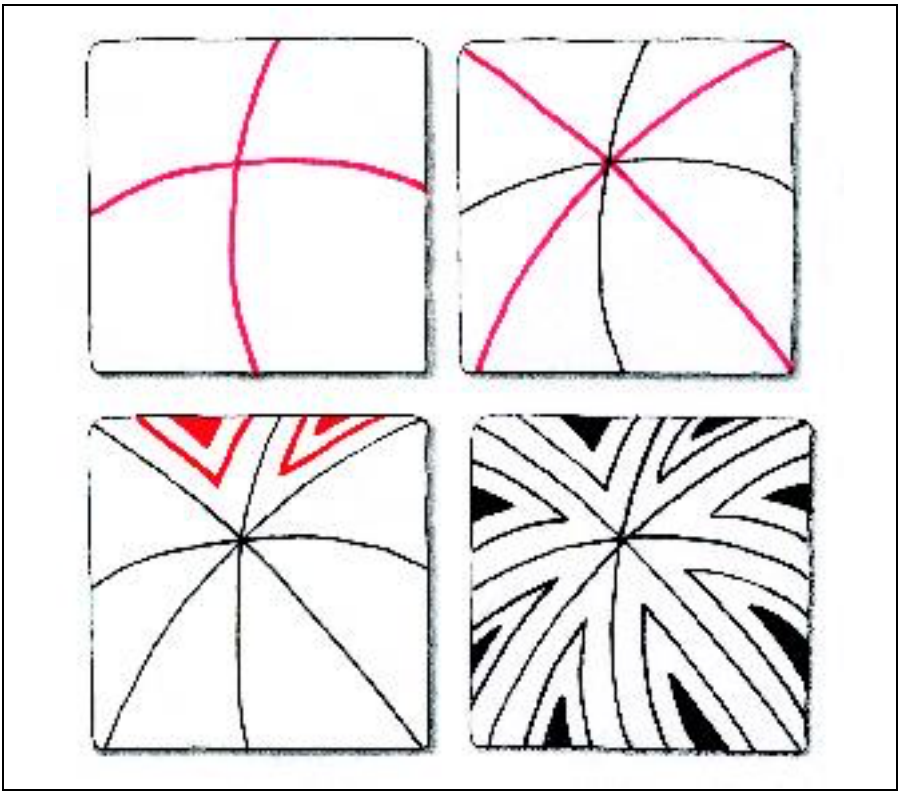
Colloquy

Volume 15 Fall 2020



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

Editorial Statement

Colloquy is a journal of the Department of Communication Studies at California State University, Los Angeles. Colloquy aims to represent the variety of scholarship conducted in the Department of Communication Studies as well as representing different types and levels of academic thought. Writing style varies with students' experience with writing as a scholarly enterprise.

The editorial board is comprised of students in the Department of Communication Studies and supervising members of the Communication Studies faculty. Typically, the membership of the editorial board changes with each issue. The intention of the editors is to ensure that essays 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.

As representative of the scholarship in Communication Studies, a number of essays in Colloquy have been presented at national and regional conferences, including the International Communication Association (ICA) conference, the National Communication Association (NCA) convention, and the Western States Communication Association (WSCA) conference. As such, Colloquy highlights the achievements of students in the Communication Studies department while providing a forum for scholarly discussion and innovation.

The editorial board wishes to thank all those who contributed to this volume, including the authors who submitted essays, the faculty members who solicited materials and mentored students, Dean Linda Essig who provided the funds to produce the issue, and members of the production staff.

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About the Authors and Editors

We're the Teachers and We Do Care: Critiquing fantasies and narratives of participation in 2019 United Teachers Los Angeles protests

Joseph Lee

Abstract
Teachers are some of the most influential people in a person's life. In January 2019 members of United Teachers Los Angeles and their supporters staged a two-week strike stemming from their dedication to students and to highlight issues of wages, staff employment, and ongoing disputes with school officials regarding charter schools. Through analyses of narratives and fantasy themes, this paper explores how one former student joined the protests and reflections afterwards through rhetorical inquiry, with emphasis on stories and goals of audiences and proxemics as a chaining route.

Keywords: protests, social movements, public education, narrative criticism, rhetorical vision

Introduction

On January 14, 2019, I woke up to people chanting "We're the teachers and we do care" close to an elementary school next to my apartment. Until that moment I had forgotten about the UTLA (United Teachers Los Angeles) protests, with teachers protesting wages, classroom size, and influence of charter schools (UTLA, 2018).

The chants continued for days, both before and after school, and I went outside my apartment to watch the protests. For the rest of the week, I could not get the picture of the UTLA protesters out of my mind and kept visiting news websites to read stories about them daily. I kept thinking to myself, "of all the places to protest, why at an elementary school next to where I live, and why was I attracted to messages about concern for students?"

After watching the protesters outside my apartment for days, I felt I had to participate somehow. On January 18, I presented a speech to protesters, asking school officials to reconsider demands by UTLA members. "Never forget the students," I declared. "What teachers want is a better educational environment for students they care about." Despite reminding myself that I did contribute something with this speech act, I felt conflicted and guilty afterwards (Lee, 2019), asking myself if my participation helped protesters in the end.

What made my participation special were two things: my goal of becoming a teacher one day, and the fact that this took place at a school close by. My participation in this event led me to my research question: how did proximity, stories, and goals of audience members become a route for chaining a rhetorical vision about public education through UTLA protests? I will answer this through a combination of two widely used methods: Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm, and Ernest Bormann's symbolic convergence and fantasy-theme analysis. These methods are appropriate because each participant, myself included, created a narrative based on diverse stories, and participation became a possible chaining route of a vision about improving the well-being of students.

Literature Review

The 2019 UTLA strike was one of the latest episodes in protests regarding funding for public education, charter schools, and

mismanagement by school officials. Although 2018 protests were staged in states with Republican majority such as West Virginia and Kentucky, the January 2019 protests were unique in that they took place in a blue state (Thompson, 2019). After Los Angeles, a similar protest took place in Oakland, California for similar reasons: funding, charter schools, and well-being of students (Freedberg, 2019).

Recent protests, including the UTLA protests, were centered around two areas of public education: funding, and reputation. Compared to the early 2000's, post-recession funding for public education has been in decline (National Education Association, 2018), leading to furlough days and overcrowding. In addition, citing poor academic performance and overcrowding, charter school advocates have pushed for more choices, including building more charter schools through initiatives at different states (Jason, 2017). However, as one charter school teacher observed, an effort to provide "alternative forms of public education through charter schools" is actually hurting the community, students, and education as a whole (McDonald Vaca, 2019), suggesting that a collaborative partnership may resolve the underlying problem of quality, reputation, and funding for education.

The most notable aspect of the artifact was the fact that it highlights student and alumni participation. Several protest gatherings prominently featured students, including a march in December 2018 that featured more than 50,000 teachers, parents, and students (UTLA, 2018). UTLA president Alex Caputo-Pearl mentioned "kids" and "students" multiple times, along with publications noting that these protests were all about students (Freedberg, 2019). Despite widespread coverage, narratives from students and alumni are lacking, or if present, are presented from UTLA's point of view. One student felt the strike "created a ghost town in schools" (Aldayeh, 2019), demonstrating the material effect of the absence of teachers and its meaning for students. Other narratives focused on why students have joined the strike, including several Facebook videos from UTLA that asked students for their feelings about the protests.

There are two aspects of this artifact worthy of further study. First, it is important to remember the place where this took place – an influential city located in a blue state. This is significant as it provides the process of how schools, in this case, schools in Los Angles, can become rhetorical constructs of "place" in a broader social movement

(Endres and Senda-Cook, 2011). Second, this artifact serves as a form of autoethnography, as I have participated and reflected on this experience as a rhetorical fieldworker (Middleton et al, 2019) and a contributor.

Methodology

Given that the artifact concerns a group and its actions, it could be tempting to use a method suited for understanding organizational messages. However, as Hart (2018) exerts, fantasy themes are "… local variations of a grand narrative …" thus it is important to study how narratives helped shape a group's rhetorical vision and its actions. Therefore, a combination of narrative criticism and fantasy-theme analysis will be used in this study.

According to Walter Fisher, humans are "storytelling animals" (Fisher, 1989; Griffin, 2015). As such, people are influenced by, and influence others through various stories such as personal tales, small group narratives, and cultural myths. Unlike rational paradigm where logic and reason dominated human communication, Fisher sought to view all human communication as narration, thereby bringing importance of stories and the act of storytelling front and center.

A narrative or a collection of stories involve one or more characters, a plot, setting, and a unifying theme, collectively known as a narrative form (Kuypers, 2017; Foss, 2004). Characters can be anything – people, animals, objects, and elements of nature. These characters interact with the setting, or the overall environment of the story or a scene within it, driving the plotline of the story. A careful study of characters, setting, and plot reveals a grand theme – one or more central messages of a story. Analysis of narrative form can be used to understand a story's narrative function. A compelling story draws the attention of the audience from beginning to end. A persuasive story allows rhetors or storytellers to identify with the audience. The combination of a memorable plot and setting transports audiences to an alternate reality where they can encounter characters and understand the unifying theme. Finally, through appeals to values and emotions, audiences are persuaded to act.

As expressed by Fisher, the standard for judging persuasiveness of a story is evidence of coherency and fidelity (Harrick, 2018; Griffin, 2015). Coherency, or probability, refers to how components of narrative

form work together to present a compelling story. Fidelity refers to how the story fits the reality the audience has come to know through similar narratives. Foss (2004) furthers, a typical rhetorical criticism centered around narratives would first seek to locate narrative form – characters, setting, events, theme. The critic will then analyze the narrative form to determine the function of narratives, followed by critiquing how and why the story holds together and if it is believable.

But what happens if a critic wishes to study how narratives inform a group's vision and action? This can be examined with fantasy-theme analysis (Kuypers, 2017; Hart, 2018), consisting of fantasy themes, chaining, fantasy types, and rhetorical visions.

According to Bormann, fantasy themes are "… individualized, dramatic interpretations of a group's message …" (Hart, 2018). For example, a group of people watching a poetry performance that enacts a group's message about justice may interpret the speech act differently based on life experiences. For some, specific words may resonate more vividly, and to others, specific passages would aid them in recalling certain ideas.

When each member of a group shares stories about their experiences and interpretations, a process called chaining occurs where narratives are propagated throughout the group (Griffin, 2006; Harrick, 2018). These narratives are then collected into a grand narrative, or a fantasy type, with recognizable characters, setting, plot, and unifying themes, which informs the group's message and action, or a rhetorical vision. For instance, after watching the poetry performance on justice, each group member might be asked to share their favorite passage from the speech act. Each member's interpretation, as chained or shared amongst members, forms a collection of fantasy themes with recognizable characters and ideas based on passages shared, which collectively becomes a rhetorical vision for the group as seen through the performance and individual interpretations. In effect, although members may present stories and themes about justice, the fantasy themes collected would prescribe a specific vision about justice as seen by this group.

Drawing inspiration from Ernest Bormann's symbolic convergence theory (Littlejohn, 2009), groups form a unified vision through an act of chaining. Fantasy-theme analysis seeks to understand how a group can create rhetorical visions via fantasies, or stories from

individuals which are then shared amongst members. As Kuypers (2017) reminds us, a critic seeking to use fantasy-theme analysis to understand rhetorical visions would first categorize fantasy themes – stories from group members. Once fantasy themes are identified, the themes are traced to locate possible routes for chaining and construction of one or more fantasy types. Fantasy themes, chaining, and fantasy types are then examined together to arrive at possible rhetorical visions for a group.

For this artifact, a participatory autoethnography, I will use a combination of these two methods to discern how stories and participation led to the chaining of a group's rhetorical vision, along with how that was transcended when I spoke to protesters.

Analysis

We will first analyze this artifact through separate lenses – narratives and fantasy-themes – before offering a unified analysis. Doing so helps understand how each part of the analysis interacts with each other to create a unifying theme.

In terms of narrative analysis and form, the cast of characters were teachers, school officials, students, and me. The first three are obvious: teachers protesting over wages, class sizes, and the welfare of students; school officials insisting that they do not have enough funds to cover UTLA demands; students participating in solidarity with teachers. I am included in this cast because of my participation via my speech to protesters - not only as an alumnus, but also because of my perspective as a future educator.

Setting and plot go hand in hand. In addition to regional protests at LAUSD headquarters and chants over wages and student welfare, this participatory experience took place at an elementary school next to where I live, with daily protests before and after school. This combination of proximity and chants before and after school prompted me to participate and become a character within this narrative.

The overall theme emerging from this narrative is participation to make public education better for all involved. Throughout the week, the major protest slogan was teachers caring about students, a narrative that captures an ideal educational institution for protesters: publicly funded, government supported, caring institution for educating

future leaders. This theme, coupled with setting and plot, along with my goal of becoming a teacher helped me participate in the protest, thus forming the narrative form.

The idealized educational institution also became the narrative function that propelled the coherency and made the story believable. The slogan of caring teachers transported me and other participants to a future where students did not have to think about being neglected due to lack of funds. The word "caring" also became an emotional drive for protesters as they kept chanting and gave speeches about how school officials "did not care about pupils they were in charge of." Passion for education, and by extension the act of making sure needs of students are not forgotten, kept the story going and made it believable, which fulfills Fisher's narrative paradigm.

Second, education and advocacy for students became one of many fantasy-themes seen throughout the artifact, which powered this social and moral fantasy type. In addition to "teachers caring about students" which powered the fantasy of a concerned parent, other stories and fantasy-themes have included government as an investor in public funding for education; sacrificial and advocacy action as seen through protesters skipping classes; and collective action fantasy exemplified by more people coming out each day to join the protests. Of these, advocacy and collective actions were notable, in that the first reminded me of righteous lawyers fighting for the oppressed, and second, the role of volunteers in a project to make the world better. Combined, the major fantasy-theme was a group of selfless, righteous advocates coming together for a cause: teachers, students, and I joining hands to advocate for the well-being of students, a form of social and moral fantasy type.

The fantasy of selfless advocacy, and the fact that this protest took place next to where I live, and my goal of becoming a teacher one day helped this fantasy chain out to me. Although I did hear about the protests from various news sources, witnessing the actual action in the first place kept my mind busy for the next few days, including contemplation of speaking to participants. On Friday the 18, I did just that – speaking to teachers about my feelings about students from the viewpoint of an alumnus, thus chaining the fantasies.

The grand narrative, or rhetorical vision from all this was importance of public education and well-being of students. Although

charter advocates were vocal against these protests, as noted from the article above, it caused at least one charter teacher to question the direction of this move. The fantasy of selfless advocacy for students, stories from teachers and students, along with my participation as an alumnus solidified the grand vision: public education teachers care about students, and by extension, the importance of the institution, as protesters were willing to take risks to save the institute of public education.

Lastly, combining analyses of narratives, fantasy-themes, and rhetorical vision helps us map out a possible route for chaining and the importance of reflection on the goals of participants. For me, the most effective route for chaining the vision of public education was a combination of stories, goals, and close proximity. Coherent and believable stories about struggle for public education, involving a diverse cast of characters, proximity, and a plot that spanned days to years helped solidify the fantasy of advocacy. This fantasy also aligned with my goal of working with students and, combined with stories from news media and experience learning from teachers, helped me become a participant, thus chaining the vision of the well-being of students and education.

In response to the research question on how proximity, stories, and goals of audience members become a route for chaining a rhetorical vision about public education through UTLA protests, it was advocacy and teaching, along with witnessing it firsthand that helped me participate in this artifact. In short, believable and coherent stories and reflective goals that tap into the hearts of audience members can become a chaining device for rhetorical visions, made more effective when considering where the artifact took place.

Evaluations, Implications, and Recommendations

There are two themes emerging from this analysis – time and place, along with goals as motivating factor, along with associated implications. In addition, there are several research avenues to help the artifact resonate with more audience members.

First, as noted throughout the analysis, time and place played a crucial role in making the fantasies and narratives chain out to an observer-turned-participant. Hearing the chants from teachers daily next to where I live helped me understand their advocacy strategies.

This also led to the aforementioned cognitive dissonance: an initial conflict between just observing or participating, resolved after giving a speech to protesters.

This brings into view an implication of proxemics as a chaining device. Numerous communication scholars have studied how spaces and proximity work to forge social bonds. Wood and Bitzer (2014) stresses the importance of space when constructing a rhetorical situation (Harrick, 2018). Although the persuasiveness of a given communicative medium and message is partly shaped by how rhetors come across to the audience via logos, ethos, and pathos, in order for certain persuasive messages to be effective, rhetors and audience members must feel connected through physical, virtual, or other spaces, highlighting the importance of proximity. Close proximity also aids in chaining, as new group members would be compelled to share stories in a space that they assume to be safe – in the company of an understanding audience–therefore adding to social bonds centered on rhetoric.

Second, not only does proximity matter, but willingness from audience members to reflect upon their goals, which can serve as a persuasive medium. One of the most important things that led me to participate in these protests was the fact that my goals aligned with those of the protestors. Teaching has been my goal for some time, and some of my role models are teachers from my high school and collegiate experience. For protesting teachers, their aim was to show their empathy and courage for students, and to use protests as a teaching opportunity. Thus, goals and aims worked together to bring coherency and believability to protest narratives.

Evaluation of audience goals and rhetor's aims working together to construct narratives helps us critique rhetorical criticism practices, as well as conception of constructing realities for a time. Critics use probes and questions to uncover how speakers, films, and other communicative events persuade an audience (Hart, 2018). However, as Fisher observes when introducing narrative paradigm, "we are storytelling animals." If the word "we" in this context is taken literally, it would include more than just rhetors reflecting upon their experiences to construct a communicative act; it also includes audience members capable of reflecting upon their experiences, goals, and attitudes, thus co-creating a coherent and believable narrative alongside rhetors, much

akin to Pearce & Cronen's (Foss & Littlejohn, 2017) description of how meanings are generated through co-constructing realities. In this case, meanings are created through stories when goals of audience members and aims of rhetors are aligned and embedded inside stories.

Third, participation can reshape self-perception about a speech act. An emerging trend in rhetorical criticism is participatory analysis and rhetorical fieldwork. Rather than being guided by established standards and traditional texts, Middleton et al (2019) argues that "… participatory rhetoric can reshape the role of a critic …". The protest experience and the resulting analysis above is an example of a more practical and reflexive rhetorical fieldwork, made stronger when considering the emotional effect, the speech act, stories, proxemics, and fantasies had on the scholar.

Based on above findings, one recommendation is investigation of proximity and goal/aim alignment between rhetors and audiences. In organizations, this concept would help scholars understand more effective routes for recruitment and socializations. In rhetorical criticism, it would help broaden how certain communicative acts and reflections from audience members can theoretically and practically assist critics in generating more novel and insightful analyses of persuasive messages.

Conclusion

Teachers are some of the most influential people a person meets throughout their lifetime, especially educators willing to advocate for the well-being of students. This is one of the reasons why my career path is set on education, and to witness the advocacy before me is what led me to participate in 2019 UTLA protests. Through this analysis, goals and stories of audience members combined with proximity between rhetors and audiences can become a chaining route for rhetorical visions, as I have experienced when I gave my speech. After my impromptu speech teachers and school officials agreed on a contract in late January, a renewed effort to examine effectiveness of charter schools was initiated by the governor in March, and I gave numerous competitive impromptu speeches in April using UTLA protests as an example. But advocacy for the well-being of students did not stop with the January protests – it is ongoing, and so are more opportunities to study the rhetoric surrounding this and other events.

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The Female Fight: A Feminist Examination of Laws, Lawsuits, and Instagram Posts about Strippers as a Call to Action

Ashley Neal

Abstract
Over the past few years, various wage and misclassification lawsuits have been made by current and former exotic dancers against the clubs at which they previously worked. In these lawsuits, the women claim they were misclassified as independent contractors and would like to be classified as employees who receive employee benefits and a minimum wage. As a result of these lawsuits, all dancers in California clubs will now be considered employees, giving owners and managers complete control over all aspects of a very personal job. Additionally, a recent bipartisan law (Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act [FOSTA] - Stop Enabling Sex Trafficking Act [SESTA]) has been passed at the federal level. These laws work to further criminalize all sex work. The implementation of these new laws and lawsuits puts dancers' autonomy and safety at risk. The present study examines relevant Instagram posts and their captions' rhetoric to reflect the anticipated impact of these changes on female strippers.

Keywords: feminism, law, strippers, sex workers, FOSTA, SESTA, Instagram

Introduction

Despite stripping being seen as a devalued occupation (Reid, Epstein, & Benson, 1994), and often viewed as a career that furthers female objectification (Siebler, 2015), the women in this occupation remain strong and continue to fight for equality. Perceptions of strippers as unable to be feminists (Dworkin, 1987; Mackinnon, 1987), uneducated (Abraham & Perlstein, 2018), and unable to maintain a romantic relationship (Bradley, 2007) have been perpetuated by media misrepresentations for as long as strippers and media have existed together (Morrow, 2012).

The 'whore stigma' created by popular media, emphasizes negative, prostitution-like qualities of some strippers (Stenvoll, 2002), including having sex with customers or giving them blowjobs in a private room. Outsiders assume that all strippers partake in those acts, resulting in the generalization and dehumanization of strippers (Morrow, 2012). Because prostitutes have historically been shamed by the public, the 'whore' representations and stigmatization extend that shame to strippers.

The shame is not only cast on stripper by outsiders, but on others in the industry as well, making the fight for equality exhaustive and seemingly worthless. These women often end up with no social support inside or outside of the stripping community, which is a vital tool for survival (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Social support helps individuals appropriately cope with adverse situations and maintain their mental and emotional health; without it, the only way that many strippers know how to maintain their confidence and strength in the face of stigma is by focusing on the positive aspects of their career (money, time flexibility, and so on) (Mavin & Grandy, 2010).

This study focuses on a string of lawsuits involving strip clubs mostly in California, along with newly implemented federal sex trafficking bills. In addition to the examination of legal action and legislation, the present study also analyzes the rhetoric surrounding these changes that is displayed on prominent strippers' and activists' Instagram pages. This analysis shines a light on a community that is often misunderstood due to misrepresentations of strip culture in popular media (Knodell, 2018). Through the examination of previous feminist and stripper research, and with the use of feminist frameworks

and feminist jurisprudence (MacKinnon, 1983), I seek to bring awareness to an issue that has received little-to-no media coverage in the mainstream media.

In the sections that follow, the laws and lawsuits that directly or indirectly affect strippers will be examined, followed by two research questions that drive this study. Next, findings will include an analysis of Instagram posts in order to answer these research questions. Finally, this study will conclude with a discussion of the implications, limitations of this study, and suggestions for future research. Throughout the following sections, the terms "stripper," "dancer," and "exotic dancer" will be used interchangeably as a reflection of how the women who I have encountered prefer to be referred. This study focuses exclusively on female strippers due to my limited access to and experience with male strippers. More importantly, the focus on female strippers arises out of the imbalance of regulations which negatively affect female strippers and disproportionately ignore male strippers (Bernard et al. 2003). Such an imbalance can be interpreted as a reinforcement of how patriarchal societal norms seek to control women.

Strip Clubs

Strip clubs throughout the world vary in many aspects. Although my experience is limited to the few clubs that I have knowledge of as a dancer, waitress, and researcher, this summary will aid in a better understanding of the reasons for the lawsuits that were brought against certain clubs and give an illustration of the political economy of a strip club.

Strippers in most states throughout the country are classified as independent contractors. By law, this means that dancers have agency over their schedules, breaks, attire, and legal activities engaged in while at work. At Spearmint Rhino in Las Vegas, however, the dancers are now classified as employees upon hiring. "Employees" can mean a variety of things, as we will examine in the lawsuits against Spearmint Rhino later in this piece. As an employee at this Spearmint Rhino location, workers receive a share of their company once they have worked 32 days in the year and receive no employee benefits in perpetuity, even beyond this 32-day threshold. Spearmint Rhino in Las Vegas dangles the incentive of being a shareholder for workers who, in my experience, are usually

traveling and thus not likely to work enough to reap any employee benefits.

Some clubs and cities have agreed to form stripper unions in which the dancers are paid minimum wage, keep their tips, and receive benefits from the club. Julia Query published a documentary in 2000 titled "Live Nude Girls, Unite!" which took place in a San Francisco peep-show club and followed the women who worked there as they tried to unionize their club. While peep-show clubs differ from most strip clubs in pay and hours, the documentary depicts the struggles that many strippers face on a daily basis: receiving minimal wages, complying with disrespectful customers, and dealing with racial inequality. The goal of the documentary was to demonstrate that nude entertainment is a legitimate line of work. Although stripper unions formed in America after the events in the documentary, unions have only been efficient in protecting strippers' legal rights, but have not been successful in validating the career or shifting public sentiment toward de-stigmatization of these workers (Morrow, 2012). The discussion of independent contractor versus employee status can be tricky, but with this base knowledge, we can now examine some examples of lawsuits fought in court.

Dynamex Operations West, Inc. v. Superior Court of Los Angeles/ Lee v. Dynamex, Inc.

In May 2018, the California Supreme Court reversed a previous 2008 ruling and ruled against Dynamex to classify all independent contractors as employees if they pass the "ABC" test as defined later in this section. Dynamex is a nationwide package pick-up and delivery company, which in 2004 began classifying all of their employees as independent contractors to save money. In 2005, a Dynamex employee filed a lawsuit stating that the company violated various laws, including the Fair Labor code (Lee v. Dynamex, 2008). The 2005 lawsuit became a class action suit in order to define "employ" in Martinez v. Combs (2010), which included three separate definitions: (1) to control wages, hours, or working conditions, (2) to permit to the individual to work, and (3) to engage in (and thereby creating) a common-law employment relationship. However, S.G. Borello & Sons, Inc. v. Department of Industrial Relations (1989) defined "right to control," one of the most important factors when considering if someone would be classified as

an employee or independent contractor, as an independent contractor's right to dictate when, where, and how they do the job that they were hired to do (including secondary factors such as ownership of equipment, and the opportunity for profit or loss). The court disagreed with Dynamex and concluded that Martinez v. Combs was not limited to a joint employer context, as Dynamex had attempted to argue when bringing up the Borello case. After 13 years, the court ruled against Dynamex in Dynamex v. Superior Court of Los Angeles, which means that both "employ" and "employee" are defined from Martinez v. Combs.

The court also ruled that the second part of Martinez's definition could not be interpreted literally as it obviously applied to workers who have been traditionally independent contractors and would therefore destroy any distinction between employees and independent contractors. As a result, the court adopted the "ABC" test to limit the scope of the definition of "independent contractor": (A) the worker is free from the control and direction of the company in terms of work performance, (B) the worker does work that is outside of the company's normal course of business, and (C) the worker is a common part of an independently established trade, business, or occupation that is similar to the work performed. Prong B of the ABC test is nearly impossible to pass. For example, the primary course of a strip club is strippers who strip; there is no work being done outside of the "normal course of business."

There are approximately 1.4 million independent contractors in California alone, and the use of independent contractors is reflective of our modern society (Adams & Jencunas, 2018), wherein the younger generation seek more autonomy in the workplace and more control over their work. This is also a reason why strippers choose their work (Mavin & Grandy, 2010). Adams and Jencunas (2018) estimated that the shift from independent contractors to employees could cost California businesses roughly $6.5 billion each year, due to increased labor costs, which includes wages, benefits, employment taxes, and other expenditures.

Byrne v. Santa Barbara Hospitality Services, Inc. (Spearmint Rhino)

In March 2017, Lauren Byrne led a class action lawsuit against the worldwide corporation Santa Barbara Hospitality Services, Inc,

which is a strip club that operates as Spearmint Rhino. The lawsuit was brought under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and the California Unfair Competition Law. In the lawsuit, the dancers who had all currently or previously worked at Spearmint Rhino argued that the strip club chain did not pay the employees state-mandated minimum wage, compensate for overtime, pay wages within the specified time by law, nor provide breaks or time to eat. In addition, dancers were required to pay money to work there and tip other staff employees,

The lawsuit recognized that dancers were classified as independent contractors upon hiring. The dancers claimed that they were misclassified, and were thus seeking payment reflecting that of employees. In 2009, a similar misclassification lawsuit was brought by another group of dancers against Spearmint Rhino. This lawsuit settled with the claim that, within six months, dancers would be classified as employees or owners in the form of shareholder, partner, limited partner, or member. The lawsuit also specified that dancers in California would no longer have to pay stage fees, which are fees to work at the club that day.

Similarly, a 2012 lawsuit brought against Spearmint Rhino in California, Nevada, Kentucky, Texas, Idaho, and Florida resulted in 14 dancers winning a $13 million settlement from the club. The class action suit sought back wages, tips, attorney fees and damages, claiming that a majority of the average $500,000 per year that the women earned in tips, table dances, and lap dances went to support the club and its employees. Again, Spearmint Rhino agreed to treat their dancers as employees or shareholder.

Most recently, in February 2018, roughly 8,000 former employees of Spearmint Rhino were awarded $8.5 million in a wage and hour lawsuit. While this lawsuit was similar to the 2012 suit with its focus on wage violations, the dancers in the 2018 lawsuit did not wish to be classified as employees. The women's decision to remain classified as independent contractors stems from the amount of control that a company has over their employees. If classified as employees, the dancers would have to abide by strict schedules, wear whatever the club told them to and sell customers any legal thing that the club desired, including merchandise. It is too soon to see if this class action suit will finally have an impact on Spearmint Rhino's business practices beyond Las Vegas.

Doe 1-2 v. Déjà Vu Services, Inc.

A 2016 class action lawsuit against Déjà Vu and affiliated clubs across the country accumulated over 28,000 dancers and former dancers as members. Similar to the Spearmint Rhino cases, this lawsuit was centered around the independent contractor/employee debate. The dancers claimed that they were paid no wages by the clubs, but had to pay stage fees, 30% of their tips, and penalties for arriving late or leaving early. The settlement agreed to by the club — which claimed no wrongdoing — was seen as too low at $6.5 million; just based on the clubs' failure to pay minimum wage, class action members felt the settlement should have been more than $141 million. The low settlement left some of the 28,000 women with at most $2,000, and others with far less. As a result of this settlement, Déjà Vu must now assess all dancers on set criteria to determine their standing as employees or independent contractors. As employees, the dancers would be paid minimum wage, 20% commission on private dances and drink sales, and receive payment from the club for employment-related expenses (e.g. dry cleaning, purchasing outfits, required local license fees).

While no changes took place immediately after the settlement (Egan, 2017), most clubs in California posted signage that the minimum wage agreement would go into effect in November 2018. This change is a result of the Spearmint Rhino and Déjà Vu lawsuits, along with the Dynamex lawsuit that was previously examined. In addition to lawsuits filed against strip clubs by the strippers who work/have worked there, federal legislation has been implemented that affect all sex workers in addition to strippers.

FOSTA and SESTA

A federal law was put in place on April 11, 2018 when President Donald Trump signed HR-1865, a bipartisan bill titled Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA)-Stop Enabling Sex Trafficking Act (SESTA). This bill was a revision to Section 230 (the "safe harbor" clause) of the 1996 Communications Decency Act (CDA). The CDA protected websites from any potential liability for content that is shared on their site by other users. Now, with the revision, any content that "promotes or facilitates the prostitution of another person" could end in time served for the

website's owner(s). As a result, the classifieds website Backpage and the "personals" category on Craigslist, both marketplace sites for selling and buying sex, were shut down, which in turn hurt sex workers who are in the industry by choice. While it may seem like a win for the fight against human trafficking, these laws have forced sex workers into riskier situations with unknown clients who can no longer be screened, or out on the streets where there is a higher risk of violence (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005).

Safety has been commonly discussed in the sex work industry (Lilleston, Reuben, & Sherman, 2012). There are various types of violence that are of concern to sex workers, including exposure to STIs and physical violence, the levels of which are largely dependent on the physical and social environment (Shannon et al. 2008). Jobs that take place in venues (brothels, strip clubs, and massage parlors) often experience lower rates of violence than those that take place on the street (Church et al. 2001; Harcourt & Donovan 2005). Wesely (2002), who studied power and violence in the lives of exotic dancers, stated that women who are in sex work often face significantly more violence than those who are not, and this violence is typically overlooked by the general public, who deems it as acceptable because of their job choice.

In addition to making conditions unsafe for workers outside of a venue, the passage of FOSTA/SESTA has resulted in many customers who used the internet to purchase sex work to now seek out sex at strip clubs, leading to a dangerous situation if a dancer refuses, according to The New Yorker's (2018) piece on stripper comedian Jacq the Stripper. In her speech to the Black Sex Workers Collective, Jacq also stated that the fear for safety engrained in women takes on a whole new meaning in the sex industry: knowing the misconceptions of strippers as "whores" and "sluts", the fact that laws do not protect sex workers, and "nobody outside of the industry and your immediate circle really cares about you."

Lilleston, Reuben, and Sherman (2012) studied Baltimore strip clubs and found that many spaces utilized cameras, large mirrors, and bouncers to monitor safety within the club, and also explained that dancers felt an obligation to protect one another if a situation arose. Although the inside of the clubs was perceived as safe, the authors' findings indicated that the street outside of the club was not. The women who worked at the clubs feared being harassed, kidnapped,

raped, and murdered primarily due to their occupation within, and association with, the strip club; one dancer even described the club as their "sanctuary" where they were safe from the outside world (p. 7). However, with the implementation of FOSTA-SESTA, and the increased solicitation of sex from new customers, even the inside of the club has become unsafe.

Thankfully, some areas of the country do recognize this danger and are taking steps to prevent it. For example, in Washington, over 50 strippers consulted on the creation of a state-wide bill that passed the State House 95-3: HB1756 Stripper Safety and Security Bill. The bill requires all strip clubs to implement safety precautions such as panic buttons in private rooms and women's restrooms (where bouncers are typically not present), requires "know your rights" training for all dancers, required maintenance and enforcement of a "blacklist" of all dangerous and violent customers, and requires the establishment of an advisory committee composed of dancers to help implement and further maintain the bill (workingwa.org, 2019). While it seems that women are always looking over their shoulder to ensure their safety, sex workers have the added danger of the public's disapproval and criminalization of their occupation (Wesely, 2002), making such legislation necessary considerations.

While analyzing these lawsuits and federal legislation, I began to research how the women in these occupations felt about these changes. There has been an emergence of strippers commenting on the previously examined debate and decisions in light of the upcoming changes, mostly through social media due to the lack of mainstream coverage that the issue has received. As a result, a guiding research question arose that drives this study, and the following section will discuss the methods used for conducting this research:

RQ: *In what ways have strippers and sex work activists on Instagram expressed their concerns for the anticipated impacts of new rules and laws on their safety and autonomy?*

Methods

For this study, I seek to bring awareness to issues that can seriously impact, and even harm, the lives of strippers — an already vulnerable population — by attempting to further control them. To do

so, I have analyzed and interpreted the Spearmint Rhino, Déjà Vu, and Dynamex lawsuits, along with the FOSTA-SESTA legislation that has been outlined and described in the previous sections. Additionally, I analyzed the content of public Instagram posts by prominent strippers and stripper activists regarding the upcoming changes as a result of the lawsuits and laws. The current discussion of strippers' autonomy and safety as a result of new legal situations has received no media coverage beyond strippers' and activists' social media posts.

Many of the strippers and stripper activists with many followers on Instagram (and other social media platforms) have done extensive research on the laws that affect sex workers. In addition to information, their posts contain their personal experiences and opinions, along with possible courses of action that can be taken by women in the industry to ensure safety and protection, and what the women can do to respond to potentially detrimental legislative changes. To examine these posts, I sought out common themes regarding the issues of independent contractor versus employee status in the strip club, and risks to sex workers' safety and autonomy as a result of new laws. Similarly, I analyzed the previously described laws and lawsuits using the same three themes to examine their potential implications based on the information in the Instagram posts.

The posts chosen for this study are from five stripper and sex work activist pages: @Survivetheclub (41.6K followers), @Stripperwriter (91.7K followers), @Jacqthestripper (155K followers), @SurvivorsagainstSESTA (4,898 followers), and @Professorstripsalot (6,979 followers). These pages were chosen based who my co-workers and I follow to get advice and knowledge on the sex work industry. While there are many Instagram pages that address sex work, these accounts spoke extensively about the impact of legislation on safety and autonomy within the industry. Moreover, while these pages post on a variety of issues, the ones I examined are the most recent that focus on the laws, lawsuits, and the new changes discussed earlier. The following section uses the method of qualitative content analysis to determine the effects of new legal changes on strippers' livelihood and safety based on concerns expressed within the posts. Through this method, the following findings emerged in response to this study's two research questions.

Independent Contractor vs. Employee Status

Due to the lawsuits for back wages against Spearmint Rhino and Déjà Vu/affiliated clubs by dancers who currently work or previously worked at these clubs, strippers were classified as employees at all clubs in California on or around November 04, 2018. Elle Stanger as @Stripperwriter on Instagram shared a photo on October 22, 2018 of signage posted in a California club which stated, "Effective on or around November 4, 2018, the club will terminate your contract and place you on its payroll as an hourly employee." The poster goes on to explain that the dancers will receive $15.00 (minimum wage) per hour, dancers may be eligible to get a commission on dance sales once they reach a "certain level," they may keep all tips, and all deductions required by law will be taken out of their payroll check. The wording "certain level" and "may" is ambiguous as none of the lawsuits specified any percentage dancers should get to keep from their private dances. After the switch to employment within California clubs, however, this ambiguous wording manifested as a tiering system solely based on the women's "attractiveness" in the managers' opinions.

Prior to this change, the clubs I know of allowed dancers to keep all of their tips, between 50-65% of the money that they make on their lap dances, while requiring dancers to pay a stage fee anywhere from $20-$100 per day. With the ambiguous wording of the new rules, the clubs can and have set any arbitrary quota and percentage. For example, a club may require a dancer to do 50 lap dances (which would likely take a few days) before taking home 20% of their dance earnings. Even with the minimum wage, the majority of strippers would be losing substantial amounts of money. Similarly, after the implementation of these new employment rules, many clubs have been requiring dancers to pool their tips and split them evenly amongst all other employees (which is against the Dynamex ruling agreement), according that same post from @Stripperwriter on January 22, 2019.

@Professorstripsalot posted an image on October 20, 2018 which stated "All labor is exploitation under late capitalism." The image also includes two small flags at the bottom that read "sex work is work." This post implies that, under America's current economic situation, all labor could be considered exploitation due to the minimum pay workers receive to do a significant amount of work in the service of company profit. Despite the fact that most would agree that they do not get paid

what they feel they deserve (cbsnews.com, 2013), the career of sex work is typically seen as "exploitative" because people outside of the sex work industry perceive sex workers as simply profiting off of their bodies (Reid, Epstein, & Benson, 1994). The change to employment status in California reflects this concern, as stated in the caption attached to the photo. Essentially, whether or not outsiders felt dancers were being exploited despite choosing to do their job and most actually enjoying it, they were almost entirely in control of how much money they were making. With the new law, however, they have almost no control over any aspect of their work environment and are compensated less than they feel they deserve.

The photo shared by @Professorstripsalot also includes a validation that sex work is the same as most other jobs. Other careers that are more socially acceptable also require people to use their bodies to make money, such as construction workers, boxers, ballerinas, and athletes. These workers are not compelled to validate the job to others who are not a part of that industry. A separate Instagram post by @Professorstripsalot on October 19, 2018 reads "Sex work doesn't have to be empowering to be valid, because no other job has that standard." This post emphasizes the social requirement for women in the industry to justify their work by explaining how empowering it is.

While dancers obviously use more than their bodies at work, given the fact that most interactions with customers closely resemble therapy sessions (Egan, 2003; @Survivetheclub), the occupation is seen as dirty and deviant, rather than legitimate work (Weitzer, 2000). Some dancers who participated in the class action lawsuits defended their support of the switch from independent contractor to employee by pointing out that receiving minimum wage and benefits as "employees" would work to validate their career as legitimate to those outside of the industry, yet @Jacqthestripper's caption on a watercolor photo of a strip club interaction suggests that becoming employees would have little to no impact on the public's perception of strippers. Additionally, since the implementation of the new employment rules, clubs have found loopholes that could undermine the validity of strippers as employees: such as only allowing the dancers to work a maximum of 20 hours per week (a part-time employee), so they are not legally required to provide any benefits (@Survivetheclub).

The sign posted in the strip club on @Jacqthestripper's page also indicated that the club felt they were protecting the dancers' rights and freedom to be an independent contractor, something not many other jobs allow, and emphasized that many of the club's competitors will be taking the same actions. The need to stress this point about their competitors is important to prevent dancers, dissatisfied about only making minimum wage, from going to work for another club, as it is unlikely that they will find one that has not implemented the new rules. @Stripperwriter stated in her post that, since the rule is only in California clubs for now, dancers will likely leave to nearby states in order to maintain status as independent contractors.

Risk to Autonomy

@Stripperwriter's post of the signage in a California strip club regarding the new changes pointed out that as an employee the dancers may still be fired at any point without reason. The Déjà Vu lawsuit stated that the status of independent contractor or employee will be determined by the club based on set criteria, one of which includes the dancer's expressed intentions. The wording of this criteria is vague. First the suit says, "set criteria" then proceeds to only give a single example that is just as vague. The criteria of dancers' expressed intentions can include their decision to either stay as a long-term entertainer, or only in a short-term situation as many transient dancers do. Presumably, the short-term dancers would remain as independent contractors and long-term dancers would be employees. However, "expressed intentions" could be interpreted as many other things that are not specified in the lawsuit or in any signage posted in the clubs. Overall, the ambiguity of the settlement terms in the strip club lawsuits could prove to be disastrous and harmful to strippers' income and freedom within their occupation. As independent contractors, many dancers have almost complete control over their schedules, outfits and appearance, choice of music, and so on. As employees, the clubs would have essentially complete control over all aspects of the dancers' work. That means a limited number of sick days/leave, a set weekly schedule and minimum hours per week, and most importantly, the ability to destroy the artistic aspect of the dancers' work by dictating what they wear, the music played in the club, and the dance moves that are allowed on stage and in private dances.

Based on the posters already being seen in California clubs, it seems that the dancers will have no choice in whether or not they are classified as employees. There are, of course, some dancers who make less money than others and would benefit from being classified as employees, but a large number of strippers would be financially hurt by the change. The lack of a dancer's choice in status classification, as well as the increased authority that a club will have over the dancers as a result of the new rules, can be interpreted as larger entities attempting to control these women, their artistry, their creativity, and their income under the guise of "better for everyone."

On and around May 28, 2018, Instagram began banning stripper-related hashtags including #stripper, #stripperlife, #nakedhustle, and #yesastripper. Additionally, some hashtags that related to women in general were banned including #curvy and #ass. After the hashtag bans, many stripper-related accounts were shadow-banned from Instagram, meaning the users could post their content but the users' followers would not be notified of their posts, and others were deleted completely, thus decreasing visibility. Some Instagram accounts were completely deleted from Instagram as well. An October 28, 2018 Instagram post by @Jacqthestripper shows a tweet by @Melissagira which states "When social media platforms claim they can't possibly take down all the accounts that make persistent violent, racist, sexist threats, maybe it's just because they've thrown all their resources at deleting strippers and porn performers instead." The banning of sex workers online, even when content is within the site's guidelines, functions as an effort by our society and FOSTA/SESTA to remove sex workers from the public eye, and by doing so, stripping them of their voices and autonomy.

Risk to Safety

A photo shared by @Professorstripsalot on October 21, 2018 shows her and her fellow sex workers in face masks holding a large banner that reads "BERNIE SIGNED FOSTA 20+ DEAD SEX WORKERS AND COUNTING." This post also includes an image of a group of other women sporting a variety of feminist t-shirts, implying their support for all women. Those same women are shown yelling at the women holding the banner to remove their masks and claimed their disdain for sex workers. While FOSTA and SESTA have resulted in women moving their

work offline or to "safer" locations, the classification as employees will likely push out strippers and those who came to the clubs seeking a safe space to work, resulting in more sex workers being killed or harmed in the future.

On various Instagram pages, including @SurvivorsagainstSESTA and @Survivetheclub, there are posts regarding the impacts of FOSTA and SESTA - wittily drawn images that depict some sort of strip club interaction with a serious caption about the bills. The captions discuss stories of various outcomes that have already taken effect as a result of the two bills, including a loss of control over dancers' safety in the occupation that they love, a deprivation of their livelihood due to the lack of equal protection as human beings, feelings of panic and hopelessness, increased violence in historically safe spaces (like strip clubs), an increase of pimps coming into clubs to find new girls that they can no longer find online, and a loss of access to resources that keep sex workers alive. One caption from @SurvivorsagainstSESTA interpreted the bills as an attack against sex workers under the guise of "safety" and explained that the government wants sex workers out of sight, dead, or in the streets where they can be easily arrested.

In addition to the risk of physical harm as a result of FOSTA and SESTA, @Jacqthestripper explained in her caption for an October 03, 2018 post that read, "Believing women requires actually listening to them," that sex workers are "fucked" because these new laws further criminalize all sex work including stripping. As a result, when these workers experience any sort of violence from customers, it will be seen as acceptable because of the line of work they chose to be in, rather than holding male customers accountable. The lack of protection for these workers shows how disposable our government sees them, how less-than-human our society makes them out to be, and punishes them for doing the work that they want and choose to do.

Similarly, @Stripperwriter's October 22, 2018 post of the signage in California clubs points out (without proof) that the change of status from independent contractor to employee will require dancers to list this employment on future applications when applying for jobs. Paula Howley shared her experience of disclosing her occupation as a stripper in the past when applying for a teaching job in her article titled "Coming Out of the Stripper Closet." While her employer was accepting of her past, her employer's partners were not so accepting and

requested that she not be allowed to teach the children as they felt she would be a bad influence on them. Howley's experience is just one of many examples that illustrate the potential discrimination women can face when they disclose a deviant occupation to employers of future jobs.

The new laws and rules that will be implemented as a result of various lawsuits have the potential to destroy dancers' autonomy in their work, put them at higher risk of violence by bringing in customers who are seeking more than a lap dance and may be angry if the answer to their request is no, bring in sketchy customers like pimps who wish to exploit and control them, and by creating an environment where violence against them will not be taken seriously because of their line of work. Strippers have long been a vulnerable population due to the stigma associated with the career, so implementing laws and rules that further oppress, diminish the existence of, and invalidate the women in this work perpetuates the marginalization and stigmatization of a vulnerable group.

Discussion

Laws like FOSTA and SESTA, along with the implementation of employee-status for all strippers against their will (for many), is just the most recent in a long history of our government's and society's efforts to control what women do, how they make money, and what they do with their bodies. Throughout history, women had no legal existence separate from their husbands; they were dependents, could not own property, and could not be the guardian of their children if their husband died. Women's dress has always been controlled and hyper-sexualized, from ankle-length dresses to young girls with strict dress codes that are not similarly enforced for boys. In the same sense, male prostitution is hardly regulated as strictly as female prostitution; it seems the issue is that our society does not like women to be in control of their own bodies and lives.

With Instagram as one of the main forms of media for strippers to express their fears for their safety and autonomy, only a limited number of people will be exposed to those concerns. Most people who follow the stripper and sex work activist Instagram pages are likely in the industry themselves, thus already aware of the issues and share the same fears. The attacks on an already-vulnerable population has

received little-to-no mainstream media coverage, which allows the general public to turn a blind eye to sex workers thus furthering the invisibility of these women. The lack of media coverage shows how devalued the occupation of sex work is to those outside of the industry (Reid, Epstein, & Benson, 1994). Additionally, the lack of media coverage on these issues results in the public being uninformed about the actions being taken to control sex workers.

By analyzing and answering the guiding research question, the present study serves as a call to action to prevent the loss of autonomy for women in our country. The examination of the women's Instagram pictures and captions functions as a way to display and make their legitimate concerns in light of these new rules and laws; something that impacts over 400,000 strippers (victoriasfriends.com, accessed October 29, 2018), and over an estimated 3,000,000 other sex workers (businessinsider.com, 2012). The rhetoric used in the Instagram captions is easy to understand, powerful, and utilizes colorful language to emphasize how passionate the users were about the topic. Conversely, the language used in the laws and lawsuits is vague, which permits strip clubs to find loopholes and interpret the wording in a variety of ways that allow them to take advantage of and gain the most control possible over the dancers.

Many sex workers use Instagram as a platform to share their real experiences and stories in the industry, which serve as an attempt to delegitimize the negative stereotypes that are associated with their occupations. With social media silencing these voices and banning accounts, these women's stories will be overpowered by the mainstream image of sex workers thus continuing the harmful narratives that depict sex workers as less than human. The images that accompanied the descriptive captions examined in this study, such as the drawings of interactions in the strip club, serve as examples of the daily experiences of these women in an attempt to humanize them.

Women have always been under attack in our country, whether blatantly in ways that allow men to harm women, or subtly such as the wage gap or slut-shamming instead of holding men accountable. Some of the first steps that can be taken to help the women in the stripping industry are simple: (1) give dancers a choice to be either employees or independent contractors, (2) recognize that stripping and sex work are

legitimate forms of work, and (3) stand up for those whose voices are silenced or who are publicly misrepresented and misunderstood.

Strippers are scared. Sex workers are scared. They have jobs they love. Their livelihoods and safety are being ripped out from under them, and the public is none-the-wiser or does not care. Allies need to stand up for these women during their time of need. Feminist literature needs to focus on how our country is attempting to use the law to hurt and remove these women from society. Action needs to be taken on a larger scale than simply calling representatives in order for positive change to occur. While the strippers I have met are empowered women, they are also vulnerable because of their occupation and thus need the support of those who are not as stigmatized by our society.

Limitations

I was unable to find many previous studies that discussed laws meant to control sex workers or the implications of those laws on the larger population of women. Hence, there is a need for more collaboration between legal studies and feminist sex work research, as the US has historically used legislation to control women. Additionally, logical predictions were made based on this history as well as on the rhetoric used in the Instagram posts; however, there is little fact beyond the fear that the posts expressed to validate those predictions. Because FOSTA-SESTA is fairly recent, future research could meaure the impact of this legislation on the quality of life for sex workers.

The focus on strippers in this piece, rather than other sex workers, comes from the fact that it is difficult to argue legal protection for occupations that are still illegal in many places, and strictly regulated in others, in our country. While decriminalization would benefit all sex workers, including strippers, that was not the focus of this study. For future research, it would be beneficial to look at anti-prostitution laws and create a layout for how legalization would benefit everyone, even the government. Additionally, drawing a more descriptive timeline of the United States' history of oppression of women will be beneficial to all arguments made.

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Body Rhetoric as a Form of Survival: An Autoethnography of Grassroots Community Work on Environmental Justice

Rossmery Zayas

Abstract

In this study I use a communication studies approach to explore how the relationship between nature and culture may be conceived and transformed through activist struggles in grassroots community work on environmental justice. My study is inspired by the notion of critiquing coloniality of knowledge, power, and history as they craft our social world and shape the environments that human beings are inevitably a part of. I both argue for and document how marginalized groups become bodies at risk that disrupt and challenge systems of oppression despite the risk of facing violence and criminalization. My study aims to expand on the visual components of argument, persuasion, and the body as a form of communication in order to understand how rhetoric is deployed by marginalized communities to impact material conditions of society. While bridging rhetorical criticism and environmental justice is not new, this autoethnographic approach is an effort to contribute to interdisciplinary scholarship by shifting from a general theory of discourse to a specific context of power relations.

Keywords: Rhetoric, argumentation, persuasion, body rhetoric, marginalized groups, community organizing, communities of color, South East Los Angeles, Wilmington.

Introduction

Growing up in South East Los Angeles (SELA), I learned the value of *comunidad*.[1] My two older sisters were involved with Communities for a Better Environment (CBE), one of the most prominent environmental justice organizations in the nation. I grew up attending local meetings and youth-led actions in Huntington Park, California. Some of my earliest memories consist of witnessing people in my community come together to organize workshops, events, and community gatherings. At a very young age, I participated in marches and protests and developed the understanding that as people of color, we need to be present in order to be heard. Community organizing and community presence continue to be something that I observe and reflect on.

In the first section of this paper, I argue that people of color must continuously fight for their livelihoods and that the body must be used to enact agency. Understanding that rhetoric influences our world, one must consider the historical context of the body as rhetorical in order to better understand grassroots organizing efforts in SELA. In *The Rhetoric of the Streets: Some Legal and Ethical Consideration,* Franklyn S. Haiman challenged how rhetoric was defined in the '60s during the Civil Rights Movement (where protests went beyond picket signs and verbal communication) by shifting focus on other forms of communication such as sit-ins and walkouts (1997). I share some reflections on my experiences of how people from low-income communities of color use their body to create platforms to demand change. Through this section, I will expand on the visual components of argument and persuasion to emphasize that the body is a form of rhetoric we should pay attention to (Selzer & Crowley, 1999). Often times theorists who do not utilize an interdisciplinary framework limit their research to verbal actions or to the collection of words, which neglects the idea that a body can be used as a symbol to resist problematic hegemonic norms (Birdsell & Groarke, 1996).

In the second section of this essay, I reflect on my experience of how non-black people of color specific to these communities are

[1] A version of this essay was presented at the Western States Communication Association Conference in 2020.

perceived when utilizing their body as rhetorical artifacts, also referred to as racial body rhetoric (Flood, 2017). I emphasize the importance of recognizing the bridges between identity and the use of the body as a form of communication. In his 1997 study *Rhetoric, the Body, and Civil Society*, Hauser explained that although acknowledging the body as rhetorical was no longer a new concept, there was a need to narrow questions on how the body functions rhetorically and why only specific examples of body rhetoric succeeded in capturing attention. Furthermore, I will engage with contemporary research that identifies body rhetoric as a way for marginalized groups to disrupt and challenge systems of oppression (Flood, 2017). I argue that such attempts provide insight into the consequences faced by those who hold multifaceted, intersectional identities (Scraton, 2004). Through these reflections, I aim to show that there must be a commitment from communication scholars to address the field's exclusionary history with marginalized individuals whose voices, bodies and dignity continue to be contested and erased.

Based on my experiences, I claim that as low-income people of color, our bodies are one of the few sources of power we have and they must be used as a tool for social change. I argue that for people of color who are marginalized and oppressed, body rhetoric is fundamental to their survival.

Literature Review

Rhetorical Traditions and Limitations

An interest in effective communication, public argumentation, and persuasion can be traced back to the sophists, Plato, and the democracies of ancient Greece. While rhetoric became a necessary aspect of democratic processes grounded in value and performance, it also prompted scholars to more critically examine our place in the world and in relation to others, including philosophical and rhetorical scholar Kenneth Burke (Patterson & Corning, 1997). Burke is best known for his work in analyzing the nature of knowledge and for developing the interpretive communication theory Dramatism, which claims that language and other symbol systems create the rhetorical worlds in which we live (Cheney, 1983). While Burke's claim that we live in a symbolic world (1969) was a major stepping stone, it did not account for intersecting social identities and overlapping systems of oppression.

Research by French feminist theorist Janice Norton offered important insight and criticism based on her argument that rhetorical criticism must be seen as ethical action (1995). Norton argued that rhetorical traditions are exclusive of women and there is a need to stop idolizing theorists like Kenneth Burke. Norton is famously known for developing the theory of identification, consubstantiality, and how we understand the body (1995). She argued that while Burke made contributions that remain salient, he also referenced marginalizing binary sexual differences (Norton, 1995). In *Researching the Body: An Annotated Bibliography for Rhetoric*, similar critiques are made claiming that rhetorical theory is beyond its classical definition as the art of persuasion and our understanding of the body should no longer be limited medically and psychologically (Patterson & Corning, 1997).

Traditional rhetorical methods were limited and argumentation theorists did not pay enough attention to the visual components of argument and persuasion (Birdsell, & Groarke, 1996). In a study that focused on rhetoric in civic life, scholars expanded on traditional methods by adding presence, embodiment, and enactment as key components of visual rhetoric (Palczewski, et. al, 2012). Palczewski et. al furthered this research by coining the term "body rhetoric," defined as rhetoric that foregrounds the body as part of the symbolic action (2012). While more contemporary rhetoricians have considered all forms of symbolic action, there remains a need to continue contextualizing the many ways marginalized communities embody their struggles to survive and to flourish.

Understanding the Use of Body Rhetoric

The body has been argued to be endemic to protest to advance the claims of social justice during the 1950s and 1960s (Hauser, 1997), but research has only scratched the surface of this concept. Franklyn S. Haiman (1967) emphasized how the body was used as a form of communication in the 1960s when people were staging sit-ins and walkouts. Additionally, Haiman (1967) focuses on the role of civil disobedience and how most people who protest with their bodies are aware of the consequences and do not expect exemption from punishment, similar to protests we see occurring presently. Richard B. Gregg (1971) critiques the rhetoric of protest and the use of what he calls "body force" from a philosophical point of view. He reflected on

the use of body rhetoric in *The Ego-Function of the Rhetoric of Protest* (1971) and stated the following:

> *The escalation of demands, in fact the very couching of wishes in terms of demands, appears to those in positions of power, reacting to the rhetoric, to foreclose meaningful discussion. Opportunities for dialogue become further limited as protestors, at moments of confrontation reduce their verbalization to slogans, epithets, and chants, and rely upon obscene gestures and sheer body force to make their points. Protesters appear to reject opportunities for identification, refuse to make the kinds of appeals, which might gain them a receptive audience, and in fact, flaunt and make a mockery of the values and ways of behaving which are meaningful to the 'establishment.' Rhetoric as we usually understand it, seems to flee the scene, leaving in its place coercion, threat, and intimidation.*

Gregg's main argument was that rather than raise a few specific issues that can be resolved through legislative work, community leaders in social movements use body force to create demands that go beyond the power of authorities who respond to individual issues (1971). Researchers Randi Patterson and Gail Corning (1997) stated that as a network of non-centralized forces, power and persuasion operate in relation to human bodies and that if we read rhetoric as a persuasive discursive network of power and knowledge, we must first read the body as the site of cultural inscription, self-regulation, and resistance. This scholarship also identifies the historiographical concerns when remembering the role of the body and how argument is privileged over narrative and logos over pathos (Patterson & Corning, 1997).

Bodies at Risk

Understanding what is communicated through the body is not limited to communication studies as connections must also be made to research in other disciplines. Many scholars such as Douglas and Bourdieu have focused on the body in anthropology and sociology (Patterson & Corning, 1997). Douglas argues that the human body is the primary model for order, both social and political (1973). This is crucial in making clear that in order to understand the questions of power and

oppression, the ideologies of sex, gender, and racial differences must not only be considered, but they must also be defended. Bourdieu made theoretical connections that were otherwise missing from research in the communication discipline at the time. He introduced the concept of "bodily hexis," where he bridges the understanding of the body to class and social issues (1984). Thus, the body is recognized as rhetorical, but scholars must continue to ask why people engage in body rhetoric in the first place.

DeLuca (1999) challenged the concept of performativity by arguing that bodies are not like flags being waved to attract attention, but instead they are the flags. DeLuca's main argument is that research within the communication discipline neglects the body in social movements and fails to identify that these are bodies at risk (1999). DeLuca argued more recently that these bodies are not violent but vulnerable, and when violence is in fact used, it is not the same as the type of violence used to oppress these bodies in the first place (2013). He stated the following:

> *Beyond a shattered Starbucks, engaging violence undermines the comforting myth that violence is rhetoric's obscene Other. Violence is the heart of rhetoric. Blanchott declares, "All speech is violence, a violence all the more formidable for being secret and the secret center of violence" (1992, p. 42). Zizek perversely echoes Isocrates, "What if, however, humans exceed animals in their capacity for violence precisely because they speak?" (2008, p. 61). In seeing violence as opposite rhetoric, scholars smugly enable systemic violence, rendering invisible the catastrophic levels of violence inflicted upon plants, animals, people, and ecosystems as part of the normal processes of the techno-industrial capitalist juggernaut that ravages the earth.*

Additional research regarding the body as rhetorical makes more connections to identity and power. Palczewski et. al argued that people, especially oppressed people, use body rhetoric because it is their only available proof for an argument (2012). Flood added by stating that all social institutions, which include religion, gender, sexuality, etc., can be challenged using the body as symbolic action and groups that do not or cannot conform to the ideals of these regimented social institutions

often use their bodies as a means of protest (2017). In analyzing literature regarding rhetoric and the body, it is clear that scholars first understood the body itself as an argument and as a form of attention. However, as scholars we must understand the body as rhetorical which calls for a need to challenge privileged epistemologies. In sum, researchers should develop an intersectional approach to the body when attempting to understand all forms of public argumentation as well as understanding the use of the body as rhetorical protest that challenges the institutions that enforce them.

Methodology

This study is based on autoethnographic self-reflections as its primary source of data, a critical autoethnographic approach to situate myself as a community organizer who is familiar with the neighborhoods in which I live. Implementing an autoethnographic method allows me the opportunity to make valuable connections and personal observations that researchers outside of my community cannot make.

Theoretical Framework

This paper implements the theory of intersectionality by Kimberle Crenshaw, which claims that social identity categories that include but are not limited to race and gender are interconnected and operate simultaneously producing either privilege or marginalization and erasure (Valentine, 2007). The development of intersectionality as a theoretical framework in this paper reflects a Western, predominantly US perspective. This is important to note because while systems of oppression are the same, social categories do not carry the same meaning everywhere. Intersectionality approaches in the United States may still carry the formation of social hierarchies when considering citizenship or language (Berger & Guidroz, 2010).

Valentine (2007) explains that while scholarship considers differences between groups, intersectionality accounts for differences among groups and how social identities are also concerned with systems that give these identities meaning. Intersectionality serves as a theoretical research paradigm that focuses on how the interaction of various identities tie into societal power hierarchies. Furthermore, intersectionality scholarship has produced a change in how we study

and approach the concepts of hierarchy, power, and justice (Berger & Guidroz, 2010). It has provided an area of research that theorizes on individual experiences building an understanding around identity and power and why it is crucial in order to understand body rhetoric as a form of survival for marginalized groups.[2] Ultimately, intersectionality challenges traditional framing, a necessary step in furthering research about body rhetoric in the communication discipline.

Analysis

Two Communities of Color

In Los Angeles, California, Hollywood Boulevard serves as a cultural icon, with footprints and embedded stars stretching fifteen blocks. These paved stars are visited by Los Angeles tourists from all over the world through the famous "Hollywood Star Tours." What does not receive the same attention are the Toxic Tours that have been going on in communities like South East Los Angeles and Wilmington since the 1990s. Although community organizers have been hosting Toxic Tours for quite some time, there is no scholarly research to acknowledge that. Instead, we have hidden histories and oral narratives from community members who are ground truthing on a daily basis. A Toxic Tour is best understood as a grassroots community method that local organizations implement in order to make locals and people who are not from the surrounding communities more aware of toxic sites.

A Toxic Tour is an alternative way of getting familiar with the Los Angeles area from the perspective of those who inhabit it. The tours include visits to toxic sites, metal recycling facilities, oil refineries and other sources of pollution that are linked to asthma, birth defects, and cancer. They include personal stories told by locals who are struggling to hold industry and government officials accountable for toxic pollution in their neighborhoods. It is a hands-on and immersive approach to learn about the environmental injustices faced by communities of color in South East Los Angeles and Wilmington. A Toxic Tour of South East Los Angeles takes participants through the neighborhoods of Huntington Park, Walnut Park, South Gate, Lynwood, Bell, Maywood, Cudahy, and

[2] I am a non-black woman of color scholar who is committed to more deeply explore intersectionality in my approaches to writing.

Vernon, all low-income communities of color. For the purposes on this study I will focus on Huntington Park and South Gate.

Huntington Park, a predominantly white community up until the late '70s, was incorporated in 1906, but it is important to recognize that this is indigenous Tongva land. After white people left during white flight, it became a predominantly Latino community. African Americans were marginalized and pushed out of the community past the Alameda Corridor, which continues to act as a physical barrier between South Central and South East Los Angeles. According to census data, roughly 97% of community members in Huntington Park are people of color while 73% of those are renters (LA Times, 2000a). Based on the most recent cancer risk estimates released by the South Coast Air Quality Management District, cancer risks levels are higher in Huntington Park than other monitored sites in South East Los Angeles (2015). When taking a look at the Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) Map of Los Angeles released by the Environmental Protection Agency (see Figure 2), there are five major air polluters in the nation, and thirteen major air polluters in this city (1996). (U.S. EPA, 1996)

Personal archivists share stories about La Montana, a five-hundred-foot-tall pile of concrete that was brought into the community for profit after the Northridge earthquake in 1994, impacting the health of hundreds of residents and locals until it was finally cleaned up after community efforts. Community members in Huntington Park also deal with *Asthma Town,* named by residents for the high asthma rates, especially among children and is the only part of Huntington Park that has a special needs school, which is surrounded by the industrial city of Vernon on three sides.

There are also cumulative impacts faced by community members who are already dealing with several sources of pollution, including diesel-truck pollution from the nearby I-710 Freeway. The city of South Gate was incorporated in 1923, and remains Tongva land. Before the white flight, it remained an exclusively white community that kept out people of color and black people. According to census data, it is now roughly 96%. Personal archivists share stories of those who faced environmental racism such as the Tweedy Elementary incident in 1986, where a local metal plating facility released a chlorine cloud that drifted to the elementary school. Community members recall the emergency evacuation, where a total of roughly 70 teachers, staff, and children

became unconscious in the halls of the school. Parents demanded health testing, but County Health Department officials denied that children would suffer any long-term health effects from exposure to chlorine. The school was moved a few feet away and the company still operates today.

In 1998, similar concerns over the effects of hexavalent chromium led to protests at another South East Los Angeles school, Suva Elementary and Intermediate School in Bell Gardens. That year two teachers miscarried deformed fetuses, while a third teacher had to abort one. Research by Suva employee Roberta Swanson revealed that four out of five pregnant school employees had miscarried. The Suva school sits right next to two chrome plating plants, Chrome Crankshaft Co. and J&S Chrome Plating Co. Both have been discharging hexavalent chromium for 30 years. Despite studies, no direct cause was found for the high incidence of miscarriages among Suva teachers. The school remains open, and the plating plants continue to operate. South Gate community members dealt with the proposed Nueva Azalea power plant in the year 2000, where Sunlaw Energy Partners wanted to build a power plant the size of the Dodger stadium despite being in close proximity (a one-mile radius) to schools, churches, parks, and hospitals. In 2001, community members organized and ultimately forced the company to withdraw its application. These stories are few of the many shared by community members who refuse to forget.

A Toxic Tour through Wilmington will take you down the I-710 South freeway past the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach and past the biggest oil refineries in the nation.

In Wilmington, there is a large history of oil production and land misuse. Early in its time, Los Angeles was a slowly growing agricultural region, but in the early twentieth century came the production of petroleum, the importing of water, and a rapidly expanding transportation network (Liberty Hill, 2015). In fact, the number of active oil wells in the County of Los Angeles is 5,194 with 70% of those being located in close proximity to homes, schools, and hospitals. The American Lung Association (L.A.'s statistics) claim that the increase of air pollution is due to the overwhelming amount of oil refineries, impacting the health of everyone around. When looking at the demographics of Wilmington, it is 99% people of color, 76% of whom are renters, and 53% of whom are living in poverty (Liberty Hill, 2015).

These community members expressed that the South Coast Air Quality Management District ignored evidence that smog-forming toxins, and greenhouse gas emissions at new and expanded refinery sources including flares, heaters, storage tanks, marine vessels, and others were drastically impacting their lives. Personal archives reveal that community members have been making connections between oil extraction and environmental justice for decades. For example, the largest oil refinery complex on the West Coast, Tesoro LA, made the decision to switch to extreme crude oil despite research on the existing cumulative impacts it has had on surrounding communities. In recent years the California Independent Petroleum Association, which represents Exxon, Chevron, and hundreds of crude-oil and natural-gas producers and related entities statewide filed a lawsuit against those who demanded protection from the city against neighborhood oil drilling. Fortunately, the California appeal was dismissed by the court due to youth of color organizing, refusing to be silenced, suing back, and winning. While victorious in one battle, community members expressed how powerful these oil companies are regardless of city regulations. For example, personal archivists from Wilmington shared their experience of being denied the opportunity to participate in Relay for Life to support raising money for cancer research simply because they protested Tesoro and other oil refineries that funded the event. Using lawsuits and wallets to silence community members is an important part of Wilmington's history, creating the ongoing need for community organizing.

Body Rhetoric as a Form of Survival

My conversations have allowed me to make important observations, the first being that as community organizers, we place our bodies on the frontline and therefore engage in racial body rhetoric. As someone who has participated in protest marches, I am able to recognize that even though we had people ready for interviews and speakers prepared to address the gathering crowd, the press was more interested in taking photos of participants who were enacting the role of the angel of death by wearing all black holding a scythe and youth members physically blocking the street holding signs. This is to be expected and the difference between these efforts compared to mainstream movements is that as grassroots organizing space, youth

activists do not care about funding or how they are portrayed because the only thing that matters is making sure they fight for their right to breathe.

In my observations and conversations one theme that stands out is that because of community organizing, we became more aware of the social injustices in our community. After developing social consciousness, we know that people of color have to fight for their livelihoods because no one is going to come save us. Every day there is a need to organize. Our participations are experienced differently because our lives are all different. Some actions are a matter of economic resources while others are based on what makes sense to our communities at the moment. Whether it is intimidating politicians by filling up a room or staging a die-in against a company, we ultimately engage in these actions because our quality of life depends on it. It is necessary to protect our health and the safety of others, so community members must also be careful about how they engage their bodies.

This is reflected in our interdisciplinary approach when organizing in our community. It is crucial to acknowledge race, gender, sexuality, income, immigration status, ability, religious/non-religious affiliation, and more. As someone who also lives in the city of South Gate, it was valuable for me to reflect on this. I recall the countless times I used my body to make a change. I think about the die-in we organized at the United People of Color March held in Wilmington in 2017, where dozens of people silently fell to the ground to represent the deadly consequences of toxic facilities and pollution. I also think about the planning that is going on now to ensure that we continue to use our bodies as a tool.

Criminalizing Bodies of Color

My reflection on the experience of activism show that people of color put their bodies on the line, however, it is equally important to analyze how they are portrayed or treated due to this. As organizers we understood the power of using our body to make demands. We understand there are consequences in taking over the streets of Wilmington to reclaim our community. Typically community members support our efforts because they understand and agree with the message while others who disapprove challenge and threaten us. We know that people of color are criminalized when utilizing body rhetoric.

And even though community members are well aware of the consequences they may face, they know they suffer consequences regardless, further highlighting that they organize because they have to.

I have also reflected on the importance of identity in the process of organizing, especially as people of color challenging systems of oppression. This experience has helped us develop the understanding that anyone who challenges the system is a threat, but it is people of color and other marginalized communities who are violently repressed. We can only demand to be valued, since it is not given to people of color and it has not been for centuries due to the oppressive forces brought about by colonization. People of color are political because political is personal. People develop a political conscious in organizing spaces and are not surprised with how the police react because they have already had these encounters and experiences walking down the street or driving home. There is a prevalent sense that law enforcement does not keep communities of color safe and people will continue to be criminalized for refusing to take abuse and for refusing to remain silent. We are also aware of the limitations of those in mainstream movements who openly use their bodies because they are supported, protected, and have the resources. We are aware that we are constantly being marginalized by these mainstream movements. Environmentalists tie themselves to trees, fight for fish, and oftentimes use shame tactics to convince people to recycle or quit smoking. They fail to acknowledge the directly connected systemic issues that impact communities such as environmental racism, health violations from recycling centers, and targeted marketing towards minorities. Animal activists will push for veganism and speak out against the cruel treatment of animals in cages but often fail to make connections to systematic oppression such as food insecurity, poverty, lack of education/resources, and the violation of human rights (such as the rights of those being violated behind bars in detention centers). While mainstream movements engage in body rhetoric, the difference is that communities engaging in grassroots organizing rely on body rhetoric for their livelihoods, rather than to simply make a statement.

When people of color first started to do sit-ins and direct actions, people were beaten and they were killed while fighting for their lives. Rhetorical scholarship does not emphasize the violence and deaths faced by communities when talking about the use of body

rhetoric. These observations reflect that marginalized communities need to engage in body rhetoric because it is fundamental to their survival, despite the threat it may have on their lives.

Conclusion

My reflections aim to better understand persuasion, discourse, and power associated with body rhetoric. The themes analyzed in this essay show the importance of reflecting on current theories of rhetoric while challenging and building on traditional methods. My findings suggest that for people of color and marginalized groups, their existence will always challenge systems of oppression. Therefore, I conclude that people of color who embody rhetoric are bodies at risk and they understand that it is a sacrifice fundamental to their survival no matter the consequences.

Overall, this essay makes clear what body rhetoric is, why people engage in symbolic action, and that there are material consequences when challenging rhetorical concepts. My observations show the value of personal narrative and their contributions to scholarship. In closing, there is a need to use interdisciplinary approaches when working within the communication discipline in order to achieve environmental and social justice everywhere.

Limitations and Future Research

I acknowledge the advantages and the limitations of an autoethnographic approach. While one advantage is the ease of access to data as someone who experiences this phenomenon as a primary source, this is simultaneously a disadvantage. Subscribing analysis to personal narrative is limiting in the sense that it makes an autoethnography a complicated method to follow. As a researcher situating myself into this study, I had to challenge myself to self-disclose and reduce distortion as much as possible.

While some researchers claim scholarship must strictly present the objective account of truth, I question the subjectivity of truth and whose truth is being shared. While there are no formal regulations for writing in autoethnographies, I believe this approach is necessary, effective, and humanizes the research. I encourage those who study body rhetoric to go beyond the production of academic text. Despite criticisms of the method, this approach allows for future research to

encourage readers to not sit back as spectators, but to have care and desire to be agents of change.

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Horror Films and The Emerging Niche of Inverted Tropes

Amy R. Peterson

Abstract

Mass media, cinema in particular, is one of the largest influences on culture. People internalize what they see on screen to shape their identities and their attitudes about the world around them. The horror genre has evolved through film to not only scare, but to comment on the nature of mankind and the perversions we see within ourselves. Among this commentary, films have created a semiotic language of common plot and visual metaphors commonly referred to as tropes. Because tropes are unique to every genre and horror films are linked to the cultural fears and attitudes of society, many tropes are laden with controversial histories that are often questioned. For instance, common tropes that having sex will make you a target for the killer, or that the African American character will always die first. With the evolution of modern culture, I seek to bring awareness to a rise of horror films that are challenging these recycled tropes by utilizing their opposites. With films like *Get Out*, where the black character is the sole survivor of the carnage, and *The Witch*, where the virginal girl becomes the most corrupted, it is worth analyzing these newfound inverted tropes and touch upon what this might be saying about modern filmmakers and the development of societal attitudes.

Keywords: horror, film, tropes, cinema, feminism, race, sexuality, violence, slasher

Introduction

Identities are often formed through exposure to the various subsections of the entertainment industry. What we watch and read through screens send us powerful, sometimes subconscious messages about what is considered acceptable and normal in our societies. For those that accept things at face-value, these messages can be hard to see as misleading or harmful. Hence, when we are presented with these messages rapidly *en masse*, it becomes hard to separate our identities from the parts that are harmful, and may lead to the potential perpetuation of these damaging views on an individual and personal level. For movies in particular—a section of the entertainment industry that arguably has a reach that stretches further than any other form of mass media—these messages are internalized within people of various cultures on a global scale, and as a result have deeply embedded ideologies in their plots which we commonly call tropes. Tropes in movies are recurring themes or motifs that are perpetuated uniquely in each genre. For the horror genre in particular, tropes have become well-established in their complicated, longstanding history in the film industry. Racism, sexism, sexuality, and heteronormativity are all subjects that have staked their claim in the horror movie genre and have done their share in establishing certain mindsets: that the virgin lives, having sex gets you killed, women are sexually terrorized and killed in bloody and gruesome ways, lesbians are sexualized and portrayed negatively, and persons of color are magical, secondary, or otherwise devalued characters. All have helped create tropes most horror films contain, and each is problematic in its own way. However, because these tropes reflect the hegemony of the world at large and have changed over time with society's expanding tolerance, it is the belief of this study that because people are more socially-conscious and accepting of previously conservatively-rejected viewpoints, these tropes have recently begun to be reconstructed and given new meanings. Therefore, I wish to qualitatively analyze more recent horror films to find out if these tropes have been repurposed to better represent marginalized groups or are altogether eliminated in the modern genre.

Gender Roles

There is a consensus in the academic world that horror films tend to play off conservative society's typical and elementary knowledge of traditional gender roles for their characters. Horror films assign hetero and cis-normative roles to their characters and when they stray from those traditional male/female binary roles, they are marked as unique in some way. For males, when they express feminine tendencies or lack strict Western, heteronormative, masculine traits, they are typically granted the role of the killer (Clover 1996). For women, they are expected to remain sex objects for the male gaze at all times and will always be feminized in some way. When she strays from traditional female roles (ie: gentle, scared, sexually available, ditzy) she is granted the role of "final girl" and usually survives the carnage. Carol Clover elaborates on these traditional roles, writing that male killers in films become violent for a number of reasons, mainly relating to sexual perversion—childhood trauma, impotence, sexual guilt and confusion, and anger towards women. However, female killers become killers for revenge towards those who have done them wrong—through rape or cheating lovers. Ultimately, she contends that the characterizations created for men and women are based in traditional sex roles: men are angry, sexual beings who take their anger out on others, and women only become angry when their modesty or devotion to men is threatened (1996). Birks & Coulthard (2016) agree with Clover, declaring that conflict arises through gendered difference, manifested in a non-traditional, feminized monster who threatens the natural order of the sex dichotomy.

Rieser (2001) further presses that modern cinema continues working in tandem with hegemonic ideologies, even stating that just including small variances from heteronormative standards in their characters do not make the films progressive, but fool the audience into believing they are. By the end of most horror films, disordered characters who did not follow the strict guidelines of binary dichotomy often embrace heteronormativity after the monster (who most threatened the norm) is defeated. Missing in Rieser's account of attempted progressive horror films is the way in which the audience will perceive the film. In critical analysis, perhaps it will fail to meet strict academic guidelines of what constructs a wholly anti-ideological narrative, but for the average audience member, the message may be

received in a far simpler and more positive way. In other words, films where the leading female possesses masculine qualities may be read by audiences as an acceptance of women who go against the pressures of society, or vice versa embracing the fact that a feminine-presenting women can still be valued. In the case of men, Kate Robertson's (2018) analysis of the film *Better Watch Out* discusses cis-male entitlement presented in the form of the film's young killer, Luke. She states that gender coding is heavily ingrained in horror films, and Luke embodies this coding as a manipulative male who feels he should commit murder to obtain the love of his babysitter, Ashley. This reflects Rieser's (2001), Clover's (1996), and Birks & Coulthard's (2016) views on gender in horror films by having Luke follow the typical role of an angry, sexually confused male who takes his anger out on others. However, Robertson believes the film also reflects its own self-awareness of the use of this trope. The writers make it obvious that while Luke is following a typical gender role for the genre, they are making the audience aware that this is horrific and toxic. In doing so, it uses tradition to make the audience reconsider what society should grant as acceptable in regard to these roles.

Sexual Desire

Reflecting further hegemonic societal standards, horror films have a longstanding history of depicting the expression of sexuality in a negative way. In *Antichrist*, sex is coded as a disconnect from others when the protagonists' son dies falling from a window while the neglectful parents have intercourse in another room (Zolkos 2011). And according to the virgin-lives-at-the-end trope, Birks & Coulthard (2016) describe the nature of the "asexual final girl" to be a reflection of conservative views about sex and purity, with horror films upholding this mainstream ideology by depicting virgin heroes as the only ones to survive. Linda Williams (1996) asserts, "the horror film may be a rare example of a genre that permits the expression of women's sexual potency and desire...only to punish her for this very act, only to demonstrate how monstrous female desire can be" (p. 35). Such is agreed upon by most academic scholars, including Karen Renner (2016) who wrote in her article reviewing *The New Daughter* and *Jennifer's Body*:

> Jennifer's Body *wants to treat Jennifer as a sympathetic victim, but only according to the logic that "normal" girls don't want casual sex; since Jennifer does, something terrible must have happened to her to make her no longer a "real" girl...In making Jennifer—a teen who engages in casual sex—a monster, the film in fact promotes a rather anti-feminist idea: that girls who desire where they do not love are horrific. Once she becomes a demon, Jennifer's desire for casual sex becomes literally monstrous, associated as it always is with the slaughter of innocent men.* (p. 41)

And of *The New Daughter*, Renner (2016) writes, "while the mound walkers are interested in Louisa purely for reproductive reasons, the boys in a 'realistic' version of the story would have only sexual intentions: in both cases, the girl is only prized for her body's capacity to produce and please, respectively; her pleasure or desires are of no concern" (p. 35). In both cases, Renner finds that while the films aim to give sexual agency to their stars, ultimately the message is lost in the transformations they undergo, which makes them repulsive and horrific.

The very premise of *It Follows* is that having sex will get you killed. While Hahner & Varda (2017) argue in their analysis of the film that it is more representative of an anti-rape message, they fail to recognize that most audiences will receive the surface value of the film: that Annie has sex and is repeatedly punished for it. However, because the film's message is so ambiguous, I will digressively agree that this is debatable and at the very least, has encouraged academics and viewers alike to start a dialogue about sex, sexual health, and consent.

As discovered by Andrew Welsh (2010) in a quantitative study of films to see the relation between characters' sexual activity and their survival, "sexual female characters were less likely to survive and had significantly longer death scenes as compared to those female characters who did not engage in sexual behaviors" (p. 762) This reinforces the idea that women in particular are not only shamed for their sexual agency, but violently so. On the other end of the spectrum, Casey Kelly (2016) identifies independent film *Teeth* as a rape revenge narrative given to pro-feminist audiences to subvert to the "asexual Final Girl" trope.

Although Kelly does claim that because protagonist Dawn's empowerment is clouded by the fact that she must first be violated sexually before being given agency to exact her revenge, she still praises the film for challenging the approach to the "male gaze" in cinema: How can you view Dawn as a sexual object when the men engaging sexually with her are being presented as doing so forcibly and inappropriately? Although it is not completely independent of traditional horror tropes, *Teeth* takes a step in a progressive direction at re-appropriating areas of the genre. A second film, *The Witch*, also depicts the reclaiming of forbidden behaviors and feelings of desire. In the film, sexuality is demonized, and desire of all kinds is repressed within Puritan ideals primarily upon the main character Thomasin. By the end, though, Thomasin is freed from the oppression and guilt of her family, and ultimately embraces the forbidden parts of herself and her inhibited desires (Erikson 2016).

Violence Against Women

Articles discussing sex almost always include discussions about violence, especially in relation with sex. It seems sex and violence (especially toward women) go hand in hand. Many classic horror films such as *Friday the 13th*, *Halloween*, and *The Last House on the Left* are infamous for scenes of young couples dying mid-coitus, no doubt solidifying the trope of "sex kills" in later cinema. Clover (1996) states in her essay "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film", which analyzes horror films written in the 1970s, that while the main correlation between female characters and their deaths is that they have engaged in sexual activity in some way, they are also simply and generally created as fodder for the killer's body count. She explains, "boys die...not because they are boys but because they make mistakes...some girls die...because they are female" (p. 83). She finds that while both men and women are subjected to early deaths when engaging in sexual activity, women tend to experience more violence than men. Furthermore, the deaths of men are "…always swift. The death of a male is moreover more likely than the death of a female to be viewed from a distance...The murders of women...are filmed at closer range, in more graphic detail, and at greater length" (p. 84).

A study conducted in 2003 found that horror films were found to mix sex scenes with violence less often than was previously

suspected (Luque, Molitor, & Sapolsky 2003). However, this study was also limited to films of the last century, lacking any current updates to the research. As a side discussion of this subject, it is important to note that the directors of films that depicted violence toward women were directed mostly by men. In the case of *Antichrist*, director Von Trier claims he added most scenes without purpose, taking inspiration from his dreams (Zolkos 2011). This provokes the question: are men inclined to think violently about women because they see them as inferior, or are they just perpetuating those scenes because they have been so deeply embedded into the horror genre? What we can summarize is that most films from the horror genre in the past have been rather anti-feminist and misogynistic.

Race

Minorities in horror films are hardly represented and when they are, their inclusion in plot is low and their mortality rates are high. As such, there are countless academic papers and studies focused on Black characters in horror cinema and the implications of their roles. Classic cinema of all genres presented both Black men and women as inhuman beings who are hypersexualized and a threat to the superiority of whiteness (Berenstein, 1995). Commonly featured in jungle-adventure movies where they were depicted as savages, Black characters were eventually graduated into the horror genre as secondary characters: either as comedic relief, a mythic with mysterious powers or wisdom, and a plot device to further the white protagonists' journey (Keralis 2017).

Evidently, most Black characters in the past century had not been given equal roles in films. During the racial movement of the 1970s, "Blaxploitation" emerged as an effort to oppose the stereotypical savage, producing what Harry Benshoff (2000) describes as, "sympathetic monsters who helped shift audience identification away from the status quo" (p. 45). Furthering that, "in some cases, they exposed white 'normality,' and especially white patriarchy" (p. 45), for the most part, unfair treatment of Black characters has led to the "Black dude dies first" trope in horror films, arising from the stereotype that persons of color notoriously serve no purpose in horror films except to be the killer's first victim.

Writer Matt Berone (2013) for Complex Magazine has found that this is a misconception. Most Black characters in horror cinema do not die first; however, they do have higher mortality rates than white characters. Recent efforts seem to be slowly opposing the superficial roles given to Black characters, beginning notably with the 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead,* which features a Black protagonist, and highlights the issue of police brutality against people of color (Gerson 2016). The 1995 horror flick *Tales from the Hood* is described by Jacqueline Fulmer (2002) as a reconfiguration of African American folklore, functioning "as a reinscription of the didactic...trying to lead their young audience members toward adulthood and away from stereotypes of African American and male identities" (p. 424).

Oscar-winning film *Get Out* (2017)*,* has been the topic of many scholarly articles on Black cinema, praised for its success at reverting tropes of Black men in the genre and showcasing the horrors of white supremacy. Depy Karalis (2017) notes that the film *Get Out* takes well-known tropes of African Americans—comic relief, voodoo shaman, being a secondary character, and dying for the advancement of white characters' benefit—and subverts them. Main character Chris not only survives at the end of the film, but he and his friend Rod are the only two left alive while all the white characters have been killed off. Racquel Gates of the Department of Media Culture at the College of Staten Island (2017) similarly praises the film for its re-appropriation of the "Sambo Archetype" of Black men: the image of the subservient, wide-eyed, dark skinned, overly emotive Black man characterized during Hollywood's era of segregation. She states "I would argue that Peele's recurring motifs of single tears or blood trickling down the fixed black faces, even the fact that the whites of Chris's eyes are bloodshot rather than pure white, could be seen to operate as a commentary on the minstrel mask rather than a straightforward rebirth of it" (p. 38).

Sexuality

The horror genre seems to be limited to a small number of cis-gendered male gay films, and a larger collection of cis-gendered female, lesbian-feminist focused plots. Bonnie Zimmerman (1996) explains in her essay, "Daughters of Darkness: The Lesbian Vampire on Film," that vampire films prior to the mid-1970's were erotic in nature, exploring the macabre mixed with sexuality, and later used lesbianism as a way to

cater to male fantasies, to "capitalize on the market for pornography, since the lesbian vampire genre can allow nudity, blood, and sexual titillation in a 'safe' fantasy structure" (p. 431). Later on, these lesbian films were written through a feminist lens and "used to express a fundamental male fear that female bonding will exclude men and threaten male supremacy" (p. 432). Additionally, depicting women as capable of rape and seduction of other women as vampires alleviates male fears that women might reject men willingly. Ultimately, according to Zimmerman, these types of themes were seen less and less throughout the mid-1980's, not because lesbians were given their own agency with their sexuality, but because the focus was brought back yet again to men and their sexual threat to women in the dominant public sphere. Zimmerman analyzes a particular film, *Daughters of Darkness*, in which the main character, Delphine, is a prominent lesbian figure in the vampire horror genre who is not sexualized. She is older than the typically presented lesbian vampire, depicted as caring and protecting, and is given much authority over other characters in the film. Overall, she articulates that the film presents an ending where anyone would feel "lucky enough to be a lesbian" (p. 437).

In her article, "Un-Queering Horror: Hellbent and the Policing of the 'Gay Slasher'" (2010), Claire Sisco King describes lesbian horror through a similar lens as Zimmerman, noting that vampire films offered an avenue for lesbians to establish their identities and further describing horror's purpose as a way to see "monsters not as loathed or rejected but as key figures of desire and identification that encourage spectators to read queerly" (p. 251). She also agrees with Clover's analysis that in slashers, the killers are characterized as feminine, non-gender-conforming individuals and the final girls are written to possess traditionally masculine traits, arguably making them qualified for analysis through a queer lens. Regarding the film *Hellbent*, King does not agree with director Etheredge-Ouzts' claim that he made a queer-representation film because it relied too heavily on typical horror tropes, saying his "appeal to tradition lays claim to an acceptability, or legitimacy, at odds with queer's aims 'to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimize, to camp up.'" (p. 255). In other words, while it was an attempt at including queer characters in its story, the motifs seen in the movie are too ideological, rejecting crucial parts of queer identity that produces an approach to sexuality similar to being "racially

color-blind," from which progressive queer horror films have been trying find independence in recent years.

Conclusion

Through these scholars, I have found that there was plenty of analysis on the feminist, heteronormative approach to horror films. Most scholars agree that there are plenty of sex and gender-related problems in the history of the horror genre, but many also fail to look at aspects of race, homosexuality, and transgenderism. Articles discussing Black characters were limited, and other persons of color were entirely excluded from the discussion. Tangentially, most articles are focused on the United States sphere of the film industry, likely due to the dominance of the U.S. film industry throughout the world.

Moreover, there were absolutely no articles discussing positively portrayed transgender-representative movies or characters besides those that depicted the killer as a perverted, feminized monster, reinforcing cis-normative perspectives. I believe a large gap missing here is discussion of how more of these films are representative of changing values in modern society, and what these films are saying about marginalized groups. There are abundant analyses on the evolution of film and issues they reflect or resist modern values. Likewise, I believe there are many more films that show an evolution in horror due to an increasingly tolerant society.

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Talking to my Professor: Analyzing Microaggression and Deviance in the Academic Setting

Sabrina Bensimon

Abstract

This paper aims to explore the nature of microaggressions in the socio-academic environment as experienced by a blind female African-American instructor/student at a large university in Southern California. Written in the style of critical ethnography, this paper uses a dialogic style of interviewing, observation, triangulation with an advisory and participatory framework. Microaggressions committed against mainly one professor are analyzed and discussed here. This paper extends the academic microaggression conceptualization by Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso (2000). The results of this research are presented as well as recommendations for the future.

Keywords: microaggression, racial campus climate, higher education

Introduction

This paper aims to explore the nature of microaggressions in the socio-academic environment as experienced by three individuals, including a blind female African-American instructor/teaching associate (TA) who is also a student at a large university in Southern California. From here on, this individual will be referred to as Jo. I want to acknowledge Jo as a co-creator of this paper. Had Jo not shared her lived experiences with me, I would not have an analysis to produce.

Microaggressions taking place in the socio-academic environment have previously been investigated (Williams & Nichols, 2007; Rollock, 2011, Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000, Rabow, Venieris & Dhillon, 2014); this paper seeks to add to this literature with an intersectional lens and a participant who is both a student and a teacher. The dual identities of student and instructor create a special circumstance that further marginalizes the main participant in this study. This study looks to expand our understanding of how microaggressions occur in the academic setting. Specifically, this study seeks to contribute to the microaggression model of Solórzano et al (2000).

According to Huber & Solórzano (2015), "racial microaggressions are a form of systemic, everyday racism used to keep those at the racial margins in their place" (pg. 289). They go on to say that microaggressions can be verbal or non-verbal, layered (intersectional), and have cumulative psychological, physical, and academic effects (Pierce 1970; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Microaggression research acknowledges that overt racism is no longer acceptable so racism and sexism exist in subtle and covert forms (Solórzano, 1998). This study of microaggressions takes place in the context of higher education which Solórzano et al (2000) term "the campus racial climate" (pg. 61); defined broadly as "the overall racial environment of the college campus" (pg. 62), positing that it is important to investigate so we may understand "college access, persistence, graduation, and transfer to and from graduate and professional schools" (pg.62).

Due to legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the institution at which Jo is enrolled has an office for students with

disabilities that provides format conversions and other accommodations. Being a student and a teaching associate places Jo at an uncertain intersection that gives way for administrators and departments to limit access to resources. This study aims to illuminate the ways in which departments, professors, and students with certain privileges in this context employ microaggression tactics to limit access to resources and invalidate Jo's experiences due specifically to her disability.

Deviance as a cause of microaggressions is explored through Jo's own view of herself as a deviant in the socio-academic environment. My use of "deviance" is defined throughout as the state of not being acknowledged as part of the norm, and this concept comes up with my research participants who shared their experiences feeling out of place in spaces of higher education. Jo, in particular, is not a normative faculty member on her campus. While deviance is often defined by behavior, Jo is considered deviant based on her physicality. This framing of deviance is supported by Wolfson (1984), "People who suffer from physical defects and others who appear to involuntarily violate conformity receive similar reactions from lay audiences and professionals in that they are seen as being morally inferior…Deviance is subjectively determined, inferential, and reliant upon negative reactions from others" (pg. 9-10). Had Jo worked at an institution with more African American instructors or instructors with disabilities, she may not have been seen as or felt deviant in the way that she did on the campus at which she was teaching and learning.

This study is meant to critically analyze the lived experiences of three research participants following an advocatory and participatory microaggression paradigm. According to Williams & Nichols (2012), the microaggression paradigm prioritizes the perspectives and perceptions of the target of microaggressions. This approach is influenced by critical race theory (CRT) and its valuing of experiential knowledge (Huber & Solórzano, 2015). The analysis in this paper centers the lived experiences of the participants and how they interpret microaggressions. This discussion of microaggressions is not solely focused on race, nor gender, nor disability; rather all of these factors affect the nature of microaggressions deployed in this analysis. The "one group"/the dominant group discussed in this study will be considered people who are white, male, and able-bodied (specifically

sighted). Ableism is one source of microaggressions employed against Jo in particular.

Following the campus racial climate model presented by Solórzano, et al., this paper considers how microaggressions manifest in academic spaces, how these instances impact student life, and how those impacts lead to the creation of counter spaces. This constitutes an analysis of the campus racial climate, which is loosely defined to include the full racial environment of the college campus; these may include overlapping social spaces.

Methodology

To investigate my participants' experiences in this environment, I used a reflexive, participatory, and advocatory approach ethnography. To prioritize the experiences of my participants, I employ grounded theory with critical interpretive analysis because I am first interested in hearing the stories of my participants (Merriam, 2002) as well as following the grounded theory of microaggressions explored by Solórzano et al. (2001). Using this critical approach "presuppose[s] that racism is discursive, residual, and material part of history and contemporary reality of the United States" (Lacy & Ono, 2011, pg. 3); I extend this presupposition to ableism as well.

This research examined a podcast in which I took part creating for Jo's African American performance study class to teach students about black performativity. The podcasts consisted of two collaborative open-ended interviews/conversation between three participants. The podcasts also references previous literature that explores the experiences of African American women in the academic environment, as well as texts such as *The Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, the concept of W.E.B DuBois' "The veil," and double consciousness along with the works of Chiquita Howard-Bostic. The podcasts can be found at https://soundcloud.com/sabrina-bensimon.

In the podcast with Jo and fellows, we engage in what bell hooks (1994) calls "theorizing" as a practice toward liberation, in which theory is produced from personal testimony and experience; such theorizing, according to hooks, can be used to resist the commodification of feminist theory (p. 60-61). We talk and theorize without creating any commodities to be exploited. From these conversations, observations, and theorizing, we identified themes from

the participants' experiences of microaggressions. Some of these themes have literary inspirations; for example, "choking on the blood in my mouth" is discussed based off Ellison's *Invisible Man.* Denzin's interpretive process (2002) is used to deconstruct these experiences, bracket themes, and reconstruct the racial academic climate.

Participants

Originally, I had approached only Jo about participating this study. However, as the research-interview relationship formed, Jo invited me to join her podcast project, which introduced two other voices to the research. These additional voices provide a richer understanding of microaggressions perpetuated in academia due to the different background and experiences of the participants. All three participants identify as African American women: Jo is a first-generation literature Master's student and teaching associate at a large California university in her 30s. Ray is also a first generation Master's student and teaching associate who is in her 60s. Lastly, Chloe is a first-year, second-generation student who is about 20 years old.

Research Questions

As this study intends to explore microaggressions in the academic environment, I used both microaggression literature and my observations during the creation of the podcast to formulate the following research questions: What do microaggressions look like in the academic environment? Knowing what those interactions look like help us identify them in our own environments or even confront ourselves and other perpetrators around us. How do microaggressions feel? Microaggressions may not be easily identified by people who are not the targets. They may seem warranted, justified, or supported by these bystanders. What do targets believe are the sentiments behind aggression? How are microaggressions deployed to limit access to resources? How do interdepartmental dynamics limit access to resources? It is important to acknowledge how racism, discrimination, and microaggressions are then used to limit access to resources, especially if these limitations only apply to particular individuals within the academic environment.

Theoretical Framework

Due to the complex nature of microaggressions in this environment, I employ an intersectional lens in this analysis. This study is meant to illuminate the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants through grounded theory and an advocatory and participatory paradigm. While deconstructing these microaggressions, I will use the political/relational model of disability, which is explained by Kafer (2013) as "the problem of disability no longer resides in the minds or bodies of individuals but in built environments and social patterns that exclude or stigmatize particular kinds of bodies, minds, and ways of being" (p. 6). She continues, "the problem of disability is located in inaccessible buildings, discriminatory attitudes, and the ideological system that attributes normalcy and deviance to particular minds and bodies" (p. 6). I employ this framing to analyze how the regime of normalcy is employed to limit access to resources. Disability is politicized, especially on college campuses, due to legislation that acts to create more accessible opportunities. These pieces of legislation lead to the creation of offices exclusively for the use of students who identify as disabled. While students with disabilities do have these resources available, According to Banks and Hughes (2003), "African Americans with disabilities often encounter the challenge of having to internally affirm the integrity of their disability and cultural identities while confronting the norms of an educational system that has been historically hostile to those identities" (pg. 368). This reality adds another layer to the analysis of this topic. This approach analyzes the racial campus climate in a political and intersectional way.

Results

Several themes emerged during the discussions in the podcast. Many of these themes coincide with the models put forth by Solórzano, et al (2001). We started our discussions by talking about the general campus racial climate, which is alluded to but never explicitly stated. One theme that came up was the idea of deviance. Jo, in particular, perceives deviance as the cause of microaggressions she faces. The discussions then bring up microaggressions from different sources at the university from interpersonal to institutional. Some themes that emerged were especially poignant for the participants. "Choking on my blood" emerges from discussion of the *Invisible Man*'s battle royal

scene, which reflects the experience of Black students in higher education, in which they must compete against, or fight, each other. Because students who "made it" to the higher institution have made it past the battle royale and were "allowed" into the space, they must choke on the blood and saliva in their mouths and feign gratefulness, even when faced with racism in environments where they should feel safe. Finally, as conceptualized by Solórzano et al. (2001), a counter-space, for which this study is part, is created.

Themes Within the Campus Racial Climate

While the participants did not explicitly mention the state of the racial climate at their university, they expressed that overall, it is negative. As Black people on campus, they imagine their environment as the battle royal scene written by Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man.* An example of the negative racial climate is "The Black House" on the campus that the three participants attend, which houses the offices of the African American Studies department. Ray expresses the following as Chloe mentions her Africana Studies class:

> *...I just find it kind of ironic that they were in the prison building… [It was] designed by the man that designed Alcatraz, they put all the Black professors in Africana Studies departments offices over there. I just find that a little bit ironic. You know, it drips, rain comes through there, they've got trashcan catching the water on a rainy day. You don't see the English department living like that over here...to me, that's another form of segregation on this campus as if it's like a little New York neighborhood, but people walk around every day and they don't pay attention to that and they don't see that.*

Joe and Ray discuss feeling like "window dressing" to boost the image of the school's "diversity." (Bensimon, 2019). The Black House can also be seen as window dressing; the African American Studies department has a space, but it is subpar compared to other department facilities. While the school is a majority Hispanic/Latinx populated school, there is scarce representation of black people as students or faculty. Ray expressed this sentiment of window dressing with a reference to "Liberty Paints" from *Invisible Man.* In the *Invisible Man*, a company called "Liberty Paints"

makes the whitest paint with the secret use of 10 drops of black toner. Any more or any less would ruin the white paint:

> *Well, I am the 10th drop, one of the 10 drops, [Chloe's] a drop right here. Right. And that's how they justify that they added the drops by using the TA's to, you know, make up the difference of what they don't do when they hire. So, it looks like they have enough drops to comply with [the institution's obligation toward diversity].*

This school, like many others, employs graduate teaching associates to teach lower division courses. Jo and Ray are two of the teaching associates in their department. In describing the concept of "window dressing", they reference an enclosed bulletin board case in the hallway of the English department floor of the building which displays pictures graduate teaching assistants who are majority POC and works to signal that the department embraces diversity. However, department hiring practices of full-time faculty, which is still largely dominated by white faculty members, do not reflect the inclusion and diversity that case aims to portray, reinforcing the workings of institutional racism in academic environment, and fostering racial micro-aggressions as laid out in the model Huber and Solórzano proposed (2015). Statistics on the school's diversity also highlight the lack of African American presence on campus. According to the school's student life section on their website, the racial breakdown of undergraduates seeking degrees is as follows: Latinx students (42%), followed by white students (24.2%), Asian students (11.1%), "Nonresident Aliens" (8.3%), African American Students (5.6%), with smaller percentages of unknown, two or more races, Native American or Alaskan Native, and Pacific Islander. Further statistic evidence from their Office of Institutional Research shows a scarce number of African American educators on this campus. According to data reported by the participants' university from Fall 2017, there were a total of 818 tenure and tenure-track faculty. In all of the colleges on campus, there were only 43 Black/African American faculty, with only 25 who were women; a total of only 3% of faculty. Out of a total of 1,309 lecturers in Fall 2017, only 49 were Black/African American, and 24 were women. In the College of Humanities, where Jo and Ray reside, there were no African American tenure or tenure-track

faculty. In total for Fall 2017, 4.3% of educators were Black/African American and none of them taught in Jo and Ray's college. The fact that the majority of the transitory TA's are Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPoC) does not highlight their inclusive practices but rather unveils the exploitation of these bodies. These TA's have little to no say in departmental decisions and receive meager compensation, justified by their Teaching Associate status. The department uses these TAs as the face of racial diversity when the reality of their hiring practices does not reflect such inclusion or effective affirmative action.

I am deviant/ You are deviant

Jo attributes the microaggressions she experiences to her embodied presentation of deviance (Bensimon, 2019). Coincidentally when I approached Jo about this research, she was teaching a deviance-themed freshman writing class. As an African American professor who is blind and physically impaired, just being in front of a classroom is deviant. Through our discussion we likened non-white, racialized bodies to deviance. Furthermore, disability is also seen as a break from normalcy (Reid & Knight, 2006) and we can glimpse how the regime of normalcy has material consequences for Jo.

Microaggressions from students

> *In the classroom settings, I have often listened to groups of students tell me that racism really no longer shapes the contours of our lives, that there is no such thing as racial difference, that "we are all just people*." (hooks, 1994, p. 25)

As an instructor at the university, Jo is subject to microaggressions from her students. In these instances, we describe her response as wearing a mask. Before we discuss microaggressions perpetrated by students, I will use Jo's words to describe the mask:

> *There are different rules… you don't address microaggressions, you're calm. You're supposed to be a consummate professional and you're supposed to keep quiet about that… you have to put on that mask... not only do you have to wear that mask in the classroom… when you don't wear that mask, you get penalized*

> *in ways that you would not otherwise... So ostensibly it's because you're a teaching associate and you don't have the same latitude as an adjunct or as a tenured or tenured-track professor. But it's really because you're an African American and you are supposed to be okay with subsisting on the crumbs that drop down to you at the foot of the table.*

Jo talks about an interaction she had with a student who employed a microinsult, defined by Williams & Nichols (2012) as subtle remarks that demonstrate racial insensitivity, directed at her, and Jo had to wear her mask and not be offended. This student was analyzing the subversive unit of discourse in "Hoe" by Ludacris. In his analysis that he penned for an African American professor he wrote that one of the issues he identifies with the song is that it "reinforced the ghetto n***** mentality." Jo was taken aback by this as they had just discussed audience awareness choices for their writing. He was not quoting anything, so in Jo's view, there were no qualifications for him to be using that language. In a separate instance a student pathologized Black cultural values (Williams & Nichols, 2012) by saying that he does not listen to rap because it is critical of President Trump, who was in office at the time. He goes on to say that if he wanted to listen to people complain and whine, he would go to a poetry reading, which in his view is a more appropriate venue for critical thought and expression. Extensively asserting that rap, which is predominantly and originally a Black form of expression, resistance, and counter-culture, is less appropriate than mainstream white culture poetry readings for critical reflection is a form of racial microaggression and policing of Black expression.

Microaggressions from Professors

Microaggressions perpetrated by professors against students have been researched previously (Rabow, Venieris, & Dhillon, 2014). This next interaction, however, is slightly different because this happened when Jo was in an instructional role as a teaching associate. It occurred during the second class meeting of the semester. Since the previous semester, Jo has always arrived with an assistant a few minutes before class would start. She was in the same computer lab style classroom as she was the previous semester. There are written

rules near the door instructing people to make sure the door is locked when the classroom is not in use. Directly before Jo's class is another English class taught by a white woman professor who also taught Ray (Ray recalls a negative devaluating microinsultive experience with the professor that is not included in this work). The professor in question does not seem to trust the students of the university in this classroom a few minutes before their professor arrives. She would not let students in, citing university policy, even though in the previous semester that lab was constantly open. For this second class session, Jo arrived in the same manner as usual. As she arrives, her students know they can follow inside now that the other professor cannot restrict their entry. As Jo and her assistant walk in, the following interaction occurs as described by Jo:

> *...She doesn't address me directly. She talks over my head to my assistant and says, "well, we're not allowed to leave till the instructor arrives." And choking on the blood in the saliva in my mouth as I've had to do so many times… I wanted to say, "bitch, I am the instructor... Who are you talking to? Who are you talking about? please, please get out of my class."*

Without addressing Jo, she invalidates her legitimacy by assuming that she was clearly not an instructor; an assumption of Jo's inferiority. Jo also notes that her assistant is a well-known English office staff member. Jo comments that walking in on the arm of that office staff member should have signified that Jo was not a student, because that office staff member would not be assisting students in the same way. Ray later adds that the professor in question has seen Jo make the journey to her English class many times over the semester, Jo even has an office in the same hallway as this professor. There were many opportunities for this particular professor to understand her role as a teaching associate. After all, she is one of the faces of diversity displayed in the case in the hallway.

After being hired as a TA, Jo was in a pedagogy class which prepared TA's for the classes they were set to teach. A microinsult took place when a professor assumed her intellectual inferiority (Nichols & Williams, 2012). Jo describes:

> *Yeah, so when I went through the pedagogy class… there was an offer from the instructor to help me with my progressions because it was assumed that I knew very little about how to teach writing… I was the only one that was approached about being assisted with progressions when I wasn't the only one with the literature background.*

Microaggressions from Departments + Interdepartmental Play: You are allowed to be here because we let you.

The first instance that emerged from this theme was the discussions surrounding the hiring of Jo as an instructor in the English department (Bensimon, 2019). To her knowledge, she was the first blind African American woman to obtain an instructor position in the English department. During her hiring process, the other faculty members in her department discussed at length her ability to be an effective instructor, including being potential "harmful" to her students because of her perceived lack of ability to complete job functions, and how much it would "cost" the department to supply Jo with the necessary accommodation of an aide. To be clear, Jo does not need an additional person for classroom management, but rather for conducting a multi-model class efficiently. She needs someone who can see screens and wires to navigate the classroom technology. Additionally, aides typically assist her in getting from place to place more easily. During our discussion, I asked if she felt that "limitations" as a result of her blindness highlight the political and social construction of disability; Jo responds,

> *... there are some limitations that have scare quotes... but there are some definite… limitations that need to be considered. ... the fact that I am using a screen reader that does not allow me to format things properly, so there may [not] be commentary on student work as extra spacing, and capitalization, errors that sighted instructors can correct. Unless I go through it individually; Scan every word... those … were some of the concerns.*

Jo's response demonstrates that while non-sightedness is a disability due to socially constructed environments, there are still tangible needs

that must be acknowledged. While disabilities can be exacerbated by socially constructed norms, a change in rhetoric will not change the fact that Jo needs resources for accessibility. In this discussion around her hiring, she was made aware of the issues the people in charge of hiring were discussing and was shocked when she was actually hired. She describes the sentiments behind her hiring as "magnanimous," as them telling her "we let you be here." She adds that the approval of an aide for her classroom was a topic of discussion; people involved in hiring argued over whether it was necessary to have an aide that Jo herself said she needed to run a successful classroom. They believed she wanted an aide to improve her classroom management, but in fact she needed a sighted person who could help her establish the multi-modal functionality that she required for her curriculum.

Limiting Access to Resources with the Regime of Normalcy

People view disability as deviance, as a break from normalcy, so it seems natural that when someone with a disability requires accommodation, that people would think of this as a personal problem; this is how ableism functions. Our society is constructed for the "able-bodied." This means the practices within society assume that people are expected to function without accommodation. Because of this view of disability as an individual issue (Kafer, 2013), Jo is subject to departmental interplay that keeps her from resources to which other professors readily have access.

This following instance of microaggression is due to her blindness and is based in ableism (Bensimon, 2019). There is a book that is published in-house by graduate students in her department at her university which must be included in the curriculum for the course she is teaching. All professors received physical copies of the book. However, Jo cannot casually pick up a book and sort through the pages, as sighted professors can; this highlights the ableist assumptions in this department. When requesting an accessible copy, she was told to contact the Disability Resources and Education Services (DRES) office; an office that is mandatory by legislation under the ADA and IDEA. She contacted the office but was excluded from their services because she is an instructor, even though she is also a student. The office that creates accessible materials for students who need them, told this student and professor that they will not create an accessible document for her. They

told her that to obtain accessible document formatting, she must go through the university's Office for Diversity and Equality to be approved to use DRES services. She then contacted the Office for Diversity and Equality who then told her to contact her department. Her department told her to contact the publisher, even though the text itself is created by the department. At one point, someone told her to "beg" DRES to convert the files for her. After the department, DRES, and Office of Diversity and Equality responses, she decided not to include the book in her syllabus.

This instance involved many people in her department and in the other offices. She was contacted by many people, even by people who had no business in the matter and inserted themselves into the situation. All of them limited her access to resources that were readily available to her sighted colleagues. Jo's experience is an example of what Kafer (2013) describes as the pair of compulsory able-bodiedness with compulsory able-mindedness. Instead of viewing this as an issue the department could easily solve, they put the onus on her to struggle to access these necessary resources. When distributing this material, the needs of visually impaired instructors should have not been considered or requested.

Need for Gratefulness

> *A psychological hallmark of racism is the altogether too well-known tendency for whites to congratulate themselves, before a black, concerning what marvelous 'progress' is being made… If the black offended then indicates in any manner whatsoever that [they are] not convinced that congratulations are in order, he is gruffly perceived as at best an ingrate or at worst an ignoramus who refuses to comply to the rules set up by [the] oppressor.* (Pierce, 1970, p. 267)

This theme of gratefulness emerges throughout the conversation between Jo, Ray, and Chloe. They all mention gratefulness independently in different parts of the discussion. The concept of having to be grateful and don a mask when they experience microaggressions is known for Jo and Ray, but not yet to Chloe. This is evident in the following interaction:

Ray: ...we have to wear the masks and when we take the masks off or when we decorate those masks in ways that have always worked for us, that sort of tentative sort of place at the table though at the foot of the table... You were allowed to sit at the foot of the table… you're supposed to be grateful for where you are.

Jo: Yeah. Yeah. You can't, you can't ever spit the blood out of your mouth or the saliva out of your mouth.

Ray: No, you choke on it

Ray: Do you feel grateful that you're here?

Chloe: I feel very grateful to be here and…

Ray: I'm sure that teachers make you…

The feeling of needing to feel grateful to these institutions is salient to Jo and Ray, who have had longer academic careers than Chloe, who is in her first year of graduate school. After discussing the magnanimous decision to hire her, Jo expresses feeling the need to be grateful to the institution:

> *You have to seem grateful... these agents hope that you won't notice that you are, you've been, that you have been allowed to the table...on the surface you destabilize...narratives of... normalcy…because you've been sort of tasked with that as an exchange for your place at the table. ... you sort … of owe it to these agents to keep quiet about that.*

Choking on the Blood in my Mouth

"Choking on the blood in my mouth" is a perfect metaphor for the struggle these Black students and professors face in the academic environment, as Ray poetically describes. While the participants talk of holding back dissent or objection to racist behavior in order to perform gratitude, this is not quite the "choking" to which Ray refers. Choking is threatening to one's life, and can be read both literally and metaphorically. Jo starts this next excerpt by talking about the differences between the classes she and Ray teaches from the classes that other TAs teach in the way they select course material:

Jo: ... to actually have the skills to unpack the nontraditional texts, the album cover, the work of literature, the song, and why does it matter... you as an African American instructor don't have the intellectual capacity to teach students that way... when you're the kind of instructors that we are... we draw microaggressions.

Ray: That's almost like the narrator when he's having that fight and all he wants to do is make his speech, you know, all I want to do is teach… all that fighting that I have to go through just so I can teach... I just see the parallel… he's thinking in his head the whole time... I feel like that's the fight that I've had getting my degree sitting there in a classroom, looking at the wall while a White PhD professor tells me how I'm supposed to be Black... And I've been Black for 62 years... And having to turn my face and look away and cry... I just want to teach. I just want to help these students and they make it a fight for me every day.

This conversation piece highlights the internal struggle Black women must face in these institutional contexts. This test also exemplifies what Williams and Nichols (2012) term "pathologizing cultural values," which occurs when Black culture is devalued because it is not mainstream white culture and is subsequently deemed inappropriate. The two participants further spoke about comments they would receive about their course material, as noted earlier in this study. Other White classmates and instructors would say that students need more repetitive, traditional, and foundational writing instruction, while Jo is trying to make her class engaging and timely. Jo and Ray go on to explain the phenomenon of choking on the blood:

Jo: ... the other thing is the fact that he's trying to speak, but he's got blood and saliva in his mouth... You've been through all of a fight with a blood full face. You've dealt with the micro aggressions and macro aggressions and just constant sort of notion of you. You don't belong. What are you doing here? Um, and then you have to get to walk into a classroom… and try to present… a course of study

under the watchful eye of somebody who believes wholeheartedly that you are inherently inferior.

Ray: ... the closer I get to my graduation date and then the more the tears sting in the back of my eyes every day and I wonder what I did this for... I haven't seen anybody with my skin color, except for one teacher in 13 years of education and that's through three colleges. I don't understand that... the sad part is like in The Invisible Man*…it didn't even dawn on me until I was in grad school that I hadn't seen a black professor except for someone in Africana studies or something like that...None in my English department... That's pathetic. So, what do you think that says to me about my chances of being employed somewhere?*

With these sentiments, we can detect the almost regret and hopelessness of going through this academic journey. After these experiences, Ray in particular realize how much of an "outsider" she is, even as she is realizes her low chances of getting hired, as we have seen with the hiring practices of this institution. She realizes the detrimental effects of the exclusive environments in which she has been educated. How many times has she choked on the blood in her mouth throughout the years?

Creating Counter Spaces

According to Solórzano et al (2000), counter spaces forms as responses to the microaggressions experienced in the campus racial climate; "These counter spaces serve as sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained" (p.70). The creation of this paper and podcasts are an act of creating a counter space. As Jo says, when recording the podcasts, we were "in the belly of the beast," in the section of the building in which the English department resides. It is empowering to talk about instances of microaggressions experienced and have other BIPoC acknowledge the validity of pain experienced. These conversations help build resilient against the negative campus racial climate BIPoC students experience. As Jo states, "... my presence, Chloe's presence and Ray's presence… just us being here … destabilizes

that narrative of normalcy" (Bensimon, 2019). We rejoice in the creation of these brief counter-spaces. However, there is a danger to creating counter spaces and Jo acknowledges this. Her confidentiality is of the utmost importance because she worries about her academic career now that she is looking for faculty positions. While recording and editing podcasts, we had to be sure not to let the name of the institution slip. While institutions should be held accountable, the backlash may be too great for someone who is already marginalized.

Limitations

This study has a few limitations which open spaces up for further research. As discussed by Kioko & Makoelle (2014), attempts to identify and address difference may have a pathologizing affect (p. 107). This type of research runs the risk of constructing simplified categories such as oppressed, oppressor, disabled, and able-bodied.

The focus of this study was based on the single disability of blindness within the academic context, as well as a single participant at the intersection of disability and Blackness. It would have been beneficial to add other voices of students with disabilities to the study. What could someone who is wheelchair bound or deaf have illuminated for us about accessibility on this campus? With that, I must also acknowledge that this paper does not represent the totality of the experiences recorded for this study. For example, I did not discuss the casual remarks made towards African Americans such as naming them "one of those people" - people with no name. I did not fully discuss how microaggressions make their targets feel, such as Chloe's experiences with microaggressions in student dorms. There is a whole body of research that address the physical and psychological effects of microaggressions that could have been considered as well.

Conclusion

> *Our society does not stand in need of any new laws of innovative plans as much as it stands in need of eliminating offensive maneuvers from any process of interaction which involves majority and minority students* (Pierce, 1970, p.266)

As this study concludes, there are some recommendations that can be drawn from this research. First, schools should be responsible for obtaining accessible material for students and professors who need them. The runaround between various departments that Jo experienced for one piece of accessible text that already existed is indicative of a culture that normalizes ableism. The communication that ensued when she was contacting people in the university, is unacceptable. At one point she was literally told to beg DRES for an accessible document. The institutional practices that resulted in these experiences would be beneficial to explore so we can see how effective ADA and IDEA mandated offices and policies are in terms of serving the needs of students and instructors.

Second, as Pierce (1970) stated, we do not need more laws or plans, but rather changes in our attitudes towards minority students. This paper seeks to illuminate what casual microaggressions look like. Did the people who limited Jo's access to accessible documents know they were severely Othering her? Maybe not, because they hold the dominant position and ideology. People within these socially dominant positions could benefit from reading works that consider the voices of these targets so they may understand how they perpetuate microaggressions. Marginalized individuals on campuses who experience microaggressions need spaces to come together and create counter spaces in which they may feel safe and experience academic success unhindered by internalization of these negative attitudes.

Finally, university hiring practices must be addressed. The university statistics for the breakdown of faculty alone are problematic enough, and a more qualitative examination into campus microaggressions reveals the deep-seated racial and ableist frameworks, even as institutions perform a commitment to diversity. As such, the exploitation of brown and black bodies in the name of diversity must end.

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About the Authors

Sabrina Bensimon is from the San Fernando Valley, California, raised by parents who were immigrants. She obtained her Bachelor's and Master's degree in Communication Studies from CSULA. In recent years Sabrina has focused research on intersectional disability studies using her background as an adaptive skills supervisor to inform new avenues of research. Her paper about attributional confidence in the disability services field has been presented at the annual National Communication Association (NCA) conference in November 2019. She hopes to continue her work as a case supervisor and pursue a PhD program in the future.

Joseph Lee is an undergraduate student studying Communication Studies at California State University, Los Angeles. His interests are organizational communication, disability studies and representation, and collegiate forensics. He is a nationally recognized forensics competitor, becoming a semifinalist in rhetorical criticism and quarterfinalist in impromptu speaking at National Forensic Association (NFA) nationals in 2019, and being named American Forensic Association National Individual Events All-American in 2020.

Ashley Neal is a Los Angeles-based stripper with two Master's degrees – one in Studies in Law from the University of Southern California Gould School of Law and one in Communication Studies from California State University, Los Angeles. Most of her research has focused on hardships faced by strippers: occupational disclosure published as a thesis, strip club power dynamics presented at WSCA's Undergraduate Communication Association conference, and an earlier version of this study presented at the International Communication Association (ICA) conference. Ashley hopes to utilize both her degrees and experiences to benefit both the sex work community as well as the general community.

Amy Peterson graduated *magna cum laude* with a Bachelor's degree in Communication Studies from California State University Los Angeles. She is now working toward her goal of becoming a public relations specialist. Owing a great deal to her mother who read many books to

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