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"Men Are Like Bluetooth, Women Are Like Wi-Fi": What Feminist Technology Studies Can Add to the Study of Information and Communication Technologies

CAROLYN M. CUNNINGHAM

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This article provides insights into how feminist technology studies can enhance the study of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The article argues for a shift in focus from research on gender differences in ICT usage to a more nuanced analysis of the mutual shaping of gender and technology. In the end, several areas for future research are proposed.

KEYWORDS: Gender, information and communication technologies, feminist technology studies, social media

A recent Internet meme depicts a Bluetooth symbol on one side and a Wi-Fi symbol on the other (Figure 1). The caption reads, "Men Are Like Bluetooth. He is connected to you when you are nearby, but searches for other devices when you are away. Women Are Like Wi-Fi. She sees all available devices but connects to the strongest one." This meme reflects some of our long-held cultural assumptions about gender, communication, and technology.

Although feminist scholarship in communication has expanded,

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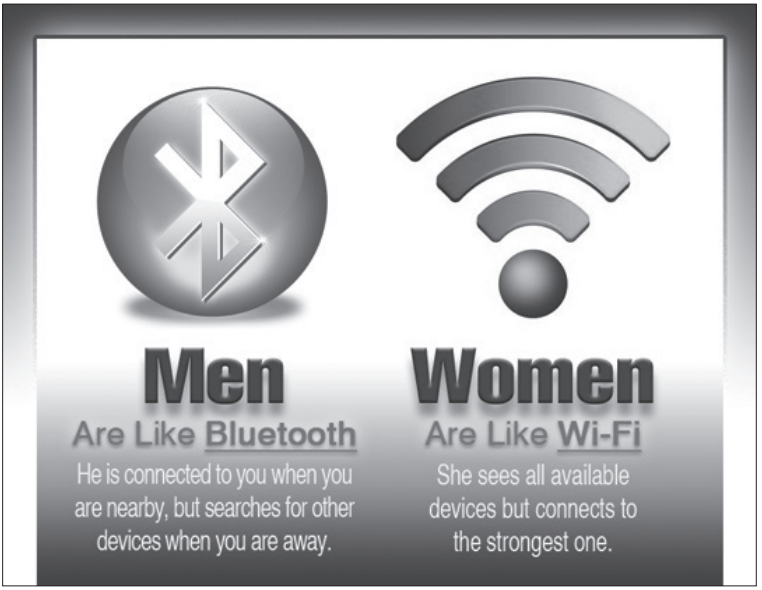

FIGURE 1. "Men Are Like Bluetooth, Women Are Like Wi-Fi."

there is a lack of feminist theory in the field of new media (Hasinoff, 2014; Shaw, 2014). In their survey of 5 years of feminist scholarship in communication journals, Dow and Condit (2005) classified the research into broad themes, including public communication, the role of gender in communication practices, communication practices that disseminate gender ideology, activism for gender justice, and theoretical frameworks. Though they recognize that computer-mediated communication is of growing concern to feminist scholars, they do not offer a systematic investigation into the themes that emerge in the area of gender and information and communication technologies (ICTs). There is little understanding of how communication technologies shape gender ideologies or of how gender is integrated into technological design. When it does occur, scholarship on gender and ICTs tends to overemphasize gender differences in usage (Lee, 2006). This research identifies significant differences between the ways men and women interact with and are impacted by ICTs.

In this article, I offer some thoughts on how feminist technology studies can enhance the study of gender and ICTs. Given the growth of both the study of ICTs and feminist scholarship, now is an important time to expand theoretical frameworks to better understand gender inequality. For example, women continue to be consumers, rather than producers, of innovations that have the power to shape gender ideologies. When they do try to enter male-dominated technological domains, they often face resistance. The recent harassment of female video game designers and feminist cultural critics, also called #gamergate, is a powerful example of the challenges women face when they try to change cultural norms. Many of the rape and death threats originated through social media, illustrating the research that shows how women are more likely than men to be victims of cyberharassment and cyberbullying (Pew Research Center, 2014).

The focus of this article is identifying to what extent gender inequality can be understood through the lens of feminist technology studies. This article offers insight into what the field of feminist technology studies (FTS) can offer the field of communication, particularly the study of gender and ICTs. In this article, I first provide an overview of FTS and show how it can expand inquiry in the field. Next, I suggest some areas of research that can be informed and further developed.

WHAT IS FEMINIST TECHNOLOGY STUDIES?

FTS emerged in the 1990s as a response to the undertheorization of gender within science and technology studies (STS). STS as a field formed in the 1980s as a way to challenge technological determinist views of technology (Bjiker, Hughes, & Pinch, 1987; Bjiker & Law, 1992). Rather than seeing technology as the source of social change, as is the case in technological determinist perspectives, STS examines the social, cultural, economic, and political forces

that influence technological development and societal change. STS scholars show how technological design requires choices rooted in social norms and cultural values. STS scholars advocate a mutual shaping approach, where technology is seen as shaped by social processes, and at the same time, our social world changes. Hughes (1986) coined the term *sociotechnical* to refer to the dynamic interactions between technology and our social world. STS scholars also argue that those who are innovating technology are also making political choices that shape our social structure (Winner, 1999).

FTS begins with a constructivist understanding of technology. Feminist scholarship on technology generally falls into two areas: women *in* technology and women *and* technology. Research on women in technology tends to look at factors that lead to gender inequality in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields, such as a masculine culture of technology (Fancsali, 2002; Oldenziel, 1999). Research on women and technology looks at how women's lives are impacted by a variety of technologies, such as domestic or reproductive technologies. As Faulkner (2001) has pointed out, feminist scholarship on technology tends to look at women as victims of technology and does not theorize technology itself.

FTS strays from feminist scholarship on technology (Lohan & Faulkner, 2004) as it offers critical insight into the mutual shaping of gender and technology (Bray, 2007; Wacjman, 2010). This perspective looks at how specific technologies are shaped by gender and in turn have consequences for gender relations. Central questions include how gender ideologies are integrated into technological design and how these technologies then influence our gender ideologies in the real world.

Antecedents to the field included Cowan's (1983) *More Work for Mother*, which showed how the industrialization of domestic technology actually created the role of the domestic housewife. Washing machines, for example, created new norms for cleanliness and thus

extended the work of women in the household. Cockburn's (1985) work on printing technology showed how the design of artifacts privileged men over women in the workforce.

Users and nonusers are an important construct in analyzing the mutual shaping of gender and technology through "gender scripts." Gender scripts are assumptions about the use of a specific technology that becomes materialized through the design process (van Oost, 2003). For example, in her analysis of instructor manuals for shavers, van Oost found that shavers configure men as tinkers and women as technologically incompetent. For example, van Oost showed how Philips designed the female-marketed "Ladyshave" based on the idea that women were afraid of technology. Thus the Ladyshave concealed the ways in which it was a technological device. The shaver was designed to look like lipstick and was presented as part of a "beauty set." The design also eliminated visible screws so that women could not "tinker" with the technology. Although gender scripts are not completely determined or stable, because users do not have to accept the script, they can delegate different competencies and responsibilities to men and women, reinforce differences in gender, and create barriers to accessibility.

One critique of FTS is that it may essentialize gender and fail to acknowledge other categories that shape technology. The response is to "hold gender as an analytical category while empirically remaining open to the existence of a diverse range of potentially contradictory gender-technology relations" (Lohan & Faulkner, 2004, p. 323).

WHAT DOES FEMINIST TECHNOLOGY STUDIES ADD TO THE FIELD?

Within the field of communication, research on gender and technology has tended to be technologically determinist, failing to interrogate the social shaping of technology. Much of this research

has assumed a media effects model, looking at the impacts of technology without investigating the technology in light of other social, political, and economic forces (Hasinoff, 2014; Lee, 2006).

Some influential studies in our field have employed a constructivist approach to gender and ICTs. These studies offer rich description and insight. For example, Rakow's (1988) analysis of the gendering of the telephone revealed how talking on the telephone is gendered work. Her historical look into telephone technology in the Midwest showed that the telephone was a tool that simultaneously liberated women and reinforced traditional gender roles. In her later work on the cell phone, she identified how cell phones created "remote mothering" (Rakow & Navarro, 1993). Cell phones created more work for mothers because mobility allowed them to be in touch with children regardless of the location and increased duties such as scheduling social arrangements. Additionally, women were working "parallel shifts" as their professional and domestic worlds collided.

There has been some work on the domestication of communication technologies and its impact on shaping gender roles and ideologies. For example, Gray's (1992) work on the VCR showed how negotiation over meaning gendered the domestic space. Women used the VCR to record their television shows to watch at a later date, yet they often felt guilty about spending time on leisure. Additionally, women saw learning how to operate the VCR as creating another chore for them in the household. Morley's (1986) work on domestication of television showed the home as a struggle over power where the home is a site of leisure for men and work for women. More recent work on the domestication of ICTs has found similar gender dynamics (Shepherd, Arnold, Bellamy, & Gibbs, 2007).

Kearney (2010) analyzed gender scripts in media-making gear for girls, including Mattel's Barbie Wireless Video Camcorder and Daisy Rock Guitars. She integrated a Foucauldian approach to look at how product design of girls' technologies relates to larger

systems of power and knowledge. In the end, she found that these technologies work to normalize and regulate girls' bodies rather than encouraging them to be media producers.

These are just a few studies that help us to understand the mutual shaping of gender and technology. By looking at processes of design, negotiation over meanings of technology, and how technologies shape our social world, these studies offer intervention and insight into gender ideologies.

Although FTS has a lot to offer methodologically and theoretically, it is an underutilized tool in the field of communication. FTS should be integrated more because it offers insight into both how technological design influences gender ideologies and how gender is embedded in technological design. In this way, our material world is imbued with politics. Rather than being a neutral artifact, our technological world shapes political, social, and economic realities. Simply focusing on gender differences in usage fails to address the larger inequalities that stem from this. FTS, then, provides guidance for communication scholars to go beyond looking at interaction to question and interrogate why technologies emerge and how these technologies shape gender.

WHAT ARE SOME DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH?

FTS offers direction for a number of research projects, including expanding understandings of gender differences in usage, examining the use of technologies for social change, and interrogating structural barriers to gender equality in the workplace.

First, scholars of FTS should continue to interrogate barriers to full civic participation in relation to ICTs. In her article "What's Missing in Feminist Research in New Information and Communication Technologies," Lee (2006) argued that much of the research tends to look at women's consumption of technology rather than their active production of content. Women, she writes, are often

constructed as "having problems" (p. 192). For example, much of the feminist scholarship has looked at the obstacles that women face in entering ICT-related jobs. This research advocates for women overcoming these barriers. Instead, there is a need to examine how different institutions produce and reproduce systems of power and knowledge that contribute to gender inequality.

Similarly, scholars of FTS should abandon a liberal feminist perspective. Liberal feminist approaches that work toward equality do not address the exploitive nature of technologies that reflect neoliberal logic. ICTs help to facilitate global capitalism by expanding the reach of large corporations that control design and use of ICTs (Lee, 2006). The information society has restructured our economic system in ways that rely on inequality, such as the exploitation of women's labor in factories that produce these technologies. As Lee argues, "gender, as a social construct, is used to maintain the ideologies of wealth concentration, access to materials, goods, and services, and the exploitation of female labour and images in a global context" (p. 192).

Research on gendered differences in communication technologies tends to narrowly frame these differences from a liberal feminist perspective, advocating for increasing participation as an avenue for gender equality. For example, research on video games has highlighted the different ways that boys and girls experience video games, finding that boys tend to play more than girls (Bertozzi & Lee, 2007; Coyne, Padilla-Walker, Stockdale, & Day, 2011; Williams, Martins, Consalvo, & Ivory, 2009). Explanations for these gender differences include sexist representations in mainstream video games (Reinhard, 2005), lack of engaging games that appeal to girls' interests (Jenson & de Castell, 2011), and lack of leisure time among girls to play video games (Winn & Heeter, 2009). Yet little of this research integrates a constructivist framework for understanding video game play. Much of this research advocates that girls need to become video game players so that they can gain twenty-first-

century skills, yet there is little interrogation of how video games shape gender ideologies and how users shape video game design because it is working from this limiting liberal feminist perspective. One area of investigation that could benefit from FTS is critically investigating the discourses of video game development to avoid technological determinism. This research could, for example, better understand the cultural, political, and economic forces at play in video game design and marketing.

FTS should continue to add to our understanding of gender differences in technology use through expanding on what we know or think about girls' and women's participation. Current research on gender and ICTs places little emphasis on *why* women and girls should achieve skills or participate in masculine cultures of technology. Participation is seen as an essential element of the Internet (Jenkins, 2006). However, some feminist scholars have questioned how participation is measured and evaluated. As Hasinoff (2014) argued, we need to critically examine how "participation can reproduce power structures even while it promises to destabilize them" (p. 271). Hasinoff also identified a bias in new media studies toward a media effects model of how new media work rather than questioning our interactions with and assumptions about new media. She called for new media scholars to "pay more attention to communication technologies' messy interconnections with people, context, social structures, and power" (p. 272). One example is Gajjala's (2014) work on online craft cultures, which found that Western women's craft production on etsy.com was seen as empowering. Yet, when non-Western women engaged in similar practices, they were seen as victims, reflecting a binary where "cyberfeminist discourse portrays the subaltern woman as needing to be empowered through westernized practices of technology use" (p. 1). This discourse reinforces Western assumptions about what technology should be used for and by whom.

FTS also should examine issues of surveillance. Shaw (2014)

called for examining the way online participation relies on systems of surveillance that are embedded in Internet sites, such as Facebook. Women are more often victims of cyberharassment and cyberbullying, impacting how they participate online. Much of the discourse on participation assumes a user can be invisible and that users have a right to privacy. Yet Shaw reminded us that online structures and systems reveal that "some bodies are always-already surveilled and hypervisible" (p. 276). In questioning structures of power, Shaw keyed into the way neoliberal logic defines much of new/digital/Internet media culture and pointed out that there is ongoing inequality of online spaces.

FTS can offer more nuanced understandings of the workplace, specifically in terms of the symbolic nature of technology. The new media workplace emphasizes a new work culture, which results in a new postfeminist problem. As an example of scholarship on the conception of reality and symbolic nature of technology, Kelan (2007) looked at gender differences between those working in ICT positions. Men described technology as a "toy," whereas women described it as a "tool." Gill (2002) found a paradox between representation of new media work as hip and nonhierarchical and the actual work environment. Most new media workplaces did not have family-friendly policies. Additionally, new values, such as informality, autonomy, and flexibility, caused a new set of problems among female workers, including a reliance on part-time work and a persistent male culture of sexism resulting from informal work settings. In the end, Gill found that the myth of new media work as egalitarian actually masked inequality, creating a postfeminist problem where women did not identify these problems in terms of gender inequality, leaving women without a language to make sense of structural problems.

This insight from research on gender differences in the workplace could be helpful for understanding how we teach communication in our field. As Lauzen (2014) has found, women are underrepresented

in Hollywood and in broadcast television careers. Thus how teaching practices shape gender ideologies would be useful to explore as a way to address gender inequality in the field. As Ramsey and McCorduck (2005) found, women often enter IT fields through nontraditional pathways. Royal (2005) argued that we need to bring technology training to female-dominated fields, such as teaching computer programming in communication courses.

In addition to the workplace, there is a need to look at differences among women and not see women as a uniform category (Crenshaw, 1991). The limited framework of "gender" may work to reinscribe inequalities, as Gajjala (2014) found in her work on subaltern women. We need to ask questions about how intersectional identities impact the mutual shaping of gender and technology. There are significant differences in how race/ethnicity, age, class, sexuality, and geographic location impact the ways that women experience and interact with technology (Nakamura, 2002). Additionally, we need to ask about to what extent gender is performative (Butler, 1993). Gender is fluid and is produced and reinforced in different contexts. This lens may provide further insight into how technologies shape gender ideologies.

Finally, there is a lack of understanding about the global economic context of communication technologies. Scholars such as Lee (2006) have argued for a global feminist political economic approach that considers international policies and governance of ICTs and impact on women, national policies and impact on women, gender policies of companies, and ethnographic studies of women's consumption of technologies and their understanding of the logic of a global economy.

CONCLUSION

There have been some notable efforts to integrate FTS. For example, the Fembot collective (http://fembotcollective.org/), which

publishes *Ada: A Journal of New Media and Technology*, includes scholarship about gender and communication technologies. FemTechNet (http://femtechnet.org/) is a global network of scholars, students, and artists who are interested in FTS. They have launched an initiative called Distributed Open Collaborative Courses not only to distribute information about gender and technology but also to apply feminist frameworks in the production of content for the courses.

These efforts show the potential of FTS in the field of communication. In this article, I have advocated for how a FTS perspective can add to our inquiries of gender and technology in the field of communication. Though some scholars are doing this work, we need to continue to move away from a media effects model that emphasizes a technological determinist approach. This approach does not serve us well because it takes the technology for granted and thus leaves the materiality of our world unexamined. Instead, a constructivist framework integrates the social, political, and economic forces that shape society.

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"I Wish a Whole New Word Was Used for It": Pro-ED Blogging and Online Identity

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Pro–eating disorder (ED) scholarship in the field of new media studies largely consists of text, discourse, and theoretical analyses. Far fewer studies involve audience work with women in eating disorder subcultures online to cross-reference scholarly analyses with the women's own experiences. Using a Foucauldian theoretical framework, this study provides data from in-depth interviews with 10 practicing-ED bloggers on how they felt silenced by the media deadlock of the thin ideal and sought vocal expression online. The findings call for an expansion of scholarly discourse beyond catch-all "pro-ED" terminology to better capture women's experiences with online identity formation. Additionally, considering blogging's revival with women's lifestyle blogs, it is vital to understand online ED subcultures' foundations in the blogosphere to better position future research addressing online female identity in emerging social media.

KEYWORDS: Online identity, pro-ana, pro-mia, blogs, thin ideal, interviews, Xanga

Obtaining the "thin ideal" of the female body is not a new trend in contemporary Western culture. But never before have women "desired a body so close to the bone" (Seid, 1994, p. 4) as seen among contemporary women online. Women and girls "know, no matter what their parents, teachers, and clergy are telling them, that inner beauty is a big laugh in this culture" (Bordo, 2003, p. xxvii). It seems

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> we have elevated the pursuit of a lean, fat-free body into a new religion. It has a creed: "I eat right, watch my weight, and exercise." Indeed, anorexia nervosa could be called the paradigm of our age, for our creed encourages us all to adopt the behavior and attitudes of the anorexic. The difference is one of degree, not of kind. (Seid, 1994, p. 4)

Yet, as thin female celebrities, for example, are readily perceived in media to be suffering from EDs or their associated tendencies, women become understandably confused about thinness and its measuring stick: the thin ideal. The message appears to communicate the impossible: Be thin, but not *too* thin. As those who admire thinness come to learn, being or wanting to be too thin in media's estimation will quickly marginalize you.

Meanwhile, the National Eating Disorders Association (2013) has estimated that nearly 20 million women and girls suffer from clinically significant EDs, but unreported cases hide the real extent of this figure (Wade, Keski-Rahkonen, & Hudson, 2011). Health experts have agreed that currently reported ED incidences barely skim the surface as "physicians are not required to report EDs to a health agency, and people with these problems tend to be secretive" (ANRED, 2011, para. 24). With a higher death rate than all other mental illnesses, EDs warrant great research attention (Arcelus, Mitchell, Wales, & Nielsen, 2011).

Communication scholars, specifically,

> have found that exposure to the thin ideal increases the risk of body image disturbances and eating disorders, as measured by self-esteem, weight satisfaction, body esteem, body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, attitude toward eating, concerns about body shape, self-objectification, and symptoms of anorexia and bulimia. (Park, 2005, p. 597)

Medical research has provided evidence supporting the notion that exposure to the thin ideal via mass media content directly contributes to EDs (Field et al., 1999; Martinez-Gonzalez et al., 2003; Tiggemann & Slater, 2004).

Recent scholarship in new media and feminist studies, specifically, has begun to address ED culture emergence online (Boero & Pascoe, 2012; Day & Keys, 2008; Dias, 2003; Ferreday, 2003; Pollack, 2003). This growing line of communication for individuals who desire to be *too* thin has solidified "pro-"—or "in favor of"—ED subcultures, which have created a foundation for expression and community for those who have never before been able to speak out honestly about their beliefs. These subcultures commonly utilize shorthand terminology to denote which disordered tendencies they affiliate with, such as *pro-ana* for pro-anorexia (calorie restriction), *pro-mia* for pro-bulimia (induced vomiting), or *pro-ED* for any combination of the two, as well as others.

Thus the core research question of this study asked to what extent bloggers within these online subcultures see their online identities as driven by media of the thin ideal and if they have felt silenced by the taboo of wanting to be "too" thin in society's estimation. Yet the context of this study sits within the competing terminology used to describe these female users and their online identity constructions. Although scholars persist in referring to the bloggers under umbrella terms like pro-ED for seemingly collective habits regarding disordered eating (Boero & Pascoe, 2012; Day & Keys, 2008; Dias, 2003; Ferreday, 2003; Pollack, 2003), the bloggers of this study complicate such terms with their own definitions of their online identities. It is hoped that this study can advance scholarship on these subcultures to graduate past pro-ED catch-all terminology to honor the identities of bloggers who all along have desired to define themselves. *Practicing-ED* is used here to set bloggers apart from ED-recovery bloggers, for example, but

encapsulate the disordered eating practices to which the women interviewed for this study fully subscribed.

As Shade (2003) noted, "anorexia and other attendant EDs are secret and shameful practices that elicit shock and concern from parents and other authoritarian figures. Before the Internet, how else could anorexics relate to each other and seek solace?" (para. 13). Though it is necessary to highlight media contributions to the growing number of individuals on the quest for the ideal body, as this study does, it is important to note that there are, of course, other possible causes for such maladies, such as biological and cognitive influences (Polivy & Herman, 2002). As eating disorder psychology experts note, "exposure to the media is so widespread that if such exposure *were* the cause of EDs, then it would be difficult to explain why anyone would *not* be eating-disordered" (Polivy & Herman, 2002, p. 192).

Nevertheless, a cursory examination of media content attests to the extent that media perpetuate the thin ideal. Women and girls quickly learn that "thin is good" but being "*too* thin is bad." Celebrities who have crossed this imaginary line of *too* thin are ultimately vilified when what used to be "beautiful" is now considered "sick," "abnormal," "diseased," "anorexic," or "bulimic" (Burke, 2006). The fear factor in such coverage is preferred over the reality. As people witness accusatory coverage of the overly thin on the front covers of magazines, the latest advertisement for Weight Watchers sits a page away. "In order to appeal to a wide audience, media usually deliver mixed messages. Love yourself, but change yourself. Look natural, but make over" (Freedman, 2002, p. xiii). These advertisement approaches are not fooling most young women: "Generations raised in the empire of images are both vulnerable and savvy. They snort when magazines periodically proclaim . . . that in the 'new Hollywood' one can be 'sexy at any size'" (Bordo, 2003, p. xxvii).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Such is the paradox of the media environment for the contemporary blogger in practicing-ED subcultures. As a result of these binary and contradictory messages, many individuals have gone online to stake claims about their identities by separating themselves from those who are unlike them offline *and* those who do not represent them online, as Boero and Pascoe (2012) found regarding "wannarexics":

> Participants in these communities seek out spaces in which to be overt about their eating disordered practices and identities, and to build rapport with others they feel to be kindred spirits. However, what our data have also shown is that this relational project is as built on enforcing the boundaries of the community as it is on bringing new people in, indeed, even more so. Aggression towards wannarexics reveals a dynamic of bolstering the identity claims of "insiders" by highlight the illegitimacy and inauthenticity of outsiders. (p. 50)

As this study seeks to demonstrate, the positioning of one's identity on the ED continuum is a starting place for any in-depth understanding of why practicing-ED bloggers initially seek refuge online. Personal reflections on such self-identification combined with dialogue regarding media's mixed messages are common in practicing-ED blogging subcultures. At their inception, weblogs were generally seen by their writers as personal diaries rather than public soapboxes (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). The very personal and self-divulging nature of practicing-ED blogging, too, reflects the need to express online what cannot be expressed off. And bloggers in practicing-ED subcultures have good reason for doing so, as they "learn from friends, media, and personal experience that

speaking up can get them into trouble with teachers, worry their parents, and endanger their friendships. . . . The process of self-silencing and subsequent missed opportunities for self-validation can be cyclical, driving girls further 'underground'" (Stern, 1999, p. 22). By studying these "underground" discourses, we can better understand both the processes and practices of disordered eating as well as the media's role in these subcultures.

Blogging Discourses

Existing new media studies and feminist studies scholarship on ED blog subcultures have begun to explain and complicate these online discourses. In 2003, Dias dissected pro-ana narratives within this online world as a place to "find sanctuary from the surveillance of the public sphere" (p. 31). In the same year, Pollack (2003) addressed the postfeminist branding some online narratives had adopted and questioned such narratives from a clinical psychological perspective when considering that "their choice of medium for protest [eating disorders] is one that has a 20 percent long-term mortality rate" (p. 249). In 2007, Ferreday considered how the outpouring of public media concern surrounding pro-ana websites represented "an appeal to censorship as a means by which, as Kristeva argues, outsiders might be 'ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, think thinkable' in order to reinstate the notion of consensus" (p. 277). The following year, Day and Keys (2008) explored pro-ED discourses addressing the power of beauty ideals and conformity, while also discovering "counter-hegemonic work with regards to dominant meanings surrounding self-starvation and purging" (p. 1). And more recently, as noted earlier, Boero and Pascoe (2012) explored pro-ana authenticity and "wannarexics." Much scholarship on ED subcultures has focused on text, frame, discourse, and theoretical analyses, but far fewer involve audience work with women in these online subcultures to cross-reference scholarly analyses with the women's own experiences. Even fewer studies have explored

the evolution and hybridity of these discourses utilizing the work of Michel Foucault (1978).

Within practicing-ED online subcultures, bloggers are certainly seeking a space to communicate in response to the silencing effect they've experienced offline regarding acceptable and unacceptable female bodies in Western culture. Institutional discourses are powerfully constructed to push contemporary standards for assimilation and profit in the name of Western femininity. And they often result in creating "deadlocks" that paralyze women who attempt to engage multiple identities simultaneously. Such impossibility has historically been a key component of power's discourse making, according to Foucault (1978). In his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault's explication of discourses and sexuality is uniquely useful in positioning online discourses discussing body size manipulation, like the discourse found in practicing-ED blogging.

From the Foucauldian perspective, discourse is a fundamental strategy for exercising social power, especially over sexuality. Foucault's repressive hypothesis states that our incessant dialogue about sexuality is actually the opposite of being repressive and is instead a method for funneling sexuality into acceptable channels, such as heterosexuality. In the same way, discourse surrounding eating disorders funnels public concepts about thinness obedience into specific channels, such as practicing-ED subcultures online.

"Power is essentially what dictates its law to sex. Which means first of all that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden" (Foucault, 1978, p. 83). To bloggers in practicing-ED subcultures, binary production is all too familiar, with media messages incessantly mandating, "Be thin, but not *too* thin." As Foucault (1979) explained, discourses teach us to possess "intelligible bodies" where we are impelled to practice self-surveillance. The messages trickling down from powerful discourses come to dominate social thought and create an adoptable ideology systemwide: "Through pedagogy, medicine, and

economics . . . sex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance" (p. 116).

In the online world of female identity making, this results in a female culture skilled in self-surveillance. Offline, these women practice manipulating their bodies into smaller sizes. Online, they extend this self-surveillance into meticulous tracking of height, weight, caloric input, and physical output, while positioning their identities around iconic media images of the thin ideal.

As female practices of bodily surveillance and manipulation become institutional issues, as Foucault predicted, these discourses also dominate media institutions with repeated news and entertainment trends covering ED issues. From accusing celebrities of being "dangerously" thin to speculating which stars have full-blown anorexia, media have a voice in the surveillance of female bodies. When timely, media also play roles in spouting "recovery" messages by applauding female figures for getting ED treatment or profiting on sensationalist recovery profiles with public calls for more honest dialogue about EDs and young people. Thus a deadlock arises from pervasive media celebration of thinness coupled with strong social censure for desiring a "disordered" level of this thinness.

But, as Foucault's (1978) "incitement to discourse" points out, the moral panic over EDs being too secretive is a farce. Ours is a culture obsessed with taking pleasure in incessant dialogue surrounding EDs. We are not repressing them. Rather, we are supporting them, fostering them, if not outright constructing acceptable ED attitudes and beliefs. And media are megaphones in this process of

> pleasure in the truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing that truth, of discovering and exposing it, the fascination of seeing it and telling it, of captivating and capturing others by it, of confiding in it secret, of luring it out in the open. (Foucault, 1978, p. 71)

The majoritarian media discourses of thinness seem to repress disordered eating but actually foster it. The media's moral panic discourse surrounding EDs channels notions of what eating practices are acceptable, resulting in the proliferation of online ED subcultures.

Blog as Confessional

The practicing-ED blog, then, serves as a literal confessional, which Foucault (1978) said is itself a construction of institutional power uniquely fitting for a culture where women are socialized not to keep secrets. "Since the Middle Ages at least, Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth" (p. 58), and it remains the standard for governing discourses of truth. Supporting Foucault's "repressive hypothesis," the Internet has long offered a clandestine space for subversive groups to divulge truths and find solidarity in the process, such as blogging subcultures discussing online identities among the morbidly obese (Sanford, 2010) and GLBTQ individuals (Mitra, 2010). Yet discourses are also unique in their potential to be sites of resistance to the power that dominates them:

> Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. In like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance. (Foucault, 1978, p. 101)

Institution and interpersonal pressure to aspire to look like media models is heavy. But bloggers' online activity also represents their aims to speak back about their mixed emotions, like anger toward the setting of impossible standards, yet longing to mimic models' bodies. This online "speak back," as seen in practicing-ED

subcultures, is its own discourse, which Foucault valorizes as having potential power to practice resistance to such mediated deadlocks—a power that many informants in this study wield from time to time to criticize the binaries by which they feel trapped.

It is in this cross section of opportunity that online identity is constructed. Online identity studies have historically been interested in positioning "new" (postmodern) media identities in relation to "old" (modern) ones. In 1995, Poster asserted that "if modern society may be said to foster an individual who is rational, autonomous, centered and stable . . . then perhaps a postmodern society is emerging which nurtures forms of identity different from, even opposite to those" (p. 443). The Internet, he went on, "seems to encourage the proliferation of stories, local narratives" (p. 450), which these bloggers aimed to share on their platforms. These "local narratives" and "their performance consolidate the 'social bond' of the Internet 'community,' much like the premodern narrative. But invention is central to the Internet. . . . the production of the unknown . . . is central to the second media age communications" (p. 450).

New media studies since have explored online identity construction extensively following the advent of Web 2.0, including those of teens (boyd, 2008), cam girls (Dobson, 2008), even postfeminist entrepreneurs (Banet-Weiser, 2011). By digging into the media of "local narrative" (Poster, 1995) presentation and expanding Goffman's (1959) notion of self-performance into the online space, online identity studies bring forth answers to why online subcultures come to be and how mediated narratives reflect feminine performance in particular, online and off.

Research Questions

Previous studies have investigated disordered eating among women as media consumers, and recent new media scholarship has begun to address ED culture online. This study breaks new ground investigating how a small group of practicing-ED bloggers felt silenced

by the taboo surrounding their beliefs about thinness offline and how they sought refuge and vocal expression in practicing-ED subcultures online. In doing so, it examines how media praise and criticism of thinness promote a deadlock among women. Two research questions were posed: First, to what extent do these bloggers think their practicing-ED online identities were driven by media portrayals of the thin ideal? Second, to what extent do these bloggers feel silenced by the taboo of desiring to be *too* thin, and how does this silencing contribute to their online identity constructions?

This study's research questions were answered using in-depth interview data collected from 2007 to 2008 at the height of the online ED subculture's leading medium: the blog. According to Optenet (2008), these online sites increased internationally 470% between 2006 and 2007, making this interviewing window deeply significant and unique in understanding the research questions posed. On the whole, blogging continues to be a commonly used platform today among these subcultures, with increases seen in microblogging, specifically, Tumblr (Pew Research Center, 2010). This study also aims to provide a better understanding of the subsequent popularity of emerging media platforms—Instagram, Pinterest, Vine, and so on—among practicing-ED bloggers.

METHOD

A sample of 10 women, ages 19 to 23 years, were interviewed to gather data to address the two research questions and comprised six self-identified American Caucasians, one Canadian Caucasian, one Korean American, one Australian Asian, and one English Caucasian from the United Kingdom. Their pseudonyms are Autumn, Michelle, Ella, Monika, Daisy, Alexis, Lilly, Alyssa, Agynees, and Marie, respectively. Informants all maintained their own blogs via the popular practicing-ED subculture blog host Xanga.com.

Stigma and Sampling

The stigma surrounding practicing-ED beliefs offline makes it difficult for those outside the subculture to contact bloggers. The snowball sampling technique was utilized to create a group of informants to bring to light the research questions posed. Although this technique has received criticism for its informal approach to obtaining a sample, it is uniquely useful for this study's purpose to connect with a highly stigmatized online subculture, which the technique has historically mediated successfully (Severin & Tankard, 2001). To communicate with informants and shed light on online female identity making, I first contacted a practicing-ED blogger via the Xanga.com messaging system. After developing a rapport regarding the study, the blogger was asked to refer another blogger who might be open to participating. I then asked this blogger to introduce me to another blogger, and so on. To minimize the proximity bias inherent in snowball sampling, I asked each informant to provide one to two names of potential participants in hopes of widening the circle of self-identifying practicing-ED bloggers, as recommended by Atkinson and Flint (2001).

Being able to work within existing online friendships between bloggers helped ease informants' initial skepticism about participating, as did conversations with me regarding the study's research questions. This technique served to build a group of informants without intruding on the anonymity that is so important to their online identity. In the process of gaining insider access to initial informants, bonds of trust were forged with each additional informant throughout data collection.

In-Depth Interview Protocols

Once a blogger agreed to participate and signed the informed consent document, I arranged a telephone interview and, at times, an e-mail interview when phone conversation was not possible (e.g., during university winter breaks, when informants would be in

family homes). The method of in-depth interviewing was selected because it was best suited to answering the research questions, which inquire about the personal experiences of these particular online subculture members. Conversations were digitally recorded with informant permission. A casual and conversational tone with detailed prompts was used to ease natural interview anxieties. Phone interviews lasted approximately 2 hours and were transcribed, and e-mail interviews amounted to 6–10 pages of written questions, answers, and notes.

Data Collection and Analysis

I asked informants to provide personal background information, their concept of the ideal body type, the image they held about their bodies and those in mass media, their history of dieting and eating practices, and their personal Internet use and exposure habits. Their assessment of the personal impact of being active subscribers to practicing-ED blogs was also solicited. The two research questions guided data collection. Secondary inquiries and probes were used to clarify points, ask for elaboration, and establish more trust over repeated contacts. To create a balanced sense of power and disclosure as key to feminist methodology, a conversational data collection guide was used to discuss the thin ideal and informants' experiences sharing their beliefs online. Notes from each interview and e-mail exchanges, combined with the transcripts, created a data set for each participant. Data analysis began immediately after each interview.

Procedural memos kept track of the evolving coding plan as well as any ideas or key words that characterized a specific theme (Esterberg, 2002). Interview data were transcribed and coded modeling Esterberg's analytical protocols for finding underlying themes in discourses. Following interview transcription, I re-read the conversations to steep myself in the discourses of practicing-ED attitudes, beliefs, and practices surrounding the research questions.

This analytical protocol led to the discovery of repetitions of specific metaphors and certain linguistic devices informants used to describe their experiences (e.g., "thinspo," "silence," "alone"). These patterns were then analyzed to further surface themes into concepts (e.g., cultural narratives, taboo, community seeking). Concepts were then rigorously analyzed and validated in conversation with an expert consultant.

Strengthening the Inquiry

To enhance credibility, a running consultation was conducted with an expert in feminist qualitative communication research methods to discuss interpretations of emerging themes. If an interpretation was in dispute or suspect, the informant was contacted again for clarification. By reviewing data sets frequently and visiting informant blogs regularly, I gained more insight into the issue of disordered eating and online identity. This ongoing engagement with the topic also ensured credibility. Informants needed to see that I demonstrated familiarity with the subculture to feel assured in my ability to interpret their online identities accurately. As Esterberg (2002) noted, the goal of qualitative "social research is to work toward human emancipation" (p. 17). Confirmability can be compromised if participants perceive a wide social distance between them and the researcher. In this study, this distance was bridged by sharing my own experiences with the thin ideal, when asked, and remaining open to personal friendships with the informants throughout and after the study.

RESULTS

Varying Positions on Online Identity

To fully address the research questions, it was first important for the informants to explain how they define the subculture's terms of identity to address practicing-ED identities such as pro-ana,

pro-mia, pro-ED, or a mashup or rejection of any of these. Bloggers do not universally identify with these terms, and many have varying definitions of the blogging community to which they belong. Only by comprehending what these terms mean to them can we fully understand why these bloggers join such underground subcultures and why they remain.

Though a variety of ED identities exist, informants tended to position themselves as near or far from common "pro-" vernacular. Alyssa did not identify as being pro-ana or pro-mia and disliked the negative connotations that surrounded the community:

> I avoid [those] terms because they have different connotations. Some people . . . refer to themselves as pro-whatever because they've had an ED for a period of time, and they feel they know a lot about it. There are . . . websites that call themselves pro-whatever . . . to give tips, foods that have negative calories. I don't really associate with those because I don't want anybody else to be in this position. It sucks. . . . I wish a whole new word was used for it.

Daisy said not all sites offer tips and inspiration:

> For the most part, the whole pro-ana/pro-mia thing means . . . for example, someone who's pro-mia would give people tips on how to purge. . . . I don't want to be out there showing all these girls how to starve. . . . Some use [the sites to find out] which diet pills will help lose weight. [Others] use the sites [for] a comforting feeling, to express themselves and not really for thinspiration . . . they [blogging and pro-ED] kind of go together.

Lilly did not identify as pro-ana or pro-mia, but she did see similarities between herself and those who do:

> It means you want to help girls become ana or mia, I suppose. You want them to know it's okay, that it's not a disease, and it will help you become thin. Personally, it's fucking retarded. If all those girls who are "pro" were to sit down and think, "Hmm, now would I really want someone to be going through what I do?" . . . I highly doubt they would be "pro." Those girls and boys just don't think about it enough. . . . I know it's not a good thing. Yet, it's all I have. . . . Girls see it differently. And yes, I'm similar to other girls. We all hate our bodies and just want to be thin.

Michelle did not identify as pro-ana or pro-mia and often saw those who did as merely aspiring to be eating disordered:

> A lot of blogs I run into are those [of] "wannarexics." Some are people with a genuine problem while some [don't have] any disordered behavior at all. I just do my best not to judge anyone. . . . I don't know any pro-ED person who doesn't blog, but that doesn't mean he/she does not exist.

Ella saw those who identify as pro-ana or pro-mia as women who attempt to be eating disordered. She called herself pro-ED:

> To me, "pro-ED" or any term along those lines . . . refers to a group of people who may or may not have eating disorders, but I know the vibe of the group isn't going to be recovery. . . . I don't have any interest in changing my habits, and I have no prejudice against others who feel that way.

Agynees did not identify as pro-ana or pro-mia, but she was

> not against it . . . I do think I am pro-ED though. . . . I do know I can associate with most people there. I can even offer [healthy] advice—not that I would follow my own advice.

Marie offered the same insight: "I am not pro-ana or mia, but I do encourage people on fasts. I would never encourage someone to get into it, but I do encourage those already involved. . . . I think blogging makes you more pro-ED, but being pro-ED doesn't make you blog."

Alexis did not consider herself to be pro-ana or pro-mia:

> I hate when I see pro-ana/-mia stuff online. To me, girls that claim they are "pro-ana/mia" are just wishing they were. They don't understand that being this way isn't something you beg or ask for. It just happens. . . . Everyone in the "pro-ED" online community is there to lose weight. . . . I am similar in that I post my weight, my caloric intake, my screw-ups, and bits of my personal life. But I am different in that I never post pictures of myself or my progress.

Autumn had been a member of "a lot of pro-ana communities, although I didn't ever completely agree with them." She believed she was

> pretty similar to other people online who write personal journals and suffer from eating disorders, but not very similar to the more mainstream weight-loss bloggers. I don't list what I ate or what exercise I did that day. I just talk about what's going on in my life, which is often related to my eating disorder. . . . I don't know anyone who doesn't blog or at least visit them regularly who considers themselves pro-ED. . . . The Internet serves [us] well because it breaks geographical constraints.

"Thinspired" by the Thin Ideal

The first research question asked to what extent these bloggers think their practicing-ED identities are driven by media portrayals of the thin ideal. Throughout interviews, the theme of

"thinspiration" was discussed as a driving force behind their behaviors and beliefs. *Thinspiration* is an umbrella term used to describe female celebrity tabloid images, magazine advertisement models, photographed self-portraits, and/or individually created images of a combination of any or all of these.

Alyssa admitted it was difficult not to stay up to date with the latest celebrity weight "scandals": "I hate admitting this, [but] I do follow all that . . . to see their progress." For her, having a place to release her thoughts built up from disordered eating and attempts to emulate the thin ideal was essential: "It's more of a—and I'm going to sound crazy—voice . . . a voice in your head that is constantly talking."

Marie saw thinspiration as a tactic to reinforce her dieting: "Thinspiration is a method of inspiring us to do better. It shows us what we can become. . . . If I am feeling weak, I look at thinspiration to inspire myself back into fasting and/or restricting."

For Alexis, admiring thinspiration was natural:

> Everyone thinks the women in these pictures are beautiful and perfect. Naturally, you'd want to look as much like them as possible. . . . I collect pictures of beautiful thin women on my computer. Some are celebrities, some are models, and some are just real girls. I look at these pictures every day as thinspiration. I know I don't have the body type many of these women have, but I still feel I can work for it.

Thinspiration, however, was not consistently encouraging. Daisy had a difficult relationship with thinspiration:

> I don't necessarily enjoy looking at the pictures, but it's more like an obsession. . . . If I find pictures that I really like . . . then I'll post [them]. Like if somebody has really thin legs or shoul-

> ders. . . . Sometimes it has a negative effect because . . . I feel like I can't do it. . . . It's unachievable. Then I'll go and binge.

Daisy's visual obsession with size and weight was not limited to online thinspiration and was present in her offline life as well:

> I was in choir with this really, really thin girl, [and] I would just go up and touch her arm and say, "I love your shirt!" You know? Just so I could touch her. I'd find anything I could say . . . just so I could pretend to hug her or something.

To Lilly, thinspiration was a source of frustration, not a weight-loss mechanism: "There's always a thinner thinspo girl you can find. So, even when you reach your goal, it's never enough."

Although Autumn chose not to post thinspiration on her blog, she visited other practicing-ED blogs to view it: "I don't really like the idea, in general, that you need to be 'motivated' to continue your ED. My 'motivation' for doing what I do is intense self-hatred. I guess thinspiration adds to that, though."

Alyssa understood the struggle:

> It's just like looking at a fashion magazine and saying, "Oh, I like that dress" or "Oh, I like that bracelet" . . . but you know you can't afford it. You know you're not going to get there, and you don't want to spend all that money, but it's still something you aspire for. . . . In the unhealthy mindset, [thinspiration] helps. But the other half of me who wants to be healthy and okay with the way I look [knows] it's very hurtful.

Michelle acknowledged that "it isn't realistic to want to put your face on someone else's body." Ella agreed, noting that thinspiration was "often unrealistic." Yet its ability to help her reach her

weight-loss goals kept her actively posting thinspiration on her blog: "If you really want something, seeing it is going to make you desire it that much more."

Taboo and Silence; Isolation and Community Seeking

The second research question asked to what extent these bloggers feel silenced by the taboo of desiring to be *too* thin, and how this silencing has contributed to their online identity constructions. In the process of interviewing these 10 women, two themes continued to surface: taboo encouraging silence and isolation encouraging community seeking. Lilly utilized the online blog space because of the isolation she experienced when she was unable to communicate with others openly offline. For her, when online,

> you can ask a question, and others will [provide] their opinion without judging you. They are the perfect friends. You can ask anything, even boy problems or school problems. It's the ultimate stress reliever—being able to talk to people without the "Oh my God!" expressions. . . . I can type out my frustrations.

Even though she had no one to discuss her feelings with, Lilly knew it was "better to talk about it than to be silent," so she joined a practicing-ED community: "I wanted to finally belong somewhere. . . . The girls in the community don't judge you. . . . They know what you're going through. I don't want [society] to know about this community because I love this community; I don't want it taken away."

Alyssa's experience with her prolonged ED diagnosis created isolation from her peers offline:

> The disadvantage of [having] an ED is [the potential to] become so isolated. . . . In college, and especially in a sorority, everything revolves around food: "Do you want to go to lunch?" "Do you

> want to go to dinner?" "Do you want to go to the movies?" . . . I don't want to sit there and not eat and be obvious. . . . So if [an activity] revolves around food, I won't go. . . . I went from being social, everybody knowing me, to I had to take a year off from school because I'd gotten so sick. I came back and now it's awful. Nobody knows me anymore.

The ability to be honest online about her eating practices and beliefs helped Michelle break the offline isolation she also experienced:

> People can hide [in] the anonymity of the Internet, and that gives them the ability to be more honest than they would otherwise be. . . . Being able to talk about the forbidden subject of wanting to be thin is refreshing and can help when dealing with the stress of that constant pressure to be thinner.

Daisy was desperate to talk to someone who could relate to her struggles:

> No one understood me. I feel I can really connect [online]. I've made a couple of friends there. . . . We e-mail and instant message back and forth. I can [say,] "Oh, my gosh. I have a doctor's appointment coming up. I'm really nervous." They understand what I'm going through, instead of yelling at me and saying, "Well, stop doing this! Stop being psycho!" . . . When I say things like, "I cannot eat this. I just can't," they know what I mean. It's not like I can't physically put it in my mouth; it's just emotionally I can't handle eating that.

Agynees was afraid of talking to "everyone" about her practicing-ED beliefs offline, so having a community that listened online was crucial: "It gives you the worst feeling when you see in people's faces that they are judging you, but don't have the guts to

confront you. . . . Most don't know how to react if you tell them."

A practicing-ED community and its anonymous bloggers was Alexis's only communication outlet: "It's not something typically discussed in reality, so it's nice to let it out to people who understand, even though they are complete strangers. . . . I like to see I'm not alone in my habits."

Autumn, too, was afraid of talking to "mostly everyone" about her beliefs. But expressing her feelings online had been helpful: "I like writing about weight or EDs because it's something that's really hard for me to talk about in real life." Communicating with bloggers gave her "an outlet for all the craziness in my head—a place where people wouldn't judge me or just shove me in a hospital." Still, she wished she could be open with her friends and family:

> I would love to sit down with everyone and say, "Look, here's what's going on with me. This is a struggle. I'm trying to cope with it. Please help me." [But] I'm way too afraid that . . . I'd get put in treatment, which I'm not quite ready for at the moment.

Monika's fear of her parents' and boyfriend's reactions to her practicing-ED beliefs perpetuated her isolation: "They would probably assume the worst about me." She was also afraid of talking with many of her offline friends, especially those who were "jealous" of her weight loss, noting that "sometimes you can't even trust your so-called friends."

DISCUSSION

This study sought to understand how practicing-ED bloggers' identify online and how their "thinspired" response to the thin ideal has been deemed taboo. It then sought to clarify how practicing-ED bloggers' silence promoted isolation and encouraged them to go online to find a safe space for discussing their beliefs on thinness.

Overall, it aimed to serve as a voice for the informants whose own voices had been silenced amid a deadlocked topic in mainstream media. The informants all maintained their own practicing-ED blogs and were interviewed to reveal insight into the research questions posed.

As explicated by the informants, positioning one's identity on the ED continuum is a useful starting place for any in-depth understanding of why practicing-ED bloggers initially seek refuge online. Bloggers do not universally subscribe to umbrella terms such as pro-ana, pro-mia, or pro-ED. The bloggers' responses point to a need to graduate scholarly discourse studying these subcultures past catch-all uses of "pro-." These bloggers rejected the top-down categorization of their experiences as simplistic and insensitive to the complexities of their blogging practices. From a Foucauldian point of view, the scholarly designations "pro-ED," "pro-ana," "pro-mia," and so on, are exercises in discursive power that oversimplify and truncate the realities of these subcultures. Instead, these bloggers saw their online sites as safe spaces where their complex engagements with eating practices and body ideals could be fully articulated.

Foucault noted that discourses also possess the potential to be sites for resistance to power, as seen in some of these bloggers' experiences. In addition to serving as a communal respite and safe place for individual expression, bloggers' online activity at times represents their aims to speak back to discourses of power about their mixed emotions. Their online "speak back," most notably seen in their varying stances on thinspiration, their insistence in fostering community closeness, and vocal expression amid privacy, reflects Foucault's notion for the potential to resist power. In a feminist rereading of Foucault, Bartky (1988) addressed Foucault's lack of discussion surrounding how men and women are implicated differently regarding experiences of the body and processes of self-surveillance: "To overlook the forms of subjection that engender

the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these disciplines have been imposed" (p. 64).

The veil of femininity discourses is a heavy burden placed on women for the very fact that it is done so largely by male-dominated institutions. But Bartky (1988) went on to utilize Foucault's foundation to bring attention to the female experience of self-surveillance. Key in this process of female obedience is socialization through nation-state institutions like media: "The technologies of femininity are taken up and practiced by women against the backdrop of a pervasive sense of bodily deficiency: this accounts for what is often their compulsive or even ritualistic character" (p. 71). As this study's informants can attest, media images serve a unique purpose in how they practice self-surveillance by measuring their own bodies against media-produced images of bodies.

The first research question asked to what extent these bloggers saw their practicing-ED identities as driven by the thin ideal. When asked if the thin ideal as portrayed by models in media images influenced their decisions to diet, the response of participants was a resounding "absolutely, yes." The testimonies of these women strengthen existing research arguments that women suffering from EDs and disordered eating do use media images and texts to develop their sense of the ideal body type. That said, while being thin is highly admired in today's culture, becoming *too* thin is strongly criticized. The coupling of public praise and social censure as the methods for keeping female bodies "inbounds" is confusing, particularly to young women. As Bartky (1988) noted, the discursive process of keeping female bodies inbounds is comprehensive:

> The disciplinary techniques through which the "docile bodies" of women are constructed aim at a regulation that is perpetual and exhaustive—a regulation of the body's size and contours, its appetite, posture, gestures and general comportment in space, and the appearance of each of its visible parts. (p. 80)

Media images are built on the premise of deficiency and are largely read by these bloggers as the reason behind compulsive, good-sense body size monitoring online.

The second research question asked to what extent these bloggers felt silenced by the taboo of desiring to be *too* thin. The women spoken with agreed that media do disseminate conflicting messages about the ideal body. By reporting most frequently on who is "too skinny" and "too fat," media reinforce a Western mantra that women need to monitor their weight, but privately. As a result, many women in the practicing-ED subculture find themselves in a quandary. Though they want to be thin, they also want to talk about their situation and hope to be accepted by society. Bloggers in practicing-ED subcultures manage their weight accordingly, believing that calorie restriction and exercise make good sense. Yet, to avoid being ostracized offline and "damned to failure as fat and flabby" (Seid, 1994, p. 140), many have kept their silence offline.

Bartky (1988) explained that this silence is also a defense mechanism to combat the undertone in public discourses that a woman's interest in her body's outward appearance and size is petty and trivial, adding to the confusion about "acceptable" ways to look and be:

> A woman's effort to master bodily discipline will lack importance just because she does it: her activity partakes of the general depreciation of everything female. In spite of unrelenting pressure to "make the most of what she has," women are ridiculed and dismissed for their interest in such "trivial" things. (p. 73)

In her extending of Foucauldian theory explicating a specifically female experience, Bartky's reading of female self-surveillance demonstrates the significance of this study's findings. These bloggers revealed the impossibility of their situation, one shared by women across the western hemisphere. The deadlock from media demands

combined with strong social censure for going too far has silenced women from safely communicating their disordered eating habits and tendencies offline. As Autumn explained, "I would love to sit down with everyone and say, 'Look, here's what's going on with me. This is a struggle. I'm trying to cope with it. Please help me.' [But] I'm way too afraid."

Cultural narratives set discourse tones, which can be presented as entirely reliant on what women "want":

> The absence of formal institutional structure and of authorities invested with the power to carry out institutional directives creates the impression that the production of femininity is either entirely voluntary or natural. . . . No one is marched off for electrolysis at gunpoint. . . . Nevertheless, insofar as the disciplinary practices of femininity produce a "subjugated and practiced," an inferiorized body, they must be understood as aspects of a far larger discipline, an oppressive and inegalitarian system of sexual subordination. (Bartky, 1988, p. 75)

CONCLUSION

The practicing-ED movement may continue with future attempts to "speak back" regarding their full support or outright rejection of thinness obedience discourses, and increasingly so using emerging media. This is seen outright with "ProAna" and "ProMia" Twitter hashtags—one of the few media to permit visible participation ("Pro-anorexia on Twitter," 2013)—and also more surreptitiously on Pinterest as "fitspiration" boards (Williams, 2012), yet made discursively invisible as well as seen in the National Eating Disorders Association's partnership with Tumblr (Campobello, 2012). These contradictory media messages about desirable thinness and tabooed disordered eating continue to silence these voices on the whole if only out of pure confusion. Nevertheless, as these women attested,

EDs go beyond labels of "anorexia" or "bulimia." Overexercising, abusing laxatives, and manipulating diabetes are uneasily detected methods of thinness discipline. As new disorders continue to develop, so do their means of communicating and finding solace amid severe isolation. Scholars are likely to see both as new forms of the thin ideal emerge and social media continually evolve.

Finally, this topic is an important agenda item in feminist research, as "a cultural fixation on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty, but an obsession about female obedience" (Wolf, 2002, p. 187). As Bordo (2003) commented, EDs demonstrate an inevitable outcome from social pressures demanding disciplined bodies. It is, therefore, vital to understand practicing-ED subcultures' foundations in the blogosphere, especially considering blogging's regain in popularity in recent years. Although this study's small sample size is limited in scope and therefore representative of just these Xanga.com bloggers, it remains a starting point for future feminist media studies expanding on the nuances of online identity among marginalized communities (Myers, 2000). Future studies should consider other blogospheres, especially amid a recent boom in women's lifestyle, DIY, and neodomesticity blogging. From using all-natural products and sewing one's clothes to attachment parenting and Mormon mommy blogging, the bar is rising for female self-discipline, morality, and piety. Increasing already high female standards and enabling tendencies for further home voyeurism are no doubt reviving the popularity of the woman's blog.

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Online Media Representation of a Woman Protest Leader in Israel[1]

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The social protest, which gained unprecedented public support and extensive media coverage, is portrayed as a seminal event in the history of Israeli society. The leader of the protest was an anonymous 25-year-old student, Daphni Leef, who initiated the protest on Facebook by publicizing a call for people to join her. The study discusses the elements of gendered framing of the protest leader in the online press in Israel (*Walla*, *ynet*, *Globes*, and *TheMarker*) from July to October 2011. We argue that trends of change can be detected in the media discourse of the online press as it engages in the representation of women leaders in the public sphere in Israel. Studying the media's framing of Leef shows that she was very conspicuous. Contrary to the findings in many earlier studies of media coverage of women active in the political field, coverage of the leader of the social protest movement was mostly sympathetic. It follows that media framing of Daphni Leef in the online press only partly tallies with the accepted gender definitions. We see that the online media framed Leef as a new, "other" leader, legitimate and natural, and not as a "woman leader."

KEYWORDS: Gendered media framing, online press, social protest, women leaders, female representation, Israel

The summer 2011 social protest movement in Israel was part of a wave of protest that had begun in the Arab countries and spread elsewhere. Whether the reasons for its outbreak had to do with the

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economic crisis or with the call for a democratized government, two elements stood out: One was that this was a protest of the younger generation; the second was the involvement of women, both as participants and as leaders, even in the nondemocratic countries. It appears that as leaders, women embodied the demand for a new social order.

In Israel, the protest was typified by an unprecedented citizen participation in a protest on social issues. The protest gained extensive media coverage both in the mass and new media.

Daphni Leef, an unknown student, became prominent as the initiator of the protest, winning the title of the "face of the protest." Within a short time, Leef was joined by different groups interested in making their concerns part of the public agenda.

Tarrow (1999) argued that a shared goal is the chief motivating factor that makes different people unite for the purpose of action. Their faith in their ability to bring about change is based on solidarity and collective identity, translating into real power. In the summer 2011 protest, a shared supergoal manifested itself, becoming the chief motivating force: the aim of achieving change, whose nature became the subject of public debate. But in contrast to Tarrow's claim, the summer 2011 protest in Israel was characterized by heterogeneity and absence of collective identity. Despite the split into various groups, solidarity prevailed in the fight represented by the motto "The People Demand Social Justice!" The media framed Leef as an authentic leader and showed her as a unifying force during the protest.

Against the backdrop of the heterogeneity in activist makeup and the small number of women political leaders in Israel, the media's supportive way of treating Leef's leadership appears to be a unique case that merits further investigation. Moreover, women's presence was impressive in the leadership group taking shape at Leef's side at the beginning of the protest and gained prominent media coverage. The media attitude was different, even surprising, given research findings in the field indicating that the media tend

to exclude women leaders. To the extent that women are covered, the coverage is typically a combination of female stereotyping, sexist attitudes, and excessive criticalness.

THE STUDY

The present article focuses on media framing of protest leader Daphni Leef in online journalism in Israel. Since the social protest took place in a new-media reality, that is, amid the emergence of online journalism, it is important to examine whether changes have occurred in the framing of women leaders.

Many researchers of the media address the question of how the media structure topics of discourse and its meanings (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000; Gamson, 1989). Their initial assumption is that focusing on the issues covered and the manner of the coverage impacts the positions and notions the public espouses.

Various definitions of the concept of *framing* have been offered. For instance, framing is the selection that "advances a particular definition of a problem, a certain interpretation, an ethical evaluation and a recommendation for treatment" (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

It also makes sense to understand frames as "organizing principles socially shared by the public, extending over time and operating in a symbolic manner to bestow meaning on structures of the social world" (Reese, 2001, p. 11).[2]

Gamson (1989) argued that frames the media adopt reflect shared cultural narratives and myths. Certain frames enjoy an advantage because the language and ideas they convey fit more extended themes, making the frames stand out more clearly in the communications media. According to Gamson, the key components of framing are metaphors, events from the past or the present, slogans, adjectives, and visual images.

Framing theory contributes a tool particularly appropriate for gender, politics, and communications research studies. Norris (1997) argued that gender framing outlines communications discourse

of the centrist stream in the United States. In her view, the issues in need of looking into in the media's discourse are the following: Do the media frame gender politics in a different way? How does this perspective conceal and dwarf the involvement of women in public life? Her criticism focuses on questions of the extent of stereotyping in the representation of women, of negligence in handling issues important to women, and of lack of recognition of women's achievements. Gender framing is rooted in the tendency to tell the political stories in men's terms of force, of struggle, and of confrontation (Tidhar & Lemish, 1992). Coverage of women leaders treats them as outsiders to the system, as "pioneers" and agents of change. News information often concentrates on women's contribution to politics, primarily on issues traditionally understood as women's issues, but not on areas affecting the citizens of the state as a whole (Ross, 2002).

The discussion of online journalism highlights its place as a new platform for disseminating news, opinions, and ideas, in which the balance of power differs from that of traditional print journalism (Dror, 2011; Nerone, 2013; Ward, 2002).

The corpus of research includes *Walla* and *ynet*, both of which are leading online newspapers. Considering that the issues at stake had led to social protest based on economic distress, two economics periodicals were also considered: the online edition of *Globes* and *TheMarker*, the online economics supplement of the daily *Haaretz*.[3] The extent of exposure to newspapers of similar standing was found to be more or less the same.[4]

The sample included all articles devoted to news, featured articles, and opinion essays identifiable by means of the search words "Daphni Leef" on various sites. In total, 224 items were tested: from *Walla*, 52; from *ynet*, 44; from *Globes*, 61; and from *TheMarker*, 67. The time period tested was from July 15, 2011 (when the first tent was set up in Tel Aviv), until October 3 of the same year (the day when the tents in Tel Aviv were dismantled).

The research method was textual analysis. Data analysis of sub-

themes in gender discourse relies on grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The tested items were grouped into four thematic categories according to prevalence: salience; talents, qualities, and characteristics; using the media; and feminist discourse. These categories are supported by the findings of a previous study.

The analysis elicits overt and latent interpretive meanings in an Israeli cultural context. The interpretation presented here is one of several other possible interpretive readings.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The study focuses on two theoretical frameworks: (a) the media image of women leaders in institutionalized politics and protest movements and (b) media framing, especially gender framing.

The Media Image of Women in Institutionalized Politics

Research undertaken in different countries in recent years has dealt with the "encounter" between women, the media, and politics (see, e.g., Heldman, Caroll, & Olson, 2006; Jalalzai, 2006; Lawerence & Ross, 2010; Norris, 1997; Ross, 2013). In research on broadcast and printed media, Tuchman (1978) puts forth the claim that women are not visible in media coverage. The way they are represented, or, more exactly, their not being represented, was described and analyzed using the theoretical concept of *symbolic annihilation*. Gerbner and Gross (1976), the originators of this concept, meant thereby to refer to the absence of minority groups in the media's discourse and to the trivialization and disparagement to which minority groups are subjected. Symbolic annihilation finds its expression in the avoidance of representing "the weak" on the stage the media provides.

Among studies aiming to investigate media coverage of women politicians over an extended period of time, Braden's (1996) research stands out. Braden's findings indicate that journalists approach women politicians in the United States with skepticism,

seeing them as having trouble making decisions and as a novel and abnormal phenomenon. Ross's (2002) research showed that the media in many countries marginalize women's activism, preoccupying themselves instead with women's external appearance and family status.

Especially prominent among the various studies' findings was the tendency to compare and connect between women candidates who had achieved renown in different countries, representing them by means of exclusion and inclusion as "women in politics" rather than as "women politicians."

Numerous studies in Israel in recent years have focused on images of women in the Israeli media's discourse. Only a small number addressed the image of women holding political office (Liran-Alper, 2009). Herzog (1994) indicated the tendency among both male and female journalists to represent women in local politics as trespassers, considering that even a woman politician is "first of all a woman." Fogiel-Bijaoui (2011) also claimed that "the media represent women as endowed with qualities and exhibiting behaviors which run counter to what is expected of 'real politicians,' thus increasing the distance between 'political man' and 'normative woman'" (p. 140).

As for news coverage of female members of Israel's parliament, the Knesset,[5] by comparison with male Knesset members in print newspapers of the early 1990s, it becomes apparent that women received less coverage than men. The way the women were represented stressed elements of no relevance to the offices they held, such as external appearance and family status. Similarly, emotionality was emphasized, on one hand, and aggressiveness, on the other. Women Knesset members were depicted as bizarre characters, not feminine in their behavior or appearance, and as a "curiosity" overall (Liran-Alper, 1994). A later study addressed newspaper coverage of Dalia Itzik during her term of service as acting president of Israel. The study diagnosed an additional gender-related

failure characteristic of media framing: the implicit expectation that women are bound to fail if they evince ambition or aim for high political office (Liran-Alper, 2009).

Furthermore, in analyzing broadcasts of election campaign propaganda conducted in Israel in 1988 and 1996, Lemish and Tidhar (1999) came upon nonegalitarian coverage patterns of male and female candidates and activists. "Mothers' strategy" stood out; that is, the maternal role of women served to legitimate their appearance and the message they conveyed about the future and about peace.

Research findings have suggested that female politicians are treated differently than men holding similar office, with the method of representation lending itself to description as a "representational exclusion" (Lahav, 2007).

Protest Movements, Communications Media, and Feminine Leadership

A *protest group* is a social group in which members striving toward a common goal undertake action, organizing in a conscientious and collective manner to go out against the establishment and change its policies (Israeli, 2007, p. 35).

An explanation of how protest movements arise requires taking stock of both structural and organizational circumstances as well as sociopsychological ones. Turner and Killian (1972) attributed great significance to the intensification of personal distress as shared by a group. Collectivization of the distress and a normative interpretation that defines a society's condition as unjust are the requisite conditions for motivating a process of change.

Social movements depend on their ability to break through into public consciousness and win adherents to their ideas. Their chances of achieving recognition depend largely on the media. Some researchers maintain that the influence of the media on the public's views of social and political issues is limited (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). There is, however, agreement regarding the

importance of the media in achieving public awareness and political involvement (Herman, 1996; Israeli, 2007).

A nonegalitarian system of relations emerges between political and social movements and the media of mass communication, indicating the interests of both sides. Wolfsfeld (1984) described the system of relations between the media and protest leaders as a competitive symbiosis, with both sides trying to control the process. The media tend to cover protest movement activism in a sympathetic manner when the issues involved are grounded in consensus (Stone, 1993).

Alongside the traditional press, a new ecological system has emerged in online media that provides protest movements with an infrastructure facilitating discussion, coordination, and organization. Social media networks specialize in this aspect (Dror, 2011).

Trying to pinpoint a social activist's special qualities shows that "the very choice of extra-establishmentarian political action demonstrates personal initiative and a concern greater than the usual for one's milieu, or else particularly severe distress" (Herman, 1996, p. 92). The attempt to clarify the motivating factors behind social or political initiative and activism relies on the understanding that, on one hand, this involves a type of activity requiring commitment and that, on the other, it offers rewards that are smaller than those the institutionalized system offers (Zuckerman-Bareli & Benski, 1989). We may note a number of outstanding qualities that leaders share (Herman, 1996):

- *Education*. Many intellectuals are part of the leadership by dint of their talents and abilities.
- *Student status*. Students are important contributors to protest movement activism and the movements' leadership.
- *Socioeconomic class*. The leaders generally belong to the upper middle class socially.
- *Women's participation*. The number of women taking part in institutionalized political action is smaller than the number

> of men, but in social movements, their numbers are high both among the participants and among the leaders. Their involvement is an outcome of a sense of being deprived of some basic right as well as of the alignment of barriers extant in the institutionalized systems, an alignment that has no parallel in a social movement setting.

Fogiel-Bijaoui (2011) noted four types of barriers facing women in the political system: the psychological, the social-economic, the political, and the media related.

The argument that relative deprivation, personal or collective, constitutes a central motive for extrainstitutionalized action may explain the prominence of women in political self-organizing aimed at protest or struggle for change in the existing social order. The relative flexibility of a protest movement by comparison with the institutionalized system, which maintains a hierarchical structure, yields an environment conducive to women's activism. Female activists become involved in movements focusing on issues of particular concern to women as well as in ones addressing issues of general concern (Kampf, 1996; Tidhar & Lemish, 1992).

FINDINGS: ANALYSIS OF THE GENDER DISCOURSE

The media's discourse online concerned with the image of Leef is here analyzed by means of a variety of accepted strategies of gender framing, as introduced in the following.

Salience

The degree of salience in coverage by the media is a variable of crucial importance in the media's representation of women leaders. The extent to which Leef was conspicuous was tested using parameters such as the number of editorials devoted to her, mentions of her name, prominent adjectives, quotations, and the scope of conversations online. One of the conspicuousness indices

taken into consideration was the number of mentions of the name of "Daphni Leef": On *Walla*, this yielded 103 instances; on *ynet*, 70 instances; in *Globes*, 136; and in *TheMarker*, 110. Besides being mentioned often, Leef was also described by a variety of prominent adjectives that were coupled with her name in the media reports. Some of the mentions treated her as an individual, independent and directing, while others referred to her as one of a group of leaders. *Globes* went especially far when it crowned her as "Daphni Leef, the uncontested leader of the protest" (August 8, 2011). Buzzilla Company provided data on the online discussion dealing with the social protest. An analysis of characters most talked about online shows that "this protest has an uncontested woman leader . . . at the symbolic level. . . . Daphni Leef achieves a grounding for her status as the face of the revolution. . . . She is the true star born this month" (*Globes*, August 1, 2011). Leef took third place, after Prime Minister Netanyahu and the minister of the treasury.

All the periodicals repeatedly quoted Daphni Leef, whether in the main headlines, the subheadings, or the body of the articles. For instance, a main headline on *Walla* was "Daphni Leef: Summer 2011—The Summer of Israeli Hope" (September 4, 2011). A main headline in *Globes* read "Tent Protest Initiator: This Is from Netanyahu; the Public Is in Despair" (July 17, 2011). The quotations are a rhetorical means of providing a discursive frame for Leef's status, emphasizing her importance and bestowing public recognition upon her as a woman leader. By means of the quotations, the media framed Leef in the role of the "voice of the protest"—a female voice conveying the general hope for change. Newspapers publicized profile essays about Leef the protest leader, such as the editorial in *TheMarker* titled "She Has Become the Face of the Wave of Protest."[6] Along with this, a number of editorials showed her as the first among the women leaders of the protest.

Another indication of her high level of salience in the rhetoric and of the public recognition of her as a leader can be seen in her being described as "Lady Globes" or as woman of the year among

the "50 Influential Women" of 2011. Publicists and thinkers, such as the writer Yoram Kanyuk, crowned her the leader of the protest. In an opinion piece, Kanyuk described her as "something special, she is smart, they'll call the revolution by Daphni's name" (*Walla*, September 2, 2011). In addition, overseas newspapers writing about the protest movement in Israel described Leef as the female leader of the protest, for instance, an article by the editors published in Britain's the *Guardian* titled "In Praise of Daphni."[7]

Talents, Qualities, and Characteristics

In the media's discourse referring to women leaders, the media make abundant use of gender media frames that reiterate common patriarchal and stereotyped rhetoric. Emotional behavior is frequently attributed to female leaders, along with dependence and weakness, which demonstrate women's unfitness for leadership. There is also frequent reference to points irrelevant to the office in question, such as the women's external appearance or their family status. These parameters were taken into account in the present study's analysis of the online media coverage of Daphni Leef.

The attitude toward Leef as a woman leader came to the fore in a series of titles and descriptions she was given by the different newspapers considered during the period in question. The most striking among these were "initiator of the protest," which appeared 45 times, and "leader of the protest," with a total of 12 instances. Differently from earlier research findings, a female leader's characteristics of the greatest importance as indicated by the present study were steadfastness and courage:

> Netanyahu does not understand what's happened here in the past few days, what kind of force it is he is up against. . . . The People of Israel has gone out into the streets . . . will stay there until the Prime Minister and the government of Israel present a revolutionary and serious plan. (*TheMarker*, July 26, 2011)

Her calling on Netanyahu to resign demonstrates assertiveness and a clear focus on objectives. She won praise from the media for her firmness, as well: "When Daphni, who had dared make her voice heard and take action, suddenly appeared, they all got a stamp of approval. In Daphni's eyes, this is a symbol exposing the good extant in Israeli society" (*ynet*, August 1, 2011).

While the struggle was in progress, Leef was represented as firm in her opinions and insistent, as maintaining a clear stance on social and economic issues. She specified her positions clearly, while addressing the need for a basic change of consciousness:

> Our revolution is a revolution of consciousness . . . to demand the rights we deserve. . . . We do not want to replace the government, but the rules of the game . . . change the record and begin to work for us. (*Globes*, July 31, 2011)

The question of the justice and honesty of female leaders has been probed in earlier studies but not found to be significant (Liran-Alper, 1994). Leef was represented as someone cleaving to her beliefs, an honest woman maintaining her values and fighting for justice for the benefit of society as a whole: "We will not fight each other for crumbs, but fight on behalf of everyone for a new cake" (*Globes*, August 27, 2011).

Her image was framed as a woman committed to protest and prepared to pay a personal price for the goal, which consisted in the success of the struggle: "I am going to resign from my job so as to risk my life defending what is going on here" (*TheMarker*, July 21, 2011). Her readiness for self-sacrifice lent authenticity to her image:

> Her whole essence is oxymoronic: an anti-heroine turned leader, naïve. . . . But in testing the results, this is the face of the new leadership. . . . The woman of the year is Daphni Leef—the symbol of the protest, the match that ignited the tribal campfire. (*Globes*, September 15, 2011)

Daphni Leef's young and naïve appearance runs counter to the accepted public image of leadership in Israel, which represents maturity and experience.

The emotionality typically ascribed to female leaders is partly why female candidates for leadership positions, along with female leader incumbents, are criticized in the media for being motivated by feelings when making decisions rather than by rational thinking, as they should be (Braden, 1996; Lemish & Tidhar, 1999). Leef, too, was criticized for being overly emotional and lacking in the rational thought essential for channeling the protest toward appreciable results. She adopted emotional vocabulary when talking about herself: "I am a person who is all heart . . . a person very emotional. . . . Strategies that's not me. . . . I went through this whole revolution with a broken heart" (*Globes*, September 14, 2011).

A headline ran the appeal "Daphni Leef, Translate the Revolutionary Romanticism into Practice!," with the subheading "Protest Must Have Clearer Goals" (*Globes*, September 9, 2011). She lent support to the emotive romanticism with a paraphrase of a famous quotation from Scarlett O'Hara (the heroine in the movie *Gone with the Wind*): "I cannot think about this now, if I think, I will go crazy" (*TheMarker*, July 31, 11). But the emotive expressions came intertwined with idiom demonstrating strong opinions and self-control: "Daphni Leef at the Silent March in Tel Aviv: 'We Will Not Give in This Fast'" (*Walla*, August 20, 2011).

Her position vis-à-vis the Trachtenberg Commission (which the prime minister set up to look into the protesters' demands) and her reiterated calls on Netanyahu to resign won extensive media coverage, framing her in the media's discourse as a woman who is impractical, ineffective, and tending toward confrontation. Even though her objectives ran counter to the stance taken by the Student Union,[8] she insisted on enunciating her position clearly, even at the cost of risking a split within the protest leadership. This led to her being cast as a nonpragmatic woman, as compared to Shmuli, the "logical man."

The research literature has indicated excessive concern on the part of the media with the external appearance of female leaders. As opposed to this, we have found little reference to Leef's dress or looks in the online coverage of the protest. In the media and public discourse, the hat she wore was tagged as a fashion icon. One of the few references to the topic was actually her own, when she herself did away with the relevance of her external appearance: "I have no problem with shorts, I don't care at this point what they say about my thighs." Another statement about fashion was taken up by a female correspondent trying to emphasize the uniqueness of the way Leef acted as a woman. The article mobilizes feminine attributes bound up with external appearance, along with emotionality, to come up with a positive description: "Leef allows photographing of herself as she shaves her legs in the tent, or when she cries" (*Walla*, September 5, 2011).

Women's protest movements in Israel led to media framing that focused on gender and feminine characteristics, such as in the case of the organization Women in Black, which was active in the struggle to end Israeli rule in the West Bank (Kampf, 1996), or maternal status, such as with the Four Mothers (active on behalf of leading the Israel Defense Forces out of Lebanon in 2000), whose coverage was described as talk about a "womb mobilized into the public sphere," as per Lemish and Barzel's (2000) claim. The media's discourse included feminist discussion and sexist perspective, even though the protest issues were not "feminine" by nature but rather had to do with foreign affairs and security.

The research literature has stressed use of sexist language in the media's coverage of women activists (Lachover, 2008). Members of Women in Black were scathingly described as "women . . . alone, Arabs' whores" (Helman & Rappoport, 1997, p. 137). By contrast, most of the criticism of Leef focused on her role as leader and did not often resort to sexist idiom.

Women's unfitness for leadership is often explained by their lack of ability and appropriate background (Herzog, 1994; Liran-Alper,

2009), whereas the Israeli context calls for a leader with military experience and education. One of the debates in the media about Leef's leadership capabilities began in the wake of an interview on Channel 10's *Economics Night*, when the interviewer attacked Leef for not having served in the army. This personal detail had sparked some controversy in the media. When Leef later adduced health reasons to explain her failure to do military service, this took some of the sting out of the criticism.

The media drew a connection between Leef's activism and views and advancing democratic values. The reiterated call for establishing a new social order was given wide publicity, including her call for transparence in politics. Inter alia, she demanded negotiating with the prime minister in front of TV cameras as a manifestation of a different kind of politics. Again and again, the claim issued from protest leaders' lips that the protest was not political (in the authors' view, meaning that it was not partisan). In addition, Daphni Leef called for a right to speech for everyone and was quoted as proclaiming, "We have one primary goal, we are all together. . . . Everybody deserves the right to speak" (*ynet*, July 16, 2011).

A senior correspondent wrote an opinion piece describing the protest's young leadership, with Leef at the head, as "pure protest of the masses" and even appealed to them not to go into politics, which "turns original and creative people into manipulative, shallow-thinking robots ready to compromise" (*Globes*, September 4, 2011). The British *Guardian*, in an editorial quoted in *Globes*, praised Leef's democratic grasp of things: "She looked democracy in the eye when leading a serious and popular protest movement" (*Globes*, September 8, 2011).

On the opposing side, rightist political circles objected to her activism because she represented a radically leftist stance. She was blamed as an anarchist whose one aim was to topple Netanyahu's government rather than find a real solution for the distress (*ynet*, August 7, 2011).

Using the Media

Protest leaders' skill in handling their movements' public and media relations is of great importance. Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) suggested three elements that impact media coverage of protest movements: strategic planning, wording and designing clear and catchy messages, and clearly defined demands. When the protest began, the tents set up in Tel Aviv were cast as spontaneous self-organization. As the protest continued, attracting increasing numbers of participants, it became clear that there was no general strategic plan to it; this was, perhaps, the secret of its appeal. At first, ambivalent voices made themselves heard in the media about the seriousness of the protest and its chances of success. Side by side with articles directly reporting the growing protest movement came others that saw the tents in Tel Aviv as a carnival, a youngsters' party with drinking and smoking or a kind of Woodstock. "The media compared the protest to summertime TV entertainment, or a type of 'survival' program."[9] Even so, journalists represented Leef as someone who "understands the media" and behaves wisely, a necessary talent for a leader in the postmodern age. With the first stake planted in the ground in the tent area, the onsite physical presence of the media also became obvious. This came to the fore in the extensive coverage of the protest.

Leef was depicted as making wise use of the media in general and of the new media in particular. Newspapers reported Facebook publicity, videos uploaded on YouTube, and calls on Twitter: "Get out of the impassivity, meet at the Square." A close look at the messages issued by the protest movement shows that under the catchy joint slogan for all those involved, "The People Want Social Justice," it is hard to pinpoint common themes. This is due to the heterogeneous characteristic of the different groups of protesters involved in the movement. At times, a message issued by one group contradicted that of a different one.

As the protest grew, criticism was leveled at Leef because she was

overly concerned with preserving a revolutionary-media persona, instead of translating the protest results into practical gains. The feeling that she was not managing to specify clear-cut demands was explained by her inexperience and young age.

Feminist Discourse

From the beginning of the protest, the media referred to the central role played by the women at the helm, even though this was not the first time that women were involved in protest movements in Israel. As already noted, media framing of earlier protest movements led by women brought out feminist talk even when the issues involved were of general social concern, such as foreign affairs and security (Lemish & Barzel, 2000). The summer 2011 protest also focused on general social concerns, economics, and welfare, but it was not grasped as a women's protest; rather, it was seen as a protest in which women occupied positions of leadership. In this connection, two questions arise: Did the media's form of discourse bring out feminist elements in the coverage of Leef? And did Leef herself consider her activism in feminist terms?

A Feminist? The Media About Daphni

Online periodicals marked expressions of admiration for Leef and the women's leadership of the protest:

> I look at the pioneers of the revolution on Rothschild Boulevard with admiration, and still can't believe it: women are at the head of the undertaking. Women! And Israeli ones, to boot! Now this, gentlemen, is nothing to pooh-pooh. . . . The Israeli woman is finally inventing herself anew, breaking through the feminine cliché about the plethora of her unwritten laws and initiating. . . . What Daphni, Stav, and their associates did was to declare war upon the imperious approach and the socio-economic management which have been in the lead in Israel for

> the past thirty years or more. . . . And yes, it had to be a woman with the first tent, because only a woman can arouse waves of empathy and identification like this in a cynical public. . . . In the end, women's leadership is directing a struggle which is all about empathy for the Other, values of equality and commiseration, caring, solidarity and justice. . . . I am proud to declare hereby that, finally, the feminism I have been yearning for has been born. (*ynet*, August 9, 2011)

In an opinion piece in *Globes*, the author connected the demand for a new social order with the centrality of women among the protest leaders: "Women's leadership . . . the kernel of the future, change and power." The author claimed that time is up for the

> present establishment, the Israeli oligarchy—that privileged group, well-connected and organized, the link among the lords of politics-wealth-senior officialdom-army, the elite enjoying organized extra privileges. . . . This generation . . . is talking about revolution. About a different economy. A different society, a different life. (*Globes*, July 29, 2011)

A correspondent noted for her feminist affiliation focused on the inbuilt dichotomy between men and women in terms of the objectives of the struggle. Shmuli, Student Union chairman, appeared as someone wanting to improve the situation while maintaining the extant social order, while Leef sought "to change the approach, to replace the old order with a new one, less hierarchical and more egalitarian." Leef also discussed the tendency, which comes to the fore in "women's language," to connect between the public and the personal:

> Leef speaks a different language, she speaks openly even about what she is going through personally, but also about what is happening "to us," the feelings of a nation both ideological

> and political. She speaks not about a "moment" or "resolution," but about a process; she remembers all kinds of "We" and speaks about the ability to include variance, multiplicity, and debate . . . an inclusive, direct, sincere language, a feminine language at its best. (*Walla*, September 5, 2011)

A Feminist? Daphni About Herself

Daphni Leef was sparing in her use of feminist rhetoric. She often noted that the beginning of the protest was a product of personal frustration and distress. When called on to answer the question "How do you explain it that it's women . . . who are leading the struggle?" she stressed the uniqueness of the feminine voice. Briefly she enumerated the character traits peculiar to women, which generate a new set of gender priorities:

> I don't know, but what's important is that the feminine voice, which was always here, should now be clearly heard. I think that women have less ego, and they come from a place both patient and tolerant. . . . This is a protest led by women because women come from a place of caring and concern. Up until today those who led the country were men, and, to my regret, what was always at the top of their priority list was the political security platform. (*ynet*, August 1, 2011)

Leef assumed a noncompromising position about organizing the mass demonstration of July 23 when she demanded that the student leaders allow women to speak at the event.

In response to the claim about resorting to violence and radicalization of protest movements as a means of attracting the media's attention to their work (Wolfsfeld, 1984), it should be emphasized that Leef led a nonviolent protest. The issue of nonviolent protest and its link to women and leadership got some attention in the media:

> Not for naught is this protest so non-violent: the people behind it, leading and directing it, are women. . . . This new language—not only is it non-violent, it is also a connecting language, a language of dialogue, a language making room. (*Walla*, September 5, 2011)

> They are trying to silence the protest and to drag us into violence, but we will continue in our way. (*Globes*, September 8, 2011)

DISCUSSION

Studying the media's framing of Leef shows that she featured prominently in online newspapers. This tallies with research findings devoted to the way women are represented in social movements, with a focus on topics seen as expanding the private female sphere, in contrast to movements that focused on foreign affairs and security (Israeli, 2007; Kampf, 1996).

Unlike the findings in many earlier studies of media coverage of women active in the political field, coverage of the woman leader of the tent protest was mostly sympathetic. In analyzing media frames, the present study also found that the conspicuous traits ascribed to Leef were steadfastness and courageousness, assertiveness and persistence, honesty, authenticity, and commitment to the goal. At the same time, in this study, too, Leef was framed as tending toward excessive emotionality. While criticized as a leader because of her lack of adequate knowledge of economics, she was also praised as someone advancing democratic values. Findings in earlier studies show frequent references to women's external appearance. In the present study, online periodicals did not often mention this, and almost no sexist expressions were identified. It follows that media framing of Daphni Leef in online journalism only partly tallies with the accepted gender definitions.

Daphni Leef's leadership, despite her being a young and nameless woman, was legitimated by the media. In our view, her reception

in the online media as a leader was natural. A possible explanation lies hidden in the demand for establishing a new social order, which would include a demand for different leadership, for a new hierarchical division of power and resources, including change in terms of language and representation; that is, echoes and assimilation of new notions can be discerned in media frames ("feminist" talk, which was not called explicitly by its real name). Attempts to undermine Leef's leadership stemmed most often from the masculine establishment's desire to preserve notions of the old social order. Take, for instance, her being reproached for not understanding economic policy and being unable to change it. This criticism was occasionally quoted in the media in Leef's own words, whether as an expression of her modesty and acceptance of her limitations or as a way of adopting the prevalent type of discourse.

A look at Leef's references to herself indicates the absence of an orderly feminist agenda, even though she often talks about revolution and change of consciousness. The "I" and the "We" intertwine in her language, whether as an expression of gender language or as an authentic language reflecting a change in the value environment and in the dominant ideology.

The demand for mutual responsibility enfolds a key Jewish value that was implicitly included in the foundational narrative of Israeli society. Patterns of journalistic discourse give meaning to real events and to Leef's actions in the protest movement by linking them to socialist ideas. Leef's image in the media, along with her demands, repeatedly provoked a yearning for values of social solidarity, which had been pushed aside by the penchant for individualism in Israeli society (Almog, 2004).[10]

The wave of protest in Israel and other countries was characterized by the central role played by women as participants and leaders.[11] Summing up, we see that the online journalism framed Leef as a new, "other" leader, legitimate and natural, and not as a "woman leader."

In the present Israeli online media case study, a change may be identified in the discourse dealing with the representation of women leaders. A degree of assimilation of supra-gender discourse evolving in media frames can be discerned; moreover, Leef's personal concerns and public image were framed as the distress of middle-class youth. "A leader's biography is the codification of society, its beliefs and the behavior expected of its members" (Strate, 1985, p. 47).

The summer 2011 protest movement in Israel unfolded in a new media setting as compared to earlier protests. It seems that the young protest leadership that emerged in the ecological environment of the new media, and the online newspapers, contributed to shaping new patterns of news coverage and discourse.

NOTES

1 An early version of the research was published in Hebrew only.
2 The definition includes six components of media frames: organization, principles, commonality, continuity, symbolism, and internal structure.
3 Web portal and news website *Walla* (http://walla.co.il) was founded in 1995 and belongs to Bezeq the Israeli Telecommunication Corp. Ltd. and Schocken Publishing, which publishes the daily *Haaretz.* In 2000, the Yedioth Ahronoth Group, which publishes the daily *Yedioth Ahronoth,* founded the web portal and news website *ynet.* Much of *ynet*'s news content is original work, published exclusively on the website and written by an independent staff, but it also incorporates articles from *Yedioth Ahronoth.* Daily financial newspaper *Globes* was founded in 1983. Since 1997, it has also run a free Internet website. *TheMarker* was founded in 2000 as a response to *Globes.* Since 2005, the *Haaretz* financial supplement and the online newspaper have had a joint editorial board.
4 The November 2011 TIM survey (http://www.ice.co.il) shows 63.3% exposure to *Walla*, 13.5% to *Globes*, 14.4% to *TheMarker*, and 59.4% to *ynet.*
5 The Knesset comprises 120 members from various political parties who are elected in national elections. In 2011, there were 21 women Knesset members, and in the 2013 elections, 27 women were elected—a record number since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.
6 Arguably, the numerous pictures accompanying the texts frame Leef as the "face of the protest."
7 Quoted in *Walla,* September 8, 2011; see also *Globes,* September 8, 2011: "*The Guardian* praises Daphni Leef: 'She looked democracy in the eye.'"

8 The National Union of Israeli Students was one of the large institutional organizations that took an active part in the social protest. As the protest continued, differences of opinion emerged between the union leader and Daphni Leef, especially over the issue of their position vis-à-vis the political system.

9 *Survival* is a popular TV reality program.

10 The dialogue between the protest groups and the media can be described as inter-ideological communication. It should be noted that the communications media covering the protest are owned by wealthy proprietors whose primary interests lie in preserving the economic status quo.

11 Women featured prominently in the Arab Spring (in Syria, Egypt, Libya, and Bahrain) in their use of the new media and gained extensive newspaper coverage. Leef, too, was described in the Israeli media as making skillful use of the new media, especially Facebook. The legitimacy the media accorded to Leef's leadership stems to some degree from her image as a member of the "Me Generation," today's generation of young people who are self-involved and equipped with the technological tools to communicate with the public at any given time (Dror, 2011).

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The VAST Model for Online Instruction: Promoting Significant Learning Experiences

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This article first establishes from the literature the characteristics and merits of a significant learning experience and suggests that such an experience can be designed into an online course and into the face-to-face environment. Then the authors define terms that are relevant to the virtual asynchronous and synchronous transactional (VAST) model, describe the components of the model, and, finally, explain how each component is designed to engage students and provide them with significant learning experiences. This model is relevant to both undergraduate and graduate seminar courses and to online learning in general.

KEYWORDS: Synchronous, asynchronous, active learning, pedagogy, cooperation, collaboration, online

Online courses are becoming more popular with college students and more attractive to administrators (Allen & Seaman, 2011) because they allow students to gain access to course content without being in the same geographical location as the instructor (Lewin, 2012). But online courses also bring with them a loss of interpersonal transactional intimacy when compared to face-to-face courses (Baker, 2010). This article explains how a model of online communication can constructively provide a sense of interpersonal

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connectedness, develop a sense of community, and contribute to the transactional richness of human communication and relationships by offering significant learning experiences (Fink, 2003) to students in online courses.

The purpose of this paper is to explain the virtual asynchronous and synchronous transactional (VAST) model of online instruction. The model arose because of the criticisms about the loss of interpersonal transactional intimacy in online courses that were predominantly asynchronous (Baker, 2010). The model designers noted the importance given in communication literature to synchronous transactional processes in the creation of significant learning experiences in face-to-face classes (Kaufman et al., 2008; Saulnier, Landrey, Longenecker, & Wagner, 2008; Thompson, Jungst, Colletti, Licklider, & Benna, 2003; Thompson, Licklider, & Jungst, 2003). The problem the VAST model designers sought to address was how to maintain this interpersonal intimacy in the online learning environment.

This article first establishes from the literature the characteristics of a significant learning experience and suggests that such an experience can be designed into an online course and into the face-to-face environment. Then the authors define terms that are relevant to the VAST model, describe the components of the model, and, finally, explain how each component is designed to engage students and provide them with significant learning experiences. This model is relevant to both undergraduate and graduate seminar courses and to online learning in general.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When designing and developing a course, whether it is a face-to-face class, an online class, or a hybrid class, instructors have to determine what they want the students to learn. By focusing on learning instead of teaching, instructors use techniques that can create meaningful learning experiences for their students by having

the students explain the relevance of what they are learning, chunking information into understandable units, and encouraging the students to be active participants in the learning experience (Kaufman et al., 2008).

Instructors operating from within this learner-centered paradigm want to create "new and better games . . . that generate more and better learning" (Saulnier et al., 2008, p. 170) and incorporate strategies that promote cooperation, collaboration, and support. These strategies are designed to help students and instructors learn together, help students understand the depth and breadth of a subject, assist them in learning how to organize information, enhance their abilities to retain and retrieve it, and contribute to developing their metacognitive abilities (Thompson, Licklider et al., 2003).

Meaningful learning happens, according to Thompson, Jungst et al. (2003), when the focus in a classroom environment moves from being teacher centered to learner centered. The instructor enriches the students' ability to learn by adopting new approaches that are designed to deepen the students' understanding of concepts and skills; understanding how learning occurs; paying attention to the physical, emotional, and social aspects of learning; and helping students *learn* how to learn. These aspects of learning are similar to Fink's (2003) taxonomy of significant learning, which includes foundational knowledge, application, integration, the human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn.

Fink (2003) believed that students (whether they are in a face-to-face classroom or online) should have a "significant learning experience" (p. 6) comprising process and outcome dimensions. When they are involved in a significant learning experience, students will be engaged in what they are learning and exhibit a high level of energy. This kind of experience will result in "significant and lasting change" (p. 7), which will continue after the students graduate. These experiences, according to Fink, have the potential for being of value to students for a lifetime.

A significant learning experience is more likely to occur when

a teacher uses a learner-centered paradigm rather than the more traditional content-centered paradigm, according to Fink (2003). Under the *content-centered paradigm,* teachers are under pressure to cover the content of the course. A *learner-centered paradigm* does not neglect or ignore the course content, but it does take a teacher in a different direction because it incorporates new, significant, and meaningful kinds of learning experiences for the students, which are similar to the cognitive and affective learning taxonomies outlined by Bloom (1956, 1964) and updated by Krathwohl (2002).

Whereas the content-centered paradigm focuses primarily on foundational knowledge (having students learn about topics A–Z), the learner-centered paradigm includes process and outcome dimensions of learning that Fink (2003) labeled as (a) foundational knowledge (comprehending and remembering information and ideas), (b) application (developing skills; managing projects; and practicing critical, creative, and/or practical thinking), (c) integration (how ideas and people connect), (d) human dimension (reflecting on the self and others), (e) caring (developing feelings, interests, and values), and (f) learning how to learn (becoming a self-directing learner). These qualities are jointly constructed in synchronous transactional processes. Fink contrasted the new paradigm for college teaching with old-paradigm teaching methods. The VAST model seeks to incorporate the new paradigm advances into the new online environments.

Courses that privilege the convenience of asynchronous interaction run the risk of a loss of the interpersonal richness of new-paradigm face-to-face courses. These same issues of access, convenience, and interpersonal communication are still central to the discussions about online learning. This article describes a model for online learning that could be used by organizations, residential colleges, or universities where the primary objective of the courses is not to serve thousands of people at a time but to provide an immersive online course that is not physically restricted by place and

that combines the community-building features of transactional face-to-face classes with the convenience of asynchronous access to course materials. This kind of course could provide a "significant learning experience" as described by Fink (2003).

Having established the characteristics and merits of a significant online learning experience, the authors now define terms that are relevant to the VAST model.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Of particular concern are the terms *interaction, collaboration,* and *community.* To begin with, *interactional* will be contrasted with *linear* and *transactional, collaboration* will be contrasted with *co-operation,* and then the definition of *community* will be addressed.

Interactional and Transactional

Human communication scholars (Barnlund, 1970; Berlo, 1960; Schramm, 1954; Shannon & Weaver, 1949) draw distinctions between *linear, interactional,* and *transactional* communication.

Linear communication is asynchronous, as when Person A sends a message to Person B (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). For example, in an online environment, communication is linear when an instructor posts text files, audio files, PowerPoint slides, or video clips to a course management system for students to access.

Interactional communication occurs when Person A, who sent the initial message, receives feedback in some form from Person B (Berlo, 1960; Schramm, 1954). When a student reads or processes the posted content or responds by submitting homework, answering test questions, or asking questions about the content, that feedback is asynchronous and interactional. Interactional communication, then, is a stepwise process where messages are sent and received, which then provokes a response in the form of feedback. Texting or tweeting a response would be considered interactional, because

messages sent through those channels are asynchronous, even though the participants may be online at the same time. The mediating nature of these channels does not allow for the transmission of synchronous transactional messages.

Both linear and interactional communication are distinguished from transactional communication. Barnlund (1970) believed that the transactional communication process describes the evolution of meaning. In this view, transactional communication is dynamic, circular, unrepeatable, and irreversible. This type of communication involves both verbal and nonverbal cues and synchronous sender–receivers.

To illustrate the unique nature of transactional communication, Barnlund (1970) offered this scenario: "As Mr. A and Mr. B become aware of the presence of the other, each becomes more self-conscious, more acutely aware of his own acts and alert to the nonverbal cues of the other, as an aid to defining their relationship" (p. 98). This process is significant and similar to how personal intelligences (Gardner, 2004) are developed.

Transactional communication is synchronous and occurs when participants recognize that "each of us is a sender-receiver, not merely a sender or a receiver . . . you are receiving feedback from your listeners simultaneously, mostly nonverbally" (Rothwell, 2013, p. 14). Person A and Person B *continuously* influence each other and develop a relationship with each other as they communicate (Anderson & Ross, 1994).

This highlights differences between asynchronous and synchronous communication in online courses. Face-to-face communication is *transactional* and characterized by high incidences of immediacy behaviors (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Christensen & Menzel, 1998; Kearney, Plax, & Wendt-Wasco, 1985; Witt, Wheeless, & Allen, 2004). The International Communication Association (n.d.) defines *transactional immediacy* as "verbal and nonverbal behaviors that convey warmth, communicate positive relational

affect, signal approach and availability for communication, and create increased physiological arousal in receivers." "Hence, teacher immediacy appears to trigger students' learning motivation, and, in turn, motivation leads students to perform desirable behaviors and achieve positive learning outcomes" (Wei & Wang, 2010, p. 477).

Thus, moving a face-to-face classroom course to an online environment can result in a loss of transactional immediacy, which is especially true of nonverbal behaviors, if synchronous transactional modes of communication (such as video conferencing) are not employed.

Having defined *linear, interactional,* and *transactional,* the authors now compare cooperation and collaboration. This distinction is important because analyzing the communication processes involved reveals that cooperation and collaboration are very different. Knowing the differences and how to apply them is crucial to social cohesiveness and task completion.

Cooperation and Collaboration

Under the old college teaching paradigm, learning is competitive and individualistic. But in the new paradigm, learning is cooperative, and "faculty become primary designers of learning methods and environments" (Fink, 2003, p. 18).

Though Goodsell, Maher, and Tinto (1992) felt that they could not provide a definitive definition of *collaborative learning,* they thought it refers to a variety of educational approaches that involve students exploring and applying the course material rather than relying on the instructor to tell them what it means.

In moving from competition to cooperation to achieve learning, Prince (2004) defined cooperative learning as a form of group work in which students work together to accomplish a common goal but are assessed individually. According to Prince, collaborative learning is any kind of group-based learning in which students work together to achieve a common goal, and in this kind of learning,

the emphasis is on student interactions rather than on students working in isolation to achieve group goals.

Hooper (1992) made a more useful distinction between the two kinds of learning. In cooperative learning, students are highly interdependent; they divide up the work and specialize in separate areas. For example, if 50 foreign language words need to be learned in a group of five, each member might learn 10 and teach them to the other members or simply present their 10 words to an audience. Each individual is highly dependent on the others to do his or her own task well for the group to succeed as a whole. In collaborative learning, however, there is a decrease in interdependence and an increase in task completion mutuality. All students, then, would be encouraged to learn all 50 words and help each other learn and present them as a unified whole.

These differences between cooperation (interdependence) and collaboration (dependent mutuality) fit into the new paradigm for college teaching (Fink, 2003) and can be illustrated by the use of a metaphor. Imagine students are building a boat. If one person only researches how to make oars and rowlocks, and another only masts and sails (not rigging), another tillers and rudders, and another how to lay clinker planks and make them watertight, then they will only have knowledge of their specific tasks. Outcomes will be significantly different; none of them would be able to build a boat should he or she be the only survivor shipwrecked on a desert island. Instead, if they had collaborated, the one survivor would have known how to build a boat.

Having explored cooperation and collaboration, the term *community* is now defined.

Community

Small groups usually comprise three or more people and are small enough for members to develop relationships with all other members (Moreland, 2010). A crowd might refer to the number of people

who attend a concert or a sporting event. They may all have similar interests in the event and share similar behavior patterns (buying tickets, lining up, entering the stands, finding seats, watching the action, conversing with friends and strangers, shouting encouragement or abuse, and making their way home), but they could not be defined as a group or a community (Rothwell, 2013).

A community is distinguished from collections of people who exhibit specific group behaviors and those who develop transactional relationships with corresponding immediacy behaviors. Transactional relationships are developed in synchronous environments.

The concept of sense of community was developed by Sarason (1974). McMillan and Chavis (1986) described the four factors that work together to create a sense of community: membership (which includes a sense of belonging, personal relatedness, investment of self, and being a part of the community), influence (which includes individual members making a difference to the group and the group having an influence on its members), integration and fulfillment of needs (which includes feeling that members' needs will be met, reinforcement, group success, and group and individual competence), and shared emotional connection (which includes the commitment and belief that the community has and will continue to share a history, common places, shared events, and time together). This sense of community contributes to significant learning experiences.

Research on small groups includes a task dimension (Psycharis, 2008) and a relational dimension (Barnlund, 1970). Communication researchers (Frey, 1994; Keyton, 1999; Shaw, 1981) identified the principal features of a small group: the expression of common goals, interaction, mutual influence, and interdependence. Interdependence here means that all members rely on each other for the attainment of group goals. Small groups develop cohesiveness, which is "the attachment members feel towards each other, the group,

and the task—the bonds that hold the group together" (Adams & Galanes, 2003, p. 187). It is that cohesiveness that produces a sense of community among group members.

Creating courses and class assignments that foster cooperation, collaboration, a strong sense of community, and significant learning experiences requires synchronous communication processes. Online learning environments can allow for this. The VAST model was specifically designed to combine all of these components.

COMPONENTS OF THE VAST MODEL

The VAST model combines eight components: (a) required synchronous class sessions, (b) themed assignments and strategies, (c) self-directed learning groups, (d) a guide-on-the-side philosophy, (e) just-in-time teaching, (f) virtual breakout rooms, (g) Facepage conversations, and (h) the development of competent cybercitizenry. A description of these components follows.

Required Synchronous Class Sessions

In the VAST model, design considerations focus on how course objectives can be realized in the online environment and how immediacy behaviors can be maintained to develop a sense of community and facilitate significant learning experiences.

Synchronous class meetings are scheduled in the same way and for approximately the same amount of time as regular face-to-face class sessions. The students also meet for synchronous meetings with their group members outside the regular synchronous class sessions. The course, therefore, provides opportunities for students to experience, manage, lead, and initiate group work transactionally. They develop production and presentation skills usually reserved for course instructors. This requirement is in the course description so that students are aware of it before they register.

Themed Assignments and Strategies

The course is designed around a theme, and self-directed learning groups are given the final assignment or project during the first week of the course. The extended assignment design helps students explore a theme in depth and is specifically and intentionally self-reflexive. What *self-reflexive* means is that instead of course texts and materials being the only content that students are required to learn, there are assignments *about* the content and discussions *about* the application of the content in the assignments. The objective is to go beyond content regurgitation and evaluation to create a unified structure in which the self-directed learning groups can articulate an understanding and application of the complexities of higher levels of learning. This is akin to Fink's (2003) concept of learning to learn.

The following illustrates one possible way the VAST model can move self-directed learning groups through a themed assignment. First, students post a text document in which they introduce themselves, describe their interests, and indicate when they would be available to meet with other students. On the basis of these preferences, the instructor matches students into groups for the first synchronous class session. Each member of the group is then required to respond to all the other members of the group, and a conversation about building communities in an online environment begins.

Next, they produce an individual 90-second video podcast in which students can take concepts from an assigned chapter in a textbook, combine them with the course theme or final presentation topic, and relate them to their personal lives. The objective is to encourage students to relate course concepts in some way to their own beliefs and practices, and the beliefs and practices of others, which continues the self-reflexive conversation about building online communities. This process is continued throughout the semester, culminating in the term project (a paper, a

video, a presentation, a research report, or a product for a client).

Similarly, the self-reflexive design is incorporated into the just-in-time submissions and the use of virtual breakout rooms, which are covered in later sections. The contents of those sessions can be developed by the groups and used in their final products.

The themed, self-reflexive assignment design facilitates a more holistic, systemic approach and may be appropriate for courses in the humanities or the sciences that can draw on a variety of different learner-centered strategies that faculty members can use to develop their own discipline-specific themes and organizational designs. These could include interrupted case studies, process writing, service learning, or process-oriented guided inquiry learning.

Self-Directed Learning Groups

Self-directed learning groups are at the heart of the VAST model because it is in these groups that students put into practice the active, problem-based, cooperative, and collaborative learning processes.

At its core, active learning requires student activity and engagement in the learning process (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). According to Prince (2004), active learning is any instructional method that engages students in meaningful learning activities and requires them to think about what they are doing. This means students need to be aware of and be able to articulate their understanding of what they are doing.

Prince (2004) and Ahlfeldt and Sellnow (2009) defined problem-based learning as an active learning approach that is usually collaborative. In this approach, problems are introduced at the beginning of a course to provide "the context and motivation for the learning that follows" (Prince, 2004, p. 223). The VAST model follows this practice by having the final group assignment set at the beginning of the course so that the self-directed learning groups can work together to accomplish their tasks. The point is that all earlier assignments are part of a consistent (themed)

organization that the self-directed learning groups follow in their progress toward a final product.

Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991) have long advocated for cooperative learning and are well known for contrasting cooperative learning with the conventional instructor-centered lecture format. Features of the VAST model are based on a range of well-established best practices (Johnson & Johnson, 1999) and on continuing research into group-oriented, student-centered, problem-based, active leaning.

To encourage collaboration and determine if students have succeeded in applying cooperative and collaborative strategies, instructors monitor the process by requiring rough drafts at specified dates, developing reflexive or metacognitive conversations in class (Fink, 2003), or monitoring the synchronous group meetings that the students record outside regular class time.

Guide-on-the-Side

The concept of guide-on-the-side is used in two ways. First, new practices change the role of the instructors from declarative experts to facilitators (Fink, 2003; McCombs & Vakili, 2005), so that the course becomes learner centered. Second, in a learner-centered course, instructors are not disseminators of knowledge; the delivery of course content changes so that students become discoverers of knowledge.

In contrast to the content-centered model, in which information is presented and comprehension and retention are assessed, planning, teaching, and assessing the learner-centered course revolve around the needs and abilities of the students (Bain, 2004). In the VAST model, instructors present themselves as resources and providers of resources who help students solve problems, organize their work streams, develop skills, and achieve the learning objectives. In the synchronous class sessions, they lead self-reflexive or metacognitive discussions that are about concepts and assignments

(Fink, 2003). For example, in exactly the same way that good face-to-face class discussions can go beyond the use of the lower-order questions in Bloom's (1956, 1964) cognitive and affective taxonomies, online synchronous discussions can facilitate questions that zigzag up the full cognitive and affective orders of complexity. Through reflexive discussions, students can learn how to apply and evaluate course concepts.

In the VAST model, the course management site is front-loaded with PowerPoint slides, Camtasia files, video files, audio podcasts, and Word or PDF documents as learning modules. Students access the modules asynchronously, and they may be part of the just-in-time teaching process. These modules focus, clarify, and augment in-class synchronous discussions. During synchronous classes, the students discuss these concepts and apply them to their academic and life experiences as much as possible.

Just-in-Time Teaching

Just-in-time teaching can blend active learning with web technology to engage students with feedback on pre-class assignments. Novak, Patterson, Gavrin, and Christian (1999) stated that just-in-time teaching encourages students to take more control of the learning process and become active and interested learners.

Asynchronously, students may do warmups, puzzles, or some thought-provoking or question-asking assignment and submit a response to the instructor prior to a class session. Some of the class is then rapidly designed around the issues or needs of the students. The questions or issues raised provide the starting point for a rich in-class discussion that allows for a greater exploration in terms of complexity and depth. The instructor may also compose questions from those submitted by students, combining them, or, rather than simply answering them, turn them back to the students and lead them into the discovery process.

Just-in-time teaching allows instructors to work through answers

with the students without supplying *the right answer* for them. Having students use PowerPoint slides to submit answers also develops the students' abilities to create and display items when they have to share documents or other communication functions during online presentations or group meetings.

In the VAST model, the just-in-time questions become part of a strategy to close the feedback loop and create reflexive class discussions that emphasize the learner-centered group activity. It emphasizes collaborative thinking through synchronous transactional processes.

Virtual Breakout Rooms

Most course management systems have virtual classrooms that offer virtual breakout rooms. Groups can use the breakout rooms to work collaboratively with new information. Students are encouraged to develop group identity, and the activity breaks up the hub-and-spoke pattern that occurs when the instructor disseminates information to students who only interact with the instructor and not with each other. The small-group network patterns become one class-sized network again when students return to the main room and can use the "reporting-out" procedures to lead class discussions. The small-group activities encourage students to engage in significant learning. They actively participate rather than passively receive information.

The Facepage

The VAST model further encourages this participation by raising the contribution profile of all members of the class as much as possible through the use of the Facepage. The aim of the Facepage is to have students contribute to discussion or respond to question-and-answer sessions *synchronously.*

In the Facepage, the instructor places pictures of the students into a table with two columns and as many rows as there are students (up to 10) on PowerPoint slides. Their faces (shown with

their permission in Figures 1 and 2) are in a narrow column of cells on the left, next to a wide-cell column of textboxes to the right. The instructor may load as many slides as necessary to include all the students in the class. When the instructor invites students to answer a question or a prompt, the 10 students on that particular slide type into the text box next to their pictures. All responses are thereby displayed synchronously, and the discussions are enriched by the ability to compare and contrast responses and to add to and change comments.

In Figure 1, the Facepage is presented in the whiteboard section of an Elluminate screen, and the instructor can be seen in the largest video pane asking a question.

In Figure 2, the text responses to the question "What is social sustainability?" are displayed synchronously in the textboxes next to their pictures, and one student who has been called on to begin discussion can be seen in the large video pane. Simultaneously, some scrolling text messages appear in the chat box on the left from students who are not currently displayed on the Facepage.

The students also rapidly learn to erase and replace their comments. The instructors can pick out comments to start conversations and invite students by name to participate using the audiovisual functions. If there are more than 10 students on the class roster, more PowerPoint slides are preloaded, and the instructor can toggle back and forth so everyone participates.

This component creates opportunities for enriched transactional communication because all students can see, compare, and build on all the written responses. This thereby increases their ability to participate and enriches the open-ended, conversational nature of any questioning techniques. This facilitates a process of discovery in learning and addresses the loss of interpersonal intimacy sometimes associated with asynchronous learning environments and the didactic lecture format. Students gain mastery of and learn how to behave in their online environment.

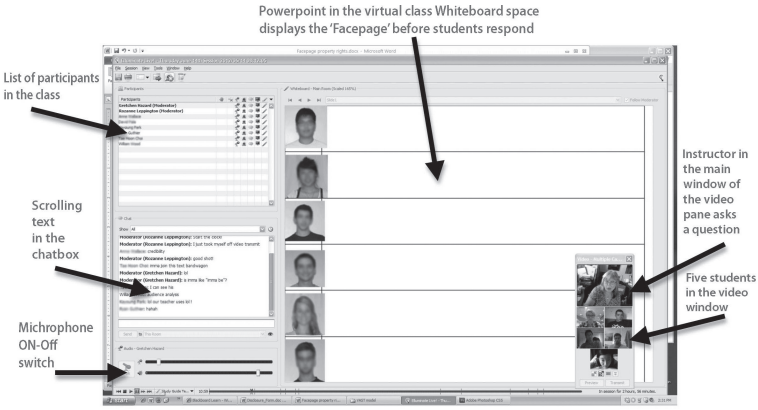

FIGURE 1. The Facepage displayed on the virtual classroom whiteboard.

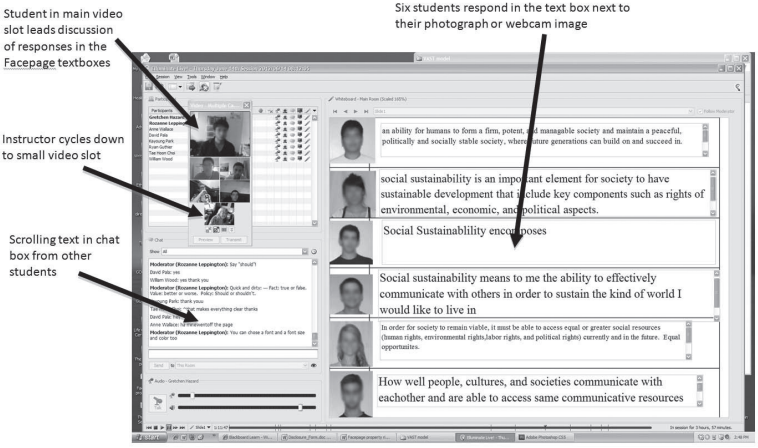

FIGURE 2. The students respond to the instructor prompts.

Creating Competent Cybercitizens

In the VAST model, everything that could add to the transactional experience for all participants is encouraged, modeled, and practiced. This is because personal intelligence (Gardner, 2004) is considered key to competent cybercitizenry (which used to be called "netiquette"). Gardner describes *personal intelligence* (following Sigmund Freud and William James) as interest in the self as located in the individual and an individual's relationship to the outside community. One comes to know oneself and one's role and function as a member of a community. This is a valuable, teachable, basic relational skill appropriate to the online environment.

Just as in offline social situations or face-to-face classes, *participation* becomes an issue. Students are encouraged to cycle in and out of the conversations and to use all the audio, visual, and text functions the virtual classrooms offer in the course management system. Having students raise their level of participation prevents quiet members from sitting in the background. "Lurking" may be acceptable in some online forums, but in a collaborative self-directed learning group, it is tantamount to social loafing. Johnson et al. (1991) stated that instructors should get silent members involved because "a group is not truly cooperative if members are 'slackers' who let others do all the work" (p. 11). The technology now makes it possible to structure individual accountability for participation in transactional patterns that develop and exhibit students' personal intelligences and social-cyber skills online.

To model good cybercitizenry, instructors greet students as they "enter" the class. They then encourage students to text greetings to other students and to test their microphones and cameras. Ball and Leppington (2013) found that although students were commonly at ease with texting, with encouragement, they soon developed more screen skills. They liked to express applause or use the emoticons, draw on the whiteboard, or make other graphic marks on-screen. When encouraged to use the microphone for asking or responding

to questions, they rapidly adopted turn-taking. The textbox became a part of the community-building forum rather than being a primary means of expressing dissatisfaction with the technology or a back-channel for gossip. The students became more competent as they participated in assignments and activities in which they displayed documents or PowerPoint slides, responded in the Facepage, or used the features in their group breakout rooms.

The cybercitizenry component models the kinds of behaviors that create the conditions for building an online sense of community that has similar transactional properties to face-to-face classes.

The components explained here should be thought of as complementary, interacting parts of a process. The model is a process design. The eight components work best when they complement one another. The resulting process avoids the loss of interpersonal intimacy and provides students with opportunities for significant learning experiences. However, challenges to the model are addressed next.

CHALLENGES TO THE MODEL

Reliable, high-speed bandwidth may be a challenge to some students in rural areas who cannot afford high-speed Internet connections or who could lose their connections during synchronous class sessions. But these technology problems are a challenge for all online systems and are not particular to the VAST model.

Some students may want to complete course requirements with no more than minimal involvement simply to earn course credit, and they may limit their participation and act in ways that would be deemed social loafing in a face-to-face version of the course. Strategies for involving these students are available in both cases.

Another challenge may be that required synchronous meetings are too demanding on students who are working or who have restrictive schedules. These issues are always a trade-off between

objectives and commitment. Full, prior disclosure of expectations can be written into the course description with a full explanation of required attendance, necessary computer hardware, tools, and programs. Alternative versions of the course may be available.

A limitation exists in the Facepage. The Facepage uses static images of the students, so they exhibit immediacy behaviors only when they come on-screen when they answer or ask questions individually. When technology allows the number of concurrent on-screen video images to increase and audio feeds have improved, this will no longer be a problem.

The challenge in academia is for one instructor to perform all tasks synchronously. The designers of the VAST model used an instructor and a background producer who monitored the chat box, helped students troubleshoot technical difficulties, and encouraged quiet ones to participate. This arrangement allowed the principal instructor to concentrate on facilitating the class proceedings. Commercial websites often stream meetings with presenters and background technicians, and though improvements to the technology will make multitasking more manageable, it may be useful to consider using support personnel techniques found on commercial sites.

Finally, some critics have worried that the model is too time consuming or involves much more work than a normal face-to-face course. This is not the case. The VAST design moves instructors to the role of facilitator, and the design features do not require any more preparation time, monitoring, or assessment than is expected in any other learner-centered course.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND TESTING

More research might focus on validating student attitudes and preferences for transactional communication online over the convenience of asynchronous online courses. Outcome studies should

be conducted to explore differences with regard to student performance in courses using synchronous transactional process model designs, such as VAST, and in asynchronous online courses.

CONCLUSION

This article has established the merits of significant learning experiences, defined terms, and clarified concepts to identify those features that need to be retained in the transition from the traditional classroom to the online environment without a loss of interpersonal intimacy. The VAST model encourages rich patterns of communication in which meaning, relationships, and a sense of community contribute to significant learning experiences. The eight components, consisting of a combination of pedagogical best practices and strategies, are offered so that instructors may adapt them to their specific disciplinary course designs that have an emphasis on student-centered, active learning; developing a community of competent cybercitizens; and providing significant learning experiences.

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Graduate Assistant Dissent Expression: Navigating the Role of Student and Employee

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This study explores graduate assistant dissent expression and identifies the triggers and influences on decisions to approach or avoid dissent. Qualitative analysis of 18 master's-level graduate assistant interviews revealed issues of autonomy, ideas for change, and university procedures as dissent triggers. Graduate assistants made decisions to approach or avoid dissent based on personal characteristics, supervisor relationships, and department openness to communication. Finally, graduate assistants' role identifications as student or employee framed their dissent expressions. Findings, implications, and future directions are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Organizational dissent expression, graduate assistants, role identification, graduate education

Graduate assistants are a valuable resource to many higher education institutions. A graduate assistantship allows for a mutually beneficial relationship between students and universities where students pursue their education while researching and teaching within their discipline and universities gain skilled employees at low cost. The complexities of the dual role as student and employee and the complicated nature of supervising and mentoring

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graduate assistants are overlooked areas of research specifically within master's-level institutions (Schwartz, 2009; White & Nonnamaker, 2011).

According to the Council of Graduate Schools (2012), in 2011, 1.73 million students were enrolled in graduate programs, and 75% of these students were in master's or graduate certificate programs. The National Center for Education Statistics (2011) cited that 15.3% (275,872) of graduate students at public, 4-year institutions (both master's and Ph.D. granting) held assistantships in 2009. Mentoring, training, and supervising these students is a challenge universities face as they work to continuously improve their mechanisms for preparing students for professional *and* academic careers.

Although feedback is a critical component of developing better university systems for training, preparing, and matriculating graduate assistants, feedback from graduate assistants is also essential for improving programs, research agendas, and classroom instruction. Organizational dissent is one specific form of feedback where an employee experiences a feeling of incongruence or difference with an organization and chooses to voice his or her ideas. However, feedback given by graduate assistants in the face of disagreement with organizational policies, practices, and procedures may be hindered because of the inherent nature of the graduate assistant role as a learner and employee. Broadly, this research project explores organizational dissent expression within the graduate assistant context. More specifically, this study focuses on the triggers, channels, and enactment of dissent and how, if at all, graduate assistants' willingness to express their disagreements (i.e., dissent) is affected by their dual role as learner and employee.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational dissent involves the expression of disagreement or contradictory opinions about organizational practices and policies

(Kassing, 1998). Garner (2009) described *dissent* as a form of organizational voice that "consists of those complaints and gripes that are orthogonal to the goals of organizational leadership" (p. 198). Many organizations formally and informally discourage dissent because it may invoke change, challenge existing power structures (both formal and informal), cost the organization money, or bring to light embarrassing or unethical practices; however, studies have shown that dissent can serve as an important monitoring force within organizations (Eilerman, 2006; Kassing, 1997, 1998, 2001; Perlow, 2003; Redding, 1985). Those organizations that are more receptive to dissent allow for feedback to monitor unethical and immoral behavior; impractical and ineffective organizational practices, policies, and decisions; and insensitivity to employees' workplace needs and desires (Eilerman, 2006; Kassing, 1997; Perlow, 2003; Redding, 1985; Shahinpoor & Matt, 2006). The costs of suppressing dissent include wasted time, reduced decision quality, productivity, creativity, emotional and relationship costs, and decreased job motivation, which can result in the organization losing money, time, and resources (Eilerman, 2006; Perlow, 2003; Shahinpoor & Matt, 2006). Therefore it is in the organization's best interests to provide effective mechanisms for this form of employee input.

Dissent often begins with a triggering event that prompts individuals to speak out and share their opinions about organizational practices or politics. The types of issues that cause employees to dissent vary. The majority of employees seem to express dissent because of resistance to organizational change, while other factors may include employee treatment, decision-making tactics, inefficiency, role or responsibility, resources, ethics, performance evaluations, and preventing harm (Graham, 1986; Hastings & Payne, 2013; Kassing, 2002; Redding, 1985; Sprague & Ruud, 1988). Kassing (2008) found that employees consider the importance of an issue and its connection to job satisfaction as the strongest considerations to weigh when expressing dissent. Interestingly, he found concerns

about being perceived as adversarial as the weakest consideration.

Employee dissent can be self focused, other focused (welfare of the organization as a whole), or neutral (Kassing, 2002). With this in mind, there are three types of dissent that employees might express that are typically dedicated to specific audiences: (a) Articulated (or upward) dissent is expressed toward management and supervisors, (b) latent dissent is expressed toward coworkers, and (c) displaced dissent is expressed toward friends and family outside the organization (Kassing, 1997, 1998, 2002). Garner (2009) identified 11 types of dissent messages with solution presentation, direct-factual appeal, coalitions, and inspiration as the more frequently used strategies. Within the graduate assistant context, students may employ a number of these strategies at different levels. They may engage in articulated dissent by expressing their disagreements or concerns upward to faculty or administrators within and/or outside their departments. Latent dissent could occur laterally with fellow graduate assistant "coworkers." And similarly to a more traditional employee, students might also express displaced dissent to their family and friends. Little research has addressed the forms of graduate assistant dissent or the individual, relational, and organizational factors influencing their decisions to voice concerns.

Factors Influencing the Expression of Dissent

Dissent expression is a complex act, and employees decide how, when, and whether to dissent based on a number of factors at the individual, relational, and organizational levels (Kassing, 1997). Individual influences concern qualities that employees bring to the organization, expectations they have acquired, and behaviors they enact within organizations (Kassing, 1997, 2000a). According to Kassing (1997), relational influences involve "the type and quality of relationships people maintain within organizations" (p. 324) and involve supervisors as well as coworkers. Organizational factors include how employees "relate to and understand their organizations"

(p. 324), which affects communicative behavior. Though this framework offers a way to categorize the influences on dissent, it is important to note that these are not mutually exclusive categories.

Individual factors such as conflict orientation, verbal aggressiveness, argumentativeness, and locus of control impact dissent expression (Kassing & Avtgis, 1999, 2001). Whether employees enact dissent based on personal traits may depend on the various relationships they develop and maintain within organizations. The superior–subordinate relationship is an important relational factor (Kassing, 2008, 2009; Payne, 2014; Redding, 1985). Employees can take varying approaches in the way they communicate dissent to supervisors and the way in which they maintain a "communicative" relationship with their supervisors in general (Kassing, 2006). Employees who perceive high-quality relationships with their supervisors are more likely to use articulated dissent. Some employees may feel that their supervisors respect their opinions and that they have mutual influence and persuasion over the outcome of organizational decisions. Conversely, employees who perceive their relationships with their supervisors as low quality will resort to latent dissent, as they feel there is no room to voice their opinions upward (Kassing, 2000b). Trust in supervisors also plays a role in the perceived quality of supervisor–subordinate relationships. According to Payne (2014), employees who report high levels of supervisor trust are more likely to use articulated dissent strategies, and those who report lower levels are more likely to use latent and displaced dissent strategies.

In addition to individual and relational factors, organizational influences concern how organizations relate to their employees (Kassing, 1997). Once an employee joins an organization, it is through assimilation that the employee learns the norms of the organization (Jablin, 1984). Perlow (2003) suggested that organizations placing high value on being polite and avoiding confrontation can cause employees to be uncomfortable expressing their

differences. Employees make assessments about motives and restraints when others dissent and use this knowledge to inform their own decisions about when and how to use dissent (Hastings & Payne, 2013; Kassing, 2001).

One might expect dissent to be encouraged in a university setting because the academic environment is ideally a place where new ideas are fostered and constructive debate is appreciated, especially through shared governance systems. However, even if a department chair encourages the expression of disagreement among faculty in meetings or in one-on-one conversation, dissent from graduate students may not be encouraged to the same degree, if at all. Additionally, in departments or universities with less than democratic structures, input from faculty and students may be discouraged by withholding information, controlling the structure of meetings in a way that prohibits dialogue, and using autocratic decision-making processes. In these climates, it is likely that the status distance between administration, faculty, and students is exacerbated. Graduate assistants may perform many of the same teaching duties as other instructors, but their simultaneous role as students may overshadow their role as employees, creating less opportunity to express concerns and frustrations. The dichotomy a graduate assistant faces as an employee and a student–protégé may further complicate triggers, factors, and strategies for expression of dissent.

The Dichotomous Role of the Graduate Assistant and Dissent

Unlike corporate employees, the role of a graduate assistant is unique, and the line between student–protégé and university employee is blurred; therefore knowing when and how to bring up issues may be more difficult for a graduate assistant. While studying to meet academic requirements for advanced degrees, graduate assistants complement their formal studies through research, teaching, and/or administrative work under the supervision of faculty or staff. It

is important for graduate assistants to have a clear understanding of their dual status, being aware especially of the requirements, responsibilities, and privileges of their positions as both student and professional. According to Feezel and Myers (1997), "meeting responsibilities to one's school, department, advisor, professors, students, graduate colleagues, and even family and friends may cause a state of heightened concern" (p. 110) for new graduate assistants. Graduate assistants may experience uncertainty with their dual role as employee and student, and this uncertainty will affect their communicative behaviors. Discovering how graduate assistants perceive their role and their relationships to supervisors and/or the university will help shed light on the factors that affect graduate assistants with regard to dissent. Therefore this research intends to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What issues do graduate assistants identify as dissent triggers?
RQ2: How do graduate assistants describe their willingness to approach or avoid dissent?
RQ3: How do graduate assistants' perceptions of their role as employee or student frame their dissent?

METHOD

Participants

This study explored the dissent patterns of graduate assistants at one university. The researchers selected a purposeful sample of interviewees from a university-wide list of graduate assistants at a large, comprehensive university in the southern United States.

The sample was selected taking into account type of assistantship (academic or nonacademic), department or program, college, gender, race, and international status. The researchers first sorted the list by academic program. Each researcher solicited participants from diverse departments on campus with diverse types of

assistantships ranging from academic to nonacademic departments. Participants were not recruited from the same departments, and the researchers strived to represent a wide range of disciplines. When soliciting participants, the researchers sought a balance between male and female students and included minority members and international students. The appendix provides general information about the total population of graduate assistants at the university and information about the final sample of participants. Interviews were scheduled until the research team felt a high level of data saturation had been achieved.

Eighteen master's-level graduate assistants were interviewed representing a wide array of programs and departments on campus. The sample consisted of 10 women and 8 men.

Procedures

To respond to the research questions and better understand the role of dissent among graduate assistants, we took a qualitative approach. Upon institutional review board approval, interviewees were contacted by e-mail and interviews were conducted over two semesters in a private setting. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form prior to the start of each interview. The duration of the interviews ranged from approximately 30 minutes to longer than 1 hour. A semistructured interview guide contained questions regarding relationships with mentors, perceived organizational openness, triggers for dissent, discussion of personal strategy to express dissent, and some background questions. This structure was used to allow for probing of participant responses and for collecting comprehensive data. To promote confidentiality in the study, participants were allowed to select their own pseudonyms. All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim, resulting in 209 pages of single-spaced text.

Data analysis began with a review of the transcripts to obtain a broad understanding of the data. The transcripts were analyzed

using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Open coding was conducted using analytical notes in the margins of the transcripts. Next, a comprehensive list of codes was created based on words, phrases, and stories. This list was further refined into broader categories using Owen's (1984) criteria of recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. With regard to dissent triggers, issues of autonomy, work processes, and university procedures emerged as major themes. Personality and personal characteristics, relationships with supervisors, and departmental openness emerged as key themes influencing graduate assistants' willingness to approach or avoid dissent. Finally, collegial relationships and perceived level of job responsibility marked participants' classifications of themselves as more of an employee than a student, whereas being treated as having a lower status or identifying as a learner were the key considerations graduate assistants mentioned when they perceived themselves primarily as students. Two of the authors collectively reviewed and refined the themes during data analysis sessions by comparing categories and returning to the transcripts for support of the themes.

FINDINGS

Analysis of the data revealed rich themes of organizational dissent expression among graduate assistants. Specifically, graduate assistants experienced dissent triggers connected to autonomy, work processes, and university procedures for matriculation. Second, graduate assistants cited personal, relational, and organizational influences on their dissent expression. Finally, dissent expression was framed differently depending on whether graduate assistants identified as students or employees. The research questions and themes are described in the following sections.

Dissent Triggers

The first research question set out to identify the triggers of graduate assistant dissent. Three major themes emerged relating to issues of autonomy, ideas for improvement, and issues with university procedures.

Issues of autonomy. Graduate assistants described issues of dissent centering on tensions of autonomy and structure. Specifically, some graduate assistants wanted more freedom in their work, but others expressed a need for more structure. Participants who identified the need for more autonomy focused on issues of academic freedom. These students assisted with large lecture courses, supervised labs, or taught stand-alone sections with preset examinations. Toby described his difficulty in grading essay exams and maintaining an appropriate standard that would not lead to grade inflation: "I think it was the difference between our expectations and [my teaching supervisor's] expectations. But, what does it mean to give an A in this course?" Toby felt conflict over what he felt were appropriate grades and yet at the same time felt he should defer to the experience of the professor.

Other graduate assistants in the study were responsible for teaching labs corresponding to large lecture courses. Whereas some graduate assistants had leeway to create their own lab assignments, others were required to follow closely the main lecture course and conduct experiments the way the professor of record wanted them completed. This created issues when the graduate assistants did not see the lab exercises as the best way to teach the material. Mark describes frustration with wanting to change the content of his lab:

> The problem is that the professor who teaches the course, he does his research on zebra fish. . . . he already has breeding lines going with the mutations that are somehow tied to what he's doing. And so he really wants the students to look at those mutants because that's what he's familiar with. The problem is

> the mutations that they have are very subtle and very difficult to spot. . . . I don't think the lab needs to be difficult in any way.

Mark felt as though the professor's research interests dictated the nature of the labs, and when he discussed this issue with his advisor, he was told that because the professor donated and funded the specimens, things were not likely to change.

Although some graduate assistants were interested in greater levels of autonomy, other students longed for more structure and input from their supervisors. Sometimes the structure needed was as simple as more face-to-face communication, but others had a need for more mentoring and direction. Claire described a time when her supervisor forgot to tell her about an important event that, had she attended it, would have been beneficial to the recruiting project she was working on. "I just wasn't informed. So, when I spoke to my supervisor about it briefly, she was like, 'I thought I told you.' And, she does that a lot, but she's very busy." Although Claire was complimentary of her supervisor, she wanted more face time with her so as not to miss important events, but also she wanted more meetings for career mentoring. The uncertainty in managing a program was also evident in Marx's account: "While it's nice to have freedom and nice to be able to do your own thing and figure stuff out, it's also nice to be like, hey am I, is this right? Thumbs up? No? Like, that's useful."

Several graduate assistants in the study were in charge of their own courses and were responsible for creating the syllabus, lessons, and assessments. Although this was viewed as a learning opportunity, several longed for more direction and structure, even though they perceived their department's approach was one of promoting academic freedom. Elizabeth addressed these issues as well as the variation created in different sections of the same course:

> The department as a whole could do good by having some standards of these are the kinds of things that should be covered in

> this particular course. . . . Some of the other graduate teaching assistants teach to the structure of a textbook, but I know there is at least one who uses a nonstandard textbook, and his class is probably a lot more free form.

Tensions of autonomy served as dissent triggers for graduate assistants, but often these remained unresolved problems, as the graduate assistants felt little power to change the circumstances.

Ideas for improvement. A second major theme of dissent triggers revolved around the need for changing processes that would enhance communication and navigation of formal elements of graduate school, such as finding an assistantship, getting paid, and completing university forms. When asked how she located an assistantship outside of her home academic area, Claire responded, "We are trying to somewhat formalize that process because there are quite a few of us who have GAs, but it's just kind of hit or miss." She described her department's efforts to involve graduate assistants in solving common problems such as these. Marx provided another example of needing to improve communication processes. He described the problem of having multiple supervisors (directors, codirectors, and a coordinator) and acknowledged that after a year in the position, he was still unclear about to whom he should report. To address this problem brought forward by the graduate assistants, the staff was planning a retreat to iron out chain-of-command issues. Graduate assistants dissented about changes in programming, recruiting strategies, and work processes. Although not all issues were resolved, they felt they were listened to and had a safe outlet for communicating dissent.

Issues with university procedures. A final dissent trigger was the issue of graduate forms and perceptions of bureaucratic red tape. Graduate assistants were disgruntled with forms in general, and some looked to their departments to assist them as opposed to their actual advisors. Cody relayed frustration over who should be responsible for forms:

> The theory is you're adults, grad students, you're supposed to be held to a higher level of responsibility and you're supposed to know these things. You're supposed to keep track of these things. Well that's true, but we're also keeping track of research experiments that last throughout the night, and we're keeping track of our classes. We have to make As and Bs; we can't fall below a B. And we're teaching and we're holding office hours, and we're grading papers, and we're grading exams, and you know, some travel [out of town] to teach. . . . You could at least have sent me a reminder or something.

Other students identified the Graduate Office as the source of the problem and felt their departments served as their advocates. Dan described the tension between his department and the university: "There has been some tension in the past because they have expectations on their end, and the department has expectations on their end. Sometimes the student's interest in what is going on is lost in the process." Dan viewed the graduate advisor as an advocate and described these issues as common administrative problems that eventually got worked out. While participants readily identified triggers of dissent, they differed in their decisions to communicate their ideas forward.

Willingness to Approach or Avoid Dissent

The second research question addressed how graduate assistants described their willingness to approach or avoid dissent. Graduate assistants' dissent behaviors were often connected to personal characteristics, the quality of their supervisor relationships, or the department's or program's openness.

Personal characteristics. When asked about their decisions to express their disagreements, ideas, and suggestions, participants frequently credited their personality, age, and experience as explanations for approaching or avoiding dissent. Several participants discussed their personalities in combination with their departments'

openness as motivators to dissent. Cody remarked, "I'm pretty vocal. . . . I don't know that I always take the appropriate avenues of who I'm supposed to take it to . . . when I think of it I say it, which may be a character flaw." She went on to say, "The people that I interact with on a daily basis are open to my opinions." Claire similarly credited her dissent behaviors to her personality but also focused on her experience: "I haven't been in school, and I'm 28 and a lot of them are in the 22–26 range. . . . I've been in the professional world. I've been in the corporate world." Like Claire, Lila referenced her professional work experience as having an impact on her expression of dissent; however, she credited her professional experience with teaching her the value of restraint:

> Having those two years between my undergrad and my grad, I learned, this is a job, you get done what you need to get done. . . . At the same time, there are some personalities that you can kind of tell from the beginning, okay there can be a little give and take here. . . . And then there are other personalities that they don't want you to do that, they just want you to do what you're told.

Quality of supervisor relationships. In addition to personal qualities, participants also focused on their supervisor relationships as a key component of approaching or avoiding dissent. By and large, participants communicated positive, open communication climates with supervisors and credited these strong relationships as the reason they felt comfort in voicing dissent. When discussing their positive relationships, graduate assistants used the terms *friend, colleague,* and *coworker.*

Graduate assistants who felt a strong sense of connection with their supervisors described the ways their supervisors took an interest in the graduate assistants' personal and school lives and spent time with them professionally and socially. Lila experienced two very different types of supervisor relationships upon switching her

assistantship in the second year. For her current assistantship, she used the word *phenomenal* several times to describe her supervisor:

> He is very good about treating me very professionally. I feel like I'm his colleague and been with him forever. He's really good about asking how I feel about the workload: Is it too much for you, what do you think about this, what are your ideas? . . . I don't feel like he's using me just as a student helper, or, you know, like a slave.

This experience was in great contrast to her previous year. When probed about the professor she had assisted, she said, "If I'd had any problems I wouldn't say I'd go to her. . . . I try to keep peace and just do things and not complain because it's not worth it. Especially not when you are a student and, you know, politics and what not." Lila's strained relationship with this professor prevented her from dissenting about concerns that might stir up political issues. Though the supervisor relationship was a central component of graduate assistants' willingness to dissent, they also referenced their programs' openness to dissent as an impetus to speak.

Department's openness to dissent. Participants widely reported that their departments were open to ideas and dissent and perceived graduate assistant input positively. They also readily acknowledged that that openness did not always translate into their issue being resolved or ideas implemented. Isaac captured this sentiment: "I don't ever think it's been a bad thing to bring something up or have a complaint. But whether or not they do anything about it is another story." Graduate assistants accepted this compromise and continued to look for ways to offer their thoughts "appropriately," which Robert translated as being respectful. "I am not going to be scared to say something. I feel like they hired me for a reason, as long as I bring it up respectfully they are not going to have a problem with it." When asked how his department perceived

graduate students who express dissent, he said, "They like it when we do that. . . . It shows that we're being more active in our role, and that we care . . . as long as it's not just incessant complaining about something that doesn't really matter."

Graduate assistants in the study provided a wide array of formal opportunities for graduate student voices to be heard, including weekly meetings, scheduled meals with supervisors, graduate student associations, advisory committees, retreats, and meetings with graduate directors and department heads. Strong relationships with supervisors coupled with outlets for addressing issues bolstered students' comfort in dissenting. However, there were graduate assistants who had strong relationships with their supervising faculty members yet received subtle cues about the department's overall lack of acceptance for dissent. The department chair was a central feature of this perception. Lila's description of her department chair was telling: "[He] isn't very open to ideas and/or change from students. And we've learned that through having him in class. We just know his demeanor on campus. So he's not someone anyone would go to for any problem."

Several participants referenced a lack of accessibility to the department chair and viewed communication with the chair as more formal in nature. Several graduate assistants from different programs explained that communication with their department chairs was supposed to be in writing, and others were not allowed to meet or talk with their chairs without an appointment. These experiences were in contrast to their supervisor relationships. Graduate assistant dissent was influenced not only by personal, relational, and organizational factors but also by the way students perceived their role at the institution.

Role Identification

The final research question addressed how graduate assistants' perceptions of their role as employee and/or student framed their

dissent. Overall, most participants did not explicitly identify role conflict as an issue. However, interesting patterns emerged with regard to reasons graduate assistants identified as a student or employee and corresponding issues of dissent. Graduate assistants viewed themselves as an *employee* when they felt equal with supervisors or when they sensed their employment carried substantial job responsibilities. Graduate assistants who identified with the role of *employee* dissented about administrative issues at the university, job procedures, and policies.

Graduate assistants identified themselves as a *student* when they were treated as having a lower status by supervisors or staff or when they viewed their primary role at the university as that of a learner. When graduate assistants identified themselves as a *student,* they dissented about topics related to being cast as a "student," or if they viewed their role as a learner, they engaged in dissent of an academic nature. These nuances are described in the following.

Self as employee. Two circumstances contributed to graduate assistants' identification as an employee: the feeling of being a colleague with faculty and the reality of having major responsibilities. First, some graduate assistants felt as though they were treated like a faculty member and used the title of "Graduate Assistant" to get answers to questions or to establish credibility. Cody captures this sentiment: "If I have to call someone and I say, 'Well this is so-and-so and I'm a graduate assistant.' That has been taken care of a little quicker than when I was an undergrad. . . . I feel like everyone else is colleagues and not so much teachers." Larry also referenced using his title and describing himself as an employee: "A lot of people ask me what I do, and I say I am a professor in the department of [science], I am an assistant professor."

Robert felt privileged to have an assistantship and was pleased with the difference from his undergraduate roles. He stated, "I have never been treated like this at a job . . . as a grad student, they respect you, they trust you to plan your own event without them hovering

over your shoulder, so you get just enough room to do what you want." Similarly, Ava commented, "They treat me like part of the group. They talk about things that are going on. . . . I am basically in charge, but [my supervisor] is my right-hand man."

Cody, Larry, Robert, and Ava's experiences demonstrate how the feeling of being a graduate assistant or, in some cases, a faculty colleague bolsters confidence in resolving issues and performing well. Other graduate assistants identified more as an employee because of the level of responsibility they had in their positions. Isaac is an extreme example of this, as he managed an entire building and supervised a staff of 31 individuals: "We're considered full-time staff members. And just the responsibilities that I have you know I feel like I'm more of an employee." Before becoming a graduate teaching assistant, Elizabeth held an assistantship in an administrative office and was responsible for managing a technology tool for faculty. She worked long hours, conducted trainings, and was on-call to assist professors. She explained, "Most people when they found out that I was a graduate assistant were actually surprised that I was a graduate assistant and not a staff member."

When graduate assistants identified as an employee for the university or program, they felt empowered to communicate dissent to resolve problems on their own or promote ideas for improving processes and procedures.

When graduate assistants embraced the identity of an employee because of the level of responsibility with which they were charged, their topics of dissent centered on processes and programming to enhance the flow and success of their work. Geri states, "You shouldn't think of yourself as a student because you have to work really hard in order to fulfill the aim of your work." Geri was searching for ways to assist student learning and didn't feel as though the preset exams were a fair assessment of students' knowledge gains. This dissent trigger is directly connected to her embracing the role of teacher, employee.

Other graduate assistants felt ownership of their work as an employee and were willing to dissent to ensure the quality and integrity of their work. Amelia echoed this: "I'm the only one that touches the stuff I work with. . . . I do what I want with it. It's my baby for this year." Whereas many graduate assistants described their role as one of employee, others experienced their role more through the lens of being a student.

Self as a student. Graduate assistants were more likely to identify as a student when they experienced treatment from others that emphasized their student status or when they viewed their primary role in graduate school as being a learner. First, graduate assistants felt aware of status differences when others such as staff, department heads, the university, or professors communicated with them as a student. Maryanne, who works in an academic department for multiple professors, felt that some professors just wanted her to complete their work instead of being like a colleague. She stated, "Some professors are kind of like 'here go do this.' . . . I am definitely treated like a student and someone who is employed to work for them."

When graduate assistants are not given the assistance they need to resolve administrative issues or complete their jobs or do not have open communication, they feel more like a student. Lydia cites treatment from office staff and the department head as emphasizing her student status:

> The office assistant is not a very nice person. . . . She kind of treats us more like a student since we are students technically. . . . I honestly think it was because she didn't want to seem that she worked for us, so she wanted us to do a lot of things on our own, which could be a learning experience.

The second major reason graduate assistants identified their primary role as that of a student was because they viewed their

primary mission in graduate school as learning. Mark succinctly captured this sentiment:

> There are three main responsibilities that we have: to teach, take classes of our own, and do research of some kind. So, and I'm learning in all three of those responsibilities. I'm learning how to teach. I'm learning how to do research. And then I'm taking classes.

Brianna explained that as a graduate assistant, she felt pressure to be a high-achieving student: "You are expected to be better prepared for classes and do better because you deserve that assistantship for a reason. . . . I have learned a lot."

The dissent triggers for graduate assistants who viewed themselves as students corresponded with whether they were treated as having lower status or whether they viewed themselves as a learner. When graduate assistants viewed themselves as a student because of how others treated them, their dissent triggers often reflected their level of frustration with some event stemming from that treatment.

By and large, graduate assistants with teaching assistantships viewed themselves more as a student, and their issues of dissent typically involved academic issues such as course content changes, grading practices, or assessments. For Mark, dissent was triggered by his desire to restructure the content of a lab he supervised, and for Toby, by an interest in curbing grade inflation. Both identified themselves as learners and focused on enhancing their students' learning while acknowledging that they were still learning how to teach.

In summary, the graduate assistants in this study experienced a wide array of dissent triggers of an administrative and academic nature and chose to approach or avoid dissent based on personal characteristics, supervisor relationships, and department/program openness. For some graduate assistants, their perception of their

role as an employee encouraged dissent to resolve problems and suggest improvements, whereas those who perceived their role as that of a student experienced dissent as a result of unequal treatment or as part of learning how to be an academic professional.

DISCUSSION

This study provides insight into the special challenges graduate assistants face and contributes to the body of research linking dissent expression and individual, relational, and organizational elements with a specific focus on how the perception of one's organizational role shapes the communication of dissent.

Graduate assistants experience myriad dissent triggers related to autonomy, ideas for improvement, and university procedures. These triggers fit within the functional category described in Kassing and Armstrong's (2002) typology of dissent-triggering events. Functional triggers involve operational elements such as inefficiencies, change, and processes. In this study, graduate assistants overwhelmingly reported dissent triggers that were functional in nature, including improving procedures for assigning graduate assistantships, setting tutoring appointments, resolving administrative issues related to pay, or structuring teaching lessons. Of particular salience were issues of autonomy, where graduate assistants were interested in having more input into lesson plans and grading or wanted more structure in their work activities, including regular meeting times.

This study also highlights interesting connections between dissent expression and the communicative characteristics of the graduate assistants themselves, their relationships with supervisors, and their perceptions of their departments' openness to dissent expression. First, graduate assistants often referenced personal characteristics such as directness, age, and experience as contributing to their decision to dissent. These findings are in line with research on dissent and other individual-level variables. Specifically, employees with

high levels of organization-based self-esteem, argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, an internal locus of control, and work experience use more upward dissent strategies (Kassing, 2006; Kassing & Avtgis, 1999, 2001; Payne, 2007). Although graduate assistants identified elements of their personality and personal life experiences as affecting their willingness to approach or avoid dissent expression, the degree to which personal characteristics uniquely influence dissent expression among participants is unclear and worthy of future study.

Second, supervisor and mentor relationships were also critical to the dissent process. Graduate assistants who experienced trust, openness, and caring with their supervisors felt as though barriers to dissent were removed or nonexistent. The supervisor relationship contributes to developing an open communication climate that fosters workplace freedom of speech and contributes to the likelihood of dissent expression without the fear of retaliation or the perception of being adversarial (Kassing, 2008). Supervisor trust is especially important, as employees who have high levels of trust in their supervisors are more likely to express their dissent directly (Payne, 2014).

Specific relational activities aided in the development of trust. Graduate assistants with supervisors who asked about their personal lives, interacted with them socially, and sought opportunities to maximize their learning experiences reported a greater level of comfort in expressing their ideas, complaints, and suggestions. Students described their supervisor relationships as high quality when the graduate assistants were treated like colleagues and when their supervisors took an interest in mentoring them in their work and academic activities. Girves and Wemmerus (1988) found that when master's students felt they were treated as junior colleagues by faculty members, they were more involved in their programs. Higher levels of involvement more than likely translate into feeling a sense of ownership in the inner workings of the department or

program and into an increased likelihood of contributing ideas and expressing dissent when faced with dissatisfactory conditions.

The mentor–protégé relationship is an important element of socialization to a discipline, academic program, and academic careers (Sprague & Nyquist, 1989). Girves and Wemmerus (1988) found that student perceptions of the quality of their relationships with faculty members were directly associated with degree progress. Additionally, Myers (1998) found positive correlations between graduate teaching assistants' levels of supportive communication in relationships, specifically in the area of career mentoring, and their use of information-seeking strategies. Similarly, participants in this study reported a direct connection between their relationships with their mentors or supervisors and their communication. Graduate assistants were comfortable expressing dissent when they perceived a supportive relationship.

The final theme relating to graduate assistants' willingness to dissent connected to perceptions of the departments' or programs' openness to communication. Organizational climates that are open to employees' voices experience greater levels of upward dissent expression (Kassing, 1998, 2000a, 2008). Many of the participants in this study discussed their departments' openness to dissent and understood that their contributions would be critically evaluated on merit, if not necessarily adopted. Several graduate assistants described a climate where every idea brought forth was evaluated before being accepted or rejected. This level of critical thought socializes graduate assistants into a process of dialogue and thinking that will, it is hoped, carry forward in their professional careers. Some graduate assistants considered it a part of their role to provide feedback and received praise and approval for being active in the life of the department. According to Kassing (2008), employees who dissent upward within the organization are more engaged. This engagement can greatly enhance job performance and can build a climate of professional learning and improvement.

Other participants described their perceptions of a closed climate, one in which more formal structures prevailed. Organizations lacking a supportive communication climate for dissent may miss out on important opportunities for improvement. While participants in this study readily identified formal mechanisms for dissent, special attention should also be given to the influence of the department chair in inviting dissent. Even though most programs in this study had graduate directors or coordinators, many students considered this role as focused on facilitating admissions, assistantship placements, and program scheduling. Outside of their direct supervisors, participants with assistantships in academic programs still looked to the department chair as the primary mechanism for communicating more serious issues of dissent. Department chairs who develop supportive communication climates, including taking a problem-orientation to decision making, where an environment of collaboration, open communication, and input is fostered, are seen as more effective, resulting in faculty members with increased levels of job and relational satisfaction (Czech & Forward, 2010). Although the participants did not specifically address the outcomes of having an open and supportive department chair, their accounts highlighted how the lack of support and accessibility served as a barrier to dissent expression.

Finally, although graduate assistants did not express any major role conflict between being a student and an employee, their perceived role identity framed the topics of their dissent expression. Whereas graduate assistants who identified as employees dissented about administrative and job-related issues, others who saw themselves as students dissented about academic topics or about issues of being treated as having a lower status. Ibarra (2003) defined work-related identity as "how we see ourselves in our professional roles, what we convey about ourselves to others, and ultimately, how we live our working lives" (p. 1). Graduate assistants differed in their work-related identities. Not only did graduate assistants

differ in conceptualizing their role as organizational or academic but they also differed in how they lived out this identity, specifically through dissent expression.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study has certain limitations, it provides a detailed first look into graduate assistant dissent within master's programs. Perhaps the most limiting aspect of the study is the selection of the participants. The researchers took various steps to ensure that they obtained participants from a variety of departments, of both genders, and of various races. However, all students attended one regional university, thus limiting insight into dissent among graduate assistants at other institutions. Also, all of the participants volunteered, so graduate students with more intense dissent expression may not have felt comfortable discussing their experiences with the researchers.

This study's findings provide various opportunities for future research. Specifically, further examination is needed of the extent to which work-related identity influences topics of dissent expression. Moreover, scholars should explore the connections between individual-level role identity and organizational identification. High levels of organizational identification may lead to adherence to cultural norms with regard to dissent expression and therefore may restrict or promote expression. The interplay between role and organizational identification is complex and deserving of study.

CONCLUSION

Participants in this study reported positive relationships with supervisors and, generally, open communication climates within their departments. These relationships increased their comfort in and likelihood of expressing dissent. Fostering strong relationships

with and modeling open dialogue for graduate assistants can assist graduate programs in building quality programs that prepare graduate students for professional and academic careers. This project expands the literature on dissent expression by describing graduate assistants who experience dissent in unique ways based on their tripartite role as student, protégé, and employee.

APPENDIX: DESCRIPTION OF POPULATION AND SAMPLE

	University[a]	Sample[b]
College/area		
Sciences	97 (26.75%)	4 (22.2%)
Liberal arts	77 (21.25%)	3 (16.7%)
Health	66 (18.1%)	1 (5.6%)
Education	57 (15.6%)	3 (16.7%)
Administrative units	33 (9.1%)	3 (16.7%)
Interdisciplinary studies	21 (5.78%)	2 (11.1%)
Business	13 (3.8%)	2 (11.1%)
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	242 (66.5%)	14 (77.8%)
International	78 (21.4%)	1 (5.6%)
African American	28 (7.7%)	3 (16.7%)
Other	8 (2.2%)	
American Indian/Alaskan	3 (0.8%)	
Hispanic	1 (0.3%)	
Gender		
Female	214 (58.8%)	10 (55.6%)
Male	150 (41.2%)	8 (44.4%)

[a] $n = 364$. [b] $n = 18$.

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