred from the truth of two premises" (Bitzer, 1968, p. 96). For example, the co-researchers were controlled by the premises of their organization's politics—or the mandate to put in work. As it turns out, when prisoners do not adhere to organizational rules there is a probability of being beaten, stabbed, or both. Or even worse in the minds of most convicts is having to "roll it up" to a protective custody yard (PC) where prisoners are stigmatized and estranged for life as "no-good" or even being thought of as "pieces of crap". Tompkins and Cheney (1985) also refer to organizational team members' "loyalty and identification"—through the process of concertive control (p. 226), the accomplishment of goals—in teams together. My co-researchers planned and accomplished organizational goals through what Tompkins and Cheney (1985) explain as "grow[ing] out of team members acting in concert with each other to control their own behaviors by essentially conscripting identification" (p. 226). By controlling each other concretively, in addition to the reasoning of enthymeme, the "steepness" of organizational hierarchy becomes decreased, while affiliate/associate "participation in decision making are heightened," thus enhancing identification and productivity in the organization (Tannenbaum, 1968, 1983; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985).

The results of this study are the product furthering an area of inquiry at the risk of personal well-being. This is a very sensitive topic and must be contained within the strict control of my professor[s] and is not to be shared outside of the professors at Cal State L.A. The data gathered from the co-researchers—both former hierarchical shot-callers for their respective cultural organizations of identification - participated in this study because they trust in my promise of anonymity and discretion as a fellow general population prisoner, researcher, ethnographer, and communication scholar highlighting a detrimental phenomenon. A phenomenon which not only financially supports dangerous criminal cultural organizations, but makes prisons and society significantly more perilous, prevents prisoners from being able to accomplish rehabilitative pursuits, and achieve self-actualization. The California Correctional Peace Officers Association (C.C.P.O.A.) thrives on the demise of prisoners. For many, they are strictly a monetary value for their livelihood. Ultimately, dangerous prisons mean *hazard pay,* overtime pay, and in many cases six-figure incomes for custodial workers doing very little work—essentially duping constituents out of vital financial resources perhaps better spent on education to reduce the public to prison pipeline. In short, a dangerous society means increased crime and convictions to populate the state's 32 prisons. It's a vicious cycle and certainly could be mitigated through the installation of jammers in California prisons, as well as prisons nationwide.

Limitations & Future developments

This study is limited in the number of contributing interviewee co-researchers as I hypothesize only a small percentage of prisoners are resourceful enough, as well as identify socially and organizationally enough to have invested effort, time, and personal finances as well as risk the likelihood of lengthier sentences for their identified cultural organizations financial longevity. This study was also conducted on one prison yard out of over 100 statewide. Therefore, future studies might consider a greater number of interviewees/co-researchers on multiple facilities to determine if similar or even quantifiable results can be obtained, or to describe the differences in their findings for the larger scholarly community. Topics for future inquiry could expand into areas such as agency, efficacy, correctional officer/free staff racketeering, and even future technologies likely to become available and potentially misused by inmate populations. The study was also limited by two representations of the yard demographic. I would have liked to interview

an African-American, an Asian-American, and Native American fitting similar inclusionary criteria. However, I was limited by niche inclusionary criteria and Covid-19 restrictions. Moreover, I had limited resources including minimal access to computer-mediated technology, and a relatively non-negotiable timeline as this paper was supposed to be due at the completion of the December 2020 Capstone curriculum.

As previously mentioned, critical ethnographers engage with marginalized, vulnerable groups which include the incarcerated. As a communication scholar and friend of the co-researchers in this study, I leveraged my unprecedented access to the life worlds of the co-researcher actors, the site, and the scene within the carceral complex. Performing from the phenomenological perspective, I conducted two in-depth interviews of a unique criteria of prisoners who had organized racketeering operations through the utilization of cell phones from prison. My findings and analysis are descriptive and interpretive and thus relate to each co-researchers conscious experience with greater fidelity than studies operating from a strictly emit perspective. This is important as this research potentially adds to available scholarship in this field of study because it is not likely that there is a teeming overabundance of extant studies conducted from the ground level (e.g. from within the prison industrial complex). Surveys and questionnaires may aid in conjecture over phenomena, but this ethnological study gets right to the heart of the matter: banished individuals organizing and operating racketeering operations to support their affiliations/associations with prison/societal gang cultural organizations.

This study represents the rare intersection of a well-trained communication studies scholar, who also happens to be a prisoner, conducting critical ethnographies of other prisoners. It shines a light on the threats that can evolve from the illegal use of cell phone technology from prison, and does so in a manner that both vilifies as well as humanizes the co-researchers by telling their stories in their own words while making connections to relevant technology and communication theories. If I can accomplish this with so little, just think of what else could be added to our collective understanding of phenomena. This study suggests that although prisoners/gang cultural organizations are held to be among the most despised of dangerous and disposable sub-classes, they are humans in need of social acceptance in a cultural space which preys on human vulnerabilities through organizational power and control.

Conclusion

This study connects the research variables: cell phone/drug contraband, internal/external actors, importations, illegal business practices, and cultural organizations—to the exigence of prisoners who socially shape their cell phone experience to operate illegal businesses as support for their cultural organizations within the CDCR. The resulting institutional and societal ills from these racketeering endeavors have exponentially impacted prisoners with drug addiction, financial burdens for their families, and group intercultural conflict and violence (e.g. segregation, assaults, and stabbings) over debt, debt-default, and control of resources. Moreover, illicit use of cell phone technology, by the study's co-researchers, has led to the exploitation of impressionable youth in their communities, and the intimidation of visitors and prison personnel in the facilitation of these illegal importations of contraband.

Equally startling in this study is the way in which cultural organizations have been able to leverage the co-researchers' identification and business resourcefulness through the rhetorical persuasiveness of enthymeme and concertive control of its members. As such, the co-researchers and respective peers (e.g. team members) were able to plan and accomplish their organizations financial goals through the syllogistic power of "probabilities, signs, and examples" (Bitzer, 1968, p. 98) of harm which had occurred to members that had not complied.

In light of the ills resulting from cell phones and racketeering in prison, as well as many other hazards resulting from cell phone use outside the scope of this study, including the tragic manipulation of U.S. Army Veteran Johns by miscreant South Carolina prisoners exemplified in the beginning of this study, CDCR officials should constrain the FCC through the legislatively approved path for the installation of cellular jamming systems in its 32 prisons statewide. Perhaps future inquiry may discover why California prison officials have foregone this already sanctioned solution.

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Invisible Identities at Work: Dealing with Dominant Culture as a SWANA Female Professional

Rasha Hanouche

Abstract

People who come from the SWANA region (Southwest Asia/North Africa) are classified as "White" in the U.S., yet may not always be treated as White by those belonging to the dominant group. While there is quite a bit of research regarding intersectionality, the ambiguous identities of SWANA women who are neither fully White nor fully Black or Brown, and who have to contend with gender and occupation, make up a type of intersectionality that has not been examined as extensively. The primary focus of this qualitative study is on the types of discriminatory communication practices SWANA female professionals in the U.S. encounter in the workplace. This research also focuses on how some of these women respond to and navigate through these interactions. By means of semi-structured interviews, issues surrounding racial identification, experiences with microaggressions, and the mental and emotional repercussions of these experiences were explored. Interview data was then transcribed and coded for thematic patterns. Findings showed that microaggressions and hostilities were experienced by all five of the respondents, to varying degrees. Consistent patterns included the racial questioning of SWANA women, sexualization, and avoidance as a means of coping with these issues. Practical application of this and future research might examine ways to best provide training programs that can equip SWANA female professionals to succeed in maintaining both their well-being and their roles within the workplace.

Keywords*: intersectionality, Middle-Eastern, Southwest-Asian, SWANA women, workplace discrimination*

A young Lebanese-American woman is approached by a White, middle-aged man who has some questions regarding one of the products she is selling at the booth of an industry trade show. The young woman responds to his question; the man stops, gives her a peculiar look, then repeats the question. She assumes that the response is either not heard, is misunderstood by the potential client, or is not to his liking. When she responds again with the same answer, the man looks at her critically and replies: "It must be a language barrier". Slightly nervous, the woman immediately conducts a mental review of the last few seconds that have transpired. Being a 35-year-old, Los Angeles-born native who was given early acceptance into Kindergarten at the age of four due to her advanced English reading skills, she is perplexed as to why the man cannot understand her.

As a young SWANA (Southwest Asian/North African) woman who currently struggles with imposter syndrome, she instantly doubts her abilities. Although this would not be the first time that something like this has happened to her, her heart palpitates as she stammers over her next words. This real-life example is just one of many where dominant groups use microaggressions when responding to SWANA women in professional environments.

Rationale

According to Bulut and Carlson (2020), the U.S. Census in 2016 revealed that of the total immigrant population, eight percent were from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). These researchers also suggest that MENA women who are a part of this eight percent have received little attention in studies of migration and female employment. Khoshneviss (2018) described how Middle-Eastern Americans have been "historically understudied in the field of ethnic and racial studies…" (p. 118), and Awad et al. (2019) argued that "without a clear, positive place in the American landscape, there is a high likelihood that the MENA

American population will experience some degree of alienation" (p. 83). What should be recognized as part of the MENA category are individuals from Armenia and other surrounding countries, making up the SWANA region as a whole. In addition to racial discrimination, SWANA female professionals may face microaggressions on the basis of their gender. Basford et al. (2014) defined gender microaggressions as "intentional or unintentional actions or behaviors that exclude, demean, insult, oppress, or otherwise express hostility or indifference toward women" (p. 341). Acker (2006) described how "theory and research on inequality, dominance, and oppression must pay attention to the intersections of, at least, race/ethnicity, gender, and class" (p. 442). Hence, examining the experiences of SWANA women in relation to their intersecting identities of race (often viewed as ambiguous), their gender, and their place within the professional context may be a significant area for further inquiry.

At a macro level, understanding the significance of this issue may highlight the need for training and development programs that can help SWANA women successfully navigate their professions and workplaces, and find ways to protect their mental and emotional health while doing so.

Literature Review

Although prior literature has used terms such as "Middle-Eastern" (ME) and "MENA" to describe the demographic being considered in this study, the term "SWANA" will be used here instead when outside sources are not being cited. This is because other terms do not include people from the regions of Armenia and the Caucasus, nor do they take into account Arabic-speaking individuals coming from North Africa. The term SWANA, therefore, fosters inclusion and brings awareness to the struggle of individuals from all lands making up this region.

Prior, peer-reviewed research done by scholars of critical and cultural communication, psychology, sociology, and organizational studies will now be discussed, based on the following topics: Racial categorizing and invisibility, racial discrimination in the workplace, sexism in the workplace, and intersectionality of racial and gender identity. These areas will be examined against the principles within the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Theoretical Understanding of Race

The inability to understand individuals who are racially different from the dominant group has often led to negative perceptions about them; the negative views, in turn, have led to the oppression of these minority groups throughout history. A theoretical framework that sheds light on this oppression is Critical Race Theory (CRT), which stipulates that racism is a reality that is endemic to daily life here in the U.S., and is built within institutionalized systems (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). To look at existing power structures through a critical lens means to examine the "politically sensitive" relationships that exist "between power, knowledge, and discourse that are produced in situations of historical and cultural struggle" (p. 14). Critical theories allow a person to look beyond the surface of day-to-day interactions, to see how these interactions are often the dominant culture's way of holding onto privilege, and perpetuating the oppression of minority groups. Membership in a minority group, however, may not always be clearly evident.

Foner et al. (2018) discussed how what comes with race are "beliefs about content and meaning…evaluative connotations" (p. 2). The ability to categorize a person by race, therefore, means being able to make sense of and understand the person they are interacting with. The phenotype of individuals from the SWANA region is often not fully recognized or understood. This often creates a struggle as the dominant group seeks to make sense of SWANA individuals they come across (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 12).

In 1909, America's Department of Justice formally decided that Syrians, Turks, Armenians, and Arabs were to be considered White; however, they have not always been treated as White (Zoledziowski, 2020; Craig & Craig, 2019). Reasons for this possible shift from acceptance to exclusion may lie in a body of thought within CRT called "interest-convergence," which is the idea that minority groups are given rights only when it favors both them *and* the dominant group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 24). According to this idea, if the interests of "elite whites" which include "profit, labor supply," and "international relations" are no longer served by minority groups, minorities might then be pushed to the margins, and discriminated against (p. 25). Support for the interest-convergence principle can be found in the history of Chinese

labor within the U.S., during the years of 1850-1882. Over 100,000 Chinese immigrants were brought into the U.S. during that time as a "workforce in mining, agriculture, railroad construction, and other trades", but were later discriminated against and banned from entering the States once their work was done (Calavita, 2000, p. 4).

Unlike the Chinese during those early years, the SWANA population was granted U.S. citizenship, and even given the White label. The U.S. benefited by doing this, as it made them appear benevolent in the international political space (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). However, this label has not created an automatic acceptance of SWANA people by the dominant group, reflected in day-to-day attitudes that began to shift when there was no longer a political gain. First, we will consider some reasons why many have difficulty placing SWANA individuals into a racial category.

Invisibility Due to Ambiguity

One reason people may not know how to categorize the SWANA population is that they have not been allowed to properly categorize themselves on any proper documentation. Not having a "SWANA" (or even "Middle-Eastern") box that can be checked off on most government forms, including the U.S. Census Form, means that the identity and experiences of SWANA Americans are excluded from almost every institution in the United States (Awad et al., 2019, p. 81). This also means that the harmful, yet subtle, microaggressions against the SWANA population are understudied due to the population's invisibility. When given the option of an alternative racial category like "MENA," however, people from these regions choose not to classify themselves as White (Maghbouleh, 2020).

Another reason people have difficulty categorizing SWANA individuals is that there is often an inconsistency between our racial classification and how we self-identify. Although SWANA are considered White according to the U.S. government, they "often have a stronger identification" with their family's country of origin than they do with Whiteness (Foner et al., 2018, p. 8). Armenians are also from the SWANA region, and have been given the Caucasian/White classification in America as a result of their white skin and often, very fair features (Okoomian, 2002). John Tehranian, an Armenian law professor at Southwestern University in Los Angeles, described how considering

people from the SWANA region as White is not consistent with how we are seen by the general public. Tehranian adds, "I don't consider myself white because I'm not treated as such" (Zoledziowski, 2020). One Armenian described the problem of racial liminality by saying: "To white people, you're too brown and to brown people, you're not brown enough" (Zoledziowski, 2020). Problems associated with this in-betweenness became evident in the late 1980s, when a Los Angeles County commission tracking hate crimes began to receive complaints from Armenian victims being targeted by White supremacists in Glendale, California (Zoledziowski, 2020, p. 221). It appears that the choice SWANA people have made to hold onto their culture and language more tightly than to their White classification has at times incited violence against them.

Racial Discrimination in the Workplace

In discussing a tenet of CRT, Lindlof (1995) argued that in addition to our interactions and communicative behaviors being socially and historically constructed, they are often also mediated by power relations. Workplace environments in the U.S. have a long-standing history where "whites as a group have higher status and hold more formal organizational and political power than do racial minorities, i.e., people of African, Asian, Native American, and Hispanic descent" (Ely et al., 2012, p. 343). These power structures continue and are further enforced by stereotypical perceptions that Black and Hispanic people are less "competent, intelligent, and hard-working" than White people who are seen as more "intelligent, successful, and educated" (p. 343). While workplace discrimination toward the Black and Brown community is well documented, where do SWANA professionals fit in when it comes to such perceptions, and how have past political events shaped these perceptions?

Khoshneviss (2018) described how the terrorist acts of 9/11 exacerbated the negative behavior towards SWANA people both in the U.S. and abroad, who were viewed as disloyal to Western domination and seen as a major threat to American lives. This perceived threat has generated fear among many White Americans, "who are constantly soliciting accounts" from SWANA people to allay these fears (p. 124). Questions can include anything from how long they have been in the

U.S., their citizenship status, their religious affiliation, whether they have family in the States or abroad, and much more.

After 9/11, harassment of SWANA individuals had increased so much so that, according to statistics by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), an increase in cases was seen during the years 2001-2006, and "accounts for almost 15% of all discrimination charges filed during those years" (Malos, 2010, P. 298). These reports only include cases filed at the federal level, and not the countless other cases filed at lower, state levels, nor does it consider the undocumented cases that were never reported. CRT stipulates that racism is difficult to "address or cure because it is not acknowledged" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 8). Discriminatory acts cannot always be objectively proven, because they are not always explicit enough to provide solid evidence of discriminatory intent. They are, however, loud enough to negatively impact the recipient of these behaviors.

Aside from racially-charged discrimination, a smaller group of SWANA individuals may be experiencing an additional threat: Discrimination based on the intersecting identities of race, gender, and occupation.

Discrimination in the Workplace Due to Intersecting Identities

Civil rights activist and lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw described intersectionality as a person's experience due to their multiple, overlapping, and sometimes competing identities that are formed by gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, nationality, occupation, position in society, roles within the family, and other factors (Ruiz-Mesa & Broeckelman-Post, 2021). SWANA women may face microaggressions in the workplace as a result of their intersecting racial, gender, and occupational identities. Gender-based microaggressions have been defined as "intentional or unintentional actions or behaviors that exclude, demean, insult, oppress, or otherwise express hostility or indifference toward women" (p. 341). Kamenou and Fearfull (2006) tell us that women from ethnic minority groups are questioned when it comes to their capabilities in the workplace; this, in turn, affects their opportunities. Basford et al. (2014) found that although at times subtle, women perceived greater microaggressions in the workplace than men, and that the more explicitly these aggressions and insults were expressed,

the more negatively the women's well-being and job performance were impacted.

SWANA working women have complained of having to deal with organizational barriers as a result of not being viewed as "career women" within the dominant culture (Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006, p. 161). Muslim SWANA women in Australia and the United Kingdom have expressed dealing with pressures and discouragement in work environments that are not supportive of their culture and religion (Murray & Ali, 2017). While these prior studies mainly focus on the differences in behavior towards Muslim women, the question comes back to whether these hostilities are also experienced by SWANA, non-Muslim women, specifically within the U.S.

Based on these findings, there is reason to believe that dominant groups may outwardly express their discomfort in making sense of SWANA female professionals, as they grapple with an ambiguous race, a gender that has a history of being perceived as inferior, and a position at work they may feel belongs to men. There is currently little in terms of scholarly work that specifically references discrimination against women from Armenian, Arab, and other SWANA countries as a collective whole within the workplace. With this in mind, the following research question will be posed in this study:

RQ 1: What sorts of discriminatory communication practices do SWANA female professionals in the U.S. encounter in dealing with members of the dominant culture at work?

What previous literature also doesn't expand upon are the reactions of SWANA women when faced with these issues. To consider this, the next research question that will be explored here is:

RQ 2: How do SWANA female professionals experience and navigate microaggressions and other discriminatory communication expressed by socially dominant groups in the workplace?

In an effort to answer these questions, the following methods were used.

Methods

This study will utilize qualitative communication research methods to explore the previously stated questions. The primary method

that will be employed will be private, one-on-one interviews with a select group of SWANA women. Interviewing is a valuable research method that feminist researchers often use to gain insight into the realities of their participants. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007) discussed how conducting interviews on feminist issues can get at the "unarticulated realities of women" (p. 113). These realities are often not told, much less receive public attention.

Participants

Individuals who agreed to be interviewed included five women who are either of Syrian, Armenian, and/or Lebanese ethnicities, and who live in the Los Angeles area. The ages of participants ranged between 30s – 40s. All are U.S. citizens who are employed in various industries including beauty, medicine, corporate sales, and education. The amount of data collected may seem small from just a group of five participants in comparison with other qualitative work, and much smaller than research done quantitatively; however, there is good reason to believe that a significant understanding can still be drawn from this sample about the issues being studied. Small samples allow us to "look at a 'process' or the 'meanings' individuals attribute to their given social situation, not necessarily to make generalizations" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 119). Likewise, the purpose of this research study was not to simply quantify how much of the SWANA female population struggles with discrimination at work but rather, to shed light on the *types of experiences* these women have and to examine the *depth of the issues* rather than the breadth or scope of the problem.

Procedures

Participants were found by convenience and network sampling. All five of the individuals were acquainted with the researcher prior to the study, and were first asked if they had any significant, memorable experiences of negative communicative behaviors with the dominant culture while at work. Respondents had to be over the age of 18, and could be from any secular field. There was no need to exclude anyone who responded to the call, since the target goal of finding at least five individuals was met to that exact number. Participants were told the purpose of the interview, asked to provide informed consent via email,

and were assured of confidentiality. Before beginning, they were also reminded of their right to stop the interview at any time, should they wish to do so.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In line with this type of qualitative research, data for this study was gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews held with participants via Zoom conferencing. Once consent was given to engage in the interview and have it recorded, each participant received a Zoom meeting code. While the sample group was small, 20 questions were explored during the approximately 30-45-minute interviews, designed to gain insight into how these women ethnically identify, their experiences with microaggressions from the dominant culture at work, their responses to these aggressions, and the mental and emotional repercussions of these interactions. Once data was received, it was transcribed and manually coded for both verbal and non-verbal communication (Saldana, 2016). Codes then generated categories, which then formulated larger concepts surrounding the experiences of SWANA women in the workplace. These categories were then examined in light of CRT principles, and discrimination as a result of the specific intersecting identities of race and gender.

Field notes were taken during the interviews in real-time, and were later examined in conjunction with my observations of the recordings of these interviews (the artifacts). Transcriptions were examined with the purpose of seeing how these discriminatory interactions affect SWANA women, and how they grapple with their ethnic identities and professional abilities as a result.

Findings and Discussion

The interviews revealed that all five women have had some former experience in dealing with hostilities and microaggressions in the workplace, although some have experienced this more frequently than others. Comparable themes emerged from these discussions surrounding the difficulties SWANA women experience, including: 1) Uncertainty regarding Whiteness and how to racially identify, 2) being questioned about SWANA culture, and 3) being sexualized by clients and superiors. The coping mechanisms found to be used by participants in dealing with

the aforementioned experiences included education as a means of navigating these issues, support-seeking, and avoidance in the aftermath of these struggles. I will now discuss these themes in detail.

Whiteness and Racial Ambiguity

During the interviews, all but one of the five women said they normally mark "White" for demographic questions when no other option is given, and sometimes they mark "other". Teddy, a 37-year-old woman of Lebanese/Armenian mixed heritage with a background in corporate sales, said she never marks "White", and prefers to write in her racial identification. Anastasia, a 38-year-old Lebanese/Syrian-Armenian woman who has worked as a gemologist as well as in retail, described the difficulty she experiences in not seeing herself represented on demographic forms. She stated: "It's hard for me to put 'White' because I, I do see my skin color as White, but I don't see my, my ethnicity or race, classified in any of the options that they've put so, and then if I put 'other' I almost feel like I'm cheating myself out of being White". The idea of potentially losing some sort of privilege or opportunity that has been extended to the SWANA population by means of their White classification by marking "other" was quite profound. Teddy described SWANA women as a "secret minority", which lends to the ideas surrounding invisibility discussed earlier in this paper.

In regards to perceived racial ambiguity, respondents seemed to describe this as either an advantage or a source of discomfort. Teddy recalls how she was told by her superior *not* to give away her race and ethnicity in her work environment. When asked why, she replied, "You can't necessarily differentiate me, unless I differentiate myself…they thought I would be at a better advantage if I was ambiguous". Anastasia lives and works in a predominantly White area, where she has also received advice about not disclosing her racial or ethnic identification in one of her previous jobs. Assumptions about religion seemed to spearhead a lot of the negative interactions and questions these women faced, as shown in some of the following examples.

Experiences with Hostility and Microaggressions

As mentioned earlier, CRT stipulates that existing power structures perpetuate oppression and inequities (Lindlof, 1995). The

women interviewed for this study all described how power and privilege belonging to the dominant group were used against them, as they recalled verbal attacks and disrespect to some degree throughout their years on the job. “Although my skin is white, um, I was treated very differently,” Sharon stated. Sharon is a 36-year-old, fair-featured Armenian woman who works as an educator with students for whom English is a second language (ESL). As she recalled the microaggressions she dealt with when working in a part of Los Angeles that was comprised mainly of White U.S. Americans, she described a time when a client waved her finger to call her over, as if she was a young child in trouble. She felt her superior (who was also a White woman) did not show support for her in this situation, and wanted her to comply with the request. When I asked her how she knew that these instances were a result of her race and not another factor, she replied, “because I had been there several months, I noticed that they did not treat other White people that way.”

Arus, an Armenian woman in her mid 40’s who works as an aesthetic nurse, described the scrutiny and micro-managing she experienced from her superiors and colleagues while working in a doctor’s office. Since English is not her first language, she would occasionally make grammatical errors on paperwork, which others called her “special signature,” or her identifying mark. Arus also described how a lot of what she said and did was criticized by White women in the office, and by one in particular who even disclosed that her ancestors were slave owners. She often teased Arus about minor things, down to the food she ate: “They would always just question and be kind of jealous…and even when I would eat something” (referring to traditional Armenian food she would bring to work), “even those things were things that they would just pick on you or comment something.”

Thinking of her time in corporate sales, Teddy recalled how someone once told her, “I think you’re gonna have a difficult time in this job. Because the males in your culture don’t respect women at all…and you don’t speak other languages, so I don’t think you’re going to do well.” It would be a good time to bring up that Teddy speaks three languages, one of which is fluent English. She also recalled disparaging comments made about parts of Los Angeles with a high population of SWANA people. During this part of the conversation, Teddy chuckled as she said, “I would constantly get stories of how hard it’s been to deal with people from my culture, from women in my culture, how much they don’t go to my city, because it’s all one culture.” When asked if she felt

the attacks were mainly a result of her gender, race, or both, Teddy described how the two seem intertwined: "It's interesting, I get exactly a combination of them thinking we're like subservient, like in some ways…we're used to being treated badly or we have like lower roles in our family dynamic, yet at the same time we're 'extremely aggressive.'"

CRT's "interest-convergence" concept reminds us that White culture has often changed the way they treat minority groups based on their ever-changing interests, and the purpose minority groups serve in relation to those interests (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 24). As seen in these accounts, there have been many negative perceptions about SWANA women in recent years, and stereotypes have been reflected in the questions these women get asked.

Racial Questioning of SWANA Women

Hostilities towards Arabs became very pronounced in the U.S. post-9/11, especially in parts of the country like Los Angeles, where there is a higher population of SWANA than in other parts of the country. During our interviews, the women described how they were expected to provide answers to a series of questions regarding their race and culture. Patterns of questioning were primarily centered around how the participants racially identify, what their religious affiliation is, what countries they are from, and why terrorism against the U.S. has taken place. Interestingly, Arus would get asked if she was Christian or Muslim, even though Armenians have no affiliation with Islam. She would even get asked if Armenian women wore the hijab (head covering) back in Armenia. This made Arus feel the need to explain to others matters surrounding religion and politics in the SWANA region.

An element within CRT called "the voice of color" thesis stipulates that marginalized communities are in the best position to voice their struggles and educate their White counterparts on matters surrounding racism, since their lived experiences surrounding oppression can communicate this powerfully (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 11). While this may be a responsibility some SWANA individuals are willing and proud to shoulder, there is an interesting relationship with White culture when they are not voluntarily providing this information, but are being demanded to do so. When SWANA people are continuously asked to take time and energy to inform the dominant culture on matters regarding geography, religion, war, international politics, and SWANA

culture, and are uncertain regarding how the information will be received, this may prove to be mentally and emotionally taxing. Arab culture may once have been viewed as exotic and harmless; after all, they are classified as "White." However, as time went on and stereotypes about SWANA people changed based on media portrayals and a changing political climate, so did attitudes toward SWANA people.

Prior research on intersectionality found that African-American women in the workplace are exposed to both racism and sexism, which places them in an "occupational 'double jeopardy'" (Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006, p. 157). My discussion with a 41-year-old, Lebanese-Armenian woman named Mila revealed the double threat to SWANA female working professionals as well. Recalling her experiences working in the very male- and White-dominated graphic print industry for some time, she said: "A lot of people don't associate women knowing anything about signs in general…they wouldn't want to speak to me…I would feel like I was spoken down to many times; 'Do you know what this material is?' 'Do you know how to use a computer?'' Although Mila initially attributed these microaggressions to her gender rather than her race, as the interview progressed, she described other interactions that highlighted people's discomfort with her racial identification as well. Lending support to the voice of color thesis, Mila also regularly underwent a series of questioning. When asked about her accent, for example, the following question was almost always, "Christian or Muslim?" Mila would also get asked to explain the terrorist attacks of 9/11 attacks while on the job: "You could tell a lot of people were angry…they would come to our shop and not leave…and we would have to explain to them." It seemed that Mila felt that these explanations were given, not just as an extended courtesy, but as a necessity in order to maintain relationships with White clients.

Anastasia's casual comments during our conversation about being "hit on" by her boss highlighted another trend I noticed among most of these women, which was their experiences with being sexualized by the dominant group.

Being Sexualized

Wood et al. (1983) described how over the years, Western culture has placed women in one of four stereotypical roles: "Sex object, pet, mother, and iron maiden," which equates women with dependence

and powerlessness rather than with capability and professionalism (p. 307). The women interviewed in this study had all at some point been evaluated by White individuals based on their looks rather than their job performance. Mila described the surprised reaction of clients who knew of her race and would meet her in person for the first time: "Oh, you're very pretty, you're not what I imagined." This raises the question of how White individuals develop assumptions regarding SWANA culture, and what looks have to do with job performance in the first place.

Anastasia recalled how she was physically touched by superiors, and was dealt with aggressively by them when their advances were not reciprocated. This unsolicited attention provoked the White women in the office, who expressed jealousy at times even though Anastasia never expressed interest in getting sexually involved with her boss. Arus described how she was accused of having affairs with doctors by her White female coworkers. Even if the surrounding male figures made no such advances toward these women, it seemed that the assumptions were made about them anyway, as if to say any success they might experience is hinged solely on their sexuality.

Coping

Respondents were asked how they chose to cope with the situations they faced after getting over the initial shock, anger, hurt, frustration, and anxiety they all described experiencing at some point when dealing with the dominant culture in the workplace.

Coping Through Education

When asked what advice they would give the next generation of SWANA female professionals, three of the five women said that they would encourage others to rise above the negative stereotypes by educating themselves rigorously, and by being the best at their job. "Every day, if you hear a word, a sentence, a procedure, a protocol, and you don't know about it…do that research right there that evening, and come educated about it," Arus commented. Mila also said, "I feel like, well, the more educated we get…it's worth it at the end of the day." These expressions were consistent with prior literature on CRT, regarding the additional effort minority groups must make to retain their

place within their occupations, and within society at large (McGee and Stovall, 2015).

Coping Through Support-Seeking

The women I interviewed all shared their stories at some point with people they felt comfortable with who could act as a sounding board, and validate their emotions. For example, in regards to the stand she took to fight for her rights, Teddy said: "I still had some insecurities about it. So, I ran it by my family to kind of get an idea, like, you know, what their viewpoint was. Like, was this all some kind of internal dialogue that was happening? Or was it real?" These sentiments were familiar to me, as they conveyed the same measure of shock that I have felt at times during work; conversations that seemed so outrageous, I wondered if I had imagined it.

Long-Term Implications and Avoidance

Prior research tells us that workplace hostilities can be quite traumatic for individuals of MENA descent (Awad et al., 2019). In an effort to minimize or put a stop to this trauma, Murray et. al. (2017) found that many seek out self-employment in order to avoid dealing with direct discrimination. Three of the five women in this study expressed long-term emotional and work-related implications due to their experiences in hostile workplace environments. *Avoidance* was a recurring theme that arose among the women who described not only ways they coped with the issue, but ways in which they handled their stress after the trauma was long over. Teddy vowed that she would never again work for a White male because of the difficulties she formerly experienced. Sharon is no longer employed at the place where she had her negative interactions with White clients and superiors. Until this day, she and her husband avoid going into that area, even for recreational purposes, because they know that SWANA culture is not welcome there in the same way it is in other parts of Los Angeles. Anastasia not only left her place of employment, but finds it difficult to even walk by the area where she once worked.

Limitations

Interviews with more than five participants would have been helpful in uncovering other patterns in relation to microaggressions and problems experienced by SWANA females in the workplace, and how these experiences have an effect on them. Also, since participants for this study were recruited from the same city, having a more geographically diverse group may have revealed new insights based on White culture in other parts of the states. In addition to expanding the research by means of qualitative methods, employing other methods like quantitative surveys could have determined how widespread this issue is across the U.S.

Considerations for Future Research

More qualitative research on this topic might reveal whether communication apprehension among SWANA women is heightened during these types of negative interactions. If so, further discussions can help to identify whether the cause is a lack of training in communication, or feelings of intimidation when dealing with the dominant group. Data collected from a larger group of SWANA women can then be examined quantitatively to determine the scope of issues surrounding communication apprehension and impacted work performance within the U.S. if this problem is found to exist.

Recommendations

The women interviewed all agreed that it is important to learn effective strategies to employ in the workplace to lessen the negative effects of their interactions with the dominant group, and were all willing to be educated on these strategies. Specific strategies that can preserve work performance, lessen apprehension, and most effectively counteract microaggressions displayed by dominant groups in the workplace can be taught by means of workshops that can be tailored to meet the needs of SWANA women. Communication experts taking the lead in these trainings can discuss “multidimensional coping strategies” that involve targeting both the problem, and the negative emotions that are a result of the problem (Murray & Ali, 2017). When it comes to addressing negative emotions and overall mental health, discussions surrounding personal experiences can be quite helpful. McGee and Stovall (2015)

described the importance of addressing issues that would result from "racial battle fatigue," and acknowledged that more is needed than just the mechanisms of resilience and perseverance as a way to *cope*; healing and nurturing are also needed for optimal well-being (p. 502, 510). Thus, trainings designed to target both problem- and emotion-based coping strategies for SWANA women may prove beneficial.

In addition to assisting SWANA women, efforts must be made by organizations to ensure that equity and diversity policies are enforced, and make amendments to these policies when needed (Kamenou and Fearfull, 2006). Welcoming input on policies from minority group members within organizations can also contribute to success, and reflect a genuine effort to promote a conscientious and dignified environment.

Conclusion

The stories I heard from this group of five SWANA women revealed microaggressions and hostilities to be a common occurrence towards the intersecting identities of race, gender, and occupation while in the workplace. In addition to dealing with the ambiguity that comes with White classification, SWANA women often also contend with racial questioning and sexualization. Avoidance, self-educating, and support-seeking were found to be used by these women as a means of coping with these issues. Practical application of this and future research might examine ways to best provide training programs that can equip SWANA female professionals to succeed in maintaining both their well-being and their roles within the workplace. In examining Critical Race Theory against my findings, I found patterns that were not only consistent with what we already know about interest-convergence, the voice-of-color thesis, and intersectionality, but also reinforced these frameworks. By engaging in open discussions and sharing our stories, we can validate the experiences of other SWANA women, and work together to implement practical solutions for maintaining resilience, strength, success, and most importantly, well-being while at work.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

Theme	Question
Introduction / warm-up questions Express gratitude for their time and efforts After reviewing the informational cover letter, asking if there are any questions, & getting consent Remember to ask if you can audio or visually record and take notes Remind them that they can stop the interview at any time, or can take a break if need be Ask what they would like to use for a pseudonym	My name is Rasha Hannouche, you can call me Rasha, and my gender pronouns are she/her/hers I am a masters student at CSULA, and I am originally from Armenia, Syria, and Lebanon, but was born here in the States Can you please introduce yourself? I'm interested in learning from you both as a woman from the SWANA region, and as a working professional who resides in the United States. Perhaps we can start by talking about your race and ethnicity? Where are you from originally? What do you do for work?
How one identifies	On demographic forms, how do you usually identify? What advice, if any, have you been given in terms of expressing your identity at work?

Experiences with microaggressions and other discriminatory communication from dominant culture Experiences with microaggressions and other discriminatory communication from dominant culture (cont.)	While carrying out duties pertaining to your professional role, have you ever experienced any hostility? Can you give a specific example? How was the hostility against you communicated to you? (passive aggressive, or direct?) Was there any name-calling? Has anyone ever made assumptions about your ability to speak and/or write in English while you were trying to do your job? Can you give a specific example? What was it about these incidents that made you realize the aggression was stemming from your phenotype/appearing foreign? How do you know the person wasn't just having a "bad day," or was simply acting consistent with their character? Have you ever been questioned about your religion while at work by anyone? Have you ever been directly asked by anyone if you are Muslim?
Response to these aggressions	When you experienced the hostilities we just discussed, how did you respond, if at all? Did you ever struggle to find the right words to address these attacks? What was your thought process in coming up with a response?

Emotional repercussions	In that scenario that you described, what emotions did you experience? What, if any, were the lasting emotional and/or work implications of that experience? How have you decided to cope with these situations? Do you feel that aggressions towards you became heightened after major global or domestic political events? (Ex: 9/11)
Support	Did you ever share the experiences you had with family or friends? (if yes/no, why?) If yes, have you ever been criticized or questioned for your reactions by them? If yes, how has this affected you?
Community outreach/Practical solutions	What strategies do you think would be helpful for the next generation of SWANA women to employ in the workplace? What advice would you give them? Would you be willing to learn communicative styles that you can implement while at work, in order to lessen the negative effects of these interactions?
Closing questions Remember to thank participants!	Is there anything else that you'd like to share?

Thoughts and Prayers on Twitter: Typographic Semiotics and Digital Space

Mathew Dell

Abstract

‘Thoughts and prayers’ is an expression that has been used and debated upon in American discourse. This study examines the semantics and communicative architecture of the phrase on Twitter and how it changes in the wake of private and public tragedies. The following research outlines communication as an underpinning facet to culture, public rituals, and Twitter as a site of inquiry. The study then proceeds to analyze point-mappings of the expression ‘my thoughts and prayers’ as it is used throughout Twitter in the United States; additionally, gesture-locale maps and content analyses of individual tweets were also performed. The findings resulted in greater expression convergence towards event locale and more personal statement-based tweets made during notable public tragedy versus lesser known private events.

Keywords*: thoughts and prayers, Twitter, sympathy discourse, point- mappings, public and private tragedy*

In the wake of an American tragedy, the internet is flooded with thoughts and prayers, a gesture often expressed by public officials and individuals as a means of giving condolence (Herb, 2017). Thoughts and prayers have existed within public discourse for years. Often the subject of debate, the gesture is met with polarized opinions of praise or rebuff. While supporters highlight the importance of thoughts and prayers as a means of maintaining solidarity in times of societal malaise (Coward 2016), critics attack the saying for being a facetious resolve: a non-solution that offers no directive forward amidst highly politicized crises of gun violence and natural catastrophe (Martinelli 2017). Given the increasing amount of discourse concerning the phrase thoughts and prayers, it has become imperative to investigate its functional ontology within the American cultural lexicon and the construction of the private and public arena for which it is sent through.

There is little known research to date inquiring about the usage of thoughts and prayers and even less on how the expression is used through computer-mediated forms of communication like Twitter. Hayes, Waddell, and Smuddle (2017) elaborate on how tragedy is compounded in sympathy discourse, offering a general guideline on how social value is ascribed through communication. Conversely, the symbolic construction of the victim is explicitly addressed in an analysis by Zhang et. al (2019) on how thoughts and prayers are given amidst tragedies of gun violence between 2012 and 2014. Moreover, the victim becomes the site of ideological valuation and subsequent politicization. The expression “thoughts and prayers” operates as the vehicle of said ascription.

While the authors and adjacent research qualify the inherency of a specific temporality that pertains to thoughts and prayers and sympathy discourse at large, none of the research is predicated on any mapping or understanding of communicative architectures outside of those that are purely semiotic; spatiality is defined more so by symbolic constructions. This begs the question of how the arena of the public and private tragedy are constructed in terms of their respective geographies. How do they differ? Where do they overlap? How might we consider the semiotics of digital space? In the following sections, I will contextualize current research on communicative rituals, Twitter as a cultural arena, and

subsequently thoughts and prayers as a means of modeling tragedy and victimhood through a new iteration of cultural time. Then, I will conduct an analysis on Twitter mappings, interrogating the functionality of the gesture in terms of how it is used on Twitter to produce potential conclusions on digital and other temporal fields.

Literature Review

There is a multitude of literature that continues to establish the ongoing, developing ties between communication and culture. In the contemporary digital era, cultures have developed across many online media platforms like Twitter. The following literature review will contextualize the relationship between communication and culture. It will then qualify the value computer-mediated communication platforms to maintain as a cultural arena. Finally, it will offer previous examinations on crisis communication and sympathy discourse, establishing a framework for how these modes of public communication exist already in online cultural spaces.

Understanding Culture Through Communication

In his 2009 work, *Communication as culture*, Carey develops the ritual view of communication. A perspective centered around participation, commonness, and community, the ritual view is explained by Carey to encompass how society creates and maintains narratives through collective engagement. Through various forms of ceremonial maintenance, a society assembles its identity, qualifies its values, and creates its history. Through the ritual view, the process of communication is portrayed ontologically as a form of spectatorship and participation within the societal area; collectively: reading, reacting, art-making, protest, etc. catalyze the affirmation, generation, and changing of values and norms into American society's dynamic cultural lexicon. Mass participation within the public sphere can be traced through Twitter.

Twitter

Culture and the ethos of the public forum have become increasingly engineered into personalized online technologies, often becoming further enhanced through developments in keyword software. Furthermore, the dynamic of culture outlined in Carey (2009) becomes compressed in digitized public settings like Twitter. Twitter is a personalized social media site used by over 330 million people around the world for microblogging and social networking

(Twitter; Statista, November 13, 2019). Users can compose a series of texts called tweets, subscribe, or 'follow' other accounts, and also 'like' or 'retweet' tweets made from other accounts. Hashtags (denoted with a # sign) can be used before a word to denote a topic or theme. Typing the @ sign before the text of a username, will 'tag' and notify the user their name has been mentioned. Users can also reply to other tweets (which will tag all accounts mentioned automatically) and 'quote-retweet'; the latter will display the quoted tweet in a box above the quoting-accounts text. Phrases of text can also be searched as 'keywords'.

Modeling Twitter as a Cultural Arena

Konstantinos et. al (2011) conceptualize Twitter as a cultural arena through mathematics, modeling the sublimation of information and the emergence of hegemony into the community dynamic. In line with Carey (2009), the model's initial mode traces community as it forms around any common element (outlined in Papadopoulos et al. (2012) as a topic, a real-world person, a place, an event, an activity, or a cause). Carey's ritual view is exemplified through Konstantinos mathematical modeling of Twitter communities in that it views participation and discourse as spontaneous and rhizomatic. This is demonstrated through the ability of the model to enumerate any topic with emerging public engagement and subsequently rank it according to other themes adjacent to the discourse of interest. It is through this modular process that the value of communal dynamic- the crux of Carey's writings on public ritual- become sedimented in the event they qualify. The association between tweeting and the prevalence of common elements is validated through Konstantinos et. al.

Twitter and Crisis Communication

Considering the importance of tracing spatiality and temporality within Twitter, Pond (2014) highlights necessary observational methods on Twitter amidst public crisis. Pond interrogates the meaning of proximity to and verification of disaster on Twitter, qualifying the prevalence of the temporal-spatial map as independent of the event timing and geography itself. While he proceeds to argue the necessity of realigning Twitter for crisis response, it is necessary to fixate on how time is compressed through meaning-making processes on the site. In order to advocate for the reconstructing of Twitter as a tool to attenuate crisis, Pond qualifies it as a system with its own cultured spatiality. Time and meaning of

crisis are created through public attendance to it. In a sense, Carey is echoed through Pond's writing in that validation of crisis is solely contingent on public verification; the societal crisis is validated by the milieu of communication that envelops it. However, he expands the thesis by calling for the interrogation of that process (for the sake of helping victims). Nonetheless, there is a liminal element between Carey and Pond that involves the utility of public attendance: How the crisis is validated through the public and whether it is socially-efficacious.

Tragedy, Politic, Public

In analyzing tragedy and public discourse, Hayes, Waddell, and Smuddle (2017) depart from the conventions of Pond's (2014) writings of crisis communication. Through considering public tragedy and its involvement of victims, they postulate the reaction of a collective 'self' comprised of a shared experience of the event. Black (2011) qualifies 'social time' as the mode in which public tragedy is attended to. According to the authors, 'social time' is where socio-cultural ideologies are posited as they clash and align on a temporal, publically-generated field. The ways in which Hayes et. al (2017) differentiate between tragedy and crisis becomes important for the sake of valuation. Tragedy, unlike crisis, is not in need of saving or helping. It is the site at which the public engenders ideological convention. The authors call for a differentiation between public and private tragedy. Their model becomes important when considering how the value of tragedy is gradated along the private-public axis. The authors define this by addressing the definition of public tragedy, providing a table that considers the scope of, social value, suffering, and consequences. Understanding the gradations of tragedy as they relate to a scale of collectivity becomes imperative in understanding thoughts and prayers.

Figure 1. Table of characteristics of public tragedy from Hayes, Waddell, and Smuddle (2017)

Thoughts and Prayers, Sympathy Discourse

Zhang et al. (2019) expand on the cultural temporality of tragedy as it pertains to thoughts and prayers, asserting that the gesture should be denoted as the symbolic construction of grievable subjects. This can be understood with Hayes et. al (2017) in order to contextualize a socio-spatial map of the gesture and the narrative for

issues it constructs across the private and public spheres. Zhang et al. qualify the politicality of thoughts and prayers as social action and how it is emblematic of a body politic. Results demonstrate how thoughts and prayers were given less when there were more African American children killed in a school shooting. These findings are essential in discussing questions of proximity and geography that are part of the temporal network created through the thoughts and prayers expression. Recalling Hayes et al. (2017), its temporality should be considered with regard to the scope of the tragedy. The discussion of Zhang et al. draws conclusions towards a public policy of White violence, death, and tragedy.

Hybridizing the approaches made by Hayes and Zhang ultimately contextualizes changes in collective politics along the spectrum, all the way into private life. What tragedies does the public give their thoughts and prayers to? How does this change per community? How is it different per the individual?

Methodology

No findings have been released that show the distribution of the thoughts and prayers expressed throughout the United States. In order to answer the research question about the geographic distribution of thoughts and prayers, I plan to create satellite mappings of the expression made on Twitter using the OmniSci TweetMap. Then, I will conduct a content analysis on how thoughts and prayers are functionally enacted on Twitter amidst private and public tragedies. Before diving into the specifics of the methodologies, it is important to understand Twitter as a research site.

Twitter as a Research Site

Twitter is a social media service where users can post written messages, links, photos, and videos. A posting on Twitter is called a tweet. A hashtag is a keyword of either a specific theme, place, event, or thing- that is posted with the pound sign in front of the word (i.e. #Love, #FourthOfJuly, #Colorado). A hashtag and all the tweets that use it can be tracked through Twitter AI. Twitter users can mention other users in tweets or reply to tweets by typing the '@' symbol followed by individuals' username. The '@username' text is automatically generated when a user replies to a tweet. Twitter is one of the most expansive public forums. With 500 million tweets posted

each day and around 200 billion per year, it serves as a dense record of public communication. This social media platform has been studied previously for its role in institutionalizing new forms of public communication (Schultz et. al, 2011). Twitter is the ideal site because it contains the highest concentration of current and archived expressions of thoughts and prayers.

OmniSci Tweetmap

OmniSci Tweetmap is a public-facing graphic representation of Twitter activity between the current date and 4 months prior. It operates through the OmniSci platform, a system that utilizes graphics processor unit (GPU)-accelerated technology to create real-time analytics for big data usage. The Tweetmap condenses the total of all tweets being sent into a bottlenecked representation of all Twitter activity. Users are able to search hashtags, tweets, and specific keywords. The map is displayed in point mode. Point mode shows where tweets are sent from as well as the content of each tweet. Expanding beyond the point-mode utility in the Tweetmap, we will draw lines between tweets containing thoughts and prayers gestures made with positive sentiment to geographic sites. These connections will contextualize any inherencies in the communicative pattern of thoughts and prayers for specific events; where the gesture is predominantly sent from and how the offline locus geography and digital space of usage changes between tragedies. Using OmniSci Tweetmap will provide a location and a representation of the activity of thoughts and prayers and any potential shifts.

Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis is used to derive meaning from text data usually in the form of transcripts or field notes. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) offer a mode of organizing data through coding: Variations of thematic in which the design of the groupings is underpinned by prior theory or research. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) further qualify the practice as a means of making informed inferences on communication. The mode of how we will execute the content analysis must strongly accommodate the translation of cultural semiotics into the digital space.

Drawing from Zappavigna's (2011) elaboration on Twitter's typographic conventions as linguistic markers, the content analysis will predominantly include the interrogation of communication using

the platform's utilities; including making tweets to personal profiles and using the '@' reply function. Directing the content analysis away from the semantics of general discourse- and more towards the functional mechanics of the online platform- allows us to consider any potential relationship between temporal space and digital architecture.

Findings

Collections of the keywords 'my, thoughts, and, prayers' made through TweetMap provide a representation of where thoughts and prayers have been expressed by individuals from July 17th to Oct 4th 2019 (see Figures 1-7). The point mappings provide an approximate distribution of thoughts and prayers being sent within the United States. Content analysis and recording of gesture-locale connection were further conducted on tweets within the data. Tweets with the gesture were then related to the site of the tragedy contained in the subject. Individual tweets made during the El Paso shooting and other various periods were also collected for comparison (see Figure 8).



Figure 1. Point map of tweets produced by OmniSci containing the keyword search 'my, thoughts, and, prayers' from July 17 to October 20th 201. The expression gesture appears to be distributed throughout most regions of the United States.



Figure 2. Point map of tweets produced by OmniSci containing the keyword search 'my, thoughts, and, prayers' from August 2nd to August 3rd (El Paso Shooting). The expression of the gesture retains similar distribution to Figure 1.; however, it is noticeably less concentrated



Figure 3. Point map of tweets produced by OmniSci containing the keyword search 'my, thoughts, and, prayers' from August 2nd to August 3rd (El Paso Shooting). Lines were drawn to content with the locale of the event. The locale for all lines is El Paso, Texas.

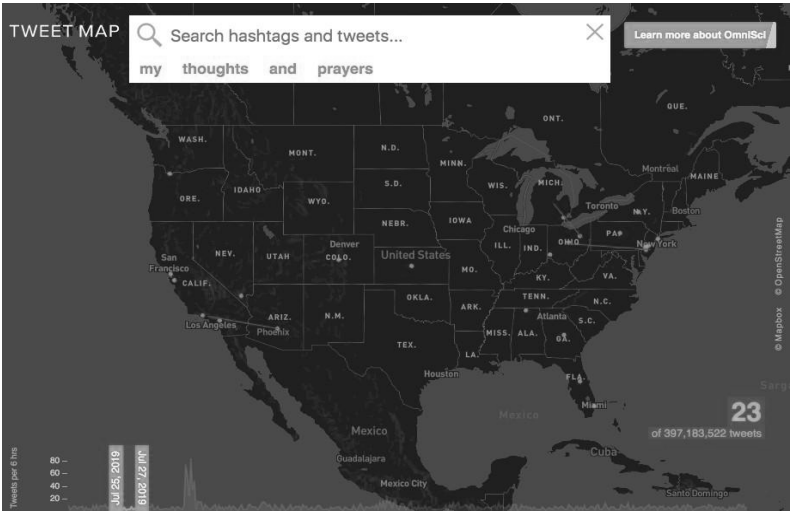


Figure 4. Point map of tweets produced by OmniSci containing the keyword search 'my, thoughts, and, prayers' from July 25th to July 27th. Lines were drawn to content with the locale of the event. Content-locale drawing appears to be more random and of less in quantity than Figure 3.

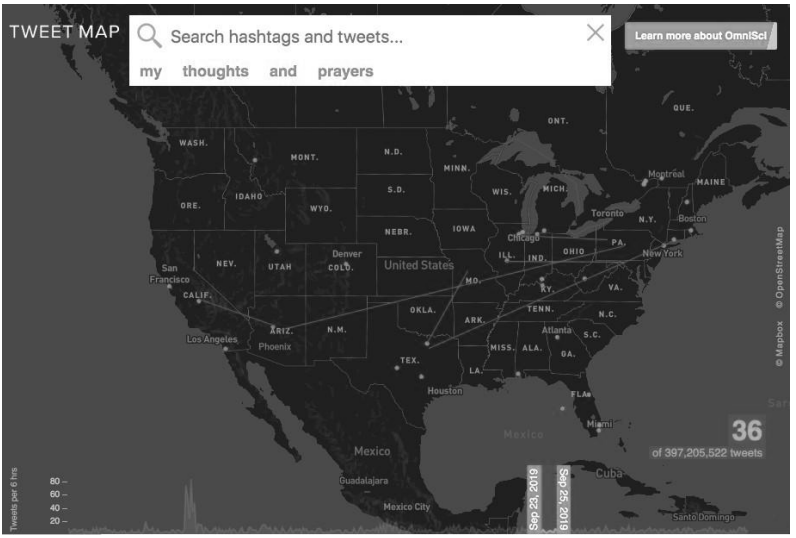


Figure 5. Point map of tweets produced by OmniSci containing the keyword search 'my, thoughts, and, prayers' from September 25th – September 29th. Lines were drawn to content with the locale of the event. Content-locale drawing appears to be more random and of less in quantity than Figure 3.

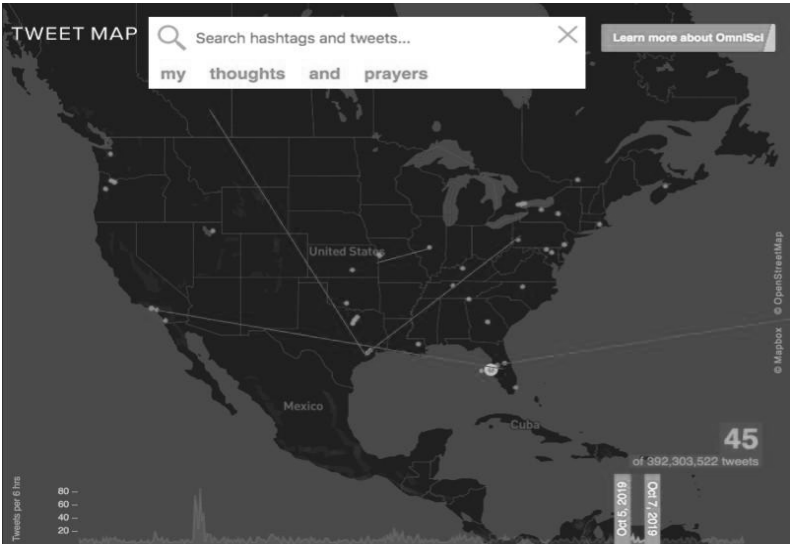


Figure 6. Point map of tweets containing the keyword search 'my, thoughts, and, prayers' from October 5th – October 7th. Lines were drawn to content with the locale of the event. Content-locale drawing appears to be more random and of less in quantity than Figure 3.

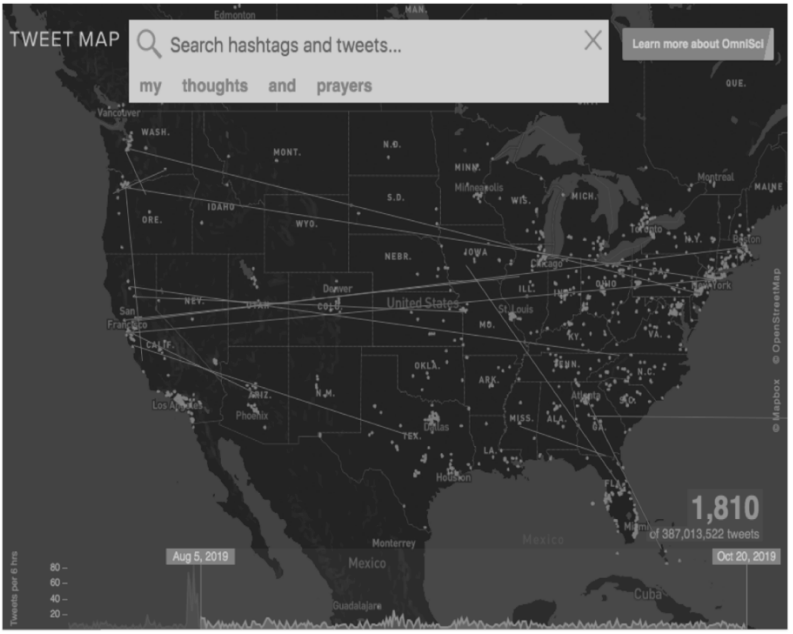


Figure 7. Point map of tweets containing the keyword search 'my, thoughts, and, prayers' from August 5th to October 20th. Lines were drawn to content with the locale of the event. Content-locale drawing appears to be more random and of less in quantity than Figure 3.

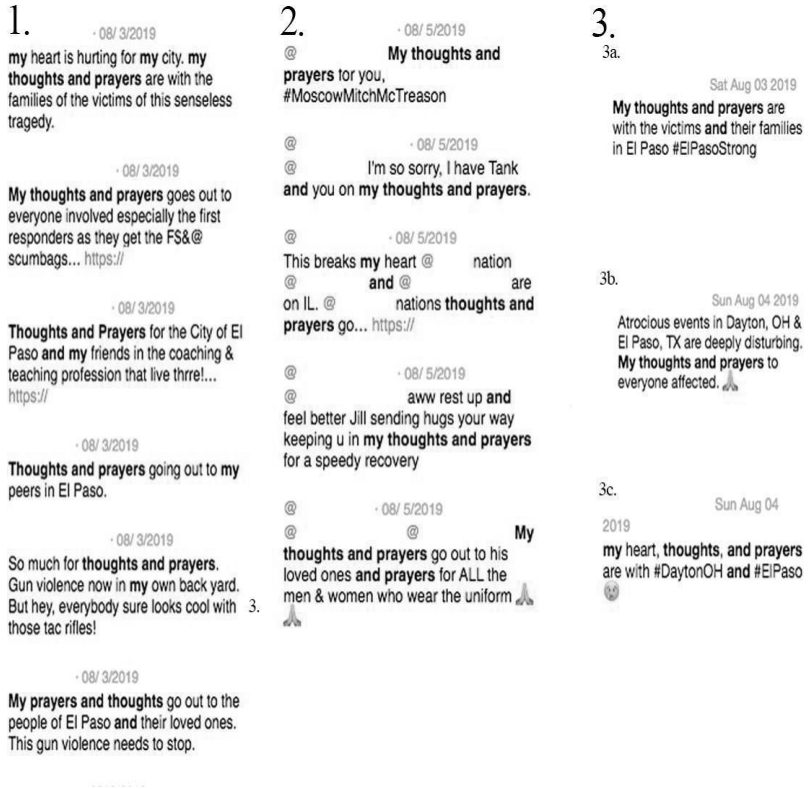


Figure 8

Column 1 A sample of tweets posted by users to their personal profiles during the El Paso shooting;

Column 2

A sample of Tweets collected between August 5th-October 20th (After the El Paso Shooting) with '@' replies containing the expressions that were sent to other users. None of the content in this sample of tweets was related to the El Paso shooting;

Column 3

A sample of tweets posted by users to their personal profiles during the El Paso shooting.

Discussion

Our findings revealed that thoughts and prayers are expressed throughout the United States generally and in the wake of the El Paso public tragedy. Aside from concentration, there were no distinctions between the point mappings produced that would affirm any assumption about the gesture retaining any geographically-localized qualities. However, the mapping of tweets with gesture-locale line drawings during the El Paso tragedy produced a unique mass convergence of tweet content onto the site of the event. This further contextualized prior research on the propagation of spontaneous temporal-spatial fields; the induction of tragedy into the public narrative based on the collective, linguistically-enacted, arrival at the site. The content analysis of how Twitter utilities were used produced distinctions in the employment of personal statements versus replies during public and more private tragic events; these findings invited inquiry into the potential relationship between typographic convention and ulterior cultural semiotics.

Expressional Ubiquity

Based on the initial point-mappings, the expression of thoughts and prayers retains no pattern of geo-locality in the data set. People around the United States use the gesture all the time. Because of this, thoughts and prayers could not be localized to any specific social or ideological vernacular in a certain part of the U.S in the study. The communicative architecture of the thoughts and prayers gesture does not lie where it is expressed geographically. These findings contrast any presumptions made with regards to usage mostly pertaining to the Midwest and Southern United States regions, areas known for their religiosity. No matter the circumstance, thoughts and prayers are sent from all around the United States. This ubiquity invites a new line of questioning into the construction of prayer and moreover sympathy given to crisis. Since the gesture cannot be localized, the semantic of ‘thoughts and prayers’ may be universal in its convention. Prayer may no longer be a means of the religious; rather it may be a mechanism to ascribe ideology. This concept is alluded to in Zhang (2019) and the authors’ description of thoughts and prayer as a utility for evaluating victims.

Locale, Communicative Architectures, Tragedy

The stark differences in the event locale mappings (Figure 3-7) bring light to the shifts in communicative patterns emblematic of a ritual around public tragedy. The scale of a public tragedy is qualified through the convergence of expressions onto the site of the event. Through the gesture-locale mappings, one can observe how the paradigm of public tragic discourse is informed by the scope and semiotic alike. Public tragedies like El Paso involve a distinct temporal-spatial field propagated by the expression of thoughts and prayers that operate within it (See Figures 3-7). While more personal tragedies are represented through non-directional lines drawn to various sites of locale in and outside of the United States, public tragedy is defined by spontaneous, systematic convergence gestures onto a single site. The axis of attendance outlined in Carey (2009) is exemplified in the functional differences between the graphs. The ritual of thoughts and prayers enacted en mass maintains a distinct convergent aspect that differs from how the gesture is usually sent. This difference highlights the facilitation of public tragedy through Carey's ritual processes. The publicity of the El Paso shooting is defined by the manner it is inducted into public narrative through linguistic action. This differentiation between mass ritual and private gestures in tragedy is further qualified through the lack of a cogent communicative pattern outside of the data concerning El Paso.

Typographic Semiotics:

Implications for Online Sympathy Discourse

A variety of thematics are involved in understanding thoughts and prayers discourse around tragedy on twitter. In the wake of the El Paso shooting, there were many more tweets made as individual statements regarding the event. Users would often post a tweet about the event that would appear on their profile. Contrary to the El Paso event, users were seen sending thoughts and prayers to lesser-known celebrities (e.g. actors, sports players, writers) and other individuals through the reply '@' function. This distinction invites inquiry into how the semiotics of tragedy differs between the El Paso shooting and these other individuals. The El Paso shooting maintains a quality deeply embedded in a moral quotient defined by mass media and social discourse. Thus, its temporal-spatial infrastructure becomes equally about social values as it is sympathy. This utility of the tweet

for moral identification echoes sentiments made by Black (2011) in that public tragedy becomes a field for exercising ideological convention. Thoughts and prayers propagate the event's time, place, and all ideologies that exist within its arena. The semantic of the self-statement involves a sense of moral identification each user enacts for their followers. Mass convergence sediments publicity: a temporal field through which ideology is refracted. This lies in stark contrast to the way users act towards individuals ailing from illness, death, or loss. Not only is the convergence of thoughts and prayers much less on someone- for example, a player on the Pittsburgh Steelers football team- but the engagement is more colloquial and not reflective of the individual making the statement. The discourse of thoughts and prayers in a more personal tragedy exists within the means of a sympathetic conversation between the user and the recipient.

In considering the findings concerning Twitter's typographic semantics, it is imperative to consider digital space as it pertains to tragedy, the public narrative, and sympathy discourse. Throughout the research, physical geography is consistently flattened by contrast to constructed time defined by a mass convergence of users, unknown to each other, expressing the thoughts and prayers gesture. The production of the semantic interpretation of Twitter typographic also offers potential conceptions of the online public space and narrative, a compression of geography into a temporally distinct field underpinned by ideological and moral convention.

With regards to thoughts and prayers, Twitter typographic seems to functionally embody a means for users to enact such identifiers, therefore the ontology of such a space should be considered simultaneously.

Limitations

At the time of this research, there was not a reliable means of collecting and testing data taken from Twitter. The OmniSci tweet map is a demo program offered by a larger commercial data analytics site. While it offers a fruitful sample of data from the social networking site, there was no means of verifying user location or knowing if the collection of tweets was a significantly representative sample. Other programs such as COSMOS have only been developed for use in the United Kingdom and do not have proper usage manuals. These programs were unable to run on my computer

and collect a proper sample from the United States as the mapping utility was structured around the United Kingdom.

Future Research

After noting the convergence of the thoughts and prayers gesture on the geographic site of the El Paso shooting, I am eager to see if this finding could be produced across a variety of publically notable tragedies. It would be interesting to see point-mappings of the tragedies explored and differentiated in Zhang (2019); there could be distinct infrastructures of the thoughts and prayers expressed constructed around material settings concerning factors outlined by the authors, such as the race of the victims and number of children involved. Admittedly, there are few ends produced in my research that offer a solution amidst contemporary discourse concerning the social efficacy of thoughts and prayers. In addition to greater education on outreach to victims of public tragedies (e.g. El Paso; gun violence), I believe it would be beneficial to pursue a study inquiring as to participants' online social media usage and political, and moral views. While my findings vaguely suggest the compression of politics and morality in digital space (while physical geography is abandoned), more research concerning usage could offer future directives towards a healthy and informed balance of personal identification online and offline.

Conclusion

Thoughts and prayers is a gesture that has existed within the American cultural lexicon for a while; but now is finally being critically considered in terms of its role, meaning, and space. As seen throughout prior research, computer-mediated forums of discourse like Twitter are fruitful sites for which to interrogate the ontology of vernacular such as thoughts and prayers. Twitter offers a look into how communication constructs its own spaces, distinct from physical constraints, with their respective temporal-thematic. While Zhang et al (2019) interrogate this specific aspect of thoughts and prayers, the research produced in my findings allows greater contextualization of the vehicle and arena at large. Through the mappings, I was able to differentiate the potential construction of entirely different cultural arenas specific to private and public tragedy. The mass convergence of thoughts and prayers onto the site of the politicized tragedy may reify a more public digital space that encapsulates ideological conventions;

this is investigated but not fully explained in Zhang et al. research study. Furthermore, my findings invite critique into the semantics behind how the usage of the reply function is differentiated between more public versus more private tragedies; and whether the employment of a statement is emblematic of the manufacturing of self and collective ideologies during public tragedy. Essentially, these findings could act as a preface to Zhang et. al. research in that it contextualizes a temporal ontology of the expression that may exist before valuation. This research produced a potential set of mappings that relates more so to the differentiations in public and private tragedy outlined in Hayes, Waddell, and Smuddle (2017). In some ways, it suggests more of a binary distinction between the public and private tragedy as the El Paso mapping is very distinct in its alignment and versus the randomized structures of the additional mappings. This would depart from the authors' adapted scale in that it would suggest a sharper differentiation that is more visually acute than ambiguous.

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