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Manuscripts are accepted on a rolling basis, and may be submitted electronically at any time. Manuscripts should conform to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA). Manuscripts should not exceed 8,000 words including references (although exceptions may be made at the editor's discretion) and should not have been published in any prior form. The journal follows a policy of blind review; authors should avoid any identification in the body of the manuscript or abstract.

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1. A letter to the editor with the title and full names of author(s), affiliation, contact information, email, and telephone number sent in the body of an email.
2. The complete manuscript with 5–7 keywords, references, tables and figures in a word document without author information.
3. A 75–150 word abstract in a word document without author information.

Table of Contents

Political Sex Scandal News Stories and Personal Fear of Betrayal: An Online Experiment

GINA MASULLO CHEN, HINDA MANDELL, AND JOHN M. WOLF

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This study aimed to examine empirically whether news stories about political sex scandals could prime people to worry about their own relationships or view sexual betrayal more negatively. An online experiment ($N = 231$) reveals that reading news stories about political sex scandals does not prime people to worry about the health of their own relationships or sexual betrayal. Rather, relationship dissatisfaction and preexisting attitudes toward sexual infidelity explain how they feel about infidelity more than what they read in the news. Results are discussed in relation to priming theory.

KEYWORDS: Priming, sex scandal, news, sexual betrayal, infidelity

American political sex scandals represent recurring phenomena that are as old as the Republic (Summers, 2000). But fervent media coverage is a significantly more recent phenomenon. Sex scandals among those with political power have proliferated in American news reports, from presidential candidate Gary Hart's "Monkey Business" in 1987 to President Bill Clinton's involvement with Monica Lewinsky in the 1990s to the more recent sexting incidents of former New York congressman Anthony Weiner from 2011 to

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2017. From 2004 to 2009 alone, for example, seven politicians of national prominence were embroiled in sex scandals that were featured prominently in national American news reports (Capuzzo, 2004; Cerabino, 2008; Copeland & Hesse, 2008; Druckerman, 2007; Garrett, 2007; Murray, 2007). Political sex scandals can generate a moral discourse about sex, gender, and power (Bauer, 2008; Berlant & Duggan, 2001; Thompson, 1995), yet little quantitative research has examined how these scandals or the discourses about them affect people (Apostolidis & Williams, 2004; Lull & Hinerman, 1997). Although it is not possible to explain definitively the reason for this gap, as scholars, we can reasonably assume that it exists, in part, because some academics have dismissed scandal research as too sensational to be the object of serious inquiry (West, 2007). We suggest that recent events show that that viewpoint may be changing, underscoring the importance of this study. For example, in the past year, an FBI investigation into Weiner's illicit sexts led the federal agency to reopen its probe into presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's private e-mail server use shortly before the 2016 presidential election (Weiser & Rashbaum, 2017). Clinton blamed that turn of events as contributing to her loss to President Donald Trump (Whitesides, 2017), highlighting the importance of understanding scandal in the context of American politics. This study aimed to fill this gap by testing empirically whether news stories about political sex scandals encourage people to worry about their own relationships or view sexual betrayal more negatively.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Study Relevance

The Pew Research Center found that scandal stories take up much of the news cycle (Anderson, 2013). For example, coverage of former New York governor Eliot Spitzer's prostitution ring entanglement occupied 23% of the news cycle from March 10 to 16, 2008, when

he resigned in disgrace (Anderson, 2013). Media coverage of former Idaho senator Larry Craig occupied 17% of the news cycle from June 22 to 28, 2009 (Anderson, 2013), after suspicions of his lewd conduct in a Minneapolis airport surfaced. Similarly, coverage of then South Carolina governor Mark Sanford's adulterous affair occupied 11% of the news cycle at its height, from June 22 to 28, 2009 (Anderson, 2013). Over time, media coverage of politicians' mistakes has been found to proliferate, as stories about one scandal foster interest about other scandals, crowding out other news (Balkin, 1999).

With so much media attention devoted to covering powerful individuals as they fall from grace, it is necessary to apply an empirical lens to discover how this coverage affects people. Although we do not assume a direct effect, we do know from communication theory, and agenda setting in particular, that media tell us not only "what to think about" but also "how to think about" issues, people, events, and problems within our culture (Baran & Davis, 2011, p. 297). With substantial news coverage devoted to political sex scandals, and given the dramatic and intriguing story lines these events convey, we expect people to follow these stories with curiosity. We know from the uses and gratifications theory that "people's use of media and the gratification they seek from it are inextricably intertwined with the world in which they live" (Baran & Davis, 2011, p. 403). Although we understand the criticism of this theory—that people's media use and consumption bend toward passivity and habit—we reject the assertion "that it makes no sense to ask people about it" (Baran & Davis, 2011, p. 252) as anti-intellectual and nihilistic. By probing how people react to news coverage of these events that receive prominent coverage, we can better understand the impact of such coverage on news consumers and how it triggers a psychological–emotional response. While the thesis of Kraus and Davis's (1976) prominent research *The Effects of Mass Communication on Political Behavior* took the

position that mass media are linked to American political behavior, "little attention [in the book] is paid to psychological explanations of media effects" (Darcy, 1978), as noted in a review of the book. Therefore this research can contribute to the literature by offering the psychological impact of consuming political sex scandal stories on people's personal lives. Future research can probe how this presumed impact influences political behavior.

In addition, this topic is worth studying because people gravitate to news coverage of scandal (Bird, 2003). As Shoemaker (1996) argued persuasively, people are evolutionarily programmed to pay attention to news that is unusual, is sensational, or involves controversy or conflict. She traced this propensity to focus on deviant news to early humans, who were more likely to live long enough to pass on their genes to future generations if they paid attention to potential threats in their environment, such as a tiger outside the cave. This stays with us today, as people are more attuned to information that is not routine, and journalists are trained to select news that is deviant (Shoemaker, 1996; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013).

People also remember news and information that feature a vibrant and dramatic component, such as sex scandal stories, better than less narrative-driven content, because they become engrossed in the story (Bird, 2003). For example, people pay more attention to narrative-driven content than to content that merely reported facts and figures (Bird, 2003). People pay more attention to emotionally arousing messages and remembered them better (Bolls, Lang, & Potter, 2001; Grabe, Lang, & Zhao, 2003). Because of this, political sex scandals draw media attention and attract an audience because of their deviance and human drama (Bauer, 2008). People talk about these stories among their friends, heightening interest (Thompson, 1995, 2000). Garment (1991) argued that "scandal is one of the most pervasive elements of our history" and that its moralizing nature makes it "utterly irresistible" (p. 2). Yet scandal is not merely a tantalizing topic, because the frequency of scandal

coverage in the news can foster a culture of political and governmental mistrust (Sabato, 2000).

Sex Scandals

For a news event to be considered a scandal, it must take place in private and violate social norms, and the person doing it must be caught or accused of wrongdoing (Thompson, 2000). In addition, the actions must be made public, and some people must speak out against the behavior of the transgressing politicians (Mandell, 2012a, 2017). Therefore, in this current study, a political sex scandal included all these elements and involved a fictional elected official who got caught violating social norms regarding sexual fidelity.

Prior research (Mandell, 2012a, 2012b, 2015, 2017) has found that news coverage of political sex scandals depicts a general fear surrounding promiscuity that violates monogamous marriages. An analysis of 437 news articles about seven political sex scandals from 2004 to 2009 (Mandell, 2012a, 2012b) found that news coverage focused heavily on what appeared to be a public fear of marital betrayal. Trend stories that emerged from this media coverage broadened the scope of the scandal stories by characterizing these scandals as events that affected all women concerned about their husbands' sexual faithfulness. Therefore media coverage moved the scandal from an event limited to a specific, actual married politician and his wife to a more general cultural conversation about male infidelity. Headlines in a textual analysis of political sex scandal news stories, such as "Public Infidelity, Private Debate: Not My Husband (Right?)," "In One Man's Fall, Bruises for All," "A Woman Betrayed With a Future to Ponder," and "First Comes Love and Now Forgiveness?" (Grondahl, 2008; Gustafson, 2009; Hesse, 2008; Hoffman, 2008; Mandell, 2012a, 2012b) revealed a public fearful of male infidelity. This earlier research prompted this current study's empirical examination of whether reading political sex scandal news

stories encouraged people to worry about their own relationships or have more negative attitudes toward sexual betrayal.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Priming provides a framework for understanding the questions in this study. Priming is the effect of some type of stimulus—such as a form of media—on how people respond to something else in a relatively short time period (Roskos-Ewoldsen & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2009). It is usually viewed as a cognitive process. This means a certain type of news story makes a particular topic or aspect of a topic more readily available in a person's memory, so that topic influences people's attitudes or emotions (Roskos-Ewoldsen & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2009). It is important to note that people do not have to realize the connection between the news story and the effect for it to occur. For example, when people see a cockroach, they immediately activate a memory of the pest without thinking about their feelings toward it (Roskos-Ewoldsen & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2009). The so-called priming hypothesis suggests that the media can prime the issues that people view as important in politics (Scheufele & Tewksburg, 2007). For example, Sheafer (2007) found that if people were exposed to positive news about the economy, they were more likely to the view the incumbent party's economic strategy favorably and to see this topic as important. Another study (Kim, Han, & Scheufele, 2010) found that news reports in South Korea influenced the way people there evaluated their president.

This current study aimed to expand on this framework by examining if this hypothesis could be tailored to political sex scandal news stories. This study examined whether these stories would prime people emotionally to worry about their own relationships and have more negative attitudes regarding sexual betrayal. The idea was that when people read about another person's infidelity, it might trigger the thought, *Would my partner do that?* The

rationale for this question came from prior research (Mandell, 2012a, 2012b) that found news stories frequently suggested this worry. Decades of research have shown that media can influence people's emotions and how they think about their own lives (e.g., Myrick & Wojdynski, 2015; Unz, Schwab, & Winterhoff-Spurk, 2008), and people frequently feel empathy for people they see or learn about through the media. In fact, the literature on elevation theory suggests quite strongly that media messages—from news to movies—can elevate or deflate people's moods or emotions (Myrick & Wojdynski, 2015; Oliver, Hartmann, Woolley, 2012). In addition, worrying about the health of one's own relationship is a seminal topic that goes to a core issue for many people. This background supports our contention that merely reading about a politician's scandal could impact how people feel about their own relationships. We proposed that merely reading a news story about a politician's infidelity could foster an empathetic response as readers put themselves in the shoes of the scorned wives in these scenarios. While certainly politicians have power that the average person does not have, we suggest that reading about a politician's infidelity would make the issue of infidelity generally more salient in people's minds. The way media salience operates, people are exposed to something—in this case, a politician's scandal—and the topic becomes more readily retrievable in people's memories (Zajonc, 2001). This operates at a subconscious level (Albertson, 2011), so people are not specifically thinking directly about the link between the news story and their own situations. However, because people are naturally self-focused (Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 1998), it is not a very far theoretical jump to suggest that when the issue of infidelity becomes more salient, people will connect it, at least at some level, to their own experiences. Therefore this study proposed that subjects who read stories about political sex scandals would be more likely to worry about their own relationships and view sexual betrayal more negatively than those who read unrelated

stories. To examine these questions, this study focused on two main concepts: relational security and attitude toward sexual betrayal.

Relational Security

For this concept, a definition was used from prior research on romantic relationships (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985) that defined relational security as the extent to which a person feels sexually secure and trusting that his or her romantic partner will not stray. This concept also included fear of sexual betrayal, or that one cannot satisfy one's own partner sexually or emotionally, which was drawn from the relationship research of Hazan and Shaver (1987) and Feldman, Cauffman, Jensen, and Arnett (2000). So in this current study, relational security was related to a fear or anxiety about the health of one's own relationship after reading a news story about the infidelity of a politician embroiled in a sex scandal.

Attitude Toward Sexual Betrayal

This concept was defined as it has been in prior research (Feldman et al., 2000; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). It encompassed people's attitudes toward relationship fidelity and feelings about whether unfaithfulness should be permissible in a monogamous relationship and whether a person could forgive a cheating partner.

On the basis of the literature and theory discussed earlier, this study proposed that people who read political sex scandal news stories would be primed to worry about the security of their own relationships and to view infidelity more negatively than those who read news stories unrelated to sex scandals. This framework leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: Reading political sex scandal news stories will prime worry about one's own relationship to a greater extent than news stories in the control condition.

H2: Reading political sex scandal news stories will prime a negative attitude toward sexual betrayal to a greater extent than news stories in the control condition.

METHOD

Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants through a link to an online experiment embedded in a SurveyGizmo questionnaire that was spread through e-mail and social media. A screening question asked whether participants had ever been involved in a romantic relationship, and only subjects who answered *yes* could complete the experiment. Participants (N = 231) were on average 21.77 years old (SD = 7.05) with 14.05 years of education (2.05). Most were female (75.8%) and White (74%).

Design and Procedures

Subjects participated on their own computers, and SurveyGizmo randomly assigned them to either the political sex scandal condition or the control. In the political sex scandal condition, participants read two news stories about hypothetical political sex scandals. In the control, participants read two news stories about a water commission meeting. The control condition was intentionally benign because, as Berger (2015) has explained, the heart of an experiment is comparing people who experienced the stimulus to those in the control group, who did not experience the stimulus. In media research, scholars suggest using similar media content (a news story, television show, etc.) for both the experimental and control conditions, but the media content in the control should include no aspects of the stimulus being tested. For example, scholars who study the effects of televised aggression suggest using a control condition that depicts a nonaggressive television show so it can be compared with a program that displays aggression (Berger, 2015; Thorson, Wicks, & Leshner, 2012). Our aim was to be comparable

to this example, so we used news stories in both the experimental and control conditions, but the control included no elements of a sex scandal, as that was our stimulus.

All participants answered demographic questions and a series of questions that served as dependent measures, which are detailed in the following paragraphs. Participants answered the dependent measures after reading both stories, and the measures assessed the influence of both stories.

Stimuli

One of the researchers, who previously worked as a professional journalist, created the news stories for the project. Hypothetical sex scandals were used so that participants' opinions about real politicians would not influence the results. Ensuring that participants' opinions about real politicians would not influence results was vital because much research has found that people respond very differently to media messages about politicians based on their own partisan views. People often use political affiliation as a heuristic—or shortcut—to decide what they think about a politician or his or her policies (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000). For example, Munro and colleagues (2010) found that people made prejudicial assessments of college applicants, based on political affiliation. Similarly, Meirick (2012) found that party affiliation was related to whether people believed misrepresentations in the news media. Given this background, using a real scandal would create too great a risk of tainting the experiment.

However, in an effort to be as realistic as possible, the scenarios in the hypothetical political sex scandal news stories were drawn from real scandals, using details from a textual and content analysis of 473 political sex scandal news stories (Mandell, 2012a, 2012b). The scandals involved senators to ensure the hypothetical scenarios would be believable. More than 77% of Americans do not know who their senators are (Jensen-Roberts, 2015), so the experimental

subjects would be unlikely to know the senators in our stories were not really senators.

The stories employed a male politician who was unfaithful to his spouse as the lead agent. This was done so the hypothetical sex scandals followed the common cultural script of the American sex scandal, where every major political sex scandal has involved a male as the lead actor (Apostolidis & Williams, 2004). The stories used as stimuli are provided in the appendix.

Dependent Measures

Threat to one's relationship security. This concept was measured in two ways. For both sets of questions, wording was in the past tense for participants who had previously indicated that they were not currently in a significant romantic relationship.

Relationship trust index. The first set of questions was based on Rempel and colleagues' (1985) trust scale. On a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*), participants rated their responses to two statements: "I feel secure in my relationship" and "I trust my partner." Their answers were averaged. This created an index that was found to have high reliability ($M = 5.66$, $SD = 0.14$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$).

Relationship security index. The second set of statements to measure the concept of threat to one's relationship security was adapted from several prior studies of relationships and sex scandals (Mandell, 2012a; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), participants rated their agreement to four statements: "I am not sure about my partner's feelings toward me," "I'm unsure about the future of our relationship together," "I am not sure if my partner finds our joint sex life fulfilling," and "I don't think I'll ever be able to satisfy my partner's sexual longings." These responses were averaged into an index with acceptable reliability ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.17$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$).

Negative attitude toward sexual betrayal. This was operationalized using four single measures adapted from the literature (Feldman et al., 2000; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Subjects rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) their agreement with the following: "Sexual betrayal is humiliating" ($M = 6.36$, $SD = 1.11$), "Sexual betrayal is one of my biggest relationship concerns" ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 2.08$), and "If my partner were to cheat on me, I'd never be able to forgive him/her" ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.73$). Two additional statements were reverse coded before analysis: "If my partners had sex with someone other than me, I'd eventually be able to forgive him/her" ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.64$) and "I would permit my partner to have sex with people other than myself" ($M = 1.45$, $SD = 1.24$).

Control Variables

To better understand the influence of political sex scandal news stories, the following control variables were considered in all analyses.

Attitudes toward sexual behavior. Because preexisting attitudes about sexual behavior may influence study results, an adaption of the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (Penke, 2011) was used as a control. Subjects rated their agreement on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) with the following statements: "Sex without love is OK," "I can imagine myself being comfortable and enjoying casual sex with different partners," "I would be willing to explore a non-monogamous relationship arrangement if it was important to my significant other," "I would feel comfortable if I learned that my closest non-sexual friend was in a consensual non-monogamous relationship," "I do not want to have sex with a person until I am sure that we will have a long-term, serious relationship," and "I believe that monogamy is more likely than any other romantic arrangement to result in a successful long-term relationship." The last two statements were reverse coded before all were averaged into an index with

acceptable reliability (M = 3.38, SD = 1.48, Cronbach's α = .75).

Relationship satisfaction. Because couples' satisfaction with their own relationships might influence results, this concept was used as a control. Participants rated their satisfaction with their current significant relationships, or the last ones they had if they were not currently in relationships, on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*very dissatisfied*) to 7 (*very satisfied*; M = 5.31, SD = 1.68). As noted earlier, people who reported never being in a relationship were excluded from the experiment.

RESULTS

Hierarchical ordinary least squares regression was used to test the two hypotheses. This was done so multiple control variables could be examined along with the focal independent variable, the experimental condition. To conduct this analysis, the political sex scandal condition was coded 1, and the control was coded 0.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that people who read political sex scandal news stories would be primed to question the security of their own relationships to a greater extent than participants in the control condition, who read stories about a water commission meeting.

Two separate regression analyses were run to test this hypothesis, because the concept was measured using two indices. The first analysis used the relationship trust index as the dependent variable. In Model 1, the effect of the two control variables—attitudes toward sexual behavior and relationship satisfaction—was examined. The overall model was significant (R^2 = .22, F = 27.12, p < .001; Table 1). Results showed that people who were dissatisfied in their own current or former romantic relationships (β = −.47, p < .001) were significantly more worried about threats to their own relationships than those who were satisfied in their romantic relationships. People's general attitude about sexual behavior did

not show a significant correlation ($\beta = .06$, $p > .05$). In Model 2, the effect of reading political sex scandal news stories was tested, and the overall model remained significant ($R^2 = .22$, $F = 18.03$, $p < .001$). However, results showed that reading the stories did not prime people to worry about their relationships, as the standardized coefficient for the experimental condition was not significant ($\beta = -.02$, $p > .05$). People who were dissatisfied in their relationships were significantly more worried about their partners cheating than those who were satisfied ($\beta = -.47$, $p < .001$). Attitudes toward sexual betrayal still produced no significant correlation ($\beta = .05$, $p > .05$). Therefore relationship satisfaction explained 22% of why people were worried about their own relationships.

In the second analysis, the relationship security index was the dependent variable. In Model 1, the effect of the two control variables—attitudes toward sexual behavior and relationship satisfaction—was examined. The overall model was significant ($R^2 = .20$, $F = 24$, $p < .001$). Relationship satisfaction showed a significant correlation ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$), but attitudes toward sexual behavior did not ($\beta = .06$, $p > .05$). This showed that those who were satisfied in their own current or former romantic relationships were significantly more worried about the security of their own relationships than were those who were dissatisfied in their romantic relationships. In Model 2, the experimental condition was entered, and the equation remained significant ($R^2 = .20$, $F = 15.94$, $p < .001$). However, condition did not produce a significant relationship ($\beta = .06$, $p > .05$), suggesting that the news stories did not prime people to worry about their relationships. Relationship satisfaction continued to show a significant relationship ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$), but attitudes toward sexual behavior continued to show no correlation ($\beta = .06$, $p > .05$). Therefore preexisting relationship satisfaction explained 20% of the variance in whether people felt secure in their relationships, and the news stories did not produce a priming effect. Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Table 1. *Hierarchical Regression Results for Two Dependent Variables Measuring Feelings Toward One's Own Relationship*

Variable	Relationship Trust Index		Relationship Security Index	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Relationship satisfaction, β (*SE*)	−0.47*** (0.04)	−0.47*** (0.05)	0.45*** (0.05)	0.45*** (0.05)
Attitudes toward sexual behavior, β (*SE*)	0.06 (0.06)	0.06 (0.06)	0.06 (0.06)	0.06 (0.06)
Condition, β (*SE*)		−0.02 (0.16)		−0.02 (0.17)
Intercept	4.34	4.38	4.29	4.32
F value	27.12***	18.03***	24.00***	15.94***
R^2	0.22	0.22	0.20	0.20
Adjusted R^2	0.21	0.21	0.19	0.19

Note. All are 7-point scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). [b]Questions were posed in the past tense for subjects not currently in a romantic relationship.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that people who read political sex scandal news stories would be primed to have a more negative attitude toward sexual betrayal than those who read the news stories in the control condition. Five hierarchical regressions were run to test this hypothesis with each of the five dependent variables. For each analysis, the two control variables—attitudes toward sexual behavior and relationship satisfaction—were examined first, and condition was added in a second model.

When "sexual betrayal is humiliating" was the dependent variable, the first model was significant ($R^2 = .08$, $F = 7.78$, $p < .01$; Table 2). Attitudes toward sexual betrayal showed a significant negative relationship ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .01$), suggesting that those with more traditional views on sexual behavior would see betrayal as more humiliating. Relationship satisfaction produced no significant correlation ($\beta = .12$, $p > .05$). In the second model, condition was entered, and the overall model remained significant ($R^2 = .08$, $F = 5.57$, $p < .01$). However, condition did not produce a significant relationship ($\beta = .08$, $p > .05$). This showed that attitude toward sexual behavior alone explained 8% of the variance in whether people saw sexual betrayal as humiliating, and the news stories did not prime people's attitudes in this regard.

When "sexual betrayal is one of my biggest relationship concerns" was the dependent variable, the first model was significant ($R^2 = .10$, $F = 10.07$, $p < .001$). Relationship satisfaction showed a significant negative relationship ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .001$), suggesting people who were dissatisfied in their relationships were significantly more worried about sexual betrayal than those who were satisfied. Attitude toward sexual betrayal also showed a significant negative correlation ($\beta = -.16$, $p < .05$), suggesting that those with more traditional views on sexual behavior would see sexual betrayal as a larger concern. In Model 2, experimental condition was entered, and the overall equation remained significant ($R^2 = .10$, $F = 6.73$, $p < .001$). Relationship satisfaction and attitude toward sexual behavior showed

Table 2. *Hierarchical Regression Results for Each of the Five Dependent Variables Measuring Attitude Toward Sexual Betrayal*

	"Sexual betrayal is humiliating."		"Sexual betrayal is one of my biggest relationship concerns."		"If my partner had sex with someone other than me, I'd eventually be able to forgive him/her."		"If my partner were to cheat on me, I'd never be able to forgive him/her."		"I would permit my partner to have sex with people other than myself."	
Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Relationship satisfaction, β (*SE*)	0.12 (0.05)	0.13 (0.05)	−0.27*** (0.09)	−0.27*** (0.11)	−0.07 (0.07)	−0.06 (0.07)	0.09 (0.08)	0.09 (0.08)	−0.03 (0.05)	−0.03 (0.05)
Attitudes toward sexual behavior, β (*SE*)	−0.25** (0.06)	−0.25** (0.06)	−0.16* (0.11)	−0.16* (0.11)	0.33*** (0.09)	0.33*** (0.09)	−0.25*** (0.10)	−0.25*** (0.10)	0.46*** (0.07)	0.46*** (0.05)
Condition, β (*SE*)		0.08 (0.16)		0.03 (0.32)		0.09 (0.25)		0.002 (0.29)		−0.01 (0.19)
Intercept	6.60	6.44	6.81	6.71	1.72	1.45	5.34	5.33	0.03	0.06
F value	7.78**	5.57**	10.07***	6.73***	12.17***	8.67***	7.19**	4.77**	25.18***	16.71***
R^2	0.08	0.08	0.10	0.10	0.11	0.12	0.07	0.07	0.21	0.21
Adjusted R^2	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.08	0.10	0.11	0.06	0.06	0.20	0.20

Note. All are 7-point scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). [b]Questions were posed in the past tense for subjects not currently in a romantic relationship. Statements were reverse scored before analysis so that they would be on the same scale as other measures.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

the same correlations as in Model 1, but condition did not show a significant relationship ($\beta = .03$, $p > .05$), showing that the news stories did not prime concerns about sexual betrayal. Relationship satisfaction and attitudes toward sexual betrayal explained 10% of the variance in people's views on sexual betrayal.

In the analysis with the dependent variable about willingness to forgive a partner who had sex with someone else, the overall equation was significant ($R^2 = .11$, $F = 12.73$, $p < .001$). Attitude toward sexual behavior showed a significant positive correlation ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$), suggesting that those with less traditional views on sexual behavior would be more likely to forgive a cheating partner. Relationship satisfaction showed no significant correlation ($\beta = -.06$, $p > .05$). In Model 2, the experimental condition was entered into the equation, which remained significant ($R^2 = .12$, $F = 8.67$, $p < .001$). Condition did not produce a significant correlation ($\beta = .09$, $p > .05$), but attitudes toward sexual behavior produced the same significant correlation and relationship satisfaction remained nonsignificant, as in Model 1. So again, this suggested that the news stories did not prime attitudes about sexual betrayal. Attitudes toward sexual betrayal explained 12% of the variance in whether people would forgive a partner who had sex with someone else.

In the fourth analysis, "if my partner were to cheat on me, I'd never be able to forgive him/her" was the dependent variable. In Model 1, the overall equation was significant ($R^2 = .07$, $F = 7.19$, $p < .01$). Attitudes toward sexual behavior showed a significant negative relationship ($\beta = -.35$, $p < .001$), suggesting that those with more traditional views on sexual behavior would be less willing to forgive infidelity. Relationship satisfaction did not show a significant correlation ($\beta = .09$, $p > .05$). In Model 2, condition was entered, and the overall model remained significant ($R^2 = .07$, $F = 4.77$, $p < .01$), but condition did not show a significant relationship ($\beta = .002$, $p > .05$). As in Model 1, relationship satisfaction produced no significant correlation, and attitude toward sexual behavior

produced the same positive relationship. This further confirmed that the news stories did not prime people's attitudes toward sexual betrayal. Attitude toward sexual behavior alone explained 7% of the variance in whether people would forgive a cheating partner.

The fifth and final analysis of the dependent measures was "I would permit my partner to have sex with people other than myself." The overall equation was significant in Model 1 ($R^2 = .21$, $F = 25.88$, $p < .001$), and attitudes toward sexual behavior explained all the variance ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$). This suggested that those with the least traditional views on sexual behavior would be the most willing to allow sexual infidelity. In Model 2, condition was entered, and the overall equation remained significant ($R^2 = .21$, $F = 16.71$, $p < .001$). Attitude toward sexual behavior continued to exhibit the same positive significant relationship as in Model 1, and no other variable was significant. This again supports the idea that the news stories did not prime people's attitudes toward sexual betrayal. Attitude toward sexual betrayal alone explained 21% of the variance in whether people would allow a partner to have sex with another. Therefore the data did not support Hypothesis 2. For both hypotheses, gender was entered into the equation as an additional independent variable, but it produced no significant effects; therefore it was removed from the model so that we would not artificially inflate effect sizes.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to fill a gap in the literature by testing whether the theory of priming—which has been used to examine political news stories—could be extended to political sex scandal news stories. This study hypothesized that reading about political sex scandals would prime people to worry about their own relationships and view sexual betrayal more negatively. In essence, this study tested the priming hypothesis, which has found that news

stories can prime how people think about politicians or about their policies (Kim et al., 2010). The idea for this current study was based on prior qualitative research (Mandell, 2012a, 2012b) that analyzed 437 news stories about seven political sex scandals. That study found that news stories about sex scandals generated a theme of feared promiscuity. This current study aimed to test this premise empirically from this earlier research that political sex scandal news stories generate a fear of infidelity (Mandell, 2012a, 2012b).

The main finding of the current study was that political sex scandal news stories do not prime readers to worry about their own relationships or to have more negative attitudes toward sexual betrayal. Reading these stories had no effect. Instead, this study found that what influences whether people worry about their relationships or view sexual betrayal negatively is how satisfied they are in their own relationships. People who are dissatisfied in their own current or past relationships worry more about their relationships than those who are satisfied. Similarly, this study found that reading political sex scandal news stories does not influence whether people feel negatively about sexual betrayal. Instead, people's preexisting attitudes toward promiscuity are the driving force in how negatively they view sexual betrayal. People who supported traditional monogamy viewed betrayal more harshly than those who were more comfortable with less monogamous relationships. It is plausible that one reason for our results is that people enjoy reading sex scandal news stories so they can point a proverbial finger at others and judge them. Following this line of reasoning, it would make sense that sex scandal stories do not cause people to reflect on their own relationships because they are too busy judging others. Our study did not empirically test this notion, but future scholars should address this question.

Conclusion and Impact of Findings

Certainly unsupported hypotheses can be disappointing. However, without asking these empirical questions, scholars and practitioners

cannot understand the full impact—or lack of impact—that the media may have on people. While media reports may suggest that there is an impact on individuals from reading sexual scandal news stories (Mandell, 2012a, 2012b, 2017), the current study disputed this view. The current findings suggest that political sex scandals may generate a discourse about sex, gender, and power (Bauer, 2008), but the discourse does not impact how people live their own lives. In a sense, this lack of an effect is unsurprising, as decades of research have found that when the media exerts an effect, it is often limited or moderated by individual differences (Oliver & Krakowiak, 2009). However, this finding is important, because it confirms that the media has less of an effect than people sometimes imagine. Merely reading about a politician's sexual perfidy may be engaging or entertaining, but it does not influence how people see their own relationships. This is a notable finding, because it suggests that people are media literate enough to separate what goes on in the mediated world from their own experiences. From a theoretical standpoint, these findings do not support extending the priming hypothesis to political sex scandal news stories. It is worth noting that this study provides greater understanding of how priming works by showing that priming did not occur in this study.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations of this research should be noted. The experiment relied on hypothetical sex scandals, so partisanship or participants' preexisting opinions about actual politicians would not cloud the issue. However, it is plausible that results may have differed if real scandals had been used. In addition, the current research was narrow in its scope. It examined only whether reading political sex scandal news stories would prime people to worry about their own relationships or view sexual betrayal more negatively. Reactions to television stories about political sex scandals may have produced greater emotional responses and provoked different results. However, this study raised the prospect of some other questions that

are worthy of research. For example, if reading political sex scandal news stories has little impact on people, as this study found, why do people focus so much on these stories? It is worth examining if political sex scandal news stories prime people in ways other than this study tested. For instance, perhaps reading about a politician's sex scandal primes people to lower their perceptions of that politician or to vote the person out of office. These are questions worthy of study. This study examined only political sex scandals, but scandals involving celebrities also point to an area fruitful for future research. Finally, our sample was limited because the average age was 21 years old. Older subjects would likely have longer term relationships or be married, which could alter their perceptions of infidelity.

APPENDIX: NEWS STORIES USED IN THE EXPERIMENT

Control Condition

Free Water at Price Rite

Cheyenne, Wyo.—(AP) Price Rite Foods grocery chain hopes you're thirsty.

In a marketing bonanza that follows the city debate over water prices, the Cheyenne-based chain hopes to benefit from the attention drawn to last week's water commission vote.

On Friday, the commission voted to maintain water rates, while also announcing that the rates would jump by 25 percent next year.

Now, Price Rite is offering customers a "buy one get one" on all bottles of water. The chain is encouraging customers to stock up for the anticipated water price hike next year.

"We want to help our customers and our community," said Casey Whitman, CEO of the national chain.

Yet corner markets, which rely heavily on soda and water bottle sales to boost revenue, were not pleased with Price Rite's promotion.

"Just because they can afford to do this doesn't mean they should," said Pat Kane. "This really hurts us, and that's not good for the community."

Price Rite's promotion ends Sunday.

Political Sex Scandal News Story Condition

Senator Case Resigns Over Facebook Scandal

Washington, D.C.—(AP) Steven Case, the senior Wyoming statesman, ended his political career Monday, when he abruptly resigned at a media-packed press conference at the Cheyenne Sheraton. He

began his political career there in 1995, when he first announced his run for the U.S. Senate.

"I have embarrassed my family, my country and myself," said Case, as his wife stood by his side. "I have become a distraction and I have done wrong. It is for this reason I offered my resignation earlier this morning."

The media storm surrounding Case and his fake Facebook account began Friday when his legislative aide, Jason Suthers, released messages Case sent to 27 women under the pseudonym of "Dan Delaney." The messages were sexual in nature and indicated that he had sexual relations with a number of women.

Suthers' sister, Josie Suthers, was one of the women sexually solicited by Case. She said her brother was blackmailed by the Wyoming senator in an effort to prevent him from publicly releasing the messages. Jason Suthers did not return multiple calls seeking comment. He has not yet released a statement on his involvement in these events.

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Testing the Communibiological Paradigm: The Similarity of Fraternal and Identical Twins Across Three Communication Variables

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Since the introduction of the communibiological paradigm, the role of genetic factors in communication processes has generated debate among communication researchers. Previous studies using twin designs to estimate heritability have found more similarities between identical than fraternal twins across a number of trait communication constructs. However, Hazel, Wongprasert, and Ayres studied twins and found insignificant differences among identical and fraternal twins across four communication variables. Given this discrepancy, the current study sought to replicate the Hazel et al. study using rigorous zygosity identification protocols. Results indicate that identical twins are more similar than fraternal twins across all variables tested and that significant variance across all three variables can be attributed to genetic inheritance. The implications of these findings are examined.

KEYWORDS: Communibiology, twins, communication competence, speech anxiety, willingness to communicate

Since the introduction of the communibiological paradigm (see Beatty & McCroskey, 2009; Beatty, McCroskey, & Valencic, 2001), the role of genetically inherited traits on a number of communication

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constructs has seen increasing visibility and influence in published communication research (see Floyd & Denes, 2015; Hickson & Stacks, 2010). Informed by Eysenck's (1986) *Big Three* genetically based personality traits of introversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism, the communibiological perspective as advanced by Beatty et al. (2001) contends that traitlike communication behaviors are strongly linked to genetic predispositions and that these static, inborn neurobiological substrates account for a significant amount of variance associated with social anxiety and other communication avoidance constructs. To buttress this model, communication scholars have advanced evidence supporting communibiology. For example, McCroskey (1997) reported that willingness to communicate (WTC), a variable linked to communication apprehension (CA) and reticence, is negatively correlated with introversion. Neulip, Chadouir, and McCroskey (2003) found that CA was significantly correlated with extraversion and neuroticism in a multicultural sample. In addition, Heisel, LaFrance, and Beatty (2003), analyzing both self-report and observational data, reported that verbal aggressiveness and affinity-seeking communication behaviors are related to the genetically influenced traits (see Eysenck, 1986) of extraversion and psychoticism. Such findings provide empirical support for the claim that genetically based temperament has a meaningful impact on a number of communication variables, which in turn has implications for both advancing relevant theory and informing best practices for communication pedagogy.

In advancing communibiology, McCroskey and Beatty (2000) have also called into question the influence of environmental experiences, learning, and conditioning on shaping, exacerbating, and/or ameliorating the presence and impact of such phenomena as speech anxiety, stating that "recent advances in neurobiology and psychology have raised serious questions about the generality and usefulness of the social learning model upon which a meaningful portion of the curriculum of many communication departments is based" (p. 1). Essentially, these authors contended that social

learning does not adequately explain some communication behaviors and is of limited influence in certain communication contexts, such as public speakers experiencing stage fright during speeches in front of audiences (see Beatty, McCroskey, & Heisel, 1998). Not unexpectedly, this position has been challenged. Keaten, Kelly, and Phillips (2009), for example, asserted that social learning plays a significant role in the formation, manifestation, and remediation of traitlike communication variables such as reticence and CA, a view consistent with other communication scholars supporting a social learning perspective in communication research (e.g., Condit, 2000). Evidence exists supporting both social learning and communibiological perspectives (e.g., see Ayres, Hopf, & Will, 2000; Keaten, Kelly, & Finch, 2003; Keaten et al., 2009; McCroskey, Heisel, & Richmond, 2001); however, the claim that genetics plays an influential role in human communication is plausible and warrants further empirical grounding, especially since neurobiological factors seem particularly salient when theorizing the causes of traitlike communication behaviors.

One way in which scholars identify and measure the impact of genetic influences is through the study of identical and fraternal twins. Specifically, twin research protocols call for examining and comparing correlational differences among identical (monozygotic; MZ) twin pairs, who share 100% of their DNA, and fraternal (dizygotic; DZ) twins, who share 50% of the same DNA. In investigating how genetic heritability may influence communication constructs and behavior, Beatty, Marshall, and Rudd (2001) used a classical twin design and analysis and found that some components of communication adaptability (i.e., social composure, wit) are highly heritable, while other components (i.e., articulation ability, social disclosure) have no heritability influences. Also, Beatty, Heisel, Hall, Levine, and LaFrance (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of twin studies using the most conservative estimates of heritability and determined that social anxiety constructs as well as personality orientations like extraversion and gregariousness are largely

inherited characteristics. Such findings demonstrate the value of twin study designs in investigating the degree to which communication characteristics are influenced by genetic inheritance or other situational factors.

Given this previous research and the assertions of the communibiological paradigm, one could reasonably expect that differences between identical and fraternal twins will be magnified when the communication behaviors are traitlike, that is, influenced by stable predispositions across multiple contexts. For instance, identical twins, who share 100% of the same DNA, should report more similar levels of stage fright than fraternal twins, who only share 50% of the same DNA. Despite this seemingly defensible rationale, a previous study conducted by Hazel, Wongprasert, and Ayres (2006) employed a classical twin design study that tested these differences among twins across traitlike communication variables (e.g., CA, WTC, and self-perceived communication competence) and found that heritability made no significant contribution to any of these constructs—a finding that potentially vitiates the claims of Beatty et al. (2001). However, a stated limitation of the Hazel et al. (2006) study was the zygosity identification protocol, which relied on self-reported identification of twin type without the corroboration of DNA identification. With this limitation, error variance may have been present that undermines the validity of the conclusions of the aforementioned findings. Therefore the purpose of the present study is to test the influence of genetic inheritance on traitlike communication characteristics after controlling for potential error related to zygosity identification.

HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The present study seeks to follow the Hazel et al. (2006) study vis-à-vis design, approach, and theoretical rationale, as explained earlier. One difference in the current study is a more focused measurement

of public speaking anxiety, because many intervention approaches for ameliorating communication anxiety directly target public speaking contexts. To that end, the Audience Anxiety Scale (AAS; Leary, 1983a) was employed to measure public speaking apprehension instead of the public speaking subscale of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA; Levine & McCroskey, 1990), because previous research (see Hazel, 2004) has found that the public speaking subscale of the PRCA yields lower reliabilities (e.g., .69, .77) than the AAS (.90, .89, .91), as reported by Leary (1983b) and Hazel, McMahon, and Schmidt (2011), respectively. Accordingly, the AAS was selected to provide a more precise operationalization of trait public speaking stage fright. As explained by Beatty et al. (2001), classic twin research studies usually focus on the magnitude of difference between twin types to generate heritability estimates; hence a research question exploring the degree of heritability across these variables is also warranted. Thus the following three hypotheses and research question were advanced:

H1: Identical twins will be more similar than fraternal twins vis-à-vis self-reported audience anxiety.

CA was conceptualized as traitlike and intractable under certain circumstances (McCroskey, 1997; McCroskey, Richmond, & McCroskey 2009), such as public speaking situations. Beatty, McCroskey, and Floyd (2009) also demonstrated that extraversion and neuroticism function in ways suggesting that such related anxiety is an in-born personality characteristic. Accordingly, we expect that identical twins would report being more similar vis-à-vis public speaking stage fright than would fraternal twins:

H2: Identical twins will be more similar than fraternal twins regarding self-reported willingness to communicate.

McCroskey (1997) and McCroskey et al. (2009) posited that WTC is an empirically grounded trait variable with regularities across communication contexts. Thus we predict identical twins to report being more similar to their twins than fraternal twins with regard to WTC:

H3: Identical twins will be more similar than fraternal twins vis-à-vis self-reported communication competence.

McCroskey et al. (2009) contended that communication competence is relatively invariant across situations. McCroskey et al. (2001) found that genetics has a significant effect on self-perceived communication competence. Given these findings, self-perceived communication competence (SPCC) is traitlike in nature, and identical twins should be more similar than fraternal twins in their perceptions of communication competence:

RQ1: To what extent are audience anxiety, willingness to communicate, and self-perceived communication competence heritable?

This question has direct implications for the working communibiological model. If a significant amount of variance among these variables can be attributed to genetics, the underpinning claim of communibiology that heritability contributes significantly to these communication traits is supported. Conversely, if these variables are shown to have limited or no heritable influence, then Beatty and McCroskey's (2009) argument that their paradigm provides a viable model for communication research regarding trait constructs is undermined.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Two hundred forty-six twins recruited for this study filled out an array of self-report measures electronically using an online survey delivery method. Each twin was e-mailed a link to the survey and asked to fill it out independently of his or her twin. These twins were found by using a twin directory, by soliciting volunteers in classes at three colleges in the western United States, and through network sampling. Twin zygosity was determined by adapting an approach Reed et al. (2005) tested in which a zygosity questionnaire was compared to DNA testing and found to be concordant in 96.8% (519/536) of the cases tested. Specifically, Reed et al. compared the questionnaire zygosity classification of a subset of twins from the National Academy of Sciences–National Research Council (NAS–NRC) veteran twin registry against DNA testing in which two questions were used to determine zygosity: "As children were you and your twin alike as two peas in a pod or of only ordinary family resemblance?" and "In childhood, did your parents, brothers and sisters, or teachers have trouble in telling you apart?" Twins were classified as identical if one or both twins gave "alike as two peas in a pod; yes" responses and as fraternal if one or both twins gave "only of ordinary family resemblance; no" responses. Given these results, these authors recommended estimating this questionnaire method as 95% accurate in classifying twin type. In the present study, twin pairs were linked to each other for comparison via demographic information (e.g., birth dates, family names), and we required 100% consistency between twin pairs' responses to these questions, classifying any twin pair as "zygosity unknown" in cases where conflicting or incomplete information was given. This identification protocol resulted in the classification of 56 twin pairs that were used in the comparative analysis: 37 pairs of identical twins and 19 pairs of fraternal twins (i.e., 112 participants; 46% of

the total sample). These twins reported age ranges from 18 to 68 years, and they came from a variety of backgrounds and cultures (e.g., students, working adults, professionals, Saudis, Japanese, Caucasian Americans). Sixty-six percent of the respondents were women. Data-gathering procedures employed in this study were approved by the institutional review board.

Measures

Data were collected utilizing several self-report instruments. These instruments included the AAS (Leary, 1983a), the WTC scale (McCroskey, 1992), and the SPCC scale (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988) scales. Each scale is described in the following pages.

Audience Anxiety Scale. The measure assesses self-reported social anxiousness in the presence of an audience (Leary, 1983b). It is composed of 12 items, some of which require reverse coding, and directs respondents to indicate "the degree to which each statement is characteristic or true of you" on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). Leary reported that the AAS is a more comprehensive measure of communication anxiety in public speaking situations than the PRCA (Levine & McCroskey, 1990). The AAS has demonstrated construct and criterion validity, test–retest reliability (.84), and consistent interitem reliabilities (.88 and .91; Leary, 1983b). In this study, the alpha reliability was .92.

Willingness to communicate. The WTC scale was used to collect data on an individual's perception of his or her willingness to engage in a variety of interactions (McCroskey, 1992). The WTC scale contains 12 items that tap WTC in four contexts: dyad, group, public speaking, and meeting. The alpha reliability of the WTC in this study was .82.

Self-perceived communication competence. The SPCC scale was used to collect data on an individual's view of how competent he or she was to communicate in four situations (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). The SPCC scale contains 20 items that measure

SPCC across four communication contexts: dyad, group, public speaking, and meeting. The alpha reliability of the SPCC in this study was .91.

Analysis

For the purposes of comparison with previous communication twin research, the current study employed a traditional twin analysis (see Falconer & Mackay, 1996) in which the proportion of heritability estimates were calculated by doubling the differences between MZ and DZ average correlations, as displayed in Table 1. This approach, however, can result in inflated estimates of heritability (Falconer & Mackay, 1996). Thus, to determine the variance attributable to genetic influences, the identical twin correlations were used as the coefficient because "the most conservative approach to estimating heritability from twin data is to simply use the identical twin correlation as the heritability coefficient" (Beatty & McCroskey, 2009, p. 59). Fisher's *r*–*z* correlation transformation procedure was employed to test the three hypotheses.

RESULTS

Pearson product-moment correlations for all variables are listed in Table 1. Applying the accepted formula (Falconer & Mackay, 1996) for estimating variance attributable to genetics by doubling the difference between the average MZ and DZ correlations across the three variables resulted in the values audience anxiety = 1.56, WTC = 1.54, and SPCC = 1.26, results that clearly indicate that the traditionally used formula can overestimate variance attributable to genetic inheritance (because 100% of variance accounted for by genetics would yield a value of 1.0). Thus, to explore the research question, the most conservative heritability estimates, MZ correlations (with disattenuated correlations in parentheses), were used as the coefficients. This procedure yielded the following values:

audience anxiety = .84 (.91); WTC = .57 (.69); SPCC = .62 (.68). Hypothesis 1 predicted that identical twins would be more similar than fraternal twins regarding audience anxiety. Fisher's r–z test, $Z(54) = 3.83$, $p < .05$, indicated statistically significant differences in the direction predicted. Hypothesis 2 predicted that identical twins would be more similar than fraternal twins vis-à-vis WTC and was supported in the expected direction, $Z(51) = 2.41$, $p < .05$. Hypothesis 3 predicted that identical twins would be more similar than fraternal twins in regard to SPCC. Results, $Z(53) = 2.41$, $p < .05$, also support this prediction in the direction predicted. In sum, identical twins were more similar than fraternal twins across all the variables tested, and a significant amount of variance across all three variables can be attributed to genetic inheritance. The implications of these findings are examined in the following section.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, it was meant to replicate the findings of the Hazel et al. (2006) twin study, which found no significant differences between identical and fraternal twins or heritability influences across the trait communication variables tested, thus leading to the argument that the close relationship between genetics and traitlike communication behavior as advanced by Beatty and McCroskey (2009) was inaccurate. Second, to add clarification to the nature and strength of the relationship between genetic inheritance and these communication traits, it derived defensible heritability estimates for trait speech anxiety, WTC, and SPCC by using the most conservative indicators of genetic influence. Contrary to the findings of the Hazel et al. (2006) study, the current findings demonstrate that heritability plays a significant role in explaining these constructs. These results raise the question why the current findings are inconsistent with the previous Hazel et al. twin study. The most plausible answer

Table 1. *Identical and Fraternal Twin Comparisons Across Three Communication Variables*

Variable	Twin type	
	Identical	Fraternal
Audience anxiety (AA)	.84 (.91)	.06 (.07)
Willingness to communicate (WTC)	.57 (.69)	–.12 (.15)
Self-perceived communication competence (SPCC)	.62 (.68)	–.01 (.01)

Note. Correlations in parentheses are corrected for attenuation. Identical twin correlations are the estimates of heritability. Degrees of freedom are 37, 19 for AA; 36, 17 for WTC; and 36, 19 for SPCC for monozygotic and dizygotic pairs, respectively.

is that the zygosity identification method in the previous study introduced confounding variance that obscured the relationship between genetic inheritance and the variables in question. In contrast, the current study protocols included a questionnaire previously validated with DNA testing that required 100% consistency among twin pair responses for zygosity classification. Given this explanation and the results of the present study, the authors recommend disregarding the results and conclusions of the Hazel et al. study in favor of the current findings, which are more likely to accurately represent the relationship between heritability and the traitlike communication variables in question. The rationale for the hypotheses advanced in this study was based on the burgeoning literature on communibiology and the expected influence of genetics on speech anxiety, WTC, and SPCC. Beatty and McCroskey (2009) have argued that past communication research has generally ignored the significant influence of genetic inheritance on a number of communication behaviors. In fact, in some cases (e.g., CA), they contended that genetics accounts for up to 80% of the variance of the construct, a value that lies about halfway between a normative analysis (e.g., Falconer & Mackay, 1996) and the most conservative estimates (see Beatty & McCroskey, 2009). While

the present study focused more narrowly on trait speech anxiety rather than on the multidimensional CA construct, the data here indicate that Beatty et al. (1998) may have actually underestimated the influence of genetic inheritance, at least as it pertains to trait speech anxiety/stage fright. Using the most conservative estimate of heritability, this study found that up to 91% of the variance in audience anxiety may be explained by genetic inheritance, a finding that buttresses assertions advanced in the communibiological paradigm. Results also indicate a significant genetic influence for WTC and SPCC, with heritability coefficients consistent with the expected range reported in the Beatty et al. (2002) meta-analysis.

Taken together, these findings show a strong connection between an individual's genetic inheritance and trait communication orientations; that is, the primary influence of such variables may be rooted in neurobiological tendencies rather than situational influences, an assertion consistent with the working communibiological model. Because data exist on both sides of the issue, further research should be undertaken to clarify the influence and interaction of situational factors and heritability among communication variables in multiple communication contexts.

This study contains limitations that warrant acknowledgment. First, the sample size used in the analysis of fraternal twins was limited. In the present study, this limitation was due in large part to ensuring accurate zygosity classification (e.g., only 46% of the respondents were used in the analysis because of rigid identification protocols), but further testing with a larger sample is warranted. Second, three nonprobability sampling methods were employed to gather twin participants. Future research in this area would be strengthened by using probability sampling with a large twin sampling frame. In addition, this study relied solely on self-report data to measure the variables in question. Thus, to determine the precision of the heritability estimates, future studies employing observational methods are recommended.

In conclusion, the study found considerable differences between fraternal and identical twins regarding their self-perceptions of speech anxiety, WTC, and communication competence. It also determined that genetic inheritance makes a significant contribution in explaining these variables. These findings run counter to the Hazel et al. (2006) study but are consistent with the position advanced by Beatty and McCroskey (2009) and by previous communication twin research (e.g., Beatty et al., 2002; Beatty, Marshall et al., 2001). With regard to speech anxiety in particular, the results suggest that this characteristic is primarily inherited at levels exceeding the original estimates Beatty et al. (1998) advanced. Given the salience of this area of research for communication education and the paradigmatic implications for the communication field at large, continuing twin research testing other trait communication variables with multiple data-gathering approaches is warranted.

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Performing Graduate Student: Impression Management in Online Discussion Forums

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The rise of computer-mediated communication (CMC) has prompted a renewed interest in impression formation research because CMC alters available cues. This exploratory study examined the impression management strategies of graduate students online to contribute to the research on the connection between behaviors, roles, and communities in online classrooms. Applying Jones and Pittman's taxonomy of impression management strategies to a content analysis of introductory discussion board posts, results show that graduate students primarily use self-promotion followed by exemplification. Implications of how instructors might use these findings are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Impression management, online education, graduate students, computer-mediated communication, identity

What does it mean to be an online graduate student? Online graduate programs offer adult learners flexibility so they can continue to work and go to school. This mode of delivering education is also viable for higher education institutions because it allows them to reach a wider audience and increase the scale of delivery. With the continued expansion of online learning, it is important to better understand how to create effective learning spaces for students.

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Research on online teaching has identified best practices for creating community and teacher effectiveness (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Much of this research looks at learning outcome differences between face-to-face (FTF) and online learning environments. In general, this research has found that students in online learning courses performed slightly better than those in FTF classrooms (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2010).

Creating community is considered an important element of online classrooms (Collison, Elbaum, Haavind, & Tinker, 2000; Maor, 2003; Rovai, 2005). Benefits include increased engagement and helping online students feel less isolated because they are not concretely present together in physical spaces. Communities have social rules, and to be successful in communities, participants must understand their roles. That said, there is little research on the connection between online behaviors, roles, and online communities in online classrooms (Yeh, 2010). Also, there is little understanding of how graduate students perform identity in online classrooms.

Goffman's (1959) work on impression management is useful for understanding how individuals perform identity to create favorable impressions. *Impression management* is defined as "the process of controlling how one is perceived by people" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 34). Goffman's framework provides insight into how students may take on roles in different social contexts and how this performance of identity is negotiated.

Impression management occurs in both FTF and online contexts. Scholars have applied impression management to better understand CMC because users have more control over their performances. CMC can be asynchronous, and users choose which parts of their "selves" to present (Cunningham, 2013). The next step, then, is to study specific online contexts to figure out the relational dynamics in each.

In this study, we use impression management to analyze the performance of graduate students in online discussion forums.

Using Jones and Pittman's (1982) taxonomy of impression management as a guide, the goal of this research is to explore the types of performances graduate students enact in online classrooms at two points in time: as new graduate students and again as more "settled" graduate students. Implications for communication in online instruction are discussed.

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

To begin, in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) likened interpersonal interactions to a stage performance. Goffman wrote, "When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him" (p. 2). He used the metaphor of the stage to illustrate how this performance takes place. Goffman saw self-presentation as a two-step process. First, individuals determine the type of impression they want to give off (in this case, graduate student), then individuals develop strategies to manage this process. Key to this definition is the notion of being conscious of the type of performance. Performance of identity is based on a perceived audience. There are multiple performances based on different contexts. Thus an individual can choose to create an impression of a wife, a mother, an employee, and a graduate student, depending on the situation. Underlying Goffman's concept of impression management is the premise that identity is socially constructed. Goffman's work is influenced by symbolic interactionists, such as Mead (1934), who claimed that the self is constructed through social interactions. Self-concept is composed partly in terms of roles (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). The various social roles we perform impact aspects of our identities to varying degrees. As Johnson (2012) described, "self presentation is the process by which we try to shape what others think of us and what we think of ourselves" (p. 215). Thus identity is relational and intrapersonal.

Scholars have extended Goffman's work to measure impression management strategies both on an individual and an organizational level. Leary and Kowalski (1990) identified two stages in impression management: impression motivation and impression construction. Impression motivation includes things such as influencing others, self-enhancement, negotiating power dynamics, and avoiding blame (Baumeister, 1982; Tedeschi, 1981). Understanding one's identity helps one to interpret the social situation and determine the course of action. Impression construction, then, involves a number of different strategies that allow individuals to project an image that is consistent with their self-concept. As Leary, Allen, and BattsTerry (2011) wrote, these self-presentational behaviors may not be conscious but instead routine and habitual.

The study of impression management is useful for understanding not only how people understand their roles but how those roles influence their behavior in social settings, because verbal and nonverbal cues signal certain performances.

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT AND CMC

Early thought in CMC was that text-based communication could release individuals from limitations of their physical bodies (Turkle, 1997). Because there was an absence of physical cues, it was assumed that individuals could perform identities in ways that were less constrained than in FTF encounters. In CMC, cues that are available in a FTF interaction, such as nonverbal communication, are absent (Walther & Parks, 2002). As CMC evolved, researchers have examined the different features that allow users to construct online identities (Van Der Heide, D'Angelo, & Schumkaer, 2012). For example, Papacharissi (2002) compared web pages to a stage where users perform identity. Users are able consciously to choose the type of information that is presented, such as text and photos, to manage their impressions. Additionally, researchers have seen a

stronger connection between a person's online and offline identities, especially as individuals use CMC to communicate with people they have met in FTF contexts (Walther & Parks, 2002).

More recently, impression management research has been applied to social networking sites (SNS), such as Facebook and LinkedIn (Cunningham, 2013). SNS can blur the lines between public and private identities because these networks include members from a variety of contexts (boyd, 2011). Thus this research has looked not only at how individuals try to control their self-presentations but also how others form impressions based on a number of other cues, such as the number of friends in a person's network and his or her membership in groups.

This research is applicable to the study of online graduate students because increasingly, adults are becoming adept at managing their different identities based on the tools they have available to them. As Carr and Stefaniak (2012) observed in research on managing impressions of professionalism, "professionals' increased use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) affords a relatively new and particularly interesting channel to assess the impact of convergent and divergent cues to their identities" (p. 406).

So the rise of CMC has prompted a renewed interest in impression formation research because of the way CMC alters the nature of available cues (Hancock & Dunham, 2001). Research on CMC and impression management has focused on two central concerns: the cues users use to transmit information and the control users have over that information (Barash, Ducheneaut, Isaacs, & Bellotti, 2010; Becker & Stamp, 2005; O'Sullivan, 2000; Papacharissi, 2011). Thus other cues are utilized, such as number of friends in a social network or the status updates of those friends (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Research has also shown that even when interaction is reduced to the leaner CMC channels, we form stronger impressions of others than we would in FTF contexts, which is what Walther's hyperpersonal model

suggests of impressions of others formed via CMC (Hancock & Dunham, 2001).

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATION

Given the insights on CMC and identity, Goffman's work in educational contexts is needed. There has been some application of his work in relation to teacher roles but very little work on student roles. In the classroom context, the performance of the role of students and the role of teacher contributes to the overall goal of learning. According to Preves and Stephenson (2009), when students and professors enter the classroom, they have preconceptions of roles that should be performed. In their work, Burke and Reitzes (1981) looked at the role of undergraduate college students and connection to identity. They identified five dimensions of college student identity, including academic responsibility, intellectualism, sociability, and personal assertiveness. As they wrote, "in order to be (some identity), one must act like (some identity)" (p. 90). Thus it follows that to be a graduate student, one must first consider how to act like one. What, then, do graduate students think this identity is in order that they perform it? From Burke and Reitzes's (1981) findings, students who identified high on the dimension of academic responsibility and low on personal assertiveness were the students with *plans* to become graduate students. Graduate students may carry some of these identity dimensions with them into their performances.

Kasworm (2005) looked at sociocultural roles as part of nontraditional adult student identity. She found that identities were influenced by a complex set of structures in college classrooms as well as students' own self-constructions about their beliefs. She found that adult students had a constructed image of an ideal college student. In her words, "adult students mediate their behaviors and actions in relation to a set of tacit beliefs of the nature of the desired

college student behaviors and actions" (p. 17). Thus students judge themselves against this image. Her work can be extended to examine not only students' self-conceptions but also their performances of identity. Kasworm recommended that teachers create classroom environments that help students be successful in performing like their ideal, or at least to adjust their expectations of the ideal student. Her study focused on adult undergraduate students. It would be useful to understand how graduate students, also adults but in a different context, construct their identities and the importance of impression management to online classrooms, especially because other students who participate in those online communities reward and punish each others' performances.

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT IN ONLINE EDUCATION

Goodfellow (2004) called for more attention to the social context of online education, as there is an "ongoing negotiation of norms" in the heavily text-based classrooms. Currently in computer-mediated classrooms, students and teachers are creating impressions and performing roles largely through the text of verbal communication, because nonverbal cues between students and students as well as students and teachers are unavailable. Performing roles and creating impressions in online classrooms do occur. Impressions, like immediacy, spring from perceptions of others. Teacher immediacy is the degree of psychological distance students perceive between themselves and the instructor (Anderson, as cited by Freitas, Myers, & Avtgis, 1998). In a study of student perceptions of teacher immediacy in online classes, students were able to perceive teacher verbal immediacy but not nonverbal immediacy (Freitas et al., 1998). The lack of nonverbal immediacy was due to a lack of those cues, and a lack of immediacy negatively impacts the way students perceive the role of the instructor (Thweatt & McCrosky, 1998). Crandall, Hazel, and Caputo (2012) found that online graduate

students perceive teacher misbehaviors (comprising perceptions of teacher indolence, offensiveness, and incompetence, according to Kearney, Plax, Hays, and Ivey's, 1991, research). It is likely, then, that the performance of the role of students online is perceivable peer to peer. In Goodfellow's (2004) assessment, we should focus on these social factors and use them to "explain the variety of individual intentions and normative and evaluative systems that coexist alongside the 'official' purpose of the interaction" (p. 397). In our view, these matter to how we form online communities and how smoothly, or not, online classrooms function.

Community is important in the classroom because it helps to increase student engagement and lends itself to collaboration (Edwards, Edwards, Torrens, & Beck, 2011). As online educators, we need to understand how also to participate in the norming of classroom communities so we know what to expect of others and ourselves in educational contexts. Recognizing the importance of online community roles and corresponding behavior to the project of collaborative knowledge sharing and learning, Yeh (2010) developed categories to identify kinds of online learning communities. The study, using 18 preservice teachers, began with roles. However, before roles emerge, impression management occurs. Yeh's (2010) exploratory study assumed that behaviors lead to the online roles in the classroom context, which matter to the kinds of communities that emerge. The current study begins at the beginning with the behavior of impression management strategies in asynchronous online discussions.

RATIONALE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How do we create effective communities for online students? Social rules and norms emerge through interaction in online classrooms, and participants co-construct those roles through a process of impression management. To extend the research on the

connection between online behaviors, roles, and communities in online classrooms (Yeh, 2010) and how graduate students perform identity in online classrooms, Goffman's (1959) work on impression management is useful, along with research on identity formation in CMC environments in general. To this point, impression management has only been applied to the role of teacher. In the classroom context, the performance of the role of student and the role of teacher contributes to the overall goal of learning. That these roles are social constructions means that if we attend to impression management strategies of graduate students online and consider the constraints and possibilities of CMC in the role emergence process, educators can co-construct those more effectively as they take shape. To that end, this exploratory study pursued the following research question: How do graduate students perform identity in online classrooms?

Methods

Quantitative content analysis was used for this study. Content analysis is a systematic reading of specific texts to identify patterns (Krippendorf, 2013). For this content analysis, we coded the data according to the Jones and Pittman (1982) impression management taxonomy. This taxonomy identifies five impression management strategies that are useful for understanding graduate student identity. This taxonomy includes *self-promotion*, where individuals emphasize their abilities in an effort to be seen as competent; *ingratiation*, a strategy of using flattery to appear likable to others; *exemplification*, a process through which individuals go above and beyond the required assignment to show dedication to others; *intimidation*, a strategy in which people utilize their power over others to seem dangerous; and, finally, *supplication*, a strategy in which individuals emphasize their weaknesses so as to appear needy. This scale has been used in several studies of impression management (e.g., Hall & Pennington, 2012).

Sample

Because we were interested in how graduate students choose to perform their identities online, we looked at cues given off as an exploratory step. Data were taken at two points. The first data collection came from two sections of students, each from the first discussion board post students had to make in graduate school in the Theorizing Communication course. The discussion prompt was titled "Getting to Know You," and the instructions were to "introduce yourself and post a picture." The second set of data are from two sections of students enrolled in elective courses (Media Literacy and Interpersonal and Small Group Communication). Students take electives after they finish their first seven core courses (at the halfway mark). The titles of the discussions in the two elective courses were "Introduction Discussion" and "Getting Acquainted." Both posts captured all of the students as they entered the classes and began to perform their perceptions of the role expectations of graduate student. Also, these introductory locations were not places where shy students could be as invisible as they can be in their discussions about course material. In all, we had 81 introductory posts to work with. We also performed an introduction word count to see if these students spent more or less text performing their impressions of graduate students in online environments. If impression formation via CMC research suggests that impression formation adapts, it would be interesting to see if there is an indication of impression management changing over time in the same CMC educational context.

RESULTS

Of the 81 discussion board posts (58 women, 23 men), the majority (52%) of graduate students in all courses used s*elf-promotion*, emphasizing their abilities to be seen as competent. The next most often used impression management strategy (25%) was *exemplification*

(going above and beyond the requirements to show dedication). The *ingratiation* impression management strategy (flattery to appear likable) was used 14% of the time, and *supplication*, or emphasizing weaknesses so as to appear needy, was used the least, at 10% of the time. No graduate student chose intimidation, or appearing threatening to be seen as dangerous. The brand-new graduate student impression management strategies were no different from the more "settled" graduate student strategies online.

Self-Promotion

In general, this dominant impression management strategy students performed emphasized their professional and academic experiences. For example, a male student in the Theorizing Communication course wrote,

> I latched onto political reporting, first heading to Boise to cover the Idaho Legislature, and then came to Olympia as a reporter at the Washington State Capitol. Sadly, the Great Recession led to a bloody massacre in newspaper reporting ranks, and, as the main bread winner for our little family of four, I decided to get out of the biz. I was Gov. Chris Gregoire's speechwriter for two years, a great experience, and now work as a press officer with the state Senate.

Another example, this one from a student in the Interpersonal/Small Group course, also emphasized professional experience:

> I am now in my last round of classes before I start my thesis this fall—yay! I currently work in a Marketing Department for a Senior Living Community. I enjoy what I am doing, but I actually plan to go on to get my Doctorate in Communications and then, hopefully, work for a University.

Within the category of self-promotion, there was a range of professional and academic training, as shown in this student's post:

> Currently, I work as an assistant coach for a collegiate speech team. My coaching responsibilities are to work with individuals who participate in After Dinner Speaking. When I'm not working with the students I work at Starbucks, free coffee is the greatest thing ever. My major passion right now though is working with a local show choir. I am on their support staff as an advisor for their student run council. It certainly is a lesson in small group dynamics.

Exemplification

Exemplification, defined as going above and beyond the required assignment to show dedication, was the second most used strategy:

> Needless to say, I'm quite a bit older than most of you, and I had no plans to return to school because I'm closer to my final retirement (nine more years), but I believe the GI Bill is a terrible thing to waste. I really love to learn; however, that doesn't mean I'm not worried about being overwhelmed with work and studying. Even though I don't have children or a spouse to care for, my dogs (shaggy rescue mutts) aren't going to understand why I can't play all the time anymore.
>
> What I hope to gain from this journey is better tools in my toolbox. I want to be able to better convey myself to people who believe that just because there's information posted on a website doesn't mean it is the most effective means of communicating. There is a large batch of baby boomers out there that think a "website" is where a spider lives.

In another example, a student used his experience in other courses and his other academic training to highlight his dedication to his education:

> I had the pleasure of doing the Cagli Project program this summer. I am enrolled as a COML student, but am pursuing the certification program. I hold a Masters in Liberal Arts in International Studies from the University of St. Thomas in Houston, TX and a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Mass Communication/Public Relations and Spanish minor. I am currently doing an internship in La Roche Sur Yon, France at a small university and will be doing so at least until the first of the new year.

Because graduate students come to the program with a range of experiences, it would be useful for further studies to examine how students may compare themselves to others and how they understand these forms of self-promotion in relation to their education.

Supplication

Supplication, or emphasizing weakness to be appear needy, was used in only 10% of posts:

> Have you ever heard a person refer to him or herself as a "college casualty"? This is how I recently described myself at a job interview. From that point on, the term stuck in my head. Allow me to explain. I realized too late into the game that the degree I was pursuing was not exactly what I had idealized. I was in my third year of school and I felt stuck. I often asked myself, "should I start completely over?"

While this strategy was not used that often, it would be interesting to look further into how supplication may play into performances of graduate student identity and how students respond to this strategy.

Ingratiation

Ingratiation, or flattery to appear likable, was used 14% of the time. The following is an example from a student in the interpersonal course: "On a personal note, I have a 7-month old son named Jackson. My husband's name is Matt and he is my better half :)"

Performance Patterns

No pattern emerged over time. The beginning graduate student performances did not vary enough from the more "settled" role of graduate student in the online environment. Although there were no differences over time, a gender difference did emerge. Almost equally (39% and 35%), men used the self-promotion and exemplification impression management strategies. Women, conversely, used the self-promotion norm, with 57% using this strategy. We also looked at time/text spent introducing themselves and did not find a pattern over time. All of the introductions ranged between 100 and 300 words.

DISCUSSION

Overall, online graduate students used self-promotion as the dominant impression management strategy in their introductory posts. While this may not be surprising given that students were prompted to share information about themselves, this finding suggests areas for future research. How much do graduate students feel they need to emphasize their professional training and accomplishments? Does this emphasis on self-promotion indicate that students have an "idealized" notion of what a graduate student is? From Burke and Reitzes's (1981) study of undergraduate student identities, those with plans to become graduate students were high on the dimension of academic responsibility and low on personal assertiveness. Perhaps the findings from this study show that when these students become graduate students online, their personal assertiveness rises

at least to a self-promotion level. CMC likely supports this behavior. Other questions are, How do others respond to the self-promotion tactics of other graduate students? As the pattern did not change over time, is the behavior likely accepted? These questions could be expanded using qualitative research or an analysis of the trajectory of discussion posts in a class.

The finding that self-promotion and exemplification are the two most used strategies is in line with research on CMC and impression management. Thus it would be good to explore if and how these strategies lead to better learning outcomes, if they change over time, and if they are crucial to community in the online classroom.

The gender differences in impression management strategies warrant further investigation. While male students tended to use both self-promotion and exemplification at similar rates, female students primarily used self-promotion as an impression management strategy. This finding is counter to the dominant finding in impression management research that women are less likely to use self-promotion (Guadagno & Cialdini, 2007; Singh, Kumra, & Vinnicombe, 2002). Impression management research has found that women are less likely to use self-promotion in the workplace, which some women offer as an explanation for why they experience the glass ceiling. Indeed, women tend to underrate their accomplishments and have less confidence in their abilities, which could lead to negative workplace evaluations. As Sandberg (2013) argued, women experience a "catch-22" where self-promotion seems both to lead to promotion and at the same time lead to lowered social attractiveness because of gender roles. In other words, there is a fine line when appropriately communicating in a male-centered workplace. The gender difference finding presented here offers some interesting directions for future research. Are there differences in women's communication patterns in educational versus organizational settings? Does the online format allow women to feel more comfortable using self-promotion?

Additionally, male students consider and use more than one kind of impression management strategy, and this may indicate that male socialization, with its connection to the public domain and competitive language use, may still offer men more options when it comes to impression management.

In relation to word count, there was little variation between the lengths of posts by introductory and more advanced graduate students. The introductory posts in the Media Literacy course were 100–200 words longer, but it is hard to say that media literacy warrants more impression management work or is connected to identity more so than interpersonal and small group communication because we are saturated in all three areas in the course of our daily lives, so the finding may be an anomaly. Researchers interested in this area should pursue it further.

While there are several limitations to this study, including a small sample size and a narrow focused only on introductory posts, this study does provide some insight into how graduate students perform identity in online classrooms where before there was none. Communication in online classrooms is primarily asynchronous, which gives students more control over their impression management. In fact, we have experienced instances where students specifically wait to post their responses until they have seen what other students have posted, indicating that they were basing their performance of identity on how others performed. In this way, students were learning what appropriate roles were. Future research could look at several factors that impact impression management, such as when a student posts, how many times he or she responds to other posts, and what strategies are used in different types of discussion posts. For example, are students more likely to use self-promotion in both introductory and course content–related posts?

There are limitations to content analysis, because we do not know students' motivations for using some strategies over others. However, content analysis offers a different research method for addressing

the limitations of self-report studies, as has been widely used in impression management research (Leary et al., 2011). Additionally, the taxonomy may not be appropriate for an educational setting. Future research could also pursue how online graduate students manage their impressions when discussing course material to see how they differ. It is possible that other impression management strategies would emerge in areas that Burke and Reitzes (1981) identified as potential dimensions of student identity, such as academic responsibility, intellectualism, and personal assertiveness. Despite these limitations, this study provides some insight into impression construction among online graduate students.

This study was exploratory in nature and offers some insight into how future studies might be designed. For example, a number of other cues could be used in online classrooms to indicate impression management. Word counts or numbers of responses can add additional insight into content analyses. Students also are able to post pictures or hyperlinks. While these elements were outside the scope of this study, they do indicate ways students may perform identity.

CONCLUSIONS

As online education becomes more pervasive, it is important for instructors to better understand impression management. CMC is the norm in the information age. Students are more adept at using it and take advantage of the "technological affordances" that help them have more control over their identities and read the identities of others (boyd & Ellison, 2007). As such, understanding the particular aspects of CMC in online classrooms is useful. The goal of this study was to better understand how graduate students perform identity in online classrooms as a way to augment the research on the impact of social presence in the online learning environment. This study found that graduate student roles in online classrooms

often begin in self-promotion. How these roles may influence learning outcomes, community, and graduate student identity is to be discovered.

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Understanding Online Writing Apprehension: An Examination of Temperament, Motivation, Fear of Negative Evaluation, and Self-Perceived Writing Competence

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This study investigated whether online writing apprehension (WA) can be predicted by the personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism and the situational components of motivation, fear of negative evaluation (FNE), and self-perceived writing competence (WC) in computer-mediated channels (e.g., e-mails, web chats, and texting). Undergraduate and graduate students ($N = 284$) filled out an array of survey instruments, and results indicate that neuroticism and FNE positively predict online WA, while extroversion, motivation, and self-perceived WC negatively correlate with online WA. The most significant variables predicting online WA are neuroticism and self-perceived WC, followed by extraversion, motivation, and FNE. The implications of these findings are further discussed.

KEYWORDS: Online writing apprehension, motivation, fear of negative evaluation, self-perceived writing competence, extraversion, neuroticism

Communication apprehension (CA), "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1984, p. 13), is an extensively studied construct among communication scholars, and this work has focused on face-to-face (Keaten & Kelly, 2004),

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organizational (Russ, 2012), small-group (Hawkins & Stewart, 1990), writing (Daly, 1978; Daly & Wilson, 1983; Mascle, 2013), and online instruction (Ledbetter & Finn, 2013). This body of research has shown that CA is a problem for many people in multiple contexts (see Daly et al., 2009), and much of this scholarship has focused on explaining (e.g., Beatty & McCroskey, 2009; Heisel, LaFrance, & Beatty, 2003) and remediating CA (Ayres, Hopf, Hazel, Sonandré, & Wongprasert, 2009).

One area with increasing attention from scholars in recent years is communication in computer-mediated (CMC) contexts (e.g., Turman & Schrodt, 2005; Wrench & Punyanunt-Carter, 2007). With the exponential increase in technology use and CMC over the past 10 years, written communication in daily life (e.g., texting, social media) and instructional contexts (e.g., discussion postings, group assignments in online course) is more prevalent and salient to maintaining relationships and achieving academic success than ever (see Swan, 2001).

Perspectives on social presence in text-based online contexts (see Kehrwald, 2008) emphasize the importance of positive exchanges. The communication medium can be either a positive or negative influence. For instance, the style and type of dialogue in CMC exchanges, such as reflecting group members' feelings, beliefs, and intentions, can positively influence perceptions of effective CMC social presence (Dow, 2008). Social presence is achieved through clear communication approaches, which include consistently posting messages and being an active participator in online class discussions (Kehrwald, 2008). Thus a positive social presence indicates active participation, and students are often graded on these dimensions in online courses.

However, writers lacking confidence in their writing skills may be disadvantaged and therefore less likely to be successful in online learning contexts. Keaten, Kelly, and Phillips (2009) indicated that people tend to avoid communication if they are anxious about their

own abilities or believe that remaining silent is less threatening than expressing themselves. This avoidant response style can potentially lead to deleterious academic and social consequences for anxious writers in an era when written communication continues to gain prominence as a communication medium, especially in educational contexts where text messages, social media posts, e-mails, blog entries, and comments typically rely on written words.

In sum, anxious writers may have difficulties connecting with others via writing in CMC contexts. Given the increasing prominence of written communication over the Internet, it is important to have a better understanding of the factors that impact online writing apprehension (WA), which refers to fear or anxiety associated with writing via any online platform in this study, and more research in this area regarding potential influences on apprehension is warranted. For example, Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter (2007) developed a model predicting and explaining the relationships among CMC apprehension, CMC skills, and CMC presence. They found that CMC apprehension and skill are negatively related while CMC presence is unrelated to apprehension. In another study, McCroskey, Richmond, Heisel, and Hayhurst (2004) examined the relationship between temperament, specifically extraversion and neuroticism, and found no relationships between trait WA and temperament. Given these potentially conflicting findings, a specific focus on the theoretical factors that may predict and explain online WA is warranted. While theory development elucidating the influence of genetic traits (e.g., Beatty & McCroskey, 2000, 2009; Beatty, McCroskey, & Valencic, 2001; Heisel, LaFrance, & Beatty, 2003) and situational factors (Ayres, 1997; Ayres, Hsu, Schmidt, & Ayres-Sonandré, 2009; Keaten et al., 2009) is ongoing, an amalgamation of these models has not been applied to explain online WA. As such, this study seeks to test these theories in predicting online writing apprehension. The following sections explain the theoretical models pertinent to the current study.

COMMUNIBIOLOGY

Communibiology (Beatty & McCroskey, 2000; Beatty et al., 2001) has been influenced by Eysenck's (1986) *Big Three* genetically based personality traits of introversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism. The theory posits that CA is significantly impacted by the interactions of environmental factors (e.g., learning), neurobiological processes, and predetermined neurobiological traits. In essence, communibiology posits that traitlike personality characteristics are largely determined by genetic predispositions, fixed and stable over time, and the most influential causal factors in explaining and predicting CA in multiple contexts. This perspective and past research findings (e.g., Beatty, Heisel, Lewis, Pence, Reinhart, & Tian, 2011; Neulip, Chadouir, & McCroskey, 2003) suggest that temperament impacts CA in a variety of contexts.

The *Big Five* temperament model (see Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003; McCrae, 2010) is the most commonly employed personality trait model and consists of five personality traits conceptualized on stable, bipolar continua: *extraversion*, *agreeableness*, *conscientiousness*, *neuroticism*, and *openness to experience* (Gosling et al., 2003). In the current study, extraversion (being outgoing; enjoying the stimuli of groups and the company of others) and neuroticism (emotional stability) dimensions (see Piedmont, 1998) are relevant because Beatty, McCroskey, and Heisel (1998) theorized that CA is the combination of introversion and neuroticism. This assertion is supported by studies indicating that CA is negatively correlated with extraversion and positively correlated with neuroticism (Hsu, 2004; McCroskey, Heisel, & Richmond, 2001). Although trait WA was not significantly related to neuroticism and extraversion in previous research (McCroskey et al., 2004), the current study focuses on WA experienced in the specific channel of the Internet, which is different from trait WA experienced across different writing mediums (e.g., written exams, essay writing). Evidence has

supported that personality traits like neuroticism and extraversion predispose people to experience negative emotions like anxiety in reaction to stressful events (e.g., Gross, Sutton, & Ketelaar, 1998). Writing online could be stressful for people with such personality predispositions, especially when they are required to participate online through written communication.

COMPONENT THEORY

Ayres (1997) developed and tested component theory, a working model that adds to the understanding of CA. As originally conceived, component theory represents CA as a function of learned, interior, qualitative, cognitive processes, which can be summarized in the following equation: $CA = M \times FNE \times (1 - CC)$. In this model, the three components are self-perceptions of motivation (M), fear of negative evaluation (FNE), and the inverse of communication competence (1 – CC; Ayres, 1997). In essence, if there is a lack of either M or FNE, or the presence of high CC, a person will not experience CA, while the opposite conditions produce higher CA (Ayres, 1997). Motivation refers to our desire to achieve a certain outcome, and component theory predicts that the higher the level of motivation one has, the greater the potential for CA will be (Ayres, 1997). FNE is a person's thoughts about how he or she might be viewed/judged by others (Ayres, 1997). For example, if someone expects or concludes that he or she will be judged negatively or face potential ridicule, the person's levels of CA rise (Ayres, 1997). Finally, self-perceived communication competence addresses how able an individual feels to accomplish a given task. If the person does not feel very competent or able, his or her potential for CA will increase (Ayres, 1997); thus the model employed the inverse of communication competence to more elegantly represent the direction of the relationship within the proposed model.

A number of researchers (e.g., Ayres, 1997; Ayres, Hsu et al.,

2009; Hsu, 2004) have tested component theory and verified its efficacy in predicting CA in a variety of contexts. In fact, the effect of these components on trait and state CA is substantial. The explained variance of these three components ranged from 61% to 67% of the variance in trait and state CA among American, Japanese, and Taiwanese students (Ayres, 1997; Ayres, Hsu et al., 2009; Hsu, 2004). In addition, Ayres (1997) demonstrated that changes in speaker state and trait CA could be predicted from changes in speakers' perceptions of their motivation, FNE, and communication competence. Hsu (2004) also found that self-perceived communication competence and fear of negative evaluation mediated culture's influence on CA in Taiwanese and American samples. These results support cognitive and affective influences on CA and suggest that working models should account for a variety of perspectives that predict and explain CA.

RATIONALE

In sum, from the communibiological perspective, which theorizes that genetically influenced traits significantly influence communication apprehension and associated temperament variables, CA is negatively correlated with extraversion and positively correlated with neuroticism (Hsu, 2004; McCroskey et al., 2001). Based on component theory, which has provided evidence to support environmental and learned influences affecting CA, motivation and FNE were positively correlated to CA, while self-perceived communication competence was negatively correlated with CA in various communication contexts (Ayres, 1997). Accordingly, the following hypotheses were advanced:

H1: A combination of extraversion, neuroticism, motivation, fear of negative evaluation, and self-perceived writing competence predicts online writing apprehension.

H1a: Extraversion is negatively related to online WA.
H1b: Neuroticism is positively related to online WA.
H1c: Motivation is positively related to online WA.
H1d: FNE is positively related to online WA.
H1e: Self-perceived WC is negatively related to online WA.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

A total of 284 students from two small-sized western universities participated in this study. Eighty-five graduate students filled out the survey online, and 199 undergraduate students completed the paper-version survey in class. The graduate students were enrolled in a variety of online graduate communication courses, while undergraduates were enrolled in public speaking, communication research, and news writing classes. Following standard informed consent protocols, graduate participants were contacted via e-mail and asked to participate, and undergraduates were asked by their instructors. Participants completed all questionnaires during class time. They were not offered any incentives for participation. To encourage them to volunteer, they were told that the findings of the study would contribute to our understanding of how to help students alleviate online WA and become better writers. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 62 years (M = 25.62, SD = 9.49). Of the participants, 46.5% were men, 51.8% were women, and 1.8% were of unknown sex. In addition, 14.8% were freshmen, 20.4% were sophomores, 17.6% were juniors, 17.3% were seniors, and 29.2% were graduate students; 86.9% were Caucasian Americans.

Instruments

Online writing apprehension. Online WA was measured using the items adapted from CMC apprehension scales (Wrench & Punyanunt-Carter, 2007). The original CMC apprehension scales

consisted of 15 items measuring apprehension in three areas: e-mail, chatting, and instant messaging. Given the "written" communication focus of this study, only items on e-mails, online chat rooms, and instant messaging were used; items involving oral communication were excluded. In addition, cell phone texting was added to the measure given its popular usage. The final version of the measure consisted of 20 items. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sample items included "When writing using e-mail, I feel tense" and "When writing in a chat room, I feel calm." This measure has been demonstrated to have good reliability ($\alpha = .90$) and adequate validity (Wrench & Punyanunt-Carter, 2007). Cronbach's alpha was .91 in this study.

Extraversion and neuroticism. Extraversion and neuroticism were measured by a brief personality inventory (Gosling et al., 2003). Gosling et al. adapted descriptors from existing Big Five instruments to measure dimensions of temperament. Two items were used to measure the extraversion dimension ("extraverted, enthusiastic" and "reserved, quiet"), and two items measured the neuroticism dimension ("anxious, easily upset" and "calm, emotionally stable"). Participants were asked to respond on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*) prompted by the phrase "I see myself as . . ." Gosling et al. reported adequate convergent and discriminant validity with the 44-item Big Five Inventory (see John & Srivastava, 1999). Gosling et al. (2003) reported a test–retest reliability (at a 6-week interval) of .72. In this study, Cronbach's alpha reliabilities were .78 and .69 for extraversion and neuroticism, respectively.

Motivation. Motivation was assessed using Richmond's (1990) measure. This scale comprises five 7-point semantic differential scales (i.e., motivated–unmotivated, excited–bored, interested–disinterested, involved–uninvolved, dreading it–looking forward to it). Participants were asked to circle the number that best described their

feelings about using e-mail, online chat rooms, or other Internet messaging programs. This measure had reasonable reliability and validity (Richmond, 1990). Cronbach's alpha was .90 in this study.

Fear of negative evaluation. The brief 12-item version (Leary, 1983) of the original FNE (Watson & Friend, 1969) was used to measure self-perceived negative evaluation. Participants were asked to circle the number that best described their feelings about using e-mail, online chat rooms, or other Internet messaging programs. Sample items included "I am afraid that others will not approve of me" and "I am usually worried about what kind of impression I make." FNE has been demonstrated to be reliable and valid (Leary, 1983). Participants were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The reliability of this instrument ranged from .87 to .93 in previous research (Ayres, 1997; Ayres, Hsu et al., 2009). Cronbach's alpha was .89 in this study.

Self-perceived writing competence. Self-perceived WC was measured by a 10-item instrument (Ayres, 1997). The items measured one's feelings of competence regarding different aspects of writing (e.g., topic selection, punctuation, and spelling). Sample items included "I am able to locate usable topics for essays" and "The themes I write are not well-organized." Participants were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). This measure has been found to demonstrate good reliability ($\alpha = .86$) and adequate validity (Ayres, 1997). Cronbach's alpha was .81 in this study.

RESULTS

A multiple regression using SPSS 22 software was conducted to test the hypotheses regarding the influence of both trait and situational factors on online WA. This method was chosen because all variables related to the hypotheses are continuous. Table 1 shows all relevant means, standard deviations, and Pearson's correlations.

Table 1. *Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlations for the Variables*

Variable	*M*	*SD*	EXT	NEU	MO	FNE	WC	OWA
EXT	9.32	3.24	1	–	–	–	–	–
NEU	5.90	2.66	−0.18**	1	–	–	–	–
MO	22.91	6.70	0.10	0.04	1	–	–	–
FNE	35.65	9.41	−0.16**	0.31**	0.22**	1	–	–
WC	36.79	6.83	0.07	−0.06	0.24**	0.06	1	–
OWA	44.59	13.23	−0.30**	0.32**	−0.19**	0.18*	−0.30**	1

Note. $N = 284$. EXT = extraversion; FNE = fear of negative evaluation; MO = motivation; NEU = neuroticism; OWA = online writing apprehension; WC = writing competence.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

Table 2. *Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Online Writing Apprehension*

	B	*SE*	β	*t*
Constants	63.09	5.16		12.22**
Variables				
EXT	−0.84	0.22	−0.21	−3.84**
NEU	1.18	0.27	0.24	4.30**
MO	−0.29	0.11	−0.15	−2.66**
FNE	0.17	0.08	0.12	2.12*
WC	−0.46	0.10	−0.24	−4.45**

Note. $N = 284$. $R^2 = .25$, $F(5, 278) = 18.99$, $p < .001$. EXT = extraversion; FNE = fear of negative evaluation; MO = motivation; NEU = neuroticism; OWA = online writing apprehension; WC = writing competence.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

All of the relationships were statistically significant. Online WA was positively related to neuroticism and FNE and negatively related to extraversion, motivation, and WC. Thus, except for motivation, online WA was related to all other variables in the direction hypothesized. As shown in Table 2, the R^2 (.254) with all variables included was significant, $F(5, 278) = 18.99$, $p < .001$. The beta weights indicate that the most significant variables predicting online WA are neuroticism and self-perceived WC, followed by extraversion, motivation, and FNE. Motivation was found to be negatively related to online WA, which contradicts Hypothesis 1c. All other hypotheses are supported.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how online WA is predicted by the personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism and components of CA: motivation, negative evaluation, and

self-perceived WC. Results indicate that all variables are significant predictors of online WA. Neuroticism and self-perceived WC have slightly stronger influences on online WA than extraversion, motivation, and FNE. Thus individuals who are emotionally unstable and lack confidence in their writing abilities experience more online WA than others. Because the temperament variables were statistically significant in the direction predicted, these results further support the communibiological perspective that inherited traits play a significant role in explaining and predicting anxiety-related constructs in multiple contexts (Beatty et al., 2001).

Regarding component theory, the results confirm that the feeling of not being able to accomplish a task increases anxiety in a given situation (Ayres, 1997; Ayres, Hsu et al., 2009). However, inconsistent with previous research (Ayres, 1997; Ayres, Hsu et al., 2009), higher motivation levels are associated with lower online WA in this study. In Ayres's studies, correlations with motivation and CA in different contexts ranged from .19 to .30, but in the current study, motivation was negatively correlated with online WA. This current finding may be explained by the traitlike nature of the online WA variable employed in this study and the context-dependent nature of motivation; that is, Spielberger, Gorsuch, and Lushene (1970) explained a state as being transitory and subject to fluctuation over time and a trait as a relatively enduring personality characteristic, which is in accord with Cattell and Scheier's (1958) factor analytic work and other communication scholars (e.g., Keaten & Kelly, 2004; McCroskey et al., 2001). To illustrate, a writer with low trait WA might still experience high state WA in high-stakes situations. For example, if contributions to synchronous online class discussion forums were a significant component of a student's course grade, a normally relaxed writer could experience high situational or state WA. Accordingly, the motivation variable in component theory might be more relevant to situational anxiety and does not mitigate or predict a more stable, generalized apprehension about

writing online. Another explanation for this inconsistent finding is that the motivation scale used in this study measures people's general interest levels in writing online, not a specific desire to impress others. People with higher interest levels may experience less anxiety than those with lower interest levels. Future researchers may want to use a motivation scale that specifically measures the desire to achieve a goal to explore these possibilities.

Both FNE and self-perceived WC were influential on online WA in the current study. Results reveal that online writers who lack confidence in their writing abilities and fear ridicule or harsh judgment from others have higher online writing WA. These results have implications for instructors who teach communication courses online. Specifically, instructors could design online discussions to address students' own worries about being judged negatively by classmates and instructors. Directly addressing students' fears of negative evaluation seems a particularly salient approach because FNE may be harder to change than other anxiety-related variables. Keaten, Kelly, and Finch (2000), for example, found that highly reticent participants did not show significant posttest differences related to FNE after successfully completing the Penn State reticence program. In addition, teachers could include more practice tutorials and writing exercises designed to build competencies for the different components of online written communication (e.g., essay writing vs. online discussion postings, synchronous chat).

In drawing these conclusions, acknowledging the study's limitations is warranted. First, briefer versions of extraversion, neuroticism, and FNE were employed in the study. While shorter instruments decrease the chances of respondent fatigue and bias, reliability may be improved with longer measures of the variables examined herein. A second limitation is the demographic characteristics of the sample. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents were Caucasian Americans, and all were either undergraduate or graduate students in communication courses. Therefore, future research

examining these variables using a more diverse and representative population should increase the generalizability of these findings. Third, these variables only explained 25% of the variance in online WA. Some components of online WA are distinct from other forms of CA. An individual's trait and state WA, computer skills, computer anxiety, and face-to-face communication might also influence online WA. Future studies should investigate these possibilities. Finally, this study employed a self-report survey method. Using an experimental design involving the manipulation of situational factors, such as types of audience and desire to accomplish a goal through online writing, might allow for a deeper investigation of how people with different traits react to different situations, thereby increasing the explanatory and predictive power of communibiology and component theory for online writing channels.

Taken together, the findings support the idea that an integrated approach is useful when employing theory to inform educational practices in an increasingly digitized and online world. The study points to the interplay of ingrained temperament and environmental, situational factors salient to anticipating how and why people may feel anxious when using online channels for written communication. In addition, 25% of the variance was explained in the current study, and although it is theoretically meaningful and practically useful, this finding suggests that future study of people's feelings regarding communicating through this increasingly used channel is warranted.

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The Subjugation of Pornography: A Queer Perspective

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This article is a response to Rakow and Wackwitz's challenge to intertwine feminist theory and communication theory. To this end, this article critiques antipornography discourse, specifically from Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, using a postmodern queer framework for a critical lens. For Dworkin and MacKinnon, pornography constitutes and perpetuates violence against women and the best way to protect women from the harms of pornography is to condemn and denounce pornography. However, a queer lens reveals that their discourse simultaneously works to discipline and constrain women's (and men's) sexuality. The analysis describes the ways in which the antipornography discourse essentializes groups and perpetuates heteronormativity. For best practices, communication researchers interested in pornography must take a queer approach and search for multiple truths. There is no essential reader of pornography, just as there is no essential pornography.

KEYWORDS: Pornography, antipornography, Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, postmodernism, queer theory, feminist communication

The central idea of Lana Rakow and Laura Wackwitz's (2004) book *Feminist Communication Theory* is to challenge communication scholars to ground their rhetorical or interpersonal studies in feminist theories. To this end, the goal of feminist communication theory is to carefully consider the construction and communication of gender and sex. However, few communication scholars have taken up this challenge. When it comes to pornography research within the field of communication, leading scholars, such as Neil

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Malamuth and P. J. Wright, give little to no consideration to feminist theories in their research (Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004), which is ironic, given that their research is often cited in women's studies journals (MacKinnon, 1986, 1989; MacKinnon, Dworkin, & Henry, 1984). Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon are prominent antipornography feminists who, in the past, have had a great deal of influence in politics with regard to the legality of pornography. MacKinnon's and Dworkin's antipornography discourse extends into communication research and, along with it, taken-for-granted assumptions about gender, sex, and sexual orientation (Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004). My goal is to accept Rakow and Wackwitz's challenge to step outside of conventional, normative, Western, White, male communication theories and bridge feminist theories with the discipline of communication.

Therefore this article aims to analyze antipornography feminist discourse from Dworkin and MacKinnon using a postmodern epistemology framework as a critical lens. Through this, I argue that MacKinnon's and Dworkin's rhetoric concerning pornography essentializes pornography, men, and women and perpetuates heteronormativity. This will demonstrate how their discourse functions to constrain rather than empower. To achieve this goal, I first define key terms in modernity and postmodernity, which I follow with an analysis of Dworkin's and MacKinnon's antipornography discourse. Last, I conclude with a proposal for best practices for pornography research in communication.

However, before I can begin, I first must situate myself historically and culturally within the context of this subject matter. I am a highly educated Venezuelan immigrant who passes for White and am from an upper-class Italian family. My perspective is one of Western privilege, and it unquestionably impacts my approach to this analysis. My relationship with pornography is positive, and it plays an important role in my identity and my marriage. It is because of my experience with pornography that I became interested in studying it for my master's thesis.

CONTEXT

In the 1970s, there was a boom in the pornography industry. New federal laws allowed for pornographic theaters to become more widespread, and thus there was a spike in pornographic content production (Clark, 1991). However, by the 1980s, conservative politicians, united by the Reagan administration, moved to examine the rise in pornographic content and determined that pornography is a legitimate cause for concern, detailed in a government-commissioned report on the negative effects of pornography consumption called the *Meese Commission Report* (Meese Report; Clark, 1991; Juffer, 2004; Murray, 1986). The report deemed pornography as corrosive to our moral values and as too obscene for our society, because it promotes sexual violence against women.

The Meese Report gained a lot of traction in conservative political circles and was in conjunction with some rhetorical movements aiming to ban all pornography in the United States, such as Morality in Media, based out of New York, and the National Coalition Against Pornography, from Ohio (Clark, 1991). In the years following the Meese Report, social groups campaigned against the immorality of sexually explicit content. For example, billboards with the words "Real Men Don't Use Porn" were seen in 23 states during fall 1991 (Clark, 1991). Although the movements did not succeed in banning all pornographic content, the 1980s served as a cornerstone for our current sociopolitical climate toward pornography.

Writers Dworkin and MacKinnon, among others, focused their attention on pornography's negative effects on society by redefining it as sexual discrimination (MacKinnon, 1985) and therefore mirroring the rhetoric of the aforementioned Meese Report. Both the political climate and the feminist movement of the 1980s came to the same conclusion: that pornography corrupts the morals of its viewers and perpetuates a culture that supports violence against women.

KEY TERMS

This section explores the distinction between modernity and postmodernity and how the shift from one epistemology to the other results as a site of multiple truths. Specifically, the influence of postmodernism in Western feminist thought serves as a critical lens for my analysis of antipornography discourse; this section provides context for that lens, highlighting the concepts of heteronormativity, essentialism, and the production of knowledge and discourse.

Birthed from modernity, postmodernity has engrossed Western feminist thought since the 1970s (Featherstone, 1991). Before postmodernism, identity categories like sex and gender were conceptualized as a binary, consisting of two choices (male–female; man–woman) that are rigid and oversimplified. Sex categories were ascribed and reinforced by the scientific and medical communities—institutions that Western culture considers to be sources of objective truths. Here an *objective truth* is a strongly held universal belief about humans and human behavior (Flax, 1992). Sex and gender are examples of these truths, meaning that under modernity, people born with male genitalia are expected to be men and perform behaviors associated with being a man, such as being sexually attracted to women, achieving financial success, and presenting leadership qualities (Ehrmann, 2013).

Conversely, postmodernism questions the notion that identity categories like sex and gender are universal truths. The goal of postmodernity is to "reject the modern assumption that reality has an inherent order or structure objectively discernible through scientific inquiry" (Mann, 2012, p. 26). In a postmodern era, the deconstruction of cultural dominant discourses, including antipornography discourse, is essential to our understanding of identity, sexuality, and power.

Postmodernism and the questioning of universal truths is accredited to the writer Michel Foucault (Flax, 1992), who, in his first

volume of *History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1980), breaks down the way knowledge and truth work as sites of both emancipation and constriction. Any claims of objective or *real* truths about men and women—what is natural or normal human behavior—represent the dominant discourse and normalize taken-for-granted assumptions about sexuality, gender, race, sex, and other identity categories (Flax, 1992). Moreover, Foucault (1980) asserted that the dominant discourse silences those in marginalized groups. When established and accredited institutions of power ignore, disqualify, or deem "sets of knowledge" as naive, *subjugated knowledges* are created.

Granted, prior to postmodernity, feminists showed that those who are in power are generally those with the loudest voices and that those in marginalized groups are rarely heard (Gatens, 1992). Intersectionality theory, which is rooted in modernity, seeks to bring to the forefront marginalized voices. However, modern theorists conceptualize power as a binary; power is something people either have or do not have (Foucault, 1980). Instead, postmodernists theorize power to be "everywhere," not just something that is dispensed from top to bottom: "there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations and serving as a general matrix" (Foucault, 1980, p. 94). In other words, for postmodern feminist theory, power is multidirectional and can even come from within, that is, power that we impose on ourselves (Bartky, 1997).

In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1980, 1986) deconstructed not only discourse and power but also concepts that are considered "natural" in the Western world: notions of sex and sexuality. Foucault stated that sex and human sexuality, like gender, are socially constructed and reaffirmed through institutional powers and producers of knowledge, such as science and medicine. That is to say, social norms regarding sexuality, sexual orientation, and the erotic are not rooted in nature and should not be discussed in "scientific or reproductive terms—but more as forms of eroticism

or bodily acts that give rise to pleasures" (Mann, 2012, p. 227). Thus the idea that men's and women's sex is dictated by their genitalia and that dictation denotes the sex to which they are attracted is false.

Queer theory is an application of postmodernism and a deconstruction of sexual norms (Warner, 1993). Queer theorists agree that identities such as man–woman or gay–straight–bisexual, and any ascribed meanings or behaviors associated with those identities, are artificial and constructed through repetitive performative acts (Butler, 1997). These performative acts, according to Judith Butler, create and constitute the self and our identity and are always dependent on the social conditions of their particular time and place. In her words, "one is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one *does* [emphasis added] one's body" (p. 421). Society and institutions of power, such as media, religious institutions, and governments, determine what acts or behaviors are considered appropriate, and anyone who falls outside of these determinations are regularly penalized and discriminated against (Butler, 1997).

Queer theory specifically sets out to criticize behaviors and norms that are considered "normal" (Halberstam, 2005), explicitly challenging the notion that success equates to achieving a heterosexual, monogamous, financially fruitful, child-bearing life. In this sense, sexuality cannot be constituted as good or bad (Rubin, 1984), meaning that morality of sexual desire is relative, and dominant socially constructed systems such as heterosexuality–homosexuality, man–woman, or masculine–feminine work to regulate bodies and discipline sexuality. Accordingly, queer theory rejects the notion that identities and values associated with those binaries are fixed and calls for an end to single unifying identity characteristics—or essentialism (Butler, 1990; Rubin, 1984). In queer theory, *essentialism* refers to applying specific attributes, or essences, to all members of a particular group (Spelman, 1988) and revealing the oppressive assumptions of essentializing groups. For example, queer theorists would reject the idea that all women share

a common trait for nurturing because of their ability to give birth.

Last, queer theory is concerned with the way heterosexual sex is normalized in Western culture (Warner, 1993). Furthermore, heterosexuality connotes a sense of hierarchy, always placing a woman's value lower than that of a man, and this hierarchy works to discipline men and women to behave in certain ways. Heteronormativity is most easily exemplified in the ways young schoolboys are ridiculed or called "gay" if they display any traditionally feminine characteristics, such as crying or speaking in a high-pitched voice. Other boys usually correct this behavior using aggression, which is an assertion of their masculinity (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003).

From this, it is clear that postmodernism, specifically queer theory, serves as a suitable critical lens to deconstruct antipornography discourse. Critiquing discourse about sexual norms, heteronormativity, and essentialism is central to queer theory. From this lens, we can analyze the rhetoric of antipornography feminists Dworkin and MacKinnon to illustrate how their position functions to essentialize pornography and its consumers and to perpetuate heteronormativity. While Dworkin's and MacKinnon's primary goal was to help "battered women" (Wilson & Dworkin, 1982)—victims of pornography—a queer analysis reveals that their discourse simultaneously works to discipline and constrain women's (and men's) sexuality.

BACKGROUND ON ANDREA DWORKIN AND CATHARINE MACKINNON

Dworkin and MacKinnon were both incredibly influential antipornography feminists who actively worked to disrupt what they viewed as the male oppression of women. Dworkin, born in 1946 in Camden, New Jersey, experienced sexual violence at the hands of a family member as a child and later at the hands of doctors in the New York Prison System at the age of 19 years. Dworkin spoke

out about her experience, which resulted in a formal government investigation into the prison, eventually resulting in its demolition (Levy, 2005). Dworkin later met MacKinnon, and in the 1980s, the two women worked to draft legislation that would allow women the right to sue for damages resulting from the creation and circulation of pornography (Wattenberg, 1995). MacKinnon, also born in 1946 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, went on to become a professor of law and, in 1974, proposed the argument that sexual harassment was a form of sexual discrimination. MacKinnon's focus turned to the legal and social issues surrounding the sex industry in the 1980s, and her work with Dworkin resulted in legislation that would classify pornography as sex discrimination against women. The legislation ultimately failed but introduced an important lens through which scholars had not before examined the societal effects of pornography, not in terms of morality but in terms of harms. Both Dworkin and MacKinnon went on to write extensively and make numerous contributions to radical feminist movements.

The importance of addressing the notions of these scholars specifically is difficult to understate. No two voices have extolled the harms of pornography as loudly and fervently as those of Dworkin and MacKinnon. MacKinnon (2013) stated in an interview with Harvard University Press that our current society is "substantially more saturated with pornography than it was before, as Andrea Dworkin and I predicted in 1983 would happen if nothing was [*sic*] done to stop it" (para. 15).

Indeed, the availability and variety of erotic content are unprecedented. Henry Jenkins (2004), Provost's Professor of Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California, argued that pornography is the driving force behind the technological development and deployment of every medium. In the 1900s, the majority of pornographic content was produced in print (magazines and picture books); in the 1970s, when the federal government decreased regulations on adult video

stores and adult movie theaters, pornographic film production skyrocketed (Clark, 1991). Many companies that have no primary affiliation with the adult film industry profit from pornography. For example, AT&T owns an adult channel that is sold to more than 1 million hotel rooms, and Hilton, Marriott, Time Warner, and even Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation "all have significant stakes in the porn industry" (Knudsen, 2007, p. 45). Pay-per-view and on demand changed the way people consumed pornography because they were no longer inconvenienced by having to go to an adult video store (Juffer, 2004; Knudsen, 2007). Yet, no other medium has changed pornography as drastically as has the invention of the Internet. The pornography industry is estimated to make $3 billion to $10 billion annually, and the largest variety of pornographic narratives and scenes exists on the Internet (Juffer, 2004; Wosick, 2015).

Moreover, the Internet provides a medium of consumer-created pornography (i.e., uploading homemade videos or erotic literature), so the general public has the power to self-produce sexual content. Consequently, the state of pornography, in this new technological era, provides a space for other erotic scenes to take place outside of the antipornography rhetoric Dworkin and MacKinnon provide. Specifically, MacKinnon stated on National Public Radio's *Think Tank* that pornography is "the practice of sex inequality" and "defined as the sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and words" (Wattenberg, 1995). To this end, the following section uses queer theory as a critical lens to illustrate how Dworkin and MacKinnon's rhetoric on pornography essentializes the sexes and promotes heteronormativity.

ANALYSIS

Michel Foucault's writings are a useful tool for unmasking how feminist theories, including theories that are meant to protect women,

still work to oppress through their discursive power (Ramazanoglu, 1993). Dworkin and MacKinnon are prominent writers, and they hold a lot of credibility both in women, gender, and sexuality studies and in politics. It is clear that their discourse carries much weight in public policy, given their influence in lawmaking (Smith, 2007; Wattenberg, 1995). In this sense, Dworkin and MacKinnon have become sources of knowledge, and that knowledge produces power. To understand how Dworkin's and MacKinnon's discourse about pornography functions to restrict sexuality and perpetuate heteronormativity and essentialism, a close examination of their rhetoric through a queer lens is necessary.

When reading antipornography texts from Dworkin and MacKinnon, it is immediately obvious that they hold a modern epistemology. For them, identity and social constructions are innate and static. In other words, from their perspective, concepts like feminism, sex, and pornography hold the same meaning for everyone, all the time. When MacKinnon (2000b) said that "empirically, all pornography is made under conditions of inequality based on sex, overwhelmingly by poor, desperate, homeless, pimped women who were sexually abused as children" (p. 103), she meant to say that *all* of pornography functions to perpetuate violence against women (Showden, 2012; Smith, 2007). When Dworkin (2000) stated that pornography is "a discrete, identifiable system of sexual exploitation that hurts women as a class by creating inequality and abuse" (p. 26), she was making it clear that pornography is *always* a form of oppression by men of women (Showden, 2012; Smith, 2007).

In fact, for Dworkin and MacKinnon, there is no room for different ways of conceptualizing pornography, women, and sexual desire; there is simply a mechanism that is used by (heterosexual) men to subordinate (heterosexual) women (Smith, 2007). When MacKinnon and Dworkin talk about pornography, they are making several assumptions, one of which is that no woman can be sexually aroused by pornography, because, according to them, it is

exclusively made for men (Hardy, 1998; Smith, 2007). This single view of sexual arousal for women and men is a perfect example of essentialism, because it assumes that men are inherently aroused by the subordination of women and that women are not sexually aroused by pornographic material. Again and again, antipornography rhetoric limits the reactions to pornography to those of men and women (Smith, 2007), and this eliminates the possibility for other truths.

In her introductory chapter to *Only Words*, MacKinnon (2000b) argued that pornography should not be protected under the First Amendment because its production constitutes more than only speech; it takes active bodies to create pornographic images, and for MacKinnon, the violence depicted in those images should not be protected as free speech. To illustrate her point, MacKinnon detailed one account where a man confessed that he started fantasizing about raping women after reading "girlie books and watching girly shows" (p. 102)—the man was facing the death penalty for vaginally and anally raping a dead woman. This extreme scenario functioned to perpetuate assumptions about the "type" of person who consumes pornography.

Additionally, critics of antipornography feminists, such as Janet Juffer and Linda Williams, see the antipornography feminist rhetoric as working against women's interests (e.g., Juffer, 2004). According to Juffer, "MacKinnon, Dworkin and other anti-pornography feminists are committed to an ahistorical politics of victimizer and victimized, in which men and women are fated to play out the roles to which porn has the sole power to confine them" (p. 49), meaning that the antipornography rhetoric always places the woman in the victim role without taking into account both the varieties of pornography that do not victimize women (e.g., lesbian amateur sex, homosexual sex, or male solo masturbation sex) and the agency of women who choose to participate in paid sex work. As Smith (2007) stated, "without exception anti-porn accounts offer

no means of understanding the motivations of women readers of sexually explicit materials except in terms of their victimization" (p. 35). Without the role of the victim, Dworkin and MacKinnon offer no way of understanding why women would consume pornography (Smith, 2007). Essentialism is so problematic to postmodernity because it normalizes assumptions about entire groups of people, thus leaving little room for other truths to be present. In other words, Dworkin and MacKinnon, through their antipornography discourse, subjugate oppositional knowledges.

Heteronormativity is another widely held assumption within antipornography discourse. Butler (1990) used the heterosexual matrix to describe heteronormativity. This matrix normalizes the assumed relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality (Atkinson & DePalma, 2009; Butler, 1990). Thus heterosexuality becomes a widely held belief. Atkinson and DePalma (2009) claimed that the matrix of heterosexuality continues to be used widely as "a tool for framing theoretical understandings of the social world" (p. 18). This matrix is also recognized as heterosexual hegemony, requiring participation through repetitive and complacent acts (Atkinson & DePalma, 2009). This notion of continual construction reflects the concept of normalizing discourse. For instance, MacKinnon wrote, "The consumer masturbates to [pornography], replays it in his head and onto the bodies of women he encounters or has sex with, lives it out on the women and children around him" (MacKinnon, 2000b, p. 106), and "in pornography, women desire dispossession and cruelty. . . . This is erotic to the male point of view" (MacKinnon, 2000a, p. 171). In both examples, MacKinnon was only calling on one type of man—a heterosexual man. MacKinnon continuously constructs consumers of pornography as heterosexual males, perpetuating the myth that only heterosexual men produce pornography for other heterosexual men.

Similarly, Dworkin promotes the same assumptions about men and heterosexuality. In her most notable work, *Men Possessing*

Women, Dworkin (1981) stated, "The male can experiment with the consequences as he imagines them of loss of power over women" (p. 35). Again, heteronormativity prevails as a major assumption of Dworkin's antipornography rhetoric. Basically, for MacKinnon and Dworkin, only a single outcome is possible in pornography: Heterosexual men watch pornography, and this *always* perpetuates violence against women (Dworkin, 1981, 2000; MacKinnon, 2000a, 2000b; Smith, 2007).

As a White, upper-middle-class immigrant from South America, my personal experiences with pornography conflict with Dworkin's and MacKinnon's claims. As previously stated, I have a positive relationship with pornography, because I grew up in a sex-positive household and also because of the Internet. The Internet allows users to search for content-specific pornography and gain access to the type of pornography they wish to watch or read. Whether it is pornography created by women for other women, homosexual pornography, or animated pornography, there is no limit to the categories available online. In my experience, the Internet complicates the claims of Dworkin and MacKinnon, which renders their definition of pornography as too narrow.

When Dworkin and MacKinnon make claims about pornography, they innately assume the response from the audience of pornography (Smith, 2007). From their perspective, pornography is not just a substitution for sex; it *is* sex (MacKinnon, 2000b). This stance ignores the possibility of audiences having a nonarousing interest in pornography as well as the possibility for alternative "cognitive interpretations of the text" (Smith, 2007, p. 45). Men—and women—are capable of being aroused by material that opposes their values and beliefs; audiences of pornography are not, according to Smith, passively accepting the images and situations portrayed in front of them. In repeating the gendered assumptions of pornography—that men consume it and subject women to violence—MacKinnon and Dworkin expressly disallow women

from expressing interest in pornographic content, meaning that in this rhetoric, women would not be allowed to speak in favor of pornography. Thus the antipornography discourse inadvertently silences women from expressing sexual desires alternative to the norm (Smith, 2007).

CONCLUSION

In sum, a queer perspective sees pornography as more complex than simply "violence against women." This article has analyzed how Andrea Dworkin's and Catharine MacKinnon's credibility in academia and the political realm act as an institution of power, where the knowledge that they produce dominates the rhetorical landscape. Thus their discourse has become a shared belief, an ideology that both liberates and constrains (Williams, 1990). Moreover, the dominant feminist discourse regarding pornography repeatedly essentializes pornography and those who consume it, and the antipornography rhetoric silences other truths or subjugated knowledges. Specifically, Dworkin and MacKinnon ignore any identity that falls outside the heteronormative man–woman, masculine–feminine assumptions; when marginalized groups are not included in discourse, they are discursively nonexistent. This absence in representation perpetuates heteronormativity and sustains essentialism.

There is no doubt that Dworkin and MacKinnon play a significant role in conceptualizing pornography in Western culture and politics (Showden, 2012; Smith, 2007). Their contributions give women who experience sexual violence a voice, and they were both successful in implementing public policy that helps victims of sexual violence (Dworkin, 1981, 2000; MacKinnon, 2000a, 2000b). However, the claims that MacKinnon and Dworkin make regarding pornography and those who consume it are not the *only* claims that can me made. A queer, postmodern critique reveals

that antipornography discourse leaves little room for alternative truths and knowledges. It allows for more choices in expressing sexual desire and practice (Showden, 2012). In the end, a queer perspective allows for a wider set of truths to become part of the discourse, because it conceptualizes pornography as more than only an essential evil in men's quest to possess women. As Smith (2007) stated, "pornography is only as influential as any other media form which seeks to convince readers of its ability to make sense of their experiences" (p. 225).

Consequently, communication research that aims to analyze pornography and pornography consumption *must* take a queer, postmodern approach. Because there is no consensus on the definition of pornography (Clark, 1991; Cornell, 2000; Showden, 2012; Smith, 2007), communication researchers and scholars have a responsibility not only to define pornography in the context of their research but also to allow for multiple truths to be present on the subject matter. It is not up to the scholar to claim what is "good" or "bad" when it comes to sexuality, and that includes pornography. Pornography plays an important role in marriages, and I argue that this role has the possibility of being negative or positive. It is problematic always to assume that pornography harms relationships, because in some cases, like my marriage, pornography is a tool for communicating or experiencing sexual desires. Last, scholars and researchers must see pornography consumers as more than just a passive audience and should not analyze the text as a "purveyor of meaning and readers as simply decoder of those meanings" (Smith, 2007, p. 21). There is a social relationship between the content and the consumer, and it is more complex than Dworkin and MacKinnon have described (Dworkin, 1981; Smith, 2007; Wicke, 2004), rendering the definition of pornography—violence against women—incomplete.

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