

# The Northwest Journal of Communication

Volume 47 Issue 1 \* Spring 2019

EDITOR

Andrea A. McCracken  
Oregon Institute of Technology

Published by the Northwest Communication Association  
*[www.northwestcomm.org](http://www.northwestcomm.org)*

ISSN 1559-0003

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### Aims and Scope

NWJC represents the diversity of the discipline, thus we welcome contributions related to any area of communication and from all theoretical and methodological perspectives. Submissions are expected to make original contributions to academic research in communication studies and should be theoretically sophisticated, methodologically sound, and make important advancements to human or mass communication scholarship. Manuscripts will be considered as they are received, and all submissions undergo rigorous peer review. Acceptance rates range, depending on the issue, from 15–20 percent.

### Author Guidelines

Manuscripts are accepted on a rolling basis, and may be submitted electronically at any time to the editor. See the website for his or her contact information: <http://www.northwestcomm.org/journal>. Manuscripts should not exceed 7,000 words excluding references and tables and figures (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.

### General Formatting and Style Guidelines

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically as a Microsoft Word file. The main document should be double-spaced, in Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins on all sides, and all pages should be numbered consecutively. Manuscripts should conform to the most recent edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA).

## Submission Checklist

1. *Letter to the editor:* Please include a brief summary of your submission, its significance, and explain why the readers of our journal would be interested in your submission. Please also confirm the work is original and not published (or in consideration for publication elsewhere). Finally, please disclose any funding sources or potential conflicts of interest.
2. *Cover page:* Please include the full names of all authors, affiliations, postal addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses. Please also note all details required by your funding and grant awarding bodies.
3. *Main document:* Please include a title page, abstract, key words, and the complete manuscript. Please include all tables and figures in this document. Please remove all identifying information from this document to allow for blind peer review. Please ensure identifying information is also absent from the electronic file information.

## Process

Manuscripts that fit the interests of the NWJC and align with the submission requirements will be sent out for peer review, typically to two reviewers. The NWJC is committed to a timely review of manuscripts and in most instances, authors can expect a submission decision within 90 days.



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# An Experimental Investigation of Food Sharing: Effects on Perceived Generosity, Attractiveness, and Masculinity–Femininity

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Food sharing is foundational to human sociality. Drawing upon costly signaling and impression management theories, the present study examined the role that observed food sharing plays in the formation of impressions of generosity, attractiveness, masculinity, and femininity. One hundred eight students were exposed to one of three videotaped interactions between two female confederates: an offer condition, a no-offer condition, and a control condition. Results show that offering to share food results in greater perceptions of generosity relative to the no-offer condition. Furthermore, failing to offer results in lower perceptions of generosity and attractiveness relative to the control condition. Finally, both the offer and no-offer conditions result in lower perceptions of femininity compared to the control condition. The discussion suggests that, for women at least, appearing generous and appearing feminine may sometimes produce a self-presentational dilemma.

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**KEYWORDS:** Food sharing, costly signaling, generosity, femininity, impression formation

“Animals feed: man eats,” proclaimed Brillat-Savarin (1825/1970, p. 13). Every day, human beings eat, frequently overlooking the myriad ways in which the foods they eat, the ways they eat those foods, and with whom they share their foods provide the substratum upon which much of social life is built. As Wiggins argued

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(2002), “we relate to others through the acts of giving, sharing, and withholding food, and our eating practices are embedded within daily (e.g., dinner) and annual (e.g., Christmas dinner) routines” (p. 312). In addition to its role in socialization (Lupton, 1996; Sutton, 2001), the literature has increasingly recognized that the symbolic meaning of food plays a substantial role in forming (Amiraian & Sobal, 2009a, 2009b) and maintaining (Bove, Sobal, & Rauschenbach, 2003) a wide variety of relationships. Kniffin and Wansink (2012), for example, found that respondents reported more jealousy in response to a partner sharing a meal with an ex-romantic partner than in response to a variety of activities not involving eating. Acknowledging distinctions between activities like eating together, sharing food, and feeding another, this study focuses on food sharing. With respect to relational communication, then, the sharing of foods can demarcate boundaries, promoting cohesion and intimacy among those who eat together (Whit, 1995).

The present investigation builds on the assumption that “people perceive food sharing as an important indicator of—and means to establish and increase—intimacy, friendship and love” (Hamburg, Finkenauer, & Schuengel, 2014, p. 3). *Food sharing* describes the act of voluntarily giving up a portion of one’s food to another. This might involve a variety of behaviors, such as providing food in a hosting capacity, sharing food “off one’s plate,” and/or providing food to someone based on perceived need. This investigation draws on two different bodies of literature. The first involves research conducted primarily by anthropologists examining food-sharing behavior in small-scale societies (Hawkes, O’Connell, & Blurton Jones, 2001; Kaplan & Hill, 1985). The second involves research conducted by social psychologists examining eating behavior and social interaction, particularly the types and amounts of food eaten, as a form of identity management among women. Despite their differing disciplinary orientations and methodological approaches, these bodies of literature converge in suggesting that

food is a polysemic resource that perceivers utilize to form and/or maintain impressions of relational partners, rendering food sharing an inherently communicative act (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993). This study builds on the insights of anthropologists but employs the methods of the social psychologist to provide further insight into the communicative phenomenon of food sharing.

### FOOD SHARING AND COSTLY SIGNALING

According to McGrew and Feistner (1992), “food sharing is the bridging element between subsistence and society” (p. 240). The richness and complexity of human social life are reciprocally connected to the richness and complexity of human consumption patterns, including the sharing of foodstuffs. Ongoing debates regarding the origins and functions of food sharing have provided multiple explanations for the practice, including tolerated theft (Blurton Jones, 1987) and conditional reciprocity (Bliege Bird, Bird, Smith, & Kushnick, 2002). Much of the research reviewed in this section derived from hunter-gatherer societies; despite differences between such societies and modern, industrial nations, if food sharing is fundamental to human social life, then explanations of food sharing should have wide relevance to contemporary human interaction.

According to Smith and Bliege Bird (2000), *generosity*, “the phenomenon of sharing food outside the immediate family, giving gifts, hosting public events, helping neighbors in need, all at some cost to ones’ [*sic*] self” (p. 253), is an important feature of social life found across cultures and subject to strategic considerations. One theory that has been utilized to account for the effects of a “reputation for generosity” (Gurven et al., 2000) is *costly signaling theory*. Smith and Bliege Bird (2000) have proposed three key conditions for costly signaling. First, the signal (i.e., the behavior under observation) must impose a significant and difficult-to-fake cost upon the source in terms of either labor invested or goods distributed.

Second, the signal must be reliably linked to the underlying quality being signaled (e.g., generosity). Third, there must be mutual gains for the sender and recipients of the signal. For senders, rewards are in the form of reputation and social status.<sup>1</sup> Receivers, alternatively, may obtain direct benefit through consumption of the distributed resource, but they also obtain valuable social information about the skills and character of the sender. Stosis (2000), for example, argued that torch fishing among men of the Ifaluk atoll is a costly activity that allows them to demonstrate their work ethic, thereby increasing their attractiveness to women. Smith and Bliege Bird (2000) suggested that those able to bear the cost of the signal obtain benefits in the form of higher quality mates and potential allies.

Costly signaling theory (Smith & Bliege Bird, 2000) suggests that the observable decisions a person makes regarding procuring and distributing resources provide information that may be utilized to form impressions about that person (Bliege Bird et al., 2002). The question arises as to why, or how, some resources function more effectively as signals than others. Stanford (1999), for example, argued that meat obtained through hunting is more valued for the social functions it fulfills than for its nutritional contribution to the diet. Conversely, it is difficult to imagine women, who do the bulk of the subsistence provisioning in most societies, building a “reputation for generosity” through their activities (e.g., feeding children). It is clear that some resources, including foods, are classified as luxury or “windfall” (Kameda, Takezawa, Tindale, & Smith, 2002) items that are highly desired regardless of their contribution to subsistence. To share such luxury items imposes a cost because the possessor could have kept the resource for himself or herself.<sup>2</sup> Thus, even in modern, industrial societies (societies not based on hunting and the distribution of meat), there are still luxury food items that are highly desirable and whose sharing can lead to perceptions of generosity. In this study, candy was used as such a desirable resource. Assuming a truth bias among receivers

(Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1996, p. 443), it is proposed that receivers will take an observed action, such as sharing candy, at face value as a clue to the target's underlying character, and their observations will affect perceptions of the target's generosity and attractiveness. This proposition undergirds the investigation's main hypotheses:

- H1: A target who offers to share food will be perceived as more generous than a target who does not offer to share food.
- H2: A target who offers to share food will be perceived as more attractive than a target who does not offer to share food.

The evolutionary approach recognizes that men and women often pursue divergent mating strategies (Buss, 1994). Insofar as food sharing may affect perceptions of underlying character traits, and those traits may be linked to qualities relevant to a potential mate versus a friend, the sexes may differ in their perceptions of a target person who shares food versus one who does not, resulting in the following research question:

- RQ1: Will men and women differ in their perceptions of a target person's generosity and attractiveness depending on whether that person offers to share food with another?

### **FOOD SHARING, MASCULINITY, AND FEMININITY**

The activities of eating, as well as the objects of that activity, are imbued with cultural significance. Mintz (1997) observed that "food and eating afford us a remarkable arena in which to watch how the human species invests a basic activity with social meaning" (p. 7). In mainstream U.S. culture, a basic division that renders food meaningful is the distinction between "good" or healthy foods and "bad" or junk foods (Chapman & MacLean, 1993; Counihan, 1999). In a study of the moral overtones of food, Stein and

Nemeroff (1995) found that subjects rated a person described as eating good, healthy foods as more moral, feminine, likable, attractive, and active as well as less masculine and less fat. Furthermore, the link between type of food consumed and ratings of morality was mediated by two mechanisms: ascription of a Puritan work ethic to the target person and application of a “you are what you eat” principle. In other words, individuals who eat healthy are perceived as more moral because they are seen as being more disciplined, hardworking, pure, and clean, all of which may be construed as culturally valued traits.

One aspect of culture relevant to eating behavior that has been the focus of a program of research is the masculine–feminine dimension. In a series of studies using a variety of methodological techniques, Pliner and Chaiken examined the role of meal size in shaping perceptions of femininity and masculinity. Chaiken and Pliner (1987) found that amount eaten had little effect on perceptions of a male target but was particularly salient for a female target. Specifically, participants rated a female target portrayed as “eating lightly” as more feminine, more expressive, more concerned about appearance, and less masculine than a female target portrayed as eating a lot. Guided by *impression management theory* (Schlenker, 1980), Mori, Chaiken, and Pliner (1987) found that women were more likely to eat less in the presence of a socially desirable male confederate. Pliner and Chaiken (1990) explored the social motives that might lead to restricted eating and discovered that, for women, concerns with both appearing socially desirable and appearing feminine could result in eating lightly in the presence of a male partner, while a competition motive could lead to restricted eating in the presence of a female partner. Drawing on this research, Basow and Kobryniewicz (1993) manipulated meal size and gender connotations of food to create four videotapes of a female student eating lunch. Participants rated the woman as more socially appealing when she consumed a small meal relative to a large one.

It is clear from this body of research that people form impressions of others based on the types and amount of food consumed. It is also clear that those others are aware of this evaluative process and may act strategically to convey desired impressions. Impression management theory (Leary, 1996; Schlenker, 1980) and costly signaling theory (Smith & Bliege Bird, 2000) converge in suggesting that perceivers will utilize food-related information and behaviors to infer the target's possession of valued traits. Traits such as generosity and attractiveness will be pan-cultural to the extent that a reputation for such traits is a common human concern. Other traits, such as masculinity and femininity, may be more culture specific, given that cultures may differ on this dimension. Prior research suggested that "eating lightly" (Chaiken & Pliner, 1987) is perceived as a more feminine behavior. It is not known, however, if attributions of masculinity and femininity will extend to the behavior of food sharing or if those attributions will differ depending on who is doing the observing, prompting the following research questions:

RQ2: Will perceptions of a target person's masculinity and femininity vary depending on whether the target person offers to share food with another?

RQ3: Will men and women differ in their perceptions of a target person's masculinity and femininity depending on whether the target person offers to share food with another?

## METHOD

### *Participants*

Participants ( $N = 108$ ) were 67 female and 41 male students enrolled in communication classes at a medium-sized midwestern university. The average age was 22 years ( $SD = 2.34$ ; range 19–35). Participants were predominantly seniors (45%) or juniors (36%), with a smaller number of graduate students (14%) and sophomores (5%). Students

received extra credit as compensation for their participation. This study was approved by the university's institutional review board.

### ***Manipulation of Food-Sharing Behavior***

In this experiment, participants were exposed to one of three videotaped interactions. Before constructing the stimulus tapes, two issues had to be resolved: choice of food and sex composition of the observed dyad. M&M's were chosen as the food in this study using the reasoning that they are a desirable food and that a person who possesses such a food has a greater latitude of choice in offering the food to another. That choice therefore imposes at least some cost to the offerer. To explore this reasoning, a brief questionnaire was distributed to 45 undergraduate students in an interpersonal communication class (29 women, 16 men; age [years],  $M = 21.51$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ). This sample did not overlap with the sample exposed to the experimental conditions. Fourteen food items were selected from a list of dietary permissible–dietary forbidden foods reported in Knight and Boland (1989). Foods were selected to represent the range of permissible–forbidden items (e.g., celery, banana, bran muffin, bacon, potato chips), and M&M's were added to this list for a total of 15 foods. Two versions of the food list were created. In one list, students were asked to indicate how important they thought each food item was for body functioning and survival using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not very important*) to 7 (*very important*). In the other list, students were asked to imagine that a friend was eating each type of food and to indicate how much they would like the friend to share that food using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*would not like*) to 7 (*would very much like*). With respect to body functioning, M&M's were ranked 14th least important ( $M = 2.07$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ), ahead of potato chips, whereas with respect to desire for sharing, M&M's were ranked 2nd ( $M = 4.64$ ,  $SD = 2.06$ ), behind ice cream. A paired samples *t*-test revealed a significant difference between these means,

$t(44) = -8.01, p < .01$ . These results suggest that M&M's were an appropriate choice for the stimulus food.

With respect to sex composition of the dyad, the decision was made to use a female–female pair for the stimulus tapes. This decision was based on two considerations. First, the results of Chaiken and Pliner (1987) suggest that eating behavior may be a more salient issue when observing women than when observing men.<sup>3</sup> Second, the connection between food and femininity may reflect the linkage between the preparation of food in the home and the traditional role of motherhood (Lupton, 1996, p. 47). According to Counihan (1999), the “predominant role of women in feeding is a cultural universal, a major component of female identity, and an important source of female connections to and influence over others” (p. 46). Thus a female dyad was considered an optimal choice for a preliminary experiment of food sharing.

To construct the tapes, two female undergraduate students from the theater department were recruited. The students were seated in chairs in front of a video camera, the target person on the right, her partner on the left. The students were given a set of four questions written on index cards. One person would read a question, they would both answer it, and then she would pass the set of cards to the other person, who would read the next question. The women went through the questions once, answering them as they normally would; they then rehearsed that conversation until they were comfortable repeating it before the camera in the same way for each condition. The conditions were set up so that the nontarget student would read the first and third questions. As she was reading the third question, the target female removed a small bag of M&M's from her purse (in the offer and no-offer conditions). In the offer condition, she opened the bag of candy and tilted it toward her friend, who shook her head and said, “No, thank you.” In the no-offer condition, she opened the bag and began eating. In both conditions, she consumed three M&M's

during the interaction. In the control condition, the target female did not produce any M&M's; the confederates simply enacted the conversation as practiced. The length of the interactions was 3:18 for the offer condition, 3:24 for the no-offer condition, and 3:27 for the control condition.

### ***Procedures***

Participants signed up during class time for a study on "impression formation." Experimental sessions were conducted in a conference room with a large TV and VCR unit placed at the head of a long, rectangular table. Sessions were conducted in groups ranging from one to five participants, and the assignment of session to condition was done randomly. Upon arriving at the conference room, participants were greeted by a research assistant, who directed participants to sit in every other chair. When all scheduled participants had arrived, they were given a consent form, which informed them that they would be taking part in a study of impression formation of actual communication behavior that would involve watching a short, videotaped interaction and then completing a questionnaire. After consent forms were signed and any questions answered, the research assistant (who was blind to the hypotheses of the study and was not familiar with the contents of the videotapes) directed participants to focus their attention on the person seated on the right in the clip, then started the videotape and left the room. Once the tape was finished, the research assistant returned, stopped the tape, and distributed the questionnaire. After completed questionnaires were collected, participants read and signed debriefing forms and were then released. Table 1 presents the distribution of participant sex across conditions.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Participants by Sex Across Conditions

Condition	Sex	
	Male	Female
Offer	13	22
No offer	11	27
Control	17	18

**Dependent Measures**

**Generosity.** Perceived generosity was measured with five items. One item (*not at all kind–very kind*) was taken from the measure of femininity described as follows,<sup>4</sup> while the other four were written for this study: *very generous–not at all generous* (reverse scored), *not at all giving–very giving*, *very greedy–not at all greedy*, *not at all selfish–very selfish* (reverse scored). Items were constructed as 5-point semantic differential scales and coded so that a higher score indicated greater perceptions of generosity ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = .76$ ,  $\alpha = .85$ ).

**Attractiveness.** Attractiveness was measured with the Interpersonal Attraction Scale (McCroskey & McCain, 1974), which measures three aspects of attraction: social (e.g., I think she could be a friend of mine), task (e.g., If I wanted to get things done, I could probably depend on her), and physical (e.g., I think she is quite pretty). In the present investigation, the measure was modified from five items per subscale to four items per subscale. Participants answered each question on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), and items were coded with higher scores meaning greater perceptions of attractiveness. The subscales were reliable: social ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = .74$ ,  $\alpha = .77$ ), task ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = .79$ ,  $\alpha = .81$ ), and physical ( $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = .77$ ,  $\alpha = .79$ ).

**Masculinity and femininity.** Masculinity and femininity were measured with the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence &

Helmreich, 1978). Masculinity was assessed with eight items (e.g., *not at all independent–very independent*) constructed as semantic differential scales ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = .51$ ,  $\alpha = .73$ ). Because one of the original femininity items was used for the generosity measure, femininity was assessed with the remaining seven items (e.g., *not at all emotional–very emotional*) constructed as semantic differential scales ( $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = .67$ ,  $\alpha = .84$ ). Items were coded so that higher scores meant greater perceptions of masculinity and femininity.

### **Potential Confounds**

**Immediacy.** Given connotations of intimacy associated with food sharing (Whit, 1995), and the potential that the confederates might alter their behavior over the course of taping the three conditions, the Generalized Immediacy Scale (GIS; Andersen, 1979) was included in the questionnaire. The GIS is a nine-item scale that measures Gestalt perceptions of immediacy (e.g., *cold–warm*, *unfriendly–friendly*). Items were constructed as 5-point semantic differential scales and coded so that higher scores meant greater perceptions of immediacy ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = .83$ ,  $\alpha = .95$ ).

**Relationship between confederates.** Participants were asked to characterize the relationship between the two confederates on the videotape by checking one of four categories: strangers, casual acquaintances, friends, best friends. The majority of participants indicated that they thought the girls were casual acquaintances (70%). Twenty-seven percent indicated that they thought the pair were strangers, while 3% perceived them as best friends.

## **RESULTS**

### **Examining Potential Confounds**

To examine the effects of immediacy perceptions, a 3 (Condition: Offer/No Offer/Control)  $\times$  2 (Sex of Participant: Male/Female) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with immediacy

as the dependent measure. All three effects were nonsignificant: condition,  $F(2, 102) = 1.68, p = .19$ ; sex,  $F(1, 102) = .35, p = .56$ ; interaction between condition and sex,  $F(2, 102) = .16, p = .85$ . Thus perceptions of the target person's immediacy behaviors directed toward her partner did not differ depending on experimental condition or sex of the perceiver.

To examine the effects of perceived relationship, a crosstabs chi-square analysis was conducted between condition and perceived relationship. The result of that test was nonsignificant,  $\chi^2(N = 107, 4) = 7.33, p = .12$ . A similar analysis between sex of participant and perceived relationship was also nonsignificant,  $\chi^2(N = 107, 2) = .74, p = .69$ . Thus perceptions of the relationship between the target person and the nontarget person did not differ depending on experimental condition or sex of the participant.

### ***Examining Hypotheses and Research Questions***

Hypotheses 1 and 2 and Research Questions 1 and 3 were tested using a  $3$  (Condition: Offer/No Offer/Control)  $\times 2$  (Sex of Participant: Male/Female) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with perceived generosity, attractiveness (task, social, and physical), masculinity, and femininity as the dependent variables. Results of the MANOVA reveal a significant main effect for condition, Wilks's  $\Lambda = .65, F(12, 194) = 3.83, p < .01$ . The main effect for sex was not significant, Wilks's  $\Lambda = .91, F(6, 97) = 1.66, p = .14$ . Furthermore, the interaction between condition and sex was also not significant, Wilks's  $\Lambda = .89, F(12, 194) = .99, p = .46$ . Thus, with respect to RQ1 and RQ3, participant sex does not affect perceptions of the target person in terms of perceived generosity, attractiveness, or masculinity–femininity.

H1 predicted that perceptions of generosity would be greater in the offer condition relative to the no-offer condition. The univariate test for generosity was significant,  $F(2, 102) = 12.45, p < .01, \eta^2 = .18$ . Follow-up comparisons using Tukey's honest significant

difference (HSD) test revealed that the difference between the offer and no-offer conditions was significant, supporting H<sub>1</sub>. Additionally, the no-offer condition was significantly different than the control condition. These results suggest that a female target who offers some of her candy to an interaction partner is perceived as more generous than a target who does not offer to share and that this latter target is perceived as less generous than a target who does not bring food into the interaction (see Table 2).

H<sub>2</sub> predicted that perceptions of attractiveness would be greater in the offer condition relative to the no-offer condition. Univariate tests for the three types of attraction were significant: social attraction,  $F(2, 102) = 3.12, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$ ; task attraction,  $F(2, 102) = 3.46, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$ ; physical attraction,  $F(2, 102) = 2.89, p < .01, \eta^2 = .09$ . Follow-up comparisons using Tukey's HSD revealed a similar pattern: In each case, the difference between the no-offer condition and the control condition was significant. Insofar as the offer condition did not differ significantly from the no-offer condition, H<sub>2</sub> is not supported. However, the comparisons suggest that a female target who does not offer to share is perceived as less attractive than one who does not bring food into the interaction (see Table 2).

RQ2 concerned whether perceptions of masculinity and femininity would differ depending on whether the target offered to share food. The univariate test for masculinity was not significant,  $F(2, 102) = .40, p = .67$ . The univariate test for femininity was significant,  $F(2, 102) = 10.83, p < .01, \eta^2 = .17$ . Follow-up comparison using Tukey's HSD revealed that both the offer condition and the no-offer condition were significantly different from the control condition, but not from each other. Thus a female target who brought food into the interaction, regardless of whether she offered to share, was perceived as less feminine than one who did not bring food into the interaction (see Table 2).

Table 2. Means for Dependent Measures Across Conditions

Variable	Condition		
	Offer	No offer	Control
1. Generosity	3.48 <sup>a</sup>	2.76 <sup>a,b</sup>	3.47 <sup>b</sup>
2. Social attraction	3.16	3.06 <sup>a</sup>	3.48 <sup>a</sup>
3. Task attraction	3.14	3.11 <sup>a</sup>	3.54 <sup>a</sup>
4. Physical attraction	3.07	2.79 <sup>a</sup>	3.38 <sup>a</sup>
5. Masculinity	3.16	3.11	3.22
6. Femininity	3.12 <sup>a</sup>	2.85 <sup>b</sup>	3.54 <sup>a,b</sup>

Note. Superscripts “a” and “b” indicate that respective means are significantly different from one another at  $p < .05$ .

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this investigation was to examine impression formation in the context of food sharing. Costly signaling theory (Smith & Bliege Bird, 2000) and impression management theory (Schlenker, 1980) were utilized to build the rationale that guided the experiment. Costly signaling theory directs attention to the role that freely given resources play in building a reputation for generosity and enhancing one’s attractiveness in the eyes of observers. Impression management theory focuses more broadly on the ways in which sources attempt to convey particular impressions in the minds of receivers. Of special interest here is a line of research examining the role of eating behaviors in shaping impressions of femininity (cf. Pliner & Chaiken, 1990). Taken together, these theories suggest that food sharing can be an important arena for relational communication.

Consistent with H1, the confederate was perceived as more generous when she offered to share her food compared to when she did not offer to share her food. Assuming that generosity is a

valued trait, this result suggests that food sharing is one route to conveying that impression to others. It was also found that failing to share food led to reduced perceptions of generosity compared to the control condition. It should be pointed out, however, that the mean for generosity was not significantly different in the offer and control conditions. If the control condition is taken as a sort of baseline perception, this might suggest that the female confederate was not so much seen as generous for sharing as she was perceived as stingy for *not* sharing (cf. Kelly, 1995, p. 142). These findings suggest that eating in front of others without offering to share is perceived negatively and that, socially speaking, the person would be better off leaving the food out of sight.<sup>5</sup>

Contrary to H2, perceptions of attractiveness did not differ as a function of offering to share food compared to not offering to share. One reason for the different effects for generosity compared to attractiveness may be temporal. That is, participants had to form their impression based on a limited amount of information about the confederate. In the absence of contradictory information, they may have been likely to take a single act of generosity (or lack of generosity) at face value as a clue to the target's character. However, to the extent that building a "reputation for generosity" (Gurven et al., 2000) takes time, and it is that reputation that enhances attractiveness, the offer manipulation may have been insufficient to affect perceptions of attractiveness. It was also discovered that when the confederate failed to offer food to her partner, she was perceived as less attractive across all three measures of attractiveness than when she left the candy in her purse. This suggests that if a person is not willing to share food, that person is better off not eating in front of others.

RQ1 and RQ3 concerned the role that participant sex might play in the impression formation process. Results of the analysis suggest that sex of the perceiver did not make a difference in this particular context. The second research question concerned perceptions of

the masculinity and femininity of the target based on food sharing. Results of the analysis suggest that masculinity was not a salient perception. However, an interesting pattern emerged for femininity: In both the offer and no-offer conditions, the target was rated as less feminine compared to the control condition. One explanation is that the act of opening the bag of candy and removing the M&M's (actions that were somewhat loud on the videotape) may have been perceived as disruptive to the flow of the conversation and/or as displaying less concern for the partner. A second possibility is that candy is perceived as less moral and, therefore, less feminine (Stein & Nemeroff, 1995). Another explanation is derived from the research of Mori et al. (1987) on "eating lightly." That is, the very act of eating candy, regardless of whether an offer to share was made, may have contravened the principle to "eat lightly," resulting in perceptions of reduced femininity. This result would then be in line with that body of research that has suggested that if women wish to enhance their feminine identity, they are better served by leaving food out of the situation.

### **LIMITATIONS**

Certain limitations of the experiment must be acknowledged. The first limitation concerns the type of food. M&M's (which were one of the foods used in the Mori et al., 1987, study) were selected with the idea that they would be considered a highly desirable food that was not considered essential to survival. Other foods might have served just as well for that purpose: Ice cream was ranked the most desirable food among the 45 students who participated in the food rating. However, such foods may raise issues of convenience and sanitation that are themselves potential confounds. M&M's are convenient because they can be purchased in individual packages and are easy to hand out without a great deal of mess or with the giver's hands ever touching the food. Future research would be

needed to see if the present results are robust across a number of food types and meal sizes.

A second limitation concerns the composition of the dyad. On one hand, these results are encouraging insofar as they extend the anthropological findings and suggest that women, too, can enhance their impressions of generosity by offering to share food with a partner. On the other hand, given the close connection between women and food (Counihan, 1999; Lupton, 1996), it is possible that even in an experimental setting in a Western culture, men's reputations might still benefit even more than women's because male food sharing is considered a positive violation of expectations. Future research should be undertaken to compare male and female food sharing more directly. A further avenue of research concerns mixed-sex dyads, where issues of attractiveness might become more salient for participants (Iredale, Van Vugt, & Dunbar, 2008).

## CONCLUSIONS

Costly signaling theory argues that signals that cost something on the part of the giver are indicative of dispositions toward generosity and other virtues (Gurven et al., 2000; Smith & Bliege Bird, 2000). Many of the behaviors used to illustrate the theory derive from research on hunter-gatherer societies and involve activities (e.g., big-game hunting, holding public feasts) that seem biased toward male pursuits. It is correspondingly difficult to ascertain what would count as a costly signal among women. On the other hand, *cost* is a relative term, and social exchange approaches argue that all interaction involves costs for both participants. In modern societies, there may be fewer opportunities for large-scale public displays, but on a smaller scale, people have opportunities every day to share resources, including food, and these displays communicate social information to audiences.

Additionally, there is abundant research evidence that negative

social information, such as negative traits and negative events, weigh disproportionately on perceivers compared to positive information (Ito, Larsen, Smith, & Cacioppo, 1998; Pratto & John, 1991). For example, multiple researchers have noted the higher weight of negative acts as perceived by a recipient when compared to positive acts (or even acts merely meeting expectations; cf. Burgoon, 1978, 1993; Gottman, 1994). As such, strategically avoiding circumstances that may be perceived as conveying negative information about oneself is beneficial for successful interactions. Even if this study did not find an overwhelming tendency for food sharing to enhance a female's perceived generosity (compared to the control condition), it is clear that failure to share detracted from those perceptions. It could be argued, then, that the failure to share is costly in terms of the negative information conveyed to audiences. Small acts signaling lack of generosity might add up, affecting the desire of others to initiate interaction with the person viewed.

In terms of impression management, perceptions of generosity, attractiveness, and femininity do not appear to operate the same way in food-related social interaction, which can result in a self-presentational dilemma. On the basis of this study and what appear to be cultural prescriptions, if a woman wishes to appear feminine, she may be better off not eating in the presence of others. If she wishes to appear attractive, offering to share food will not help her, but failing to offer will definitely hurt her relative to leaving food out of situation. If she wishes to appear generous in the context of eating, she should definitely offer to share her food with her partner if that partner does not have food. In the absence of a male food-sharing comparison condition, it is impossible to know for sure if this dilemma is specific to women. There is a close connection between women and food in Western cultures (and one could argue across cultures more generally), with much of that connection associated with mothering and its overtones of nurturance, feeding, and sharing. It may be that expectations for female

food sharing are a part of the host of expectations for femininity.

In her study of food rules among U.S. college students, Counihan (1999) uncovered themes around issues such as autonomy, control, and hierarchy, but no mention was made about rules for food sharing, though such rules undoubtedly exist. She argues that “women are shackled by the accepted food praxis of U.S. culture” (p. 126). One reason for this may be that women are unaware of how food rules oppress them, but she also concludes that women have strong motives for adhering to rules for restricted eating, including living up to cultural standards and attracting men. In our individualistic culture, it may be easier for individuals to recollect individual efforts to control eating (e.g., dieting, eating disorders), while overlooking myriad communal acts of eating together and food sharing where females feel pressure to change their behaviors to accommodate cultural expectations. Nevertheless, public or private, eating behaviors and the consequences of those behaviors would seem to factor into impression formation and its influence on relational communication.

Sutton (2001) claimed that “food exchanges, whether gift or theft, serve as a generalized reminder of a community life in which the roads of obligation are constantly open” (p. 160). The results of the present study suggest that, for women at least, this road has its bumps as well. Food sharing can be a fundamental form of social cohesion and intimacy (Miller, Rozin, & Fiske, 1998; Sommer, Stürmer, ShmUILovich, Martin-Loeches, & Schacht, 2013; Whit, 1995). In the present context of a female target, building relationships through eating with others may come at the cost of others’ perceptions of her femininity. Thus we echo Counihan’s (1999) contention that women will be unable to challenge food rules until they can collectively challenge the sex–gender hierarchy that oppresses them.

## AUTHORS' NOTE

This article was originally a paper presented to the Interpersonal Communication Interest Group, Eastern Communication Association, Philadelphia, in April 2006. The authors would like to thank Amanda Banninga and Megan Evanich for serving as confederates, Jillian Helmer for assistance with data collection, and Amanda Stoots for data entry.

## NOTES

- 1 Gurven, Allen-Arave, Hill, and Hurtado (2000) found that hunters who shared more than average received more food when injured or sick than those who shared below the average. This suggests that there may be direct benefits to the senders of costly signals as well as indirect benefits.
- 2 In many hunter-gatherer societies, meat is not considered the property of the hunter and may be distributed by village elders. In those situations, the costly signal takes the form of the labor and exposure to danger incurred by the hunter. For individualistic societies, where individuals feel entitled to the free disposition of their resources, the costly signal lies in the knowledge that the possessor of luxury items who shares gives up what he or she is otherwise entitled to enjoy.
- 3 This same reasoning led Basow and Kobrynowicz (1993) to confine their manipulation to a female confederate.
- 4 This decision was based on a pilot study in which two sections of a research methods class ( $N = 34$ ) were shown either the offer or no-offer videotape and asked to rate the target person on femininity and masculinity. The single item, ranging on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not at all kind*) to 5 (*very kind*), was significantly different between conditions, while the measure of femininity without the item included was not significant. Results of these analyses are available from the first author on request.
- 5 It is acknowledged that this principle may be more operative in contexts where food was not expected to be present versus situations where the presence or offer of food might be more typical.

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## Expected Sacrifice: Women's Socialization Experiences in Male-Dominated Totalistic Organizations

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In this article we examine the experiences of individuals who had been members of one of two totalistic organizations, the U.S. military and the Independent Fundamental Baptist Church. We used in-depth interviews to receive thick description of the organizational socialization experiences of these members. Through these interviews, we noted three themes that varied based on the participant's biological sex. Both women and men described initial concern about the tenets of these organizations, but women expressed a greater need to conform to organizational norms. Additionally, women described being asked to sacrifice more than men. Finally, women did not believe that they could change the organization, whereas men saw some opportunities for change. These findings led us to question beliefs about the equality of the socialization process for members of totalistic organizations. This work also supports and extends feminist standpoint theory by examining the process of socialization in totalistic organizations.

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**KEYWORDS:** Totalistic organizations, agency, dissent, socialization, sex differences

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The societal push for more minority membership and inclusion in male-dominated organizations has grown in recent years. The first woman has passed ranger school in the U.S. Army, and a growing number of police and fire departments have women in leadership positions (Balsamo, 2017). Similarly, churches have had more acceptance of women in leadership positions (Dodson, 2017; Hinderaker, 2017). This movement toward inclusion and away

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from dominant group isolation is positive. However, researchers must question what these nondominant group members experience during their time entering the organization and negotiating their role. In this article, we seek to describe the differences women members face when joining two totalistic organizations dominated by men, the U.S. military (USM) and the Independent Fundamental Baptist Church (IFBC). These two organizations were chosen for analysis because they are similar totalistic organizations in that they (a) hold pervasive beliefs of roles that are differentially assigned based on biological sex alone, (b) have leadership that is predominantly male, and (c) are actively preparing members for their respective versions of war. The USM is preparing members for physical conflict, while the IFBC is preparing members for spiritual conflict with Satan and the World, and for this reason, members are taught to wear the armor of God (Weeks-Richardson, 2019; Woodcox, 2017). These organizational beliefs and practices may lead to unequal treatment between men and women that is more observable than in traditional organizations.

A study, then, of these two organizations that are clear and blatant about the differences in the treatment of men and women may illuminate previous socialization and feminist standpoint theory (FST) literature in a new way. Specifically, because the expected position of women in these organizations differs from that expected of men, it is likely that women and men will have a different socialization experience because they are being socialized for dissimilar roles. This difference in organizational entry is one that is, to our knowledge, unstudied. We contribute three new ideas to organizational socialization literature: (a) Totalistic organizations specifically craft messages to reinforce status based on a member's biological sex; (b) members seek information in different ways based on their biological sex; and (c) rather than hide unfair treatment of members based on their biological sex, totalistic organizations are open about the differences, and organizational leadership validates

these differences by continuously reinforcing the roles men and women can play. Furthermore, although we understand that sex can be considered a nondichotomous identity, we purposefully use sex as a differentiator in this study because these organizations do not allow members who are transgender or who identify as a gender that is different than their biological sex.

### ORGANIZATIONAL TENETS

Scholars have noted that it is difficult to see preferential treatment in organizations because of the lack of disclosure (such as pay discrepancies) and the taboo nature of the topic. Most organizational members want to think that their organization is ethical and virtuous, because not to think so may make them question these qualities in themselves (Cheney, 1983). Therefore members may consciously or subconsciously ignore preferential treatment of men over women. However, in the case of the USM and the IFBC, an organizational justification exists for treating women differently than men: winning the physical or spiritual war.

The USM uses wartime effectiveness as a reason to prefer men over women (Van Gilder, 2018). Men are preferred due to factors such as physical strength, perceived emotional resilience, and the concern of feminine health during frontline combat, as was reported by the U.S. Marine Corps in a Force Integration Plan released in 2005. Within this plan, the U.S. Marines said that “all-male squads, teams and crews demonstrated higher performance levels on 69% of tasks evaluated (93 of 134) as compared to gender-integrated squads, teams and crews” (p. 17). Although all military occupations and positions became open to women in 2015 under the order of defense secretary Ashton Carter, the physical standards to serve on the front line were either not altered or altered slightly, and thus many units still mostly comprise men. For example, the Army Rangers has approximately 3,500 members (Murphy, 2015), and yet

only 12 women have graduated from ranger school (Cox, 2018). In addition to evidence from the military that men are the preferred members, social science researchers have shown that the USM both seeks out and breeds masculine traits in members (Eisenhart, 1975; Knight, 1990; Shpeer & Howe, 2020; Van Gilder, 2018).

The IFBC also uses wartime effectiveness as a reason to prefer men over women, although it is not as direct. The IFBC teaches and believes that the church remains strong by following biblical teachings. IFBC biblical passages like “I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Timothy 2:12, KJV) and “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body” (Ephesians 5:23, KJV) are interpreted to mean that men should be the only leaders in the church. If the church were to allow violations of this biblical principle, then the church could falter (Elmwood Baptist Church, n.d.). According to the Elmwood Baptist Church, an IFBC in Colorado,

the Bible clearly states that the man is to lead in the home and church, and the woman's role is to submit to the man's headship. There is widespread rebellion against this divine plan, though, and many women are being appointed to leadership positions in churches.

The web page further states,

These facts are evidence of the apostasy of the hour. Men and women in the world, having rejected Bible truth, are confused about the most basic things.

Many men are trying to be like women in dress and manner, while many women are demanding the right to be like men, to dress like men, to do the same work as men, to play the same sports as men, to fight in armies like men. They want more than

equal pay for equal work; they are demanding a man's place in the home, church, and state.

Sadly, the church is always affected by society. Thus the rebellion of women in the world is causing similar problems in the churches, and we find women demanding leadership roles in many Christian groups. (Elmwood Baptist Church, n.d.)

We can see from the post of this church, as well as many other IFBC websites with similarly posted beliefs, that these churches believe that men and women should be treated differently because they are created differently and that not to do so is to violate biblical teachings and thereby weaken the church.

Social scientists have found differing treatment of men and women in closely related organizations. Examining the Southern Baptist Church, a more liberal version of the IFBC, Pevey, Williams, and Ellison (1996) found that God as a man was used to reinforce biological sex stereotypes. Bendroth (1996) detailed how fundamentalist organizations tended to hold antiwoman attributes dating back to 1875, and E. Miller (2016) described the difficulties that women have faced in the Australian Pentecostal Church. Both the USM and the IFBC ground their beliefs about the differing treatment of women and men in the desire to see the organization succeed. The USM presumes that having women on the front line may hinder completing the mission, and the IFBC presumes that women in the pulpit will violate the law of God and therefore doom the church.

### **TOTALISTIC ORGANIZATIONS**

Totalistic organizations (TO) are fundamentally different than traditional organizations in that TO try to control as many aspects of the member's life as possible (Hinderaker, 2014). This control manifests in verbal and nonverbal rituals, especially during the

entry process of socialization, as these organizations attempt to transform incoming members (Hinderaker, 2014; Myers, 2005; Shpeer & Howe, 2020). Therefore TO provide an opportunity for members to both notice and describe extreme communication experiences. These rituals are likely to be particularly intense for female members entering an organization dominated by men, as existing members push women to change not only their communication patterns but also their personal identities to match the organizational identity (Chreim, 2002; Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998). If participants describe feeling a need to change to conform to the dominant group, it could void the benefits that these members would bring to the organization via their differing experiences.

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of women in male-dominated TO. To do so, we must first show that these organizations are male dominated. A force report in 2018 found that 83.5% of active-duty USM members are men and that 80.0% of reserve or guard members are men (Military OneSource, 2018). Furthermore, 82.0% of officers in the military are men, and of the top three ranks in the military, O7–O10, 92.5% are men (Military OneSource, 2018). The IFBC does not comprise mostly men (Wormald, 2015); however, as previously mentioned, most IFBCs believe that women cannot serve as pastors or deacons. For this reason, the qualities of positions that men and women can hold are remarkably different according to most IFBCs' interpretations of the King James Bible. Specific passages that IFBC leadership uses to justify these beliefs are Titus 1:6, 1 Timothy 3:4–5, and Ephesians 5:22 (see also Elmwood Baptist Church, n.d.). These organizations are thus male dominant in their leadership and power structures.

To fully understand the intricacies of members' entry process, we interviewed members of these two male-dominated TO and allowed participants to describe their own socialization processes. Earlier work on TO has not examined sex differences among members

during the socialization process. This study aims to fill that void guided by two theories: socialization and FST. In addition to these theories, this framework also employs the theoretical concepts of agency and dissent.

## UNDERSTANDING THE ENTRY PROCESS

### *Socialization*

The theoretical process of socialization (Fonner & Timmerman, 2009; Gailliard, Myers, & Seibold, 2010; C. Scott & Myers, 2010) provides a general framework that allowed us to identify and track members' entries into the organizations. Early research on organizational socialization began with work by Schein (1988) and Van Maanen (1978). Van Maanen and Schein (1979) described how it is more important to understand how members are socialized into organizations than what they are socialized into. This is done by examining the way new members are exposed to and choose to either accept, reject, or modify organizational beliefs, values, and norms. The application of socialization is essential to the study of not only organizations but also the groups within these organizations. Groups will overlap with the organizational beliefs, values, and norms of the organization, but the group could vary in the experiences of these items based on the purpose of the group (Myers, 2005). For example, every member of the U.S. Army goes through basic training, which is controlled tightly by the organization, and there is trivial difference in training at the organizational level—every member is treated as a soldier. However, until recently, only men could be in combat roles and would thus receive further combat training. As most promotions are based, in part, on military awards, women did not have the same opportunity to take part in such activities and thus may not be promoted simply because they do not have the opportunity to participate in the primary focus of the organization. These differences between group members

within an organization could make their socialization experiences more difficult.

The socialization process consists of four phases: anticipatory socialization (planning to join an organization), entry (joining the organization), metamorphosis (performing an organizational role), and exit (leaving the organization; Kramer, 2010). We focused on the entry phase of socialization in this study as this is the point at which members first encounter their role in the organization and discover organizational expectations. Such a move provides the maximum likelihood for differences to be observed. Another advantage of examining the entry phase is that if members differ in their personal beliefs, values, and norms from the organization's norms, they may remember such differences during this phase of socialization, as they have not yet gone through metamorphosis or fully identified with the organization.

### ***Feminist Standpoint Theory***

Given our theoretical focus on how women and men perceived the entry phase, we coupled the phasic model of socialization (V. D. Miller & Jablin, 1991) with FST. According to Wood (2005), "women's lives are systematically and structurally different from the men's lives and, that these differences produce different (and differently complete) knowledges" (p. 61). Knowledge is "contextualized and tied to location and vantage" (Sloan & Krone, 2000, p. 23), and knowledge is based on experiences accumulated within a hierarchical, "gender-stratified culture" (Wood, 1992, p. 11) in which men are the dominant, centered group (Wood, 2005). All knowledge is therefore partial and based on one's social location (e.g., Wood, 1992, 2005), which is why FST also asserts that nondominant members are more aware of biased group dynamics than dominant members. This awareness is sometimes called *double consciousness* or *double vision* (Brooks, 2007). As an oppressed group, women have "a heightened awareness not only of their own lives but of the

lives of the dominant group [men] as well,” which allows them to be attuned simultaneously to the dominant worldview and their minority perspective (Brooks, 2007, p. 63). It is therefore imperative to hear entry stories from dominant and nondominant members.

Because male-dominated TO adhere strictly to their beliefs and values, they may suppress women’s voices and cultivate environments of oppression more so than traditional organizations. Patriarchal organizations naturalize and normalize sex-based divisions, making such divisions and the subordination of women seem right and normal (Wood, 2005). As previously discussed, the USM and IFBC organizationally justify in formal ways the differential treatment of women and men, always privileging men. These organizations also imbue everyday practices by privileging men and heteronormative masculinity. For example, male-dominated TO have a different vocabulary, comprising jargon, acronyms, and technical terms, from traditional organizations. In the USM, the term *broke-dick* is used for a member who is always injured, and *Jody*, a name typically given to women, refers to a man who has not joined the military during a time of war (Eliason & Tuleja, 2012). In the IFBC, the *two-finger rule* refers to the cut of a woman’s neckline, wherein the distance between the neck and neckline must be within the width of two fingers (Cressy, 1993). Men do not have similar dress code expectations in the IFBC, which means it is solely women who must conform to organizational expectations. Members are most likely to first hear these vocabulary norms and experience these sex-based expectations during the entry phase, as they learn and encounter the beliefs and norms of the organization.

### ***Agency and Dissent***

Because TO have stricter structures than traditional organizations, it is important to consider the perceived agency of female members. Agency is a theoretical concept derived from Giddens’s (1984) conceptualization of structuration. Agency is evaluated by the member’s

ability to change organizational context and flow (Giddens, 1984; Koschmann & McDonald, 2015; Lammers & Barbour, 2006). The only way for members to enact agency is to act with discursive rather than practical consciousness. *Discursive consciousness* refers to a member being able to explain how and why he or she engages in an action, whereas *practical consciousness* is the inability to explain why an action was taken. Giddens (1984) hinted that if a member does not have the ability to act in an organization, then he or she does not truly have agency. Conceptualization of agency is extremely crucial, especially in this study. Kramarae's (2005) claims regarding muted group theory and nondominant group members' need to conform to the dominant group would suggest that female members do not have agency to communicatively dissent, and this would seem even more likely in the context of a male-dominated TO. Even if the position is taken that an individual can always do something to change an organization, and therefore every member always has agency (Koschmann & McDonald, 2015), it must be acknowledged that this is only supported to the extent that the member perceives that he or she has agency or the ability to act (Hinderaker, 2017). If a member is not acting in discursive consciousness but is simply reacting as the organization has trained him or her to do, then the member may never perceive agency. If women do not perceive agency, then they cannot consciously enact it.

Members of an organization or group can enact agency in different ways, but perhaps the most common is via dissent. Garner (2013) defined *dissent* as holding and expressing a belief that is contrary to the opinion held by most of the group. It is important to note that dissent is neither positive nor negative, but the use of dissent can result in either positive or negative outcomes. Society, organizations, and groups often discourage dissent (Glynn & Noelle-Neumann, 1986; Noelle-Neumann, 1977), and most individuals refuse to dissent for fear of ostracism or marginalization (Garner, 2009, 2013). Because women members of TO are already

marginalized by the organizational structures, it is important to ensure that these members have perceived agency so that they can engage in dissent.

### STATEMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

We developed multiple research questions to explore the intersections of socialization, FST, agency, and dissent in TO. One understanding central to this communication phenomenon is that members learn how to act in and interact with members and resources of an organization through the socialization process (Kramer, 2010; Myers & McPhee, 2006; Waldeck, Seibold, & Flanagan, 2004). Some researchers have theorized that the socialization process into an organization differs depending on the demographics of the organization and the individual (Allen, 1996; Cohen & Avanzino, 2010). As such, women may have a stronger need to reconcile previously held views with the views of the USM or the IFBC that they have now joined than men. Understanding that organizational structures are learned during the socialization process, that these socialization processes differ based on the level of similarity with the dominant group, and that shared previous experiences could alter the socialization process, we propose the following research question:

RQ1: Do male and female members of totalistic organizations describe their socialization process differently, and if so, in what ways?

Exploration of this research question will supply a foundational understanding of how female members experience the socialization process. This approach highlights one of the novel contributions of this project, because we can assess how these communication processes occur in male-dominated TO. Previous research has demonstrated that the socialization processes in these organizations

are markedly different than they are in traditional organizations (Gibson & Papa, 2000; Myers, 2005). This study combines the knowledge of how female members experience joining organizations with the described experiences of members of TO. This joint approach could allow for a description of the amount of perceived agency, and so we ask the following:

RQ2: In what ways do male and female members of totalistic organizations describe their level of agency?

Finally, it is plausible that female members of TO express a different method to, or ability to, express dissent in an organization because of their often-marginalized status. Members who are already different from most other organizational members may face a deeper fear of ostracism or isolation than members who are similar to the rest of the organization. With these potential differences in mind, we pose the final research question:

RQ3: How and to what extent do male and female members of totalistic organizations express dissent within the organization differently, if at all?

## METHODS

We explored the experiences of members of male-dominated TO, with a focus on the experience of female members, through semi-structured interviews. We employed this methodological approach because members of these types of organizations have a unique vocabulary to describe organizational norms and traditions, and the most effective way to understand this vocabulary, gather context, and answer the research questions was through qualitative analysis of participants' described experiences (Porter & Samovar, 2003). After gaining institutional review board approval from the lead

researcher's university, the researchers used an interview protocol to serve as guiding questions during the process.

### ***Sampling***

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling. The lead researcher reached out to personal contacts in the military and strict religious organizations asking them to participate in the study and also asking them to refer others to participate. Recruitment messages were also posted to online bulletin boards and public social media sites that are frequented by members of these organizations (Browne, 2005; Hoyle, Harris, & Judd, 2002). The only restrictions on who could participate were as follows: (a) They must have been or be a member of either the USM or an IFBC, (b) be aged 18 years or older, and (c) be a first-generation member of a TO. This last criterion helps minimize normalization of the organization in the presocialization phase or the chance that experiences during the anticipatory socialization phase could create various responses. For example, if a woman grew up in a military household, then she had exposure to the socialization process during childhood development (see Gibson & Papa, 2000). Therefore she may have been exposed to organizational norms prior to entry and may voice different experiences than women who did not grow up in such an environment. These criteria were necessary to obtain the best theoretical sample; however, they severely limited the number of available and willing participants. The researchers found that some men in leadership positions in both the military and church forbid members from participating or asked the lead researcher not to contact their members. However, interviews were conducted until theoretical data saturation was reached or no unfamiliar information was obtained from the interviews. This theoretical saturation occurred at 19 interviews; however, one participant asked to be excluded from the study after the study had concluded but before results were written and was then removed. Of the 18 remaining

participants, 9 were women and 9 were men. Eight were former members of the church and 11 of the military (one member was a former member of both). The racial demographics of participants were White ( $n = 12$ ), Latinx ( $n = 4$ ), Black ( $n = 1$ ), and Native American ( $n = 1$ ).

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

Interviews were conducted with participants face-to-face, by phone, or by a video conference after the participant had signed the consent form. Because of the previously noted potential risk of superiors' displeasure for participating, we were extremely mindful to ensure that all signed consent forms were kept locked away and were not connected to participant responses. Participants were advised that they had continuous consent and that they could refuse to answer any question and could stop the interview at any time. Participants were informed that their names were not connected to the data in any way and that pseudonyms would be used during the coding process and throughout data analysis to ensure privacy. Participants were asked for permission to audio-record their sessions, and these recordings were kept in a fireproof safe by the lead researcher, except for when removed for transcription. During transcription, the researcher used direct transcription, with the exception of backchannel talk (e.g., um, uh, OK), for the entire interview period. After transcription, the researcher destroyed the audio files to ensure privacy. Transcription of all interviews provided 81 single-spaced pages or 29,714 words of text. Interview transcriptions ranged from 2 to 11 pages of data ( $M = 4.5$ ).

The first researcher analyzed the data in a three-step system of open, inductive, and deductive analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The researcher used this variation of open and axial coding to limit researcher intrusion and encourage emic themes as opposed to etic data contamination (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Edwards & Lampert, 2014; Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011).

The second researcher used an open coding scheme, and then the researchers combined and collapsed the codes and categories into three themes.

## RESEARCHER POSITION

The lead researcher was a former member of the USM and a former second-generation member of the IFBC. This position supplies benefits to the study that outweigh the concerns of this orientation. First, the researcher has contacts in these populations, which are often hard to enter, allowing for a higher chance to collect data. Second, the researcher knows the jargon and contexts of these organizations and can interpret terms that another researcher might not understand. Finally, because of the researcher's position, participants may have felt more confident that their privacy would be protected and therefore freer to express themselves. The second researcher was never a member of either organization and therefore served as a source of reliability.

## RESULTS

Of the transcribed interview results, 1,105 lines and 17,015 words were coded. Uncoded data consisted of conversational small talk that occurred during the interview process between the researcher and participant. Data could be coded into more than one category and counted independently toward each category or subcategory statistics. Three categories were found that are relevant to the research questions posed and represented 33.6% of the data.

### *Pressure to Conform*

This category references when participants expressed a need to conform with norms, expectations, or rules within their organization during the socialization process; 13 participants discussed such

issues in their interviews. Women expressed a greater need than men to fit in and conform with expectations to avoid ostracism. Some women conformed out of concern for how their peers would view them. Ella said,

Well besides like fines and stuff, they would always send us out to do things in pairs, and I felt like this was to keep us from disagreement. Like my partner “Laura” and I would go out for ministry or soulwinning, and I would do things or not do things, not because of what I believed, [but] because of what I knew she believed and I didn’t want to get reported or in trouble. But years later when I talked to her, I found out she felt the same way but she was scared of what I would like think.

Peers reinforced conformity in other ways. Ella noted that her church reinforced norms “more subtly by just like letting you see your differences and then like conforming to how everyone else was acting so you weren’t different.” For example, she wore pants, a practice forbidden in most IFBCs, for a couple of months after she joined, and “no one like told me I wasn’t supposed to, but as I looked around I saw none of the other women were.” These experiences show that one of the most powerful forms of control may be the reinforcement of structures by other members.

The pressure to conform also continued in a top-down structure. Some women expressed not wanting to be publicly called out for nonconformity. For example, Ella stated,

There was also so much preaching on rebellion, and they would name people I knew or had known, and tear them down for their choices and tell us not to become a sermon illustration. This made me scared or like afraid to do wrong things because I didn’t want them to talk about me like this to others.

Isabella expressed a similar experience:

And then there were the churchings<sup>1</sup> and most of them were for minor stuff, but even those kept you in line. You would get called down from the pulpit if you did something wrong. . . . They would use illustrations of people from the pulpit all the time and they didn't use names, but you knew exactly who they were referring to.

Some women expressed a need to conform or follow superiors' directives because they were new to an organization and had lower status. For example, Ella said, "As a new convert I just trusted the church and I had no reason to question authority of the church but just believed in it." Ava noted that at the rank of private, "I did what I was told."

Overall, women felt pressure to meet their peers' and superiors' expectations, and this continuous pressure to conform shifted how women perceived the organization and their role in it. Maria provided this response in defense of organizational views:

If you want facts I can give you facts and then with students being like women should be in combat in positions and things like that, which I feel comfortable discussing this with you because like, you've seen it. And I'm just like, join the military, or just go for a week and go somewhere overseas and you let me know how that's going to work out. You let me know how, you know, I think girls are 140, 150 pounds, woman can carry a male who's probably 250 out of hazardous situation and get them to safety. While carrying like 70 pounds of stuff, weapons, this and that. I'm like, it's just, it's not realistic. Like, I'm all for women, equal pay and all that, but I'm just like some things there's just no place.

In another example, Isabella initially stated, “So I guess it was that support structure at church that kept me in and going,” but she went on to question this organizational structure: “Well would you call it support structure or pressure structure? You know, now that I am thinking about it, I do not know if it was a support structure or pressure structure.”

Men discussed conformity as well, but most of it was directed at others, or they discussed that they would not conform. Regarding the former, Sebastian discussed how his wife’s lack of conformity could hurt him: “Yeah there was definitely pressure. I would not have wanted to have been known as the man with the woman who sneaks around wearing britches.” For the latter, men voiced resistance against conformity. For example, Carter said, “I couldn’t really reconcile myself to believe like they believed. I think that is what led to my change in demeanor and me not reenlisting.” Similarly, Henry called some of the norms within in his church “ridiculous.” He disagreed with the presence of the Confederate flag and some of the norms for women, saying, “I disagreed with everything that a normal person would disagree with . . . like girls shouldn’t have short hair, girls shouldn’t wear makeup, girls shouldn’t you know have pants on.” He went on to say that other members “couldn’t completely convince me of what they were saying.” Though men recognized certain norms, they expressed less pressure to conform to these norms than women.

Before concluding this category, it is important to note that norms about women’s appearance were a reoccurring theme throughout the socialization discussion. Ella discussed her own experiences of learning that she should not wear pants, and Sebastian and Henry both discussed appearance norms for women. Other women discussed their socialization processes around appearance. For example, Penelope stated,

Yeah everything about it was different than what I had known.  
I did not know what Independent Fundamental Baptist meant

when I went. . . . I was really freaked out. It was nothing like I had experienced in Catholicism. Yeah it was a different world. The no pants for women was so foreign to me.

Isabella also discussed trying to learn certain dress norms early on, stating, “I was still trying to get over the two-finger rule and the slit up the back of the dress. I was like OK. And the whole culottes thing.”

Other women also discussed their struggles to learn dress norms and the role of superiors in this process. Lily said, “I would say the dress standards and not understanding that and not necessarily agreeing with it.” She learned the standards through scripture: “other materials that people had written regarding that area, and conversations with the pastor and pastor’s wife.” Ava’s experiences with dress expectations showcase the differences between formal rules and culture-based expectations within the organization:

It was strange because I checked in in my reserve unit as a dress uniform and the women can either wear a trouser or skirt, so I wore my trousers because my skirt was damaged. And my female sergeant yelled at me for not checking in wearing a skirt, and I was like where in the orders does it say I have to wear a skirt because I am not going to if I don’t have to. And it just kind of stressed me out, especially at that time. I mean come on, it affects me that I have to wear a skirt. This Marine was just very old school. She was always in a skirt.

Ultimately, women felt more pressure than men to conform to behavioral or appearance norms from their peers and from their superiors during the socialization process.

### ***Presumption of Sacrifice***

The need to conform often resulted in members sacrificing themselves or their beliefs and was reported by all of the women who

participated and two of the men. For women, this sacrifice was typically in service of their family or their husband's advancement. For example, Isabella stated that she did not agree with certain rules in the church, "but my husband did so I had to give up my old beliefs." She went on to state,

I mean this was my husband's path . . . I mean what if I didn't stop wearing pants, what would have happened to us, we would have been totally ostracized. I wouldn't have fit in. I would've been a rebel. . . . I did it for him and for our family. . . . My husband wanted the future in the church so I had to obey.

If women questioned this supportive role, they were corrected. For example, Isabella said, "I have known women that have gone to get counseling and the senior women would just put the younger women in their place and say it is your job to make this man and you need to fall in line." Ella described her experience this way: "So I was saved and baptized there, and then like two years later they convinced me to go to Bible college to be a preacher's wife."<sup>2</sup> Women were expected to sacrifice their beliefs or their time in service of their husbands or prospective husbands.

Women in the military also described presumed sacrifice, mostly about raising children. Desiree said,

So, [my daughter] staying with my mom on and off and for such long periods of time, when she gets mad at me, she'll be like well you didn't even raise me, sometimes you're not even here, and I got that from my grandma and that's not my fault, that's your fault.

Maria also described the presumption that the mother would watch the children or find a family member to fill in: "[My daughter's] dad was in the military, too, so sometimes she stayed like up to a year with my mom." These sacrifices of family time were unique

to women in that they were outside of normal expectations; men rarely discussed being gone from children during training or deployments, but women did.

When men mentioned sacrifice, it was either about their wives or about their own advancement. For example, Sebastian commented on his wife's expected sacrifice: "And my wife didn't get much credit but she followed me, which is biblical right. I said we are going to [city removed], and she said OK and was submissive like she should be." Henry also discussed sacrifice, but it was in service of his own career. Henry noted,

I was an American kid who happened to be Latino, and everyone was always trying to act like I have to be a super Christian Latino, and I was like that is not my strength, but they said if you are going to go into preaching you have to take over a Spanish church.

In this case, Henry was pushed to sacrifice his "American kid" identity in favor of his ethnic identity, but doing so would help him gain his own congregation. For women, their sacrifice was in service of others.

### ***Permission to Dissent or Create Change***

This category references when participants discussed their agency within an organization, often through the themes of dissent and change. Women were more likely to express an inability to dissent or effect change. Ella mentioned keeping her dissent "inside" and stated, "I was even scared to share my feelings with my husband for a while because I thought he would look down on me for feeling that way or questioning things." Isabella would voice dissent to her husband about the church and "say this is crazy and he would defend it." She learned, "as a woman, I could not go talk to anyone else . . . there would never have been a time for me to speak up against this except to him. . . . You do not challenge leadership,

no.” Other women also expressed a lack of agency. Ava noted that at the rank of private, “you don’t have the power to change anything.” Similarly, early on in her church membership, Ella said, “Well I don’t really think I could change anything.” Regardless of her status, Lily agreed and said, “No, I don’t think I would have the power, would have had the power to change it.” Each of these women expressed that she did not have the individual agency to enact change. Isabella went a step further and asserted that change in general was not possible: “There was no one that could change, not even the pastor and the future pastor would never have been able to make changes.” One woman, Penelope, did express some willingness to dissent but recognized that it would not lead to change: “I would buck the rules and ask why, and they would give me their answers, and if I didn’t agree with it, it didn’t matter. It was what it was. You either did it or you know.” Overall, women expressed a lack of agency within their organizations, and so they had little ability to voice push-back or enact change.

Men, conversely, often said that they would dissent, push for change, or felt as though change was possible. Oliver was content with the status quo but expressed his own personal agency: “I mean in certain situations I could have had the power to change something going on but . . . I never saw a reason to go over someone’s head.” Carter also talked about the role of rank in enacting change and said, “I normally would bring up items to the chain of command and if I thought it was something I could actually change, I would push for change.” Despite his “ability to bring up ideas for change,” Carter noted that these ideas “were generally quickly shot down.” Mason voiced his ability to dissent, stating, “Even in training there is situations where people say you should do this and I say well why should I do it this way.” Like many of the men, Mason also discussed the need to work through a chain of command for change:

I think we have a responsibility to those under us to listen to complaints and concerns, and if someone has a legitimate concern, I will push for change. . . . You know say like this was brought to my attention and they have a good point, you definitely have closed-minded people in the military that won't change, but I think that if there is something that is legitimately wrong, those voices will eventually be heard. . . . If something is proposed it will take forever for that rule or restriction to be changed. It just has to work its way up to the general, maybe colonel level. Now ultimately will that marine that proposed the change ever see it or be in the service that long, who knows, probably not, but ultimately if things gets passed up and there is ground for change, it ultimately will happen.

Other men also voiced that change was possible, but such change may be hard to enact within the organization. Benjamin noted that the public could exert external pressure and "enact change, but I think it will be very slow, the Marine Corps is a very tradition-driven institution." Even with these traditions, Benjamin still expressed some individual agency to create change:

By the time I was a corporal I couldn't make mass changes by any stretch of the imagination, but one thing I could do was the little victories in how I treated my subordinates and how I interacted with my lance corporals that were under me, and I could be more humane than others were to me.

Wesley also noted that outside action may be necessary to effect change:

You know I think they have their way of doing things and they have been doing it so long and a lot of what the Army does

is right . . . [but] if you are trying to effect change, that's like a different ballgame. I would love to as a consultant give them some ideas you know but in it, you can't do that.

Many of the men expressed general agreement with the status quo, but when they felt like change was justified, they would dissent and push for change through the proper channels.

## DISCUSSION

The stories of the participants in this study reveal that the experiences of women who were members of these organizations differed from men. We identified three themes that help answer our research questions: pressure to conform, presumption of sacrifice, and possibility of change. These findings lead us to believe that not only do women have to learn new roles in these organizations but that they have more expectations with fewer rewards. Considering the amount of organizational learning that is occurring through the socialization process and the theoretical assumptions of FST, or the new way of communicating in general, these observed differences place women at a disadvantage in these organizations.

In answer to RQ1, women members described the process of joining and staying in these organizations as a mostly negative experience; however, the experience is organizationally structured and thereby is difficult to change. They further described its negativity as arising from the pressure to conform. This conformity often caused them to sacrifice their values and beliefs for the organization. Although both men and women were expected to change for the organization, the expectation of change for women was much more drastic. Additionally, women members described not having the ability to create change, or enact agency, in these organizations for which they were sacrificing.

Considering these findings, we conclude that the socialization

process of these organizations disproportionately affects members who are women. Whether it is a drill sergeant yelling and screaming in a military formation or a preacher yelling and screaming in a church congregation, women must adapt to the heavily tinted masculine environment, an adaption that FST suggests is difficult and perpetuates inequality and oppression (Wood, 2005). This focused pressure on women to conform beyond men reveals that these organizations craft messages specifically for members based on their expectations for them and that these expectations are different for men and women. Future research on TO should consider the role of biological sex when analyzing the socialization process, especially for male-dominated TO.

RQ2 asked how men and women members perceived agency; almost unanimously, women did not believe that they had agency to change what was happening in the organizations. In examining the one participant who did perceive some agency, as a negative case analysis, she only allowed for the possibility but did not offer any firm reasoning for what it would look like. Regarding dissent, the focus of RQ3, women members described few instances of dissent against the organization. However, this lack of dissent should not be viewed as members agreeing with the organization, as shown by the internal dissent women described to the researchers. More relevant here is that women could not structure dissent messages in these organizations. Women may be unlikely to engage in dissent strategies because they believe such strategies will only lead to the organization viewing them negatively—this prompts a spiral of silence for these women (see Noelle-Neumann, 1977). As such, women's sacrifices lead to a reduction in agency, and most women participants expressed an inability even to conceive of ways to dissent against the organization.

Some of these findings differ from the findings of previous organizational research. One example is that these organizations are not trying to hide their disproportionate socialization process

of women and men (Cheney, 1983) but instead announce it and establish it as a necessity to accomplish the mission of the organization—succeeding in physical or spiritual war. Men in these organizations continuously reinforce these beliefs, and women who disagree are silenced or shamed so that only the voices of men are heard. Women who seek to avoid this ostracizing conform to the organization's norms and perpetuate this male-dominated culture. Participants reported this perpetuation occurring when other women, who had usually been in the organization longer and had adopted the organizational values and norms, told participants to “wear skirts,” “fall in line,” and so on. This push for universal conformity and eventual acceptance for many members may be why members of TO face greater difficulty in leaving an organization than traditional employees do (Hinderaker, 2014; Howe & Shpeer, 2019). When studying strict, male-dominated organizational forms, it is imperative that researchers examine differential expectations and roles between women and men, as well as the reification of these roles, in their analyses.

### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Finding participants of these organizations who were willing to talk about their experiences proved challenging. One reason is that the leadership of TO often has rules that govern how members talk to and interact with people outside of the organization. One participant even said, “The best job for a narcissist is to be the leader of the church.” Two leaders contacted the lead researcher asking that we not interview members who were in their organizations, and one participant withdrew consent after consulting with his or her leader and was not included in the study. This strict control of members limited the number of stories collected. That said, we were still able to reach saturation.

This research shows that although some women are breaking

new ground in male-dominated TO, as referenced in the introduction, these advancements have yet to reverberate across all organizations and create positive or systematic change for women entering male-dominated TO. Future research in this area could examine the absence of dissent and perceived agency to assess their interdependence. If women perceive less agency than men, they may be less likely to dissent, which deepens the spiral of silence that allows expected sacrifice to occur. In addition, researchers should consider whether male domination is a characteristic of TO and, if so, researchers should actively examine the role of gender and/or sex in TO research.

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## NOTES

- 1 *A churching* is when a pastor admonishes a member in front of the entire congregation (Cressy, 1993).
- 2 Women are not allowed to be pastors of these churches, and therefore it is thought that the highest office a woman can hold is being the pastor's wife. The church teaches women how to be a pastor's wife in Bible college.

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## A Historical Tracing of (In)civility in American Presidential Rhetoric

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Given the unique significance of presidential rhetoric, we should seriously consider how civility, rhetoric, and presidential discourse intersect. This essay explores that intersection by briefly examining two presidential campaigns that demonstrate serious incivility as well as one presidential discursive technique that tried, as we argue, to foster more civility in American political conversations. Specifically, we explore the 1796 and 1800 campaigns between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, the political rivalry between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, the Fireside Chats of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and the campaign rhetoric of Donald Trump and his first few months in office. Our hope is that by looking at historical examples of presidential rhetoric, we can identify how civility and incivility are used strategically, and we might also be able to trace some ways we can improve the tenor of civility in our political discourse.

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**KEYWORDS:** Trump, toxic discourse, Twitter, Fireside Chats, democracy, dialogue

For many Americans, the 2016 presidential campaign was the most negative and acrimonious election in U.S. history, at least in recent history (Cummins, 2016; Patel, 2016; Soergel, 2016). Causes for this bitterness range from polarizing politicians, media echo chambers, and general divisive political discourse to a resurgence in ultra-nationalism, the 24/7 media cycle, the structure of social media platforms, gerrymandering, and the lack of campaign finance reform. As a result, Americans as a whole have become embittered over electoral politics and the nature of politics in general. Americans who engage in typical conversations about the current political

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state of affairs in the United States either tiptoe around the subject, parrot their preferred vitriol from public officials and pundits, or attempt to avoid the subject altogether. For instance, polls report new lows in public perceptions about civility in politics, thus causing many to choose to completely disengage (Santhanam, 2017). As such, we see a serious “crisis of civility” among our politicians, our journalists, and ourselves when political issues arise (Boatright, Shaffer, Sobieraj, & Goldwaite Young, 2019).

Of course, we can blame the media and ourselves for not discussing current American politics with respect and civility. Such blame, though, does not shift or diffuse the essential premise that politicians (whether campaigning or governing) set a tone for discourse. Among the most prominent ways in which politicians have set the tone is through mass media channels. Rather than assign blame and perpetuate arguments about the unprecedented levels of incivility in contemporary politics, particularly presidential campaigns and public addresses, we contend that rhetorical analyses of past and present moments contribute to evaluating the strategic uses of incivility as a feature in political discourse. The public should not be surprised that our discourse has devolved into name-calling, mudslinging, divisive reactionism, and calcified dogmatism when our paragon role models engage in such behavior. Simply put, when presidential candidates reflect uncivilized, belittling, and disrespectful discourse, the rest of society tends to follow suit, given how presidential hopefuls function as rhetorical role models. During the 2016 presidential election, we witnessed the candidates of the two major American political parties wallow in some of the ugliest and demeaning political messaging in U.S. history. Yet, as troubling as their rhetoric was, we also know that Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump were not the first, nor probably the worst, perpetrators of severe incivility in their political communication as presidential candidates.

Given the unique significance of presidential rhetoric—its com-

mand of media channels to directly communicate with publics, its highly scrutinized nature by media commentators, the serious implications it has for policy making, its reflection of American political culture around the globe, and the examples it sets for others as a way of modeling communicative behavior—scholars should account for how civility, rhetoric, and presidential discourse intersect. This essay explores that intersection by briefly examining two presidential campaigns that demonstrate serious incivility as well as one presidential discursive technique that tried, as we argue, to foster more civility in American political conversations. Comparing the earliest presidential campaigns to the most recent campaigns is a means to demonstrate how our modern-day concerns are far from new. As such, we explore the 1796 and 1800 campaigns between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, the political rivalry between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, the Fireside Chats of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and the rhetoric of Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential campaign and his first few months in office. With our comparative examinations, our hope is that by looking at historical examples of presidential rhetoric, with attention to some of the nuances about the media channels through which such rhetoric occurs, we can identify how incivility is used strategically, and we might also be able to trace some ways we can improve the tenor of civility in our political discourse. Our comparative examinations rest more on presidential rhetoric as contingent on the historical trajectories of civility and less on the structural vectors by which media contribute to discourse. As such, we begin by outlining the meanings of *civility*, then we compare the historical campaigns by grounding the strategic uses of incivility.

### UNDERSTANDING (IN)CIVILITY

While definitions of *civility* may be useful for some exercises, we begin with Susan Herbst's (2010, 2013) assertion that defining *civility*

can be a distraction. After all, “while politics is a world of words, it is also a world of poorly understood words, poorly remembered words, and poorly theorized words” (Hart, Childers, & Lind, 2013, p. 13). Herbst (2010, 2013) argued to understand civility as strategies, not as definitions. Civility and incivility are strategies used for larger goals in democratic discourse. In other words, we should locate the uses of civility and incivility, according to Herbst, so that we can better understand the arguments deployed by various parties involved in political discussions. She went so far as to claim that even identifying the pros and cons of civility versus incivility may distract from the more important concern over the way democracy is discussed. While we do not necessarily agree with this extended argument by Herbst, we concur that the focus of our attention is on *how* and *why* civility and incivility are used in political talk rather than on their definitional or normative attributes.

Indeed, even during the origin of our country, James Madison (1787) lamented about and reflected upon the weaknesses of humanity. In *The Federalist Papers* 10, he described how various self-interests and perspectives of individuals create turbulent conditions in a democracy, for a union by and for the people will necessarily be messy, complicated, and tumultuous. This suggests, of course, that incivility inevitably emerges in democratic discourse. As a result, perhaps we should try to embrace the fact that disagreements will not only occur but will also become heated from time to time. This is one of the recommendations of Chantal Mouffe (1993, 2000), who discussed the importance of agonism in democracy—the idea that disagreement is a foundational principle in the *polis* and that citizens must engage in the often frustrating and challenging task of debating with each other about the condition and health of our society for it to progress and improve. In our contemporary American context, agonism helps to frame the role of civility in our political rhetoric:

Politics today, paradoxically, is not a “civil” activity—or no longer, assuming it ever was—but an agonistic field fraught with conflict, negotiation, and compromise. At its core, politics favors some to the detriment of others. There is no possible way to maintain our colossal political system—involving tax and transfer, education and social welfare, domestic security and national defense—without implicating sacrifice by some for the benefit of others. . . . We are today born into the *polis*, and contemporary politics is contestation over relative status, wealth, social rank, and well-being, over opportunities and resources, education, jobs, and so on. It is a struggle within complex relations of power. (Harcourt, 2012, p. 350)

Since democracy requires agonistic debate, such discussions occur as advocates challenge each other over ideas. To be productive, the conversations concern ideas, not divisive us versus them verbal death matches. The former type of discussion involves a civil respect of boundaries so that the depth and nuances of positions are explored—similar to how Herbst described the strategic nature of civility. The latter type of discussion is mired in uncivil personal attacks and incendiary extremism, which threatens either to silence opposition or to escalate tensions, both of which are detrimental to democracy.

To appreciate the strategic value of using civility and incivility in presidential rhetoric, we should begin with an understanding of what we mean by “civility” and “incivility.” Norbert Elias (1939/1994) traced the transformation of the term *civility* from its origins in notions of citizenship, political activity, and civil organization to the realm of manners and politeness, or what had previously been called *courtesy*. Maisel (2012) curtly suggested that “incivility implies a rudeness or impoliteness that violates some agreed on standard of society” (p. 406).

While behaviors that are considered “uncivil” may directly relate

to interpersonal interactions, such matters are slightly different in the political realm. As Todd Gitlin (2013) argues,

the incivility that has surged up in the United States since the 1980s deserves to be distinguished from rudeness. The tone of attack goes beyond *ad hominem*. It discredits the target not simply on the ground that she is wrong, or even wildly, terribly wrong, but because there is something essential about her that makes her disgusting, loathsome, beyond the pale. (pp. 59–60)

This suggests that the way argument scholars have conceptualized *ad hominem* attacks is tame compared to the way uncivil personal attacks are deployed. For instance, when Aristotle contrasted arguments against the person instead of the person's solutions, he—nor really anyone since—did not characterize such an attack as an affront to the arguer's core identity (Walton, 2001). Because politics and religion are integrally tied to a person's sense of self in contemporary discussions, the use of uncivil rhetoric transcends the traditional *ad hominem* argument to become a direct attack against a person's identity, making the attack much more personal and inflammatory. Similarly, Mark Kingwell (2012) claimed that "civility is the expression of regard for the other when discussing matters of shared political concern" (p. 157). Thus, according to many theorists and observers, political civility can include elements like politeness and rudeness, but it also involves the *way* we consider political *issues*.

If political civility includes behaviors as well as the manners by which we engage in discussing political issues, then we cannot exclude the very real importance of debate, dialogue, and deliberation as part of the *process* of understanding political civility (Herbst, 2010). As Eulau (1973) explained,

the politics of civility as I think of it, refers to a broad range of potential behavioral patterns that can be expressed by such

participles as persuading, soliciting, consulting, advising, bargaining, compromising, coalition-building, and so on—in other words, forms of behavior in which at least two actors stand in a mutually dependent relationship to each other. . . . In a civil relationship, then, the interaction is reciprocal, though not necessarily symmetrical, in that both actors gain from it. (p. 368)

Civility is a matter of relations as much as, or even more so than, the content of one's speech. The value in defining civility in this way is to reinforce the essential requirements in political discourse. As Herbst (2010) so succinctly put it, "it is most useful to think of civility as a tool in the rhetorical and behavioral arsenals of politics" (p. 6). In the same way that political figures agree to engage through shared grounds of civility, we may look to incivility as rhetorical and behavioral tactics for deliberation and governance.

### THE (IN)CIVILITY OF PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC

Now that we have a working understanding of political incivility as a strategic procedure when discussing political matters, we can begin to trace how incivility has occurred in presidential rhetoric. Obviously, we do not have enough space to chart a comprehensive and historical mapping of such discourse, but we can identify a few key examples as a way of highlighting how incivility has been a significant factor in presidential political rhetoric. We begin by discussing the incendiary campaign rhetoric of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams during the 1796 and 1800 presidential elections and the political rivalry between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr. Then, we explore the divisive tweeting of Donald Trump. In each instance, we can see how presidents and presidential candidates use incivility as a rhetorical strategy to accomplish larger discursive goals and how such uses relate to the politicians' tacit understandings of media as channels to deploy degrees of civility.

*Jefferson–Adams and Hamilton–Burr*

Shortly after the founding of the United States of America, one of our first presidential elections demonstrated serious incivility. What is additionally significant is that the election of 1796 was between two former friends and two of the Founding Framers—Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. Because George Washington did not want to run for a third term, Jefferson (representing the Democratic-Republican Party) and Adams (representing the Federalist Party) competed against each other for the position (Connor, 2011).

To mitigate our tendencies to apply our current-day standards to the past, it is important to outline three frames of reference. First, politics in the new republic were rooted in contentious battles to define the contours of what a democracy looks like, what the Constitution enables, and ultimately, the degree of power held by a centralized federal government versus state authority. Schudson (1998) referred to this period as a transition from the politics of assent to the politics of affiliation. Aristocratic practices, such as authority drawn from elite family lineage or gentlemanly decorum, still guided electoral politics. But the early elections demonstrate the development of the nascent party system, or affiliations with certain philosophies about governance and power. As such, electioneering depended on fierce loyalties. Second, the early campaigns were not quite national, or even regional, because there was no easy way for a candidate to travel in the new country. Campaigns relied on surrogates at the local and state levels and were from civil affairs (Trent & Friedenberg, 2008). Third, in the era of the partisan press, newspapers were organs of emergent political parties, publishers were clearly affiliated with certain political leaders, and printers depended on government printing contracts. Legislative actions enhanced some of the press's capacity to be a mass medium (e.g., subsidized postal rates). Conversely, the Adams administration's Sedition Act in 1798 criminalized the publication of malicious content, including attacks against the president and the government,

which amounted to restrictions on Jefferson-affiliated (Republican, or anti-Federalist) newspapers (Starr, 2004). All of these points suggest some of the reasons why electoral politics involved newspapers, which captured, albeit imperfectly, political rhetoric. The partisan press was a means to cultivate discourse among political elites and to enlarge the public discourse, even if such discourse fermented appeals to voters based on “the characters of the candidates and not their political views” (Schudson, 1998, p. 66). The uses of incivility, then, can be understood in the context of fierce debates about the role of political parties and the powers of government, the rhetorical scope of campaigning, and the reach and function of newspapers.

During the campaign, Adams’s colleague Alexander Hamilton released a series of letters to the well-read but partisan (pro-Federalist) newspaper the *Gazette*, printed in Philadelphia (Lepore, 2007). The letters accused Jefferson of having sexual relations with one of his slaves, cowardly running away from the British during the Revolutionary War, and reportedly even promising to free all slaves if elected (Bomboy, 2012). Adams won the election by only three electoral votes, and as a result of the mixture of popular votes with electoral votes at the time, Jefferson was elected to be vice president. The vitriol during the 1796 election was so acute that Washington declared in his Farewell Address that the candidates

serve to organize faction, to give it an artificial and extraordinary force. . . . They are likely, in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion. (Washington, 1796)

His comments represented the viewpoint that political affiliation was dangerous because of the potential to dogmatically entrench

factions, with partisan presses as instruments to fortify opposition and wield exaggerated and scornful attacks (Schudson, 1998). Despite Washington's denunciation of such rhetorical strategies of incivility, the mudslinging continued. Those who continued to speak, write, and print such rhetoric did so out of deeply rooted convictions about the contours of the new republic.

Although Adams and Jefferson had been friends during the founding of the country, the 1796 election took an obvious toll on their relationship. Nevertheless, the two former friends worked together as president and vice president for 4 years. But their animosity intensified as they ran against one another for the 1800 election (Connor, 2011). During that campaign, publishers who affiliated with Jefferson's politics characterized Adams as "sucking up to England," being obese (called "His Rotundancy"), and trying to establish a monarchy (Bomboy, 2012; Connor, 2011). Jefferson also allegedly told a French ambassador that President Adams was a "vain, irritable, stubborn" man (Tolson, 2001). On the other hand, pro-Adams newspapers and circulars attacked Jefferson as being a godless, Indian half-breed who was in bed with the French—voting for Jefferson risked "a civil war and a national orgy of rape, incest, and adultery" (Bomboy, 2012; Perlis, 2017). The campaign of 1800 devolved into one of the ugliest, most uncivil in our nation's history. As Swint (2008) described,

things got ugly fast. Jefferson's camp accused President Adams of having a "hideous hermaphroditical character, which has neither the force and firmness of a man, nor the gentleness and sensibility of a woman." In return, Adams' men called Vice President Jefferson "a mean-spirited, low-lived fellow, the son of a half-breed Indian squaw, sired by a Virginia mulatto father." As the slurs piled on, Adams was labeled a fool, a hypocrite, a criminal, and a tyrant, while Jefferson was branded a weakling, an atheist, a libertine, and a coward. Even Martha Washington

succumbed to the propaganda, telling a clergyman that Jefferson was “one of the most detestable of mankind.”

The outcome of the 1800 election, however, did not belong to either man. Instead, owing to an electoral tie, Aaron Burr became vice president, and the political discourse at the time was replete with venomous incivility. In July 1804, a newspaper reported that Hamilton believed Burr was unfit to be New York’s governor. Although Hamilton presumably did not say such things, Burr believed the newspaper and demanded an apology. Hamilton refused. What began as a “war of words, and was partly a product of eighteenth century notions of honor,” the conflict between the two men intensified to the point that they engaged in a duel, and Burr shot Hamilton dead (Estano, 2009).

In both sets of these examples, the politicians rarely directed their attacks personally at each other. Instead, the press, which in those days were constituted by newspapers and pamphlets, was used as a proxy. On one level, the political leaders at the time adhered to degrees of aristocratic decorum—a likely reason why Jefferson and others withheld overtly public attacks. On another level, the first iteration of a more or less organized press was inherently partisan and developed practices such as printing the edited and manicured remarks made by favored politicians and printing unverified remarks (Schudson, 1998). For example, as Tolson (2001) argued, “Jefferson was a master of the politics of denial, planting gossip, writing anonymously in newspapers, or having others—Madison or the journalist Philip Freneau—engage in the dirty business of character assassination for him.” In another example, we also know that Alexander Hamilton wrote letters to newspaper reporters to influence voters’ perceptions of John Adams (Shea & Fiorina, 2013). If we consider our current media landscape, the close relationship between political candidates and journalists (e.g., Trump and Sean Hannity) mirrors the 19th-century media-as-proxy dynamic.

However, by this point, we have had various iterations of models about the operation of politics as well as media. Thus, although there is a resemblance to some aspects of the partisan press, media and journalism have had varying roles as gatekeepers and expectations of objectivity, neither of which figured heavily in the strategic uses of incivility in the earliest campaigns. The press was not a filter but an integral part of the strategy each side used to hash out the politics of the new republic. The publication of attacks, unfounded claims, and extreme hyperboles was a stratagem to denigrate and sabotage one's opponents.

The uses of incivility were also rhetorical strategies to ferment political ideologies and persuade loyalties. The tone of incivility stemmed from deeply held convictions about the powers of federal government as well as fresh memories of monarchial, colonial rule. Of course, the French Revolution no doubt had an impact on Jefferson's view of democracy, given his profound respect for the French culture and people, whereas Adams was known to be much less impressed by the French democratic efforts. As we reflect on our present moment, what can we learn by evaluating the continuities and the changes in the use of incivility? The tone and content of incivility may not have changed (e.g., denigrating remarks against opponents, fearmongering), but the manner through which incivility is wielded demonstrates the strategic uses of direct lines of communication that often depend on that which Washington feared—fierce loyalties to political parties and characters.

### ***Donald J. Trump***

As we mentioned at the outset, the 2016 presidential election has been considered one of the most uncivil in U.S. history (Cummins, 2016; Patel, 2016; Soergel, 2016). Undoubtedly, social media plays some role in this. At a basic level, "social media alters the political calculus" by reconfiguring the flows of information and campaigning strategies (Gainous & Wagner, 2014). The more pressing matter is

the extent to which social media, and the broader media ecosystems and electoral politics, foster divisive discourse (Zompetti, 2018). Twitter, in particular, has been and continues to be a contradictory site. On one hand, it is a remarkable platform for direct channels of communication among a constellation of constituencies, such as a way for politicians to directly reach publics; for voters to talk back and talk to each other; and for party leaders, journalists, and other opinion leaders to shape what become salient political issues (Jungherr, 2016; Kreiss, 2016; Schmidt, 2014). On the other hand, Twitter is part of an ecosystem that elevates and recirculates vitriol remarks and unverified claims (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017; Ott, 2017; Theocharis, Barberá, Fazekas, Popa, & Parnet, 2016). Like the early campaigns, surrogates and partisan sources tweet on behalf of political leaders and repeat attacks against the opposition. But unlike the early campaigns, we now have a long-established national media ecosystem, gradations of expectations for the press, and, most prominently, an instantaneous and far-reaching means to communicate directly with voters. The strategic uses of incivility in an online environment most certainly remain aligned with past instances. However, we hope to highlight how the current toxic discourse—as exemplified by Trump’s tweets—moves us into a new era of rhetorical incivility. The use of social media, of course, strikes a contrast from the mudslinging of old, but the frequency and remarks directly from the source are also noteworthy.

As part of a work-in-progress sponsored by the National Institute for Civil Discourse, we analyzed tweets from Donald J. Trump since the 2016 Republican National Convention, through the election, and for the first several months of his presidency. The bulk of the more than 3,000 Twitter messages Trump sent during that time directly or indirectly referred to the mainstream media. Reminiscent of Goebbels’s notion of *Lügenpresse* (lying press), Trump often labeled the traditional media as “fake news” (Noack, 2016; “Trump Uses,” 2017). In essence, any time Trump felt the media

was disagreeing with him or reported something unfavorable, he would immediately label it “fake news.” For instance, Trump used the media scrutiny against him as a way to signify his victimhood: “It is being reported by virtually everyone, and is a fact, that the media pile on against me is the worst in American political history!” (Trump, 2016b). To intensify the feeling that the media was a formidable opponent, Trump reiterated that he was not just running against Clinton but also against the media industry as a whole—“I am not only fighting Crooked Hillary, I am fighting the dishonest and corrupt media and her government protection process. People get it!” (Trump, 2016a)—and then, a week and a half later, he wrote, “I am not just running against Crooked Hillary Clinton, I am running against the very dishonest and totally biased media—but I will win!” (Trump, 2016c). Hence, by adopting the simple phrase “fake news,” Donald Trump was able to advance several related and powerful arguments—the media was unfairly attacking him, its reports were inaccurate and dishonest, it was a serious villain to America, and it was being unfair with its stories about him.

The tone of Trump’s incivility was established during the speech when he announced his candidacy. In this address, Trump (2015) remarked,

When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. But I speak to border guards and they tell us what we’re getting. And it only makes common sense. It only makes common sense. They’re sending us not the right people.

By depicting entire groups of people as criminals and rapists, Trump strategically deploys incivility as a form of fear to galvanize

support among certain Americans. But the strategy is not just in distinguishing himself amid the other candidates or reaching his supporters. This announcement, and similar tweets, established a reference point for his followers and for his antagonists. In a media ecosystem that relies on a perpetual stream of the latest, newest content, it is noteworthy how frequently his opening remarks and subsequent tweets resurfaced. As with the next example, the hallmarks of incivility—categorical denigrations, name-calling, generalizations—also stimulate news and social media cycles that keep these specific remarks in public discourse.

Although Trump covered many topic areas with his anti-Clinton messages, he uniformly connected them with one simple signifier: “Crooked Hillary.” Time and time again, in nearly 200 tweets, Trump used the label “Crooked Hillary” in referring to his opponent. Clearly the moniker “Crooked” designated distrust and skepticism that called into question if Clinton was fit for the presidency of the United States. Another area of incivility by Trump centered around a former Miss Universe contestant. Hillary Clinton offered evidence for how Trump would divide the country and was unfit to be president. She attacked Trump’s comments about Alicia Machado, arguing that “he called this woman ‘Miss Piggy.’ Then he called her ‘Miss Housekeeping,’ because she was Latina. Donald, she has a name, her name is Alicia Machado” (qtd. in Alba and Fieldstadt, 2016). In response, and in typical Trump fashion, he used Twitter as the venue for his defense. A couple days after the debate and subsequent to Clinton’s tweets, Trump responded with “Wow, Crooked Hillary was duped and used by my worst Miss U. Hillary floated her as an ‘angel’ without checking her past, which is terrible!” (Trump, 2016e). Of course, Trump did not elaborate on Machado’s “past” but instead let his followers presume it was something salacious or indecorous. To further depict Machado as unseemly, Trump sent another tweet on the same day: “Using Alicia M in the debate as a paragon of virtue just shows that Crooked Hillary suffers from BAD JUDGEMENT! Hillary was set

up by a con” (Trump, 2016d). As such, he clearly intended for his audience to believe that Machado was not the innocent “angel” that Clinton described.

Between the Republican National Convention and fall 2017, Trump mentioned his slogan of “Make America Great Again” or its variants (e.g., “Make America Safe Again”) more than 90 times, including in simple tweets such as “MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!” (Trump, 2017a). Additionally, Trump frequently used the slogan “Drain the Swamp” to establish his vision of purging American politics of corrupt insiders. As a political metaphor, draining a swamp obviously suggests that a toxic problem must be addressed by means of a large-scale overhauling of the situation. In Trump’s case, the phrase “drain the swamp” was an extension of his “rigged” system argument. If the swamp is rigged, then it needs to be drained, and Trump is the savior who can drain, or overhaul, this rigged system. For example, in a very simple and straightforward tweet, Trump stated, “I will Make Our Government Honest Again—believe me. But first, I’m going to have to #DrainTheSwamp in DC” (Trump, 2016f). In a similar fashion, as the election was nearing, Trump tweeted, “Time to #DrainTheSwamp in Washington, D.C. and VOTE #TrumpPence16 on 11/8/2016. Together, we will MAKE AMERICA SAFE” (Trump, 2016g). As Trump’s brand and slogans became part of the American voters’ vocabulary, he was able to convert his message into a request for votes. By using the rhetorical strategy of a call to action, Trump could use the structure of a Twitter message to blend his claims of victimhood with his notion of uniquely being able to “drain the swamp” and turn these into an urgent plea for voters’ support. This rhetorical amalgamation can be seen in the following tweet: “In order to #DrainTheSwamp & create a new GOVERNMENT of, by, & for the PEOPLE, I need your VOTE!” (Trump, 2016h).

In terms of foreign policy, much of Trump’s rhetoric has also been uncivil. Just to take one example, we can look at part of his

rhetoric concerning North Korea. When, in the middle of September, he was invited to address the United Nations, Trump directly called attention to North Korea and its leader: “The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea. Rocket Man is on a suicide mission for himself and for his regime. The United States is ready, willing and able, but hopefully this will not be necessary” (Trump, 2017b). While the president calmly noted the unique role the United Nations plays in global affairs and how the United Nations and the United States should continue to work collaboratively, he also displayed childlike and unpresidential behavior by referring to Kim Jong-un as “Rocket Man” and by threatening to entirely eliminate North Korea from the planet in no uncertain terms. Using a platform like Twitter to convey these sorts of messages reinforced their toxic nature because they were disseminated in curt, truncated sound bites for the sole purpose of creating a spectacle to generate more attention—even if negative—toward Trump.

In these ways, among others, Trump directly communicated to the American people his ideas and initiatives. By using an uncivil tone, Trump strategically tried to align certain parts of the American public while simultaneously stoking the flames of fear, both of which are aimed at solidifying support for his vision. Tweeting his messages created a personal connection with his followers—a parasocial relationship whereby his supporters believe they have a friendship with Trump, and in turn, this close connection strengthens his message and support (Schifini, 2019; Stever & Lawson, 2012).

In tone and content, Trump’s rhetoric matches with many aspects of the early republic. However, commentary about his style of politics tends to call up the analogy of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Fireside Chats rather than the early campaigns, perhaps because of the prominent role of news media in mediating between a president or presidential candidate and the public. Both FDR and Trump used

a particular medium to connect with the populace in an attempt to clarify ideas and comfort Americans about the problems facing the nation, and both did so in a manner that was remarkable, because radio and Twitter enabled them to reach the public without traditional mass media institutions. Given the propensity to link Trump's Twitter use to FDR's radio use, we note how the contexts are drastically different—campaigning mode and governing amid crisis mode—but the comparison occurs with some frequency (cf. Beito, 2017; Lewis, 2016; Reynolds, 2016; Wkamps, 2017), and more crucially, it demonstrates how incivility is a rhetorical strategy deployed by Trump, at least, via the media.

## CONCLUSION

While many believe the 2016 presidential election was the most negative and polarizing in American history, we know that divisive political communication has occurred since the inception of the country. Of course, instances of incivility can be problematic. Many theorists have noted how incivility damages democracy (Andrews, 2017; Dionne, 1991; Strachan & Wolf, 2013). When Americans witness incivility in their leaders, they may mimic such behaviors, or they tend to become less politically engaged, choosing instead to avoid potentially acrimonious discussions. Indeed, “current levels of political incivility may be a warning sign that Americans are no longer inclined to peacefully negotiate solutions to collective problems—in which case, the ability to sustain a democracy is indeed at risk” (Strachan & Wolf, 2013, p. 42). If Americans feel like they cannot engage in meaningful discussions about their country—or if such discussions are poisoned with uncivil toxicity—then productive dialogue about current issues and possible visions for the future is essentially impossible.

Another tangible result of incivility is that it creates legislative impasses. If our two main political parties cannot talk with one

another to address urgent problems facing our country, then it is unlikely they will be able to negotiate or find compromises. Structurally and ideologically, our two-party system already lends itself toward gridlock, but rhetorical incivility exacerbates this trend, because politicians are less likely to listen to each other if they must endure name-calling, unsupported attacks, and verbal animus (Dodd & Schraufnagel, 2013).

Of course, to harken back to Susan Herbst's (2010, 2013) argument, the problematic nature of incivility is largely tempered by the fact that disagreements are inevitable in a democracy. What we also need to point out is how incivility (and civility) are used strategically for particular political purposes. Identifying the strategic nature of (in)civility helps us emphasize the role of argument and deliberation in democratic discourse. As Herbst noted,

if we see civility and incivility as strategic assets, we humanize the players on our political scene, in our town councils, and in our workplaces. Civil people can say uncivil things and uncivil people can be civil. Second, thinking about the *uses* of civility and incivility boosts our self-consciousness about the nature of political talk, reflection that is absolutely essential for a healthy nation. Finally, if we can view uncivil talk as just that, there can be change: If civility and incivility are "states" and not "traits," as the early psychologists used to say, how we talk to each other is changeable—daily. (p. 10, emphasis original)

Viewing incivility as a rhetorical strategy, then, implies intent and motive rather than just the personality of the politician utilizing it. Donald Trump may, by nature, be an uncivil jerk hypothetically (we do not know him personally), but we can definitely view how he uses uncivil discourse to attain specific political objectives. In this way, incivility can be analyzed as an important rhetorical strategy used in politics.

According to political scientist and consultant Richard Scher (1997), campaigns have three functions: “civic education, marketing a candidate or issue, and public entertainment” (p. 8). For our purposes, we are concerned with the first two. Understanding the role of civility in presidential campaigns informs us about civil society in general, and it helps us realize how a candidate positions himself or herself strategically during a campaign. By viewing the use of (in)civility as a strategic tool, we can see how certain presidential campaigns emphasize divisive elements—elements that candidates deem as “vital,” such that they ratchet up “acrimonious rhetoric” to highlight their perspectives vis-à-vis their opponents’ (Shea & Sproveri, 2012, p. 421). Finally, “successful presidential political campaigning depends on presenting an image that resonates with the public” (Gleason, 2005) in a way that allows many presidential candidates to employ rhetorical strategies, such as incivility, to connect with specific segments of the electorate. For instance, John Adams no doubt appealed to slave owners when he accused Jefferson of philandering with his slaves and alleged that Jefferson wanted to abolish slavery. Additionally, Donald Trump clearly wanted to resonate with swaths of conservatives who distrust the so-called liberal media every time he used the phrase “fake news.” And no doubt Hillary Clinton was strategically trying to appeal to her base when she labeled Trump supporters as “deplorables.”

Once a candidate wins the election and takes the oath of office, he or she may continue to deploy (in)civility as a rhetorical strategy. Because presidents receive copious media attention and even direct their own media pronouncements (such as press conferences, public addresses, and Fireside Chats), they “are in a unique position to influence public opinion” (Miles, 2016, p. 471). As such, “all of their public statements—even the most casual—are strategically designed to position the president for the next one in an endless series of moves and countermoves” (Hart, 1987, p. 2), which is why many suggest that the president has the power of the “bully pulpit”

(Cullinane & Elliott, 2014). Undoubtedly, Trump is now using Twitter as part of the presidential bully pulpit, which permits the strategic use of incivility directly to his followers.

In these ways, for both the president and the presidential candidate, (in)civility can be used as a purposeful rhetorical technique. Once identified, these uncivil rhetorical strategies must be noted with caution, because “nasty politics are fraught with danger for democracy. We may see higher levels of engagement, but many people are left with a bad taste in their mouth and ill feelings about their fellow citizens” (Shea & Sproveri, 2012, p. 421). Not only can important issues be obscured by the name-calling and mudslinging of political discourse but many citizens also emulate such behavior, with the consequence that our everyday political conversations often become mired in venomous bickering. If a democracy for and by the people is to survive, our citizenry must identify and resist stooping to such levels. Instead, we should strive to focus our conversations on political issues of importance, while discussing them with respect and civility, in the hope that our country as a whole can progress.

In a small way, the point of this essay is to help locate how (in) civility has been used as a rhetorical strategy in specific presidential and presidential campaign case studies. This brief tracing of (in) civility in presidential rhetoric, we hope, reveals how, historically, civility has been an important consideration in American political rhetoric. Furthermore, the use of civil and uncivil rhetoric via the prominent media channels of the time can be seen as a strategic maneuver by a rhetor to accomplish a variety of goals, including comforting an audience, galvanizing support, invoking fear, and unifying a nation.

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## Examining the 50-Year Farm Bill's Narrative Persuasiveness

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Conventional and annual agricultural practices continue to devastate U.S. soils, streams, and ecology and contribute to the climate crisis. The 50-Year Farm Bill (50YFB) offers an alternative model of perennial, polyculture agriculture (the practice of not annually tilling crops and growing them in mixtures). However, most U.S. citizens and legislators are generally unaware of this bill. Thus this cross-sectional study sought to examine the persuasiveness of the 50YFB's introductory narrative with control ( $n = 102$ ) and experimental ( $n = 81$ ) groups. Results indicate that (a) narrative elements (e.g., transportation and identification) significantly increase beliefs about ecological importance, which (b) significantly increases intent to support pro-ecological policy.

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**KEYWORDS:** Narrative persuasion, extended-elaboration likelihood model, 50-Year Farm Bill, environmental communication, science communication

Two underlying cultural narratives shape the agricultural landscape: “Wizards and Prophets—Wizards unveiling technological fixes, Prophets decrying the consequences of our heedlessness.”

—Mann, 2018, p. 6

Crews, Carton, and Olsson (2018) lamented, “The current state of agricultural soils and the ecosystems they are part of is one of degradation, depletion and pollution” (p. 1). These prophet scientists then explained how dominant agricultural practices are a primary contributor to the climate crisis. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2016) confirmed that “agriculture, forestry, and other land use” is the second top source for global greenhouse gas

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emissions (24%). One-third of the Earth's soil (24 billion tons) is degraded due to agriculture (Watts, 2017), and excess agricultural fertilizers poison streams and rivers. For instance, nitrogen runoff traveling the Mississippi River into the Gulf of Mexico has resulted in a "dead zone" the size of New Jersey (Charles, 2017).

Sustainable agricultural policy can help solve these problems. In July 2009, Wes Jackson, Wendell Berry, and Fred Kirschenmann wrote the Land Institute's (TLI) 50-Year Farm Bill (50YFB). According to Jackson, Streit Krug, Vitek, Jensen, and Berry (2009), the 50YFB "transcends the farm politics we are used to" (para. 12). It asserts that agriculture has too often involved the abuse of soil and that policy must address the problems of soil erosion and degradation, pollution, fossil-fuel dependency, and destruction of rural communities. The 50YFB proposes a shift to perennial crops and practices that are based on ecological principles (Jackson et al., 2009). As Berry (2012) explained, it uses a "50-year schedule by which the present ratio of 80 percent annual to 20 percent perennial would be exactly reversed" (para. 14).

The 50YFB lays out ecological problems caused by contemporary technology-dependent, annual monoculture agriculture. It then imagines what the U.S. landscape would look like if the current 80% annual became 80% perennial by 2067. Imbuing the prophetic approach, perennial crops "protect soil from erosion and improve soil structure. They increase carbon sequestration, water infiltration, and can contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation. Overall, they help ensure food and water security over the long term" (Land Institute, 2017).

In 2009, the bill's authors passed it along to then deputy secretary of agriculture Kathleen Merrigan (Jackson, Streit Krug, Vitek, & Jensen, 2010). However, the bill did not go anywhere. It remained dormant until 2017, when it was edited to reflect updated U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) figures. The bill was reintroduced to the framers of H.R. Resolution 109 (2019): the

Ocasio–Cortez–Markey Green New Deal Resolution (W. Jackson, personal communication, March 19, 2019). However, it did not make its way into the resolution's language. Perhaps this is because the bill does not have standard, fully formed language. One could argue that it is not really a bill *per se* but more like a narrative- and fact-driven argument for a 50-year USDA farm bill instead of traditional 5-year farm bills. Nevertheless, given the aim of the text, this article refers to it as a bill.

For the bill to gain traction, its agricultural concepts must be clearly communicated to U.S. citizens. Several communication scholars have addressed problems within our agricultural system (Broad, 2016; Freeman, 2009; Higgins, 1991; Katz, 2010). However, none has suggested “perennial crops” as an alternative method (Iutzi, Jackson, Berry, & Kirschenmann, 2017a, p. 2). For example, Katz's (2010) solutions, including multicropping and crop rotation, address problems *in* agriculture, not “the problems *of* agriculture” (Iutzi et al., 2017a, p. 1). If the bill is not widely understood because its concepts are not well known, then Broad (2016) found that the gap between ignorance and knowledge in agricultural communication is best bridged through the power of persuasive storytelling. For legislators to back a bill, support should first come from citizens, and citizens should have access to a plainly written, one-page synopsis.

The 50YFB has just that (Iutzi, Jackson, Berry, & Kirschenmann, 2017b). It includes an introduction (not a part of the version of the bill that Berry, 2012, referenced) presented to congressional staffers and laypersons interested in the bill. Similar to an extended abstract, the bill's introduction is written as a narrative. It does not describe what the bill is about but rather why the bill is necessary. It begins by telling a story about agricultural-related issues, including soil erosion, expanding dead zones, losing farmers, the demise of rural communities, and the impacts of climate change. The bill then condemns the use of short-term solutions like subsidies for commodity crops and 5-year farm bills. Finally, the introduction

proposes how the bill envisions ushering in an agricultural transformation while acknowledging current impediments. The introduction reads (Iutzi et al., 2017b),

Because these perennial crops will not begin to be ready for the farmer on any appreciable scale for another quarter century, we must make do by perennializing the landscape in other ways. The quickest and easiest would be to increase the number of pastures and have fewer livestock in the feedlot by phasing out subsidies for production-oriented grain commodities, that industry's lifeblood. Saving the soil and allowing water to improve is more important than having more meat or corn sugar calories than are needed. (p. 2)

The introduction quickly moves through several facts in narrative form with the goal of swiftly and effectively persuading citizens and policy makers to act. The power of persuasion via narrative has been studied extensively (e.g., Cohen, 2016; Fisher, 1985; Gerbner, 2012), as has the narrative persuasiveness of legislations (Dahlstrom, Niederdeppe, Gao, & Zhu, 2017; Spoel, Goforth, Cheu, & Pearson, 2008; Zhou & Niederdeppe, 2017). However, there is little research on the narrative persuasiveness of an agriculture-related bill on American citizens. This will add unique context and findings to the swelling body of research on narrative transportation and character identification.

This article seeks to further study the potential of narrative to co-create knowledge of new agricultural practices. It aims to learn how narrative can inform of a lesser-known topic while still embracing the primary *telos* of persuasion. Moreover, it practically pursues understanding which components of narrative are most effective in improving the bill's introduction and its persuasive qualities. That way, the bill's authors, as well as policy makers, can use this study to edit the introduction and increase its chances of

becoming law. This goal advances the core argument from Elueze's (2016) "Knowledge Translation in Agriculture": "Knowledge from research should be disseminated not only to advance knowledge but also to inform [agricultural] practice and policy decisions" (p. 187). To accomplish these aims, the author offers a review of relevant literature, a methodology, results, and a discussion. If agricultural practices are to become more sustainable through policy, scholars must first understand the communicative persuasiveness the bill's introduction has on the *polis's* people.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This review covers literature germane to the study, including narrative persuasion, ecological knowledge, beliefs about ecological importance, the extended-elaboration likelihood model (E-ELM), and intent to support pro-ecological policy. Finally, three hypotheses are posed.

### *Narrative Persuasion*

Communication scholars define *narrative* as a series of events and characters that "has an identifiable structure, is bounded in space and time, and contains implicit or explicit messages about the topic being addressed" (Russell, Hamby, Grube, & Russell, 2019, p. 317). Narratives communicate persuasion through cause-and-effect sequences (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1997; Russell et al., 2019) and have been considered a paradigm and mode of discourse (Rowland, 1987). Cohen (2016) argued that narrative is at the core of persuasion studies, and Lane, Miller, Brown, and Vilar (2013) found that narrative stimuli are more effective than argument-based stimuli in increasing positive attitudes toward a topic.

Narrative persuasion research among science communication scholars has increased dramatically in the last decade (Moyer-Gusé, Tchernev, & Walther-Martin, 2019; Nabi & Green, 2015). Randy

Olson (2015), a scientist turned Hollywood director, saw this as a positive necessity. Olson contended that science needs story “more than story needs science” (p. 15). Broad’s (2016) analysis of broad beliefs of science-related agriculture, including genetically modified organisms (GMOs), focused on how storytelling can shape public understandings of social life and how mediated narratives shape different ideological arguments about animal production processes. Van Gorp and van der Goot (2012) categorized six different types of common agricultural sustainability narratives, including the “sense of progress myth” (p. 140) and comparing GMOs to the “story of Frankenstein” (p. 139).

Several authors have dichotomized the cause–effect portions of narratives as driven primarily by either knowledge (objective, logos, empiricism) or emotion (subjective, pathos, narrative; Dillard & Peck, 2001; Nabi & Green, 2015; Van Gorp & van der Goot, 2012). An effective story incorporates both knowledge and emotion, with more of the latter (Allen & Preiss, 1997). Spoel et al. (2008) analyzed how two recent works of public communication about climate change, including *An Inconvenient Truth*, draw on apocalyptic narratives. They found that these generate informed participation in science policy discussions and promote scientific literacy. The extent to which narrative can persuade an individual about sustainable practices is in part related to the individual’s initial knowledge of the topic (Burke et al., 2016; Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1997).

### ***Ecological Knowledge***

Persuasion knowledge can be thought about in various ways. On an individual level, persuasion knowledge in the psychological marketing tradition has been concerned with people who believe they are the targets of persuasion attempts. Persuasion knowledge helps targets of persuasion know when a narrative is trying to persuade them and allows them to respond in a way that achieves their own goals (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Ham, Nelson, and Das

(2015) found that persuasion knowledge is dependent on, among other things, the perspectives of the agent who is making the persuasion attempt. Isaac and Grayson (2017) reported that persuasion knowledge increases positive responses to tactics associated with providing trustworthy and believable information.

In the context of pro-ecological messaging, knowledge about the topic itself is important. Proctor and Schiebinger (2008) coined *agnotology* to mean the “cultural production of ignorance” (see also Proctor, 2008; Segal, 2007). For example, Proctor and Schiebinger (2008) critiqued *ag-gag* bills, which are laws that forbid undercover filming or photography of activity on a farm without the consent of the farm's owner. As the authors argued, this can target whistleblowers of animal cruelty. As another example, Freeman (2009) found that media and policy often objectify animals in the agricultural industry because they fail to know much about them. Because the factors that implicitly persuade receivers of narrative are their “familiarity with the topic” (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1997, p. 47) and varying degrees of topic-related knowledge, *individual* knowledge of ecological degradation is a crucial step in combating cultural ignorance. After all, the knowledge a person gains after immersing himself or herself in the narrative can influence the person's beliefs, attitudes, and actions (Chen & Lin, 2014).

A major hurdle in knowledge acquisition can be the use of highly technical language (Martinez, 2019; Spoel et al., 2008; Suldovsky, McGreavy, & Lindenfeld, 2017). The 50YFB introduction is a quasi-technical piece of science communication that tells a story about the plights of agriculture and the transformation needed to solve them. Even though the introduction is somewhat technical, as it briefly introduces concepts like salinization and complex enzyme systems (Iutzi et al., 2017b), it does not dive deeply into the science *behind* the rationale for alternative farming methods improving ecological intensification and carbon sequestration; the in-depth explanations are saved for the bill itself. Nevertheless, the

introduction's sequence of events reads more like the transcript of a professorial lecture vividly explaining a defunct system and less like a storyteller espousing a captivating plot. Therefore, we asked the following research question:

RQ1: How does a technical, systems-level introduction compare to more standard narrative forms?

### ***Beliefs About Ecological Importance***

Knowledge is not the only contributor to policy support. One's knowledge is significantly related to one's beliefs, especially when it comes to technical science communication (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1997; Shelby, 1986). Isaac and Grayson (2017) concluded that "persuasion knowledge" increases a person's belief in the message when the individual knows enough about the material he or she is consuming. Shelby (1986) found that consumers of persuasive messages often alter their beliefs based on increasing their threshold of message knowledge. Chen and Lin (2014) showed that people's beliefs about pro-ecological importance, including ones akin to those found in the 50YFB, can be promoted through narrative. Knowledge and beliefs are inexorably connected, and they can influence, and be influenced by, narrative.

The values and beliefs conveyed in a narrative are often thought to be accepted without much resistance (Green & Brock, 2000). However, narratives are not monolithic. Dahlstrom (2009, 2010, 2015) found that narrative can be further reduced into causal and noncausal locations. Dahlstrom (2009) examined what happens when preexisting beliefs are inserted into the causal points of a narrative. Using the strength of an individual's pro-environmental worldview as the competing belief structure, Dahlstrom found that "while the overall persuasion of contradictory narrative information decreased as strength of belief structure increased, the difference in persuasive influence between causal locations did not

change” (p. 1). Dahlstrom’s finding speaks to the power of narrative persuasion. If one understands a narrative’s nuances and causal nodes, and implements them effectively, one can use the narrative to persuade someone to move beyond his or her previously held beliefs (far from an easy task).

### ***Extended-Elaboration Likelihood Model***

The elaboration likelihood model is a seminal communication model that forecasts the likelihood of what a person will think about a persuasive narrative, in addition to the outcome of the attempted persuasion (Lane, 2015). This model says that a message may be processed either centrally or peripherally. However, because “narrative and non-narrative persuasion are affected by different processes” (Lane et al., 2013, p. 432), Slater and Rouner (2002) introduced the E-ELM.

The E-ELM is a way to predict how narratives are processed (Slater & Rouner, 2002). The E-ELM focuses on whether the story suits the needs of the audience. The more the audience can identify with the story’s components—namely, absorption into the narrative and identification with its characters—the more likely it is that they will agree with its persuasive subtext (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Lane et al. (2013) said that only by absorbing a narrative is one persuaded by it. E-ELM is fitting for the 50YFB introduction because it beckons for narrative and argument to come hand in hand and for audiences to accept both. Cohen (2016) reexamined the idea that someone could go along with a story’s elements but not its persuasive undertones, arguing that simultaneous acceptance of both it is not only possible but preferable.

Originally developed as a tool to better study “entertainment-education” (Chen & Lin, 2014; Cohen, 2016; Slater & Rouner, 2002), E-ELM holds broad applicability to many other persuasive texts (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Unlike ELM, E-ELM does not make the distinction between central and peripheral processing routes,

because if one does not become completely absorbed by the narrative, persuasion cannot occur (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Thus all narrative persuasion processing utilizes the central route. Absorption entails the reader caring deeply about the character's emotions, making absorption more "mediator than . . . moderator" (Slater & Rouner, 2002, p. 177). Absorption does not inhibit a narrative's persuasive subtext (Cohen, 2016), and Slater and Rouner (2002) asserted that immersion in the narrative text and counterargument are incompatible. If someone is truly transported by a narrative, he or she surely cannot counterargue, because doing so would mean clashing with one's own meaning derived from "appreciation" of the narrative text (Roth, 2015). Therefore E-ELM operates within an eudaimonic motivational context (Cohen, 2016). E-ELM engages with a narrative's "story line" and "characters" (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Similar to Fisher's (1985) seminal narrative paradigm, E-ELM's narrative process is two-pronged, comprising (a) narrative transportation and (b) character identification.

*Narrative transportation (NT).* Multiple studies have suggested that persuasion is more likely to occur when a viewer is transported into a story (Green & Brock, 2000; Igartua & Frutos, 2017; Quintero Johnson & Sangalang, 2017; Russell et al., 2019; Slater & Rouner, 2002). The amount of transportation denotes the level of "absorption" in the "story world" (Lane et al., 2013, p. 432). In other words, when readers lose themselves in a story, their attitudes and intentions change to reflect that story (Fisher, 1985). Transportation into pro-ecological narratives reinforced pro-ecological beliefs (Rhodes, Toole, & Arpan, 2016) and predicted intention to engage in eco-friendly behaviors (Chen & Lin, 2014; Rhodes et al., 2016).

*Character identification (CI).* Identification goes a step further than transportation, "adopting the character's goals and point of view" (Chung & Slater, 2013). The reader perceives the character(s) to share similarities (Slater & Rouner, 2002), building empathy and trust and increasing the narrative's persuasiveness. The reader

sees what the characters see. For instance, the reader might be absorbed by the 50YFB introduction's bleak narrative of ecological catastrophe but may also perceive its characters (Americans or America) to share commonalities. Chen and Lin (2014) found that identification with characters was positively related to participants' attitudes toward nature conservation. Given that Chen and Lin examined the relationship between NT, CI, and pro-ecological beliefs, I hypothesize the following:

- H1: Narrative transportation into, and character identification with, the 50YFB introduction will positively influence beliefs about ecological importance.

*Intent to support pro-ecological policy (ISEP).* It is not enough to have complete buy-in to a persuasive subtext. There must be ISEP (Broad, 2016; Chen & Lin, 2014). In this case, one must intend to support perennial, polyculture crop alternatives. The 50YFB introduction's purpose is to make the 50YFB become law. Financial support, spreading the word, and electing congressional leaders could all stem from intending to support policy like the 50YFB. Thus, I hypothesize the following:

- H2: Beliefs about ecological importance will influence intent to support pro-ecological policy.

Chen and Lin (2014) say that embedded, pro-ecological messages can influence the receiver's knowledge "toward the issue conveyed in the message" (p. 376). However, incoming knowledge about the message is a factor that influences the persuasiveness of the message (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1997). Control and experimental group participants were not likely to differ regarding their incoming ecological knowledge of natural systems agriculture. Even for the group reading the bill beforehand, there is not enough new

information to significantly increase their knowledge beyond the other group's. Therefore, I propose the following hypothesis:

H3A: There will not be a significant difference in ecological knowledge between control and experimental groups.

The outlook for any environmental issue usually boils down to hope, fear, or a mixture of the two. The 50YFB appeals to fear more than it does to hope. Although fear appeals are not as persuasive on perceived message effectiveness as hope appeals (Chadwick, 2015, p. 608; Dillard & Peck, 2001), fear appeals contained within pro-ecological narratives can reinforce a pro-ecological outlook (Rhodes et al., 2016). Thus, I hypothesize the following:

H3B: There will be a significant difference in ecological outlook between control and experimental groups.

To answer Chen and Lin's (2014) call for more research considering the effects of E-ELM on beliefs, and because beliefs about something are influenced by a person's level of knowledge (Rhodes et al., 2016; Shelby, 1986), we make the following hypothesis:

H3C: There will be a significant difference in beliefs about ecological importance between control and experimental groups.

Finally, given Chen and Lin's (2014) findings, which were based on subject matter (nature conservation) similar to the 50YFB introduction, I hypothesize the following:

H3D: There will be a significant difference in intent to support pro-ecological policy between control and experimental groups.

Existing studies have tested the roles of NT and CI in pro-ecological films (Chen & Lin, 2014), television (Rhodes et al., 2016), and interactive storytelling (Roth, 2015) but have yet to examine roles in policy specifically designed for pro-ecological behavior. In addition, although Chen and Lin (2014) tested intention to support policy in general, this research sought to apply previous findings to the 50YFB, a specific piece of pro-ecological legislation.

## METHOD

### *Study Overview*

This study employed a survey data collection method and non-equivalent control group design. Participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental condition (in which they were asked to read the introduction to the 50YFB) or the control condition (no stimulus).

### *Participants*

A total of 257 participants responded to the online survey. However, owing to failed attention-check items, 183 usable responses remained. This resulted in 102 participants in the control group and 81 participants in the experimental group. Participants were represented in terms of gender (female,  $n = 91$ ; male,  $n = 90$ ; trans male,  $n = 2$ ), while a majority identified as non-Hispanic white ( $n = 140$ ), followed by Hispanic White ( $n = 14$ ), Asian American ( $n = 13$ ), Black/African American ( $n = 11$ ), and American Indian or Alaska Native ( $n = 5$ ). A majority of participants resided in urban areas ( $n = 59$ ) or suburban areas ( $n = 79$ ) rather than rural areas ( $n = 45$ ). Mean age of participants was 39.5 years. Complete demographics are found in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Demographics*

<i>N</i>	Control	Experimental	Total
Age (years)			
<i>M</i>	38.32	41.01	39.51
<i>SD</i>	12.39	12.59	12.52
Range	21, 76	21, 71	21.76
Gender (%)			
Male	54.9	43.2	49.7
Female	45.1	54.3	49.2
Trans male	0.0	2.5	1.1
Race (%)			
White	77.5	84.0	80.3
Hispanic	6.9	8.6	7.7
American Indian/ Alaska Native	2.0	3.7	2.7
Asian	9.8	3.7	7.1
Black	8.8	2.5	6.0
Environment (%)			
Urban	34.3	28.4	31.7
Suburban	22.6	43.2	43.7
Rural	44.1	28.4	24.6
Population (%)			
<5,000	8.8	16.0	12.0
5,000–10,000	7.8	11.1	9.3
10,000–25,000	13.7	19.8	16.4
25,000–50,000	17.6	7.4	13.1
50,000–100,000	17.6	14.8	16.4
100,000–250,000	18.6	13.6	16.4
250,000–500,000	15.7	17.3	16.4

### **Procedures**

The 10-minute online, Qualtrics-hosted survey was posted on Amazon's Mechanical Turk for participant recruitment. Recruitment criteria included (a) being older than 18 years and (b) holding a high school diploma. After providing consent and confirming their eligibility based on the participation criteria, the experimental group was exposed to the 50YFB introduction and then asked to complete CI and NT measures. After providing consent, the control group continued to pertinent survey measures, which the experimental group completed following the narrative portion of the survey. The measures addressed degree of knowledge about agricultural systems, soil erosion, water use, loss of farmer and rural communities, and climate change; beliefs about ecological importance of these issues; and intent to support pro-ecological behavior.

Attention-check measures were included to ensure both reading of the experimental stimulus and data quality in both groups. If experimental groups incorrectly answered attention-check questions about the 50YFB, they were directed to the end of the survey. The control and experimental groups were compensated \$0.50 and \$0.75 for their participation, respectively.

### **Measures**

*Narrative transportation (NT).* NT signifies the extent to which a reader gets lost in the story line. For the experimental group, narrative transportation ( $\alpha = .707$ ,  $M = 5.253$ ) was measured using a modified version of Chen and Lin's (2014) 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The scale consisted of four items, including "I could picture myself affected by the problems described in the text" and "The text affected me emotionally."

*Character identification (CI).* CI is when the reader identifies with the narrative's characters. For the experimental group, CI ( $\alpha = .88$ ,  $M = 5.45$ ) was measured with a modified Chen and Lin (2014)

7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The scale contained six items (e.g., “I think I understand how Americans are suffering”).

**Beliefs about ecological importance (EI).** EI was measured on a scale adapted from Rhodes et al. (2016;  $\alpha = .82$ ,  $M = 5.44$ ). The scale asked participants to indicate the importance of the following in the United States: two differing systems of agriculture, soil erosion, water use, loss of farmers, loss of rural communities, climate change, and use of high-yield crops (eight items).

**Ecological knowledge (EK).** Using seven items from Chen and Lin’s (2014) ISEP, participants were asked on a 7-point Likert-type scale how much they knew about each ecological issue, ranging from 1 (*not at all knowledgeable*) to 7 (*extremely knowledgeable*). This scale was found to be highly reliable ( $\alpha = .93$ ,  $M = 3.35$ ).

**Ecological outlook (EO).** Similarly, using the same seven items from Chen and Lin’s (2014) ISEP scale ( $\alpha = .79$ ,  $M = 2.96$ ), participants were asked on a 7-point Likert-type scale how good/bad the outlook was for each, ranging from 1 (*very bad*) to 7 (*extremely good*).

**Intent to support pro-ecological policy (ISEP).** For both groups, how much one intended to support pro-ecological behavior was measured using an adaptation of Chen and Lin’s (2014) intent to support pro-ecological policy scale ( $\alpha = .73$ ,  $M = 4.98$ ). This scale consisted of seven items, including “I am willing to participate in spreading the word about perennial polycultures” and “I support the passage of the Fifty-Year Farm Bill.”

**Attention-check items.** Experimental group participants were asked three “true” or “false” comprehension questions (all of which were “true”) following the stimulus. This choice was made to exclude data from participants who skipped or skimmed the 50YFB introduction, bots, and Virtual Private Server users. The items were as follows: “The 50YFB Introduction advocates for perennial polyculture crops instead of annual monoculture crops,” “The 50YFB Introduction does not see soil erosion and chemical contamination as a

problem,” and “The 50YFB Introduction states the bill will primarily help the United States.” In addition, “please select number one” was the eighth item on the outlook scale, which both experimental and control group participants answered.

## RESULTS

This study tested three hypotheses.  $H_1$  posited that the E-ELM components of NT into, and CI with, the 50YFB introduction would positively influence beliefs about EI.  $H_1$  was tested with a multiple linear regression with NT and CI entered into the first block and EI entered as the dependent variable. NT,  $\beta = .048$ ,  $p = .74$ , did not significantly influence EI by itself. However, CI significantly predicted EI,  $\beta = .33$ ,  $p = .02$ . Results of the regression supported  $H_1$ , as  $F(2, 78) = 6.04$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $R^2 = .13$ . In short, CI with the 50YFB introduction's nonhuman characters (Americans, America) did more to impact EI than did participants' immersion in the narrative.

$H_2$  stated that beliefs about EI would influence ISEP. This hypothesis was tested with a hierarchical linear regression. Results supported  $H_2$ ,  $F(3, 179) = 18.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .23$  (Table 2). Block 2 included the three predictors of EO, EK, and EI. There was an inverse relationship between EO and ISEP, meaning the worse someone's outlook was,  $\beta = -.291$ , the more likely it was that the person intended to support pro-ecological policy. In addition, the more EK one already had,  $\beta = .186$ , and the more one thought ecology important,  $\beta = .304$ , the more likely one was to intend to support pro-ecological policy.

$H_3$  included four subsaspects comparing the measures between the control and experimental groups. To test each, independent sample  $t$ -tests were run (Table 3). There was no significant difference between control and experimental groups for EK ( $H_{3A}$ ), but there was for EO ( $H_{3B}$ ), EI ( $H_{3C}$ ), and ISEP ( $H_{3D}$ ). Only ISEP significantly differed,  $t(181) = -3.778$ ,  $p < .001$ . Moreover, the

**Table 2.** *Hierarchical Linear Regression Analysis for ISEP*

Block	Predictor	B	SE	$\beta$	t	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R$
1	EK	0.147	0.047	0.217	3.100*	0.144	0.144**
	EO	-0.360	0.072	-0.349	-4.99**		
2	EK	0.126	0.045	0.186	2.791*	0.220	0.089**
	EO	-0.300	0.070	-0.291	-4.30**		
	EI	0.304	0.067	0.304	4.553**		

\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 3.** Independent Sample *t*-Tests

	Control		Experimental		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Ecological knowledge	3.304	1.444	3.418	1.348	-0.542
Ecological outlook	3.321	1.012	3.144	0.788	1.289
Ecological importance	5.474	0.845	5.398	1.072	0.536
Intent to support pro-ecological policy	4.757	0.888	5.273	0.954	-3.778**

\*\* $p < .001$ .

experimental group ( $M = 5.27$ ) was more likely to support pro-ecological policy than the control group ( $M = 4.75$ ). Thus only H3A and H3D were supported.

## DISCUSSION

This study's purpose was to understand which components of narrative are most effective in making pro-ecological legislation more persuasive. This section contains further discussion and implications for (a) NT's effectiveness, (b) EK and outlook, and (c) the persuasiveness of technical narratives that forgo traditional plot characteristics.

First, as the result of testing the first hypothesis indicates, NT alone did not significantly influence beliefs about EI. Similarly, Chen and Lin (2014) found that transportation and attitude toward nature conservation were not significantly related. For them, the persuasive effects of NT on attitude toward nature conservation were fully mediated by identification with the main character, even though they were conceptually consistent with the model proposed by Slater and Rouner (2002). Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) documented the resistance to transportation. Although Green and Brock (2000) proposed transportation as a "mechanism whereby narratives can affect beliefs" (p. 701), future research may

need to reevaluate transportation's effectiveness in the context of pro-environmental narratives. CI is frequently associated with increased persuasion (Igartua & Frutos, 2017), but transportation has had mixed results. A story may not need to hang together or ring true for it to be persuasive. As long as the narrative includes characters with whom participants can identify, that may be what it takes to get pro-ecological legislation supported.

Second, H<sub>3</sub> compared the measures between the control and experimental groups and found that for the group that read the 50YFB introduction, there was not a significant difference in EK, outlook, or importance. This suggests that ecological issues may already be well known to participants; they may not be ignorant of them. A significant, positive difference in intent to support could stem from seeing the 50YFB as a viable model for future generations' sustainable food production. People may already know there to be many ecological problems, but they could start seeing the 50YFB as an answer.

Although there was not a significant difference in knowledge between groups (H<sub>3A</sub> confirmed), the more knowledge participants had going into reading the 50YFB introduction the more likely it was that they were persuaded to intend to support pro-ecological policy (H<sub>2</sub> confirmed, EK a predictor). These findings support previous literature finding that increased knowledge is a successful predictor of persuading one's beliefs (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Isaac & Grayson, 2017; Shelby, 1986). Thus, to fight agnotological forces, a shift in agricultural practices will likely require hefty educational programs to teach perennial, polyculture practices and their resulting ideological frameworks, already conceived by Jackson, Streit Krug, Vitek, and Jensen's (2018) perennial educational program called Ecosphere Studies.

Within the results for the second hypothesis, the finding that more knowledgeable participants intended to support pro-ecological policy,  $\beta = .186$ , may encourage scholars to reconceptualize EK.

Typically, scholars consider the knowledge individuals have prior to being exposed to a narrative or how much knowledge they gain after exposure.<sup>1</sup> However, rarely do we conceptualize the communicative variables on a cultural level. Cultures produce and privilege certain kinds of knowledge, and some scholars have argued that ignorance of agricultural detriments is foremost the outcome of societal and political struggles (Freeman, 2009; Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008). The same cultural production of ignorance contributes to the public's unawareness of the benefits of perennial and polyculture grain crops (Berry, 2012; Vitek & Jackson, 2008).<sup>2</sup>

Ecological problems persist in agriculture largely because the public is unaware of them. Higgins (1991) argued that farmers and nonfarmers rely on differing systems of meaning. This is unsurprising given that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2012) has reported that only 2% of Americans work in the farming industry, compared to 12.2% in 1950. As a result, more now than ever before, the average citizen knows little about grain crops, let alone perennial and polyculture alternatives. Broad (2016) suggested that, specifically in the context of agriculture legislation, effective storytelling will bridge the gap between cultural ignorance and the necessary knowledge each individual citizen must have to support policy. Instead of asking questions like "How knowledgeable are you about soil erosion or the future of rural communities?," what if scholars instead were to ask "How frequently have you heard soil erosion spoken about by societal or political leaders?" or "How often have you learned about these issues in school?" Framed differently, these questions could target understanding the cultural production of knowledge and not just the knowledge retained by the individual.

Within the results for the second hypothesis, the worse someone's outlook is,  $\beta = -.291$ , the more likely the person was to intend to support pro-ecological policy. A bleak outlook may be motivating for intended support, so long as hope appeals are also provided, because they are more persuasive than fear appeals (Chadwick,

2015; Dillard & Peck, 2001). The previously cited communication literature says that hope appeals are more successful, and we know discussing solutions is more effective than problems. These are, of course, wildly contingent upon the audience's and participant's prior dispositions.

Third, the introduction is overly technical, which is common of science communication (Olson, 2015; Suldoovsky et al., 2017). Thus we can answer RQ1, "How does a technical, systems-level introduction compare to more standard narrative forms?" The 50YFB is not so much driven by plot as it is a description of a problematic system. Nevertheless, the results find that it is still able to foster persuasion among its readers. The technical concepts are rooted in observable data about the particulars of the benefits of perennial polyculture systems but forgo their detail to abstract. This provides a systems-level story of loss and hope for renewal. This unique type of narrative may provide a successful blueprint for other highly technical science communication contexts.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Limitations***

Although this study provides pressing implications for the future of farm policy, generalizing results to the public is cautioned against. Discussed are three limitations: (a) internal validity of the study, (b) CI, and (c) eudaimonic versus hedonic motivation.

First, this sample consisted primarily of non-Hispanic White U.S. citizens. As a result, the ability to generalize to the public as a whole is limited. Participants could have suffered attrition reading 13 paragraphs of highly technical writing. ISEP cannot predict *committed* support, for example, constituents actually voting in congressional members who would vote for pro-ecological policy, voting at all, or even registering. There are obvious limitations with using MTurk as a data collection device. MTurk workers are more educated, less religious, and more likely to be unemployed than the general population (Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013).

Moreover, research has suggested that the number of racial/ethnic groups represented as MTurk workers might be lower than the number found in the general population (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). Kennedy, Clifford, Burleigh, Jewell, and Waggoner (2018) also show MTurk workers increasingly use Virtual Private Servers with substantially worse answers, though the three attention-check questions in this study should have filtered these responses.

Second, there are no individual human characters in the 50YFB introductory narrative. Chen and Lin (2014) found persuasive effects of NT on attitude toward nature conservation were fully mediated by identification with the main characters, a 13-year-old girl named Amy and a baby goose. In fact, aside from this study and Freeman's (2009), the characters in all other studies were human. If the category of "character" broadens beyond humans, how does the narrative manage the differing interpretations of the character? In the case of study, the characters "America" and "Americans" are broad and bring to mind several different agents, states, policies, politicians, and corporations. Without the bill's context, few might have taken "America" to signify its land and ecology.

New research on the narrative persuasiveness of pro-ecological narratives must explore if it is possible identify with characters characterized as masses of people, compared to individual characters. It should also prompt a broader discussion about a rift at the heart of ecological communication. That is, we are an immediate, flight-or-flight species who engage best with stories that include human tropes, elements, and themes. Stories about our own are most effective. At the same time, the apocalyptic, fearful story can best capture the totalizing reality of climate change. A perfect example is Wallace-Wells's (2019) *The Uninhabitable Earth*, the first sentence of which reads, "It is much, much worse than you think" (p. 1). The scientific reality is that the climate crisis affects multiple members of a species *and* multiple species. Any narrative that stays true to this reality will inevitably run up against humanity's

innate tendency to embrace individual, human stories over all else.

Finally, the 50YFB introduction is a bleak piece of legislation that could make participants feel guilty for not agreeing with its many premises. Cohen (2016) asserted that most narrative persuasion research frames itself as accepting the story (based on its narrative elements) but not simultaneously recognizing its persuasive subtext. Cohen furthered that consumers of persuasive appeals accept stories based on self-realization (eudaimonic motivation) rather than feeling forced into believing the persuasion (hedonic motivation). The former allows for a better attitude toward its persuasive subtext (Cohen, 2016; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Slater & Rouner, 2002; Weinmann, Schneider, Roth, Bindl, & Vorderer, 2016). Although the E-ELM (which includes NT and CI) assumes eudaimonic motivation, one could critique this study of succumbing to hedonic principles. Future research on the eudaimonic versus hedonic narrative persuasion along the lines of Tsay-Vogel and Krakowiak (2016), within the content of pro-ecological legislation, is needed. We must ensure that when faced with ecological catastrophe, the response comes from a willing constituency, not one that merely feels obligated.

### ***Future Directions***

Climate change narratives are increasingly shifting to digital platforms (Chen & Lin, 2014; Rhodes et al., 2016; Roth, 2015) and “ecotainment” (Oliver & Bartsch, 2011; Rhodes et al., 2016). For instance, Netflix’s 2019 nature documentaries *Our Planet* and *One Strange Rock* fantastically beckon the audience to create an emotional attachment with cute, adventurous, and raw individual species—immediately after, it shows how anthropogenic climate change hurts them. For those who are motivated to act based on how climate change hurts *our* species and not just polar bears or whales, can a similar documentary be as effective? In recalling this paper’s second limitation, can a documentary about annual

agriculture's harmful effects on masses of humans elicit the same reaction from audiences?

Next, a primary assumption of this research is that, if equipped with enough knowledge, outlook, and narrative engagement, *citizens* will intend to support pro-ecological legislation. However, future research should examine the ecological beliefs of the legislators themselves. For instance, the author of this article spent 3.5 months interning in a U.S. senator's office. The author conducted preliminary research on the staff and senator with regard to their perceptions about the severity of the climate crisis and the necessity of a carbon fee and dividend with border and regulatory adjustments (H.R. Resolution 763, 2019). The senator, a moderate Republican, exhibited "doubtful" tendencies and has not expressed the need for this particular solution. Such is the case for a majority of the 53 other Senate Republicans in the 116th Congress. Yet, in a nationwide survey, the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication found that 58% of moderate Republicans and 30% of conservative Republicans are worried about global warming (Leiserowitz et al., 2018), while the percentage of young Republicans concerned about climate change increases. Studies can examine which narrative techniques (via a pragmatic "form" narrative) best bridge the gap between citizen and legislator (or staffer) beliefs,<sup>4</sup> whether they best include overcoming special interests like Citizens United, the chamber of commerce, etc., or embracing a shared value/ethic form which to create and sustain a conversation. For instance, the same senator told the author that he was able to get behind incentivizing farmers to sequester via perennial polycultures *if* there could be an assurance of yields. From there, which narrative form is most productive to persuade?

One final recommendation—future research on bottom-up (citizen-driven) or top-down (legislator-driven) change should consider stating within which assumed causality the study falls. This will better frame the narrative's assumptions and intended

audience(s). Moreover, it will likely deal with the ongoing Big Data versus narrative debate. Four factors are driving governmental policy toward extremely large data sets analyzed computationally, including speed and diversity in collection and increased quantity and quality (Williams, 2018). As this debate continues, future communication scholarship should investigate the two's distinctions, assumptions, pragmatics, and union.

## CONCLUSION

This study found that citizens were more persuaded by identifying with characters than by being transported into the narrative. It also found that those who read the 50YFB introduction were more likely to intend to support pro-ecological policy. This suggests that participants who read the 50YFB introduction are more likely to be persuaded to vote for its contents. So, when Crews et al. (2018) asked, "Is the future of agriculture perennial?" (p. 1), the results of this study suggest that we begin answering yes.

Charles Mann (2018) compared two competing agricultural narratives: the Wizardly annual and the Prophetic perennial. Mann noted that the former won by way of the 1960s green revolution, but as the 50YFB's introduction asks, at what cost? The 50YFB epitomizes the naturalist prophet route, which has for too long been unconvincing. With more studies like these—for the sake of mitigating ecological demise and climate change—perhaps that may change.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author thanks Dr. Greg Paul and Dr. Natalie Pennington for their invaluable guidance on and assistance with this project as well as Tessa Urbanovich (M.A., Chapman University) for her thorough edits and suggestions. In addition, the author is indebted to the entire staff at the Land Institute for their dedication to the perennial polyculture worldview, notably Fred Iutzi, Aubrey Streit Krug, Timothy Crews, Stan Cox, David Van Tassel, Brandon Schlautman, Shuwen Wang, and Lee DeHaan. Special thanks to President Emeritus Wes Jackson for allowing the author to access a copy of the 50-Year Farm Bill and for guiding the author to develop a “life of the mind.”

### NOTES

- 1 For instance, science and technology studies (STS) has rethought science communication, from transmission of facts to ignorant audiences to open negotiation (Bronson, 2014).
- 2 As a discipline, communication and mass media studies lacks research related to the context of *grain* agriculture. Aside from Eliason (2014), the author could not find in the literature any mention of perennial crops.
- 3 It is worth mentioning here that scholars within the cultural studies field are involved in exploring the discourse of science and may provide their own unique answers.
- 4 Olson (2015) provided a pragmatic form for any science communication narrative. It is the “and, but, therefore” approach: “And” provides a conjunction for the current scientific state; “but” provides the problem with that state; and finally, “therefore” means the study’s results should eventually become the new “and.” These are generally the causal points that the 50-Year Farm Bill utilizes. Communicating pro-environmental policy may not require a standard human-studded, plot-driven narrative to rouse support for its contents; it may simply need to follow the formula.

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## Perceptions of the Intragroup Communication That Is Believed to Exist Among Successful and Unsuccessful Basketball Teams

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The main purpose of this study was to determine whether successful basketball teams were perceived to communicate differently than unsuccessful basketball teams. A review of previous literature revealed that effective communication in team sports was a multidimensional construct, while the underpinnings of social exchange theory provided a theoretical frame for understanding intragroup relations. Study participants completed a pretest focused on athlete communication, participated in a distraction task, and then completed a posttest focused on athlete communication. The uncovered findings reveal that a successful basketball team is perceived to have effective communicators, whereas an unsuccessful basketball team is perceived to have ineffective communicators. The discussion portion of this analysis concentrated on acceptance messages among teammates as well as theoretical implications.

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**KEYWORDS:** Small-group communication, social exchange theory, SECTS-2, sports

Perceptions of the men's college basketball team at Duke University often focus on their culture of winning. Less focus has centered on how outsiders perceive the communicative atmosphere that is said to exist on the hardwood floors of Cameron Indoor Stadium at Duke University, where basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski has instituted the philosophy that "effective teamwork begins and ends with communication." This emphasis on message exchange is perhaps just

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a nominal reason why the renowned coach has amassed so many accolades. After all, a robust number of sports science scholars and some communication scholars would argue that natural ability and mental toughness supersede communication in terms of predicting basketball success. Nevertheless, the importance of constructive face-to-face social interaction has been a focal point for Krzyzewski. The practical application of his communication-first approach has resulted in Krzyzewski becoming the all-time winningest coach in the history of men's college basketball. Meanwhile, small-group scholars and perception researchers continue to grapple over what facilitates effective communication in team sports.

The notion of effective communication in team sports and its association with the social exchange family of theories is where the current research is contextually situated in the extant sports communication literature. Effective communication in team sports concentrates on whether interlocutors share positive messages with teammates in various sports-related contexts (Sullivan & Feltz, 2003; Sullivan & Short, 2011), whereas the central principle of social exchange theory posits that individuals seek to maximize their potential rewards and reduce their potential costs within their relational endeavors (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). It was within the confines of these empirical parameters that previous scholarship reported that perceptions of social cohesiveness were associated with the positive conflict subfactor of effective team communication among a sample of youth soccer players (McLaren & Spink, 2016), suggested that transformational leaders on Ultimate Frisbee teams impacted follower perceptions in a manner that produced more effective intrateam communication (Smith, Arthur, Hardy, Callow, & Williams, 2013), and revealed that Turkish athletes desired to remain with their current teams if they reported a greater quantity of perceived intrateam communication that was deemed to be favorable (Onağ & Tepeci, 2014). Collectively, these studies indicate that perceptions of effective communication in team sports are an

eclectic arena for inquiry, while novel contexts for investigating the intersection of social exchange theory and sports communication have yet to be explored.

The rationales for this study outline why the current research is needed and explicate how the current research differs from previous scholarship. One of the main rationales for this study is to potentially extend social exchange theory into the sport of basketball. This is an important area to examine because a limited amount of scholarship has applied the principles of social exchange to the small-group communication that transpires among basketball teammates. A second rationale for this study is to assess whether communication is considered to be a salient variable for a successful basketball team. Non-group members' perceptions of effective communication in basketball have been minimally discussed in previous scholarship. This study seeks to address that gap in the existing literature. The third rationale for this investigation is to learn more about the interconnection between the dependent variable of perceptions of effective communication in team sports and the independent variable of team success on the basketball court. The intersection of these two variables has been under-researched in previous scholarship. In addition, the current research can extend knowledge on the extant small-group literature by telling us whether team success is perceived to be associated with good communication. Likewise, this report on small groups could also reveal whether a lack of team success is perceived to be associated with ineffective communication in small groups. The specific topic of communication in basketball is of significance because it influences perceptions of various professional sports teams and because it can influence perceptions of numerous intercollegiate athletic programs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The current investigation utilized social exchange theory as a theoretical frame for understanding the communicative climate that exists within basketball teams. The theorems of social exchange are not limited to a singular theory but instead compose an interrelated family of theories that assert that individuals make relationship decisions based on costs and rewards. Seminal work on social exchange by Thibaut and Kelley (1959) posited that team goals were likely to become convergent as intragroup members exchanged information with one another. They argued that “pairs of sets and synchronizing conventions that are found to have satisfactory reward-cost consequences are retained (have high survival value) in the relationship, whereas those that prove to be unsatisfactory are eliminated from the relationship” (p. 62). Stated economically, individuals desire to maximize their rewards and minimize their costs within their relational pursuits. Subsequent research on social exchange by Kelley and Thibaut (1978) emphasized how interpersonal dynamics within a small group could influence decision-making, whereas Roloff (1981) was one of the first communication scholars to contemplate when interlocutors made relational assessments based on rewards and costs. When taken together, the aforementioned scholarship provides evidence that social exchange has implications for psychology, sociology, and communication studies.

One of the most developed lines of research within the social exchange family of theories was advanced by U. G. Foa and Foa (1974). Within their early scholarship, Foa and Foa argued that socially exchanged resources could be physical items, such as gifts, or nonphysical items, such as communication. Their conceptualization of social exchange was predicated on the notion that individuals typically share resources that are similar and reciprocal. For example, a basketball player who shares a positive message with a teammate

is likely to receive a similar positive message in return. In contrast, a basketball player who communicates a negative message to a teammate is likely to be the recipient of a similar negative message in return. The parsimonious foundation that outlines how Foa and Foa (E. B. Foa & Foa, 1976; U. G. Foa & Foa, 1974) conceptualized the underpinnings of social exchange is couched in two propositions. First, Foa and Foa contended that interpersonal behavior comprises giving and/or receiving resources. Second, similar resources are exchanged among participants more frequently than less similar resources (E. B. Foa & Foa, 1976; U. G. Foa & Foa, 1974). Subsequent work by E. B. Foa and Foa (2012) built on this foundational premise by arguing that (a) an individual is not able to function as a competent group member when the resources that he or she possesses fall below a minimum level; (b) a scarcity of resources is likely to result in economic and noneconomic losses, whereas sufficient economic and noneconomic resources facilitate social functioning; and (c) individuals complete an assessment of quality based on the range of all available resources. All things considered, the core propositions of social exchange (E. B. Foa & Foa, 1976; U. G. Foa & Foa, 1974) and the later research of E. B. Foa and Foa (2012) illustrated that resources like communication are socially exchanged among interlocutors while also hinting that resources can influence functioning within a team or group.

In addition to considering socially exchanged resources, it is imperative to acknowledge the extant perception literature to effectively ground the current research. Interpersonal scholarship by Sillars (1980) examined perception and conflict as it pertained to college roommates. The Sillars study on interpersonal conflict found that “responsibility attributed to self was negatively associated with perceived stability” (p. 191). In other words, study participants attributed ongoing interpersonal conflict problems to their roommates (as opposed to themselves) if a relational conflict was perceived to be recurring within their interpersonal

dyad. Similar research by Sillars and Scott (1983) concentrated on other-perceptions and self-perception in intimate relationships and claimed that “congruent interpersonal perception is important to the satisfactory negotiation of relationship roles” (pp. 169–170). Likewise, classic scholarship on perception by Laing, Phillipson, and Lee (1966) succinctly summarized, “In order for the other’s behaviour to become part of self’s experiences, self must perceive it. The very act of perception entails interpretation” (p. 10). Indeed, it is appropriate to employ social exchange theory as a theoretical frame and to note the existing literature on perception, but it is also necessary to connect these variables to the field of sports communication.

### ***Effective Communication in Team Sports***

On the basis of the notion that communication is a socially exchanged resource, Sullivan and Feltz (2003) designed the first iteration of the Scale for Effective Team Communication in Team Sports (SECTS-1). The four intrateam factors that composed the broader construct of effective communication in team sports included the reward-based resources of (a) *acceptance*, (b) *distinctiveness*, and (c) *positive conflict* and the cost-based resource of (d) *negative conflict* (see Sullivan & Feltz, 2003; Sullivan & Short, 2011). Acceptance messages are said to concentrate on interpersonal support among teammates (e.g., teammates seem to trust each other). Distinctiveness focuses on messages that celebrate a unique team identity (e.g., teammates use nonverbal gestures that are specific to team members). The factor of positive conflict refers to constructive messages that occur when teammates are involved in a disagreement (e.g., teammates discuss their problems openly). The final factor of negative conflict centers on destructive messages when differences emerge among teammates (e.g., teammates yell at one another when they are upset). Taken together, these four factors represent communication resources that are socially exchanged between sports teammates.

A wide-ranging amount of extant scholarship has focused on how communication has been exchanged as a resource among sports teammates. For example, small-group literature on effective communication in team sports by Sullivan and Gee (2007) utilized a sample of hockey, soccer, basketball, volleyball, and baseball players to explore the construct of effective communication in team sports and the construct of athlete satisfaction. The results from their study indicate that athlete satisfaction within a team shared a particularly strong correlation with acceptance communication. As they succinctly stated, "Acceptance appears to be the most efficacious of these intrateam communication resources" (p. 114). Additional findings from the Sullivan and Gee study reveal that constructive methods for resolving negative conflict among teammates were also correlated with athlete satisfaction. A similar study on communication being a socially exchanged resource was conducted by Sullivan and Short (2011), who used a sample of athletes who played on sports teams that comprised four teammates or fewer. Comparatively speaking, the findings from their investigation illustrate that acceptance communication was rated as the most important socially exchanged resource, followed by the communication resource of positive conflict. These sports science studies by Sullivan and colleagues suggested that athletes across multiple sports believe acceptance messages are important and interconnected with feelings of athletic satisfaction.

Additional research on communication being exchanged as a social resource has examined perceptions as they pertain to the interpersonal dynamics that exist between a player and coach. A study by Haselwood et al. (2005) focused on the messages that were shared among Division I coaches in the National Collegiate Athletic Association and female athletes who attended two different universities in the southeastern region of the United States. The authors' analysis centered on a variety of different sports, such as volleyball, softball, tennis, basketball, soccer, and track. A significant perceptual difference on the factor of distinctiveness was found in

that female athletes believed their male head coaches were more likely to communicate messages that promoted a unique team identity (Haselwood et al., 2005). The results from the Haselwood and colleagues study also reveal that “athletes viewed female coaches as personable, effective communicators who handle situations of conflict in a positive manner” (p. 228). In other words, their findings indicate that female coaches were perceived to handle positive conflict and negative conflict in a more effective manner than male head coaches. Although the perception-based findings from the Haselwood et al. (2005) study highlight gender differences in terms of communication being socially exchanged within the confines of the player–coach relationship, it is nevertheless important to consider other sporting contexts that concentrate on the interplay between gender, communication, and culture.

Scholarship that has centered on communication being socially exchanged has been untidy within the realms of athlete gender and cultural differences. For instance, a study by Sullivan (2004) that measured the self-reported perceptions of male and female athletes revealed no evidence of gender differences existing between men and women for any of the four factors that represent effective communication in team sports. However, a perception study by Cunningham and Eys (2007) found evidence that men on sports teams were prone to communicating the resource factor of negative conflict, whereas women demonstrated a greater tendency to engage in the resource factor of acceptance communication. A cross-cultural examination of effective communication in team sports found evidence that British and North American athletes communicated similarly on the resource factors of acceptance, positive conflict, and negative conflict (Sullivan & Callow, 2005) but that the resource of distinctiveness was not a salient factor among their sample of British athletes. Indeed, the aforementioned studies have suggested that the variables of gender and culture could contextually influence the four resource factors that constitute

effective communication in team sports, but no perception-based research has examined the relationship that these four resource factors have with the variable of team success. Moreover, previous scholarship on effective communication in team sports has yet to focus only on the game of basketball. The present research attempts to fill this gap in the extant literature and builds on the theoretical underpinnings of social exchange by proposing the following research questions:

- RQ1: Are successful basketball teams perceived as effective team communicators from pretest to posttest with regard to the socially exchanged resources of (a) acceptance, (b) positive conflict, (c) negative conflict, and (d) distinctiveness?
- RQ2: Are unsuccessful basketball teams perceived as ineffective team communicators from pretest to posttest with regard to the socially exchanged resources of (a) acceptance, (b) positive conflict, (c) negative conflict, and (d) distinctiveness?

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The participants in this investigation were 90 undergraduate students at a large southeastern university. The mean age of study participants was 19.60 years ( $SD = 1.99$ ), while the age range for study participants varied from 18 to 32 years. The majority of the convenience sample self-identified as Caucasian (58.9%), followed by African American (28.8%), Hispanic American (5.6%), Asian American (5.6%), and Native American (1.1%). Women accounted for 57.8% of the sample ( $n = 52$ ). Men represented 42.2% of the sample ( $n = 38$ ). The participants in this investigation were mostly underclassmen, as 49.0% of the sample were freshmen ( $n = 44$ ), while 34.4% of the sample were sophomores ( $n = 31$ ). Upperclassmen were in the minority for this study, as a total of 13.3% of the sample

self-identified as juniors ( $n = 12$ ), while seniors ( $n = 3$ ) accounted for just 3.3% of the sample.

### ***Instrumentation***

A modified version of the SECTS-2 scale (Sullivan & Short, 2011) was the instrument for this study. The 16-item modified scale featured individual items that concentrated on the factors of (a) acceptance, (b) distinctiveness, (c) positive conflict, and (d) negative conflict, as those items collectively represent the broader social construct of effective communication in team sports. A 7-point Likert response was used, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha was .87 for the items that concentrated on acceptance, .91 for the items that concentrated on distinctiveness, .86 for the items that concentrated on positive conflict, and .92 for the items that concentrated on negative conflict. These calculations indicated that a reliable instrument was used.

### ***Procedures***

The following nine procedures constituted this study. First, a successful team condition and an unsuccessful team condition were created. Second, bullet points were created for the successful team condition (i.e., this team had the best record in their conference, this team had their best team record in 15 years), and bullet points were also created for the unsuccessful team condition (i.e., this team had the worst record in their conference, this team had their worst team record in 15 years). Third, a single picture that was an official team photograph for an actual men's college basketball team was depleted of identifiers by a professional graphic designer and used for photo-elicitation purposes in both conditions. Fourth, study participants were randomly assigned to the successful team condition or the unsuccessful team condition. Fifth, upon arrival at the research room, study participants completed a perception-based pretest that was a modified version of the SECTS-2 (Sullivan

& Short, 2011) while the men's college basketball team photograph was in full display. Sixth, study participants engaged in a distraction task that involved completing a series of complex mathematical equations. Seventh, after completing the distraction task, the study participants in the successful team condition were informed of the success bullet points, while participants in the unsuccessful team condition were informed of the unsuccessful bullet points. Eighth, the study participants then completed the perception-based posttest, which was the same modified version of the SECTS-2, while the men's college basketball team photograph was in full display. Ninth, a poststudy manipulation check was completed by a random sample of the study participants to ascertain whether the successful bullet points were perceived differently than the unsuccessful bullet points.

### **Data Analysis**

The data for this study were imported into SPSS for the purpose of analysis. A series of repeated-measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) was conducted on the socially exchanged resource factors of (a) acceptance, (b) distinctiveness, (c) positive conflict, and (d) negative conflict. The repeated-measures ANOVA method of data analysis was appropriate because this study administered a treatment between the pretest administration and the posttest administration. The treatment in this study was introducing either the successful bullet points or the unsuccessful bullet points. Utilizing a series of repeated-measures ANOVAs was also justified because this method of testing is more robust than the paired-samples *t*-test.

Preliminary data analysis was a manipulation check. In the successful condition, the provided bullet points were rated by study participants as a 6.40 ( $SD = 0.97$ ) in terms of perceived success, while in the unsuccessful condition, the provided bullet points were rated as a 1.59 ( $SD = 1.01$ ) in terms of perceived success. The manipulation check revealed a significant difference between the

successful condition and the unsuccessful condition,  $t(68) = 22.193$ ,  $p < .001$ . Thus the preliminary analyzed data indicated that the manipulation was effectively completed.

## RESULTS

The first research question for this study asked, Are successful basketball teams perceived as effective team communicators from pretest to posttest with regard to the socially exchanged resources of (a) acceptance, (b) positive conflict, (c) negative conflict, and (d) distinctiveness? A total of four repeated-measures ANOVAs were conducted on each of the aforementioned resource factors in the successful team condition. Findings reveal statistically significant results for the resource factor of acceptance,  $F(1, 44) = 76.325$ ,  $p < .001$ . Pretest perceptions of the acceptance communication of the basketball team in the successful team condition were rated as a 4.95 ( $SD = .65$ ) on the 7-point response continuum, while posttest perceptions of the acceptance communication of the basketball team in the successful condition were rated as a 5.62 ( $SD = .83$ ). Stated differently, a successful basketball team is perceived to share acceptance messages among teammates in a manner that communicates feelings of support for one another.

The second repeated-measures ANOVA completed in the successful team condition was conducted on the resource factor of distinctiveness. Support was uncovered for the distinctiveness resource factor in the successful team condition,  $F(1, 44) = 24.756$ ,  $p < .001$ . Pretest perceptions of the distinctiveness of the basketball team in the successful team condition were rated as a 5.16 ( $SD = 1.06$ ) on the 7-point response continuum, while posttest perceptions of the distinctiveness of the basketball team were rated as a 5.61 ( $SD = 1.11$ ). That is, a basketball team who is successful is believed to share messages among teammates that celebrate a unique team identity.

The third repeated-measures ANOVA in the successful team

condition concentrated on the resource factor of positive conflict. Statistically significant results emerged for the resource factor of positive conflict,  $F(1, 44) = 60.387, p < .001$ . Initial perceptions of the positive conflict in the successful condition were a 4.52 ( $SD = .68$ ) on the 7-point response continuum, while posttest perceptions of the positive conflict in the successful condition were a 5.24 ( $SD = .85$ ). In other words, a successful basketball team is believed to share constructive messages among one another when disagreements occur within the team.

The final repeated-measures ANOVA, in the successful team condition, explored the resource factor of negative conflict. The data that emerged were statistically significant for the resource factor of negative conflict,  $F(1, 44) = 19.622, p < .001$ . In the successful team condition, pretest perceptions of the negative conflict were a 4.32 ( $SD = 1.02$ ) on the 7-point response continuum, while posttest perceptions of the negative conflict were a 3.81 ( $SD = 1.18$ ). Put another way, a basketball team that is successful is conceptualized as not sharing destructive and confrontational messages among fellow teammates.

The second research question asked, Are unsuccessful basketball teams perceived as ineffective team communicators from pretest to posttest with regard to the socially exchanged resources of (a) acceptance, (b) positive conflict, (c) negative conflict, and (d) distinctiveness? Within the unsuccessful team condition, four repeated-measures ANOVAs were completed on the resource factors that collectively constitute effective communication in team sports. The uncovered data for the resource factor of acceptance were statistically significant,  $F(1, 44) = 84.074, p < .001$ . Initial perceptions of the acceptance communication in the unsuccessful team condition were rated at a 5.07 ( $SD = .71$ ) on the 7-point response continuum, but after the study participants were informed of the unsuccessful bullet points, perceptions in the unsuccessful team condition were rated at a 3.51 ( $SD = 1.10$ ). Put differently, a

basketball team who has a bad conference record is not believed to share acceptance messages that communicate support for one another.

A second repeated-measures ANOVA in the unsuccessful team condition was completed on the resource factor of distinctiveness. Statistical significance was uncovered for the resource factor of distinctiveness,  $F(1, 44) = 8.541, p = .005$ . During the pretest administration in the unsuccessful team condition, participants initially evaluated the distinctiveness of the basketball team at a 5.25 ( $SD = .99$ ) on the 7-point response continuum, but during the posttest administration in the unsuccessful team condition, participants evaluated the distinctiveness of the basketball team at a 4.71 ( $SD = 1.23$ ). Indeed, an unsuccessful basketball team is not conceptualized as possessing a team identity that is either shared or inclusive among teammates.

The third resource factor analyzed via a repeated-measures ANOVA in the unsuccessful team condition was positive conflict. Statistically significant findings were uncovered for the resource factor of positive conflict,  $F(1, 44) = 59.539, p < .001$ . Study participants evaluated the resource of positive conflict during the pretest at a 4.62 ( $SD = .60$ ) on the 7-point response continuum, whereas evaluations of the positive conflict during the posttest were evaluated at a 3.48 ( $SD = 1.01$ ) on the 7-point response continuum. Put simply, it seems that a basketball team who lacks success is not believed to communicate in a healthy and productive manner when conflict occurs within the team.

The final repeated-measures ANOVA in the unsuccessful team condition focused on negative conflict. Statistically significant findings were uncovered with regard to the resource factor of negative conflict,  $F(1, 44) = 16.785, p < .001$ . The communication of negative messages during a conflict was initially perceived as a 4.64 ( $SD = .79$ ) on the 7-point response continuum in the unsuccessful team condition, whereas the communication of negative messages during

a conflict was perceived as a 5.09 ( $SD = .88$ ) on a 7-point response continuum during the posttest in the unsuccessful team condition. Therefore it can be argued that a basketball team who has not been successful on the court is believed to exchange confrontational and harmful messages among fellow teammates.

## DISCUSSION

The reason for this study was to provide insight into whether communication differences were perceived to exist among successful and unsuccessful basketball teams. Statistically significant findings were uncovered as a successful basketball team was perceived as socially exchanging the reward-based communication resources of acceptance, distinctiveness, and positive conflict. A successful basketball team was not perceived as socially exchanging the cost-based communication resource of negative conflict. In contrast, an unsuccessful basketball team was not perceived as socially exchanging the reward-based communication resources of acceptance, distinctiveness, and positive conflict. An unsuccessful basketball team was perceived as socially exchanging the cost-based resource of negative conflict. The discussion that follows concentrates on interpreting the uncovered findings and highlighting theoretical implications.

The results that emerged in this study can be interpreted in a couple ways. One way to interpret the findings from the successful team condition is by seeing that effective communication is perceived to positively impact team performance on the basketball court. The finding from this study that effective communication is believed to transpire among a successful basketball team is consistent with the small-group scholarship of LeCouteur and Feo (2011), whose study on netball found evidence that tactical intrateam communication among teammates is associated with successful defense in terms of the opposition achieving fewer shots on goal.

However, the findings from the successful condition are at odds with the work of Williams and Widmeyer (1991), who reported that intrateam communication did not predict performance in their study of intercollegiate sport. It is likely that the uncovered discrepancy between this study and the intrateam communication study of Williams and Widmeyer is related to sport type. For instance, Williams and Widmeyer utilized a sample of female golfers who participated on a college golf team in which athletic performance is a more individualized phenomenon. In contrast, the sports of netball and basketball typically comprise 10–15 players on their respective teams. The results of this study when compared to other scholarship provide evidence that perceptions of effective communication and its association with success on the field of play are perhaps dependent on the type of sport and the size of the team. It appears from a perceptual standpoint that sports teams comprising approximately 10–15 teammates on the roster are more dependent on effective communication than sports teams comprising 4 or fewer teammates in terms of the salience of effective communication. These variables (e.g., sport type, team size) would be an area for future analysis, as the findings from this study merely indicate that perceptions of effective communication and team success are conceptualized as interconnected variables.

Another point of discussion from the current study that needs to be noted is applicable to the relative value of the communication resources of (a) acceptance, (b) distinctiveness, (c) positive conflict, and (d) negative conflict. It is interesting to note that acceptance messages were not perceived as being effectively exchanged in the unsuccessful condition but rated as the most valuable of these communication resources in the successful team condition during the posttest administration. Similar findings regarding the importance of acceptance communication relative to distinctiveness, positive conflict, and negative conflict were noted by McLaren and Spink (2016), who found that messages of acceptance were the strongest

predictor of social cohesion among competitive soccer players. Likewise, the importance of acceptance communication that was uncovered in the present study was also consistent with the previous work of Sullivan (2004), who indicated that athletes reported offering acceptance communication more frequently than messages of distinctiveness, positive conflict, and negative conflict. Additional studies have provided further evidence that acceptance communication is the most efficacious of the four communication resources (see Cunningham & Eys, 2007; Sullivan & Gee, 2007). Consumers of sport might perceptually believe that being able to communicate feelings of acceptance among teammates allows basketball players to play the game successfully in a carefree manner that is devoid of judgment. The confidence that is born out of sharing acceptance messages with teammates perhaps allows individuals to take shots or make high-risk passes on the basketball court that could benefit the team if executed properly. This lack of fear, and the consequent ability to play in a loose manner, may lend itself to better performance on the court because basketball players do not have to worry about losing the trust of their teammates. Indeed, it seems from a perceptual and practical standpoint that having the socioemotional support of teammates in the form of acceptance messages may influence how successful a basketball team is in the field of play, but it is nevertheless important to address theory as it relates to effective communication in team sports.

A pair of theoretical implications that pertain to the underpinnings of social exchange theory are noteworthy of mention. First, the finding that a successful basketball team was perceived to socially exchange the reward-based resources of acceptance, distinctiveness, and positive conflict in an effective manner provides strong support for the second proposition of social exchange theory that was advanced by Foa and Foa (E. B. Foa & Foa, 1976; U. G. Foa & Foa, 1974), which posited that related resources are more frequently exchanged than dissimilar resources. For example, in the successful

team condition, the similar communication resources that were reward based (i.e., acceptance, distinctiveness, positive conflict) were perceived as being effectively exchanged among basketball teammates, while the dissimilar resource of negative conflict was not perceived as being effectively exchanged among a basketball team that was successful. The finding that a successful basketball team was perceived as effectively sharing the reward-based messages of acceptance, distinctiveness, and positive conflict also validates the research of Sullivan and Short (2011), who asserted that “acceptance, distinctiveness, and positive conflict are contributors to positive group outcomes” (p. 473). The current research offers perception-based evidence that basketball teams and organizations that are concerned about a successful appearance should employ coaches who advocate for the formal teaching of communication to players. While the results of this study do not confirm that effectively exchanging reward-based communication will necessarily translate into success on the basketball court, the uncovered findings do fall in line with the theoretical claim that successful basketball teams are believed to effectively exchange reward-based communication resources that are similar in nature.

A second implication for social exchange theory centers on the observed differences between the successful and unsuccessful team conditions. In the unsuccessful team condition, a basketball team was not seen as effectively exchanging the reward-based communication resources (i.e., acceptance, distinctiveness, positive conflict), which is consistent with the social exchange theory work of E. B. Foa and Foa (2012), who argued that economic loss and a lack of societal functioning are likely to occur when resources are minimal and/or not effectively exchanged. The findings from the present research, which revealed that an unsuccessful team was not perceived as exchanging reward-based resources, while a successful team was not perceived as exchanging the cost-based resource of negative conflict, serve to extend the theoretical parameters for

social exchange into the game of basketball. The current study also builds on theory pertaining to social exchange in sports as it highlights the seemingly adverse effects of exchanging negative conflict from the perspective of individuals who were not active participants in the exchange relationship. While the current research stops short of bridging the gap from theory to practice, it does offer theory-based evidence from the unsuccessful team condition that not exchanging reward-based resources among teammates is perceptually connected with a lack of team success.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***

The current study has some limitations that need to be noted; it has also uncovered some possible avenues for future research. One of the major limitations is that some of the participants in this study were highly knowledgeable about small-group communication in sports, while a negligible portion of the study participants were not knowledgeable about small-group communication in sports. It is possible that some of the study participants who were less informed about basketball could have made some uninformed conclusions during the posttest that were inhibited by their limited amount of sports knowledge. It would make sense from a design standpoint to use a specialized sample of self-identified sports fans in future research to ensure that the data obtained are based on a general understanding of the game of basketball. A second limitation is that only one photograph of an actual men's college basketball team was used for photo-elicitation purposes. Utilizing additional photographs of more basketball teams and including a women's college basketball team would have yielded additional results of interest for this particular investigation. Nevertheless, this research sought to address the exigency associated with limited scholarship on outsider perceptions of small groups in sports. Stated differently, this study placed attention on how outsider perceptions and team success are correlated. Future scholarship should explore perceptions of

effective team communication in other sports or utilize a sample of coaches to assess their perceptions of effective communication in team sports. Employing a sample of basketball coaches would also provide insight into whether their emphasis on effective team communication is consistent with the coaching philosophies of the aforementioned Coach Krzyzewski.

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## The Me Too Movement: A Qualitative Content Analysis of News Featuring #MeToo

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On Wednesday, December 6, 2017, *Time* magazine honored the Silence Breakers as 2017 Person of the Year. The present study examined online news articles published in December 2017, immediately before and after the *Time* feature. A qualitative content analysis of 78 articles published by three news outlets—the BBC, CNN, and *Fox News*—examined each article’s focus, how the articles communicated issues of sexual violence and/or gender inequality, and the similarities and differences in communication based on the news source. Results indicate a focus on public figures and a tendency to link those stories to Harvey Weinstein and the #MeToo hashtag. Few articles mentioned backlash against accusers or Tarana Burke, founder of the Me Too movement. Results provide insight into how #MeToo was communicated during December 2017 by these news outlets, which provides additional support for ongoing feminist research on activism related to violence against women.

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**KEYWORDS:** #MeToo, Me Too movement, sexual harassment

Feminism in the United States has never emerged from the women who are most victimized by sexist oppression; women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually—women who are powerless to change their condition in life. They are a silent majority.

—hooks, 2015, p. 31

A silent majority was honored on Wednesday, December 6, 2017, when *Time* magazine named the Silence Breakers as 2017 Person

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of the Year. In honor of the people who spoke out against sexual violence, *Time* covered the stories of nearly 30 women and men from a variety of industries. Only the arm of one woman, a hospital worker, appeared on the magazine cover, as she wished to remain anonymous. *Time* stated, “For giving voice to open secrets, for moving whisper networks onto social networks, for pushing us all to stop accepting the unacceptable, the Silence Breakers are the 2017 Person of the Year” (Felsenthal, 2017, para. 7). While the news featured #MeToo since the hashtag went viral on social media in October 2017, the current study examined online news articles published during the month of December 2017, immediately before and after the *Time* feature. The researchers conducted a qualitative content analysis of 78 articles published by three news outlets—CNN, *Fox News*, and the BBC—which were selected due to their popularity as cable news sources with a strong online presence (Pew, 2011). In conducting the qualitative content analysis, the researchers investigated the framing of the articles in the context of #MeToo, how the articles communicated issues of sexual violence and/or gender inequality, and the similarities and differences in framing gender inequality based on the news source through the use of the #MeToo hashtag. Results indicate an overwhelming focus on celebrities and public figures—both impacted by and accused of sexual misconduct—and link those stories to the story of Harvey Weinstein and the #MeToo hashtag. Very few articles mentioned backlash against accusers or Tarana Burke, founder of the Me Too movement. As a result of the study, we gain insight into how #MeToo was framed by these news outlets, which provides additional support for ongoing feminist research on activism related to violence against women, specifically the #MeToo movement.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Two important bodies of literature contextualize our research: #MeToo and the history of the Me Too movement as well as fram-

ing theory related to feminist movements. This work illuminates how the news articles from the present study framed issues of sexual violence and/or gender inequality and the similarities and differences in communicating gender inequality based on the news source.

### ***#MeToo and the Me Too Movement***

The Me Too movement and the hashtag #MeToo focus on highlighting stories of sexual violence and harassment through a feminist lens. According to Minic (n.d.), the “goal of feminism is a social change of unequal relations of men and women” (p. 282), and the primary focus of #MeToo and the Me Too movement is to do just that in the area of sexual violence. Historically, in American culture, “hierarchical rule and coercive authority” by those in power against those who lack power has been the cause of violence against women, which is encouraged by “white male supremacy” (hooks, 2015, p. 118). In addition to the abuse of power, the sexual objectification of women, which is the reduction of women from “fully human” individuals to objects that serve only as pleasure for others, is another cause of sexual violence, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, and sex trafficking (Gervais & Eagan, 2017). The sexual objectification of women can especially be seen in portrayals of women in the American media. The idea of women as sex objects in magazine advertisements, on television programming, in songs on the radio, and on Instagram posts has become a cultural norm of sexual objectification of women, which has created a cycle of acceptance and violence. Through the constant exposure to women being sexually objectified, media viewers begin to accept that perception of women. Through that “passive acceptance,” norms for how men should treat women shift, allowing for the perpetuation of violence (Gervais & Eagan, 2017). As the cycle continues from White male supremacy through the media to passive acceptance by the public, sexual violence against women becomes almost impossible to control or eliminate (hooks, 2015, p. 12).

#MeToo is an important example of a feminist movement seeking to frame the injustice of sexual violence, especially against women, and to raise awareness for social change. Although many recognize #MeToo as a hashtag from an October 15, 2017, tweet by Hollywood actress Alyssa Milano that quickly went viral, Milano's tweet was the framing of the injustice of violence against women. It was not, however, the first time this exact phrase had been used to communicate this same injustice. The Me Too movement began in 2006 when activist Tarana Burke founded Just Be Inc., an organization focused on "the health, well being, and wholeness of young women of color" (Just Be Inc., 2013). As senior director of Girls for Gender Equity (2018) in New York, Burke's current organization focuses on "the physical, psychological, social, and economic development of girls and women" (Just Be Inc., 2013). Earlier in her career, Burke worked at a youth camp where a girls' bonding workshop was facilitated. A young girl named Heaven pulled Burke aside and confessed to being sexually abused. On her website, Burke described feeling deep regret for cutting Heaven off and directing her to another counselor. Burke said, "I couldn't even bring myself to whisper . . . me too" (Burke, 2013). Burke's Me Too movement has worked to bring awareness of sexual violence against girls and women; for example, Burke wore a "me too" shirt as she spoke at the 2014 March against Rape Culture in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which was attended by 600 people (Lipp, 2014; Ohlheiser, 2017). At the time of Alyssa Milano's #MeToo tweet in October 2017, she had not yet heard of Tarana Burke or her Me Too movement (Milano, 2017), but Twitter posts and media coverage quickly brought Burke into the conversation. The #MeToo example supports Tufekci's (2017) argument that networked protests organized online often lack a clear leader due to the "open participation afforded by social media." Additionally, informal leaders emerge in those with "the largest followings on social media" and thus "the greatest influence" (p. xxiii). In this case, Milano received the initial credit for

#MeToo due to sharing it with her large following on social media; however, a large enough group of people on Twitter knew about Tarana Burke and highlighted her involvement in founding the Me Too movement very soon after Milano's #MeToo tweet went viral. This allowed for two social movement entrepreneurs to collaborate on the same diagnostic frame—the injustice of violence against women—using the same phrase: “me too.”

After seeing #MeToo on social media in October 2017, Tarana Burke published a series of tweets, adding her voice directly to the movement. She wrote, “It has been amazing watching all of the pushback against Harvey Weinstein and in support of his accusers over the last week. . . . In particular, today, I have watched women on social media disclose their stories using the hashtag #metoo” (Burke, 2017a, 2017b). Indeed, Milano's tweet on October 15, 2017, was a response to the sexual assault allegations against film producer Harvey Weinstein; however, participants using the hashtag #MeToo quickly revealed America's sexual violence problem beyond Hollywood. By October 16, the phrase “me too” and hashtag #MeToo had been used more than 500,000 times on Twitter (France, 2017). During that same 24-hour window on Facebook, more than 4.7 million users and 12 million Facebook posts used #MeToo (Santiago & Criss, 2017). West (2017) referred to the viral response to #MeToo as “the staggering breadth and ubiquity of sexual predation” (para. 7). Burke (2017c, 2017g) commented on the pervasiveness of sexual violence as she continued tweeting in October 2017:

It made my heart swell to see women using this idea—one that we call “empowerment through empathy” #metoo . . . to not only show the world how widespread and pervasive sexual violence is, but also to let other survivors know they are not alone.

Indeed, the concept of empowerment through empathy has been Burke's focus since she began the Me Too movement “to aid sexual

assault survivors in underprivileged communities ‘where rape crisis centers and sexual assault workers weren’t going’” (Hill, 2017, para. 5). This grassroots approach to illuminating the problem of rape and sexual assault legitimizes the mass of voices.

Although #MeToo resonated with large audiences very quickly online, the hashtag and the original purpose of the movement are not exactly the same. In a statement to *Ebony*, Burke discussed the difference between her original Me Too movement and the viral #MeToo hashtag; she said the Me Too movement

wasn’t built to be a viral campaign or a hashtag that is here today and forgotten tomorrow. It was a catchphrase to be used from survivor to survivor to let folks know that they were not alone and that a movement for radical healing was happening and possible. (Hill, 2017, para. 6)

Unlike her inability “to whisper . . . me too” (Burke, 2013) after her conversation with Heaven years before, Burke not only verbalized her “me too” but also worked to ensure that survivors knew they were not alone. Burke (2017d, 2017e, 2017f) concluded her series of October 2017 tweets,

The point of the work we’ve done over the last decade with the “me too movement” is to let women . . . particularly young women of color know that they are not alone—it’s a movement. #metoo. . . . It’s beyond a hashtag. It’s the start of a larger conversation and a movement for radical community healing. Join us. #metoo.

Importantly, Burke touches on the long-term and larger conversations needed with any social movement but especially with a feminist movement. hooks (2015) argued that the aim of feminism raises important questions, such as these: “Since men are not equals in

white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class culture, which men do women want to be equal to? Do women share a common vision of what equality means?" (p. 19). Thus issues of race, class, and privilege, which are critical to understanding unequal relations between men and women, must be considered when studying #MeToo.

Through the unequal distribution of power as well as media portrayals of women, sexual harassment in the workplace becomes commonplace, which is why #MeToo focuses on bringing this to light. hooks (2015) argued that when women entered the workforce, which also "serves the interest of capitalism," men used violence against women as a reaction to their lack of control "to establish and maintain a sex role hierarchy in which they are in a dominant position" (p. 121). Many countries view sexual harassment as one form of violence against women. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (n.d.), sexual harassment in America may be defined as "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature" and is "illegal when [the harassment] is so frequent or severe that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or when it results in an adverse employment decision (such as the victim being fired or demoted)" (paras. 1–4). However, according to Galdi, Maass, and Cadinu (2017), the interpretation of sexual harassment "as immoral and unethical or perfectly normal" by those who act and those acted upon differs based on context, which includes the immediate, microlevel, normative context "created by people's social networks or by the organizations in which they work or study" (p. 339) as well as the big-picture, broader cultural context. Additionally, in American courts of law, sexual harassment charges must stand up against the "objective prong of the severe and pervasive test," which "requires a judgment of a reasonable person, but exactly what is a 'reasonable' person?" (Kimble et al., 2016, p. 320). Owing to the context-driven construction of sexual harassment episodes, and to the "reasonable person" legal language,

identifying and prosecuting sexual harassment often prove difficult, if not impossible.

In the #MeToo era, some narratives charge sexual harassment claimants as falsely accusing and fictionalizing accounts, while others claim that women and/or feminists cannot fairly evaluate cases of sexual harassment; however, empirical data and research say otherwise. A review of research on false reporting of sexual assault and sexual harassment revealed that “the prevalence of false reporting is between 2 and 10 percent,” which has been evaluated by researchers as low (National Sexual Violence Resource Center [NSVRC], n.d., para. 10). This negates the argument that false reporting is rampant. Additionally, in terms of fair assessment and evaluation of sexual harassment cases, in an experiment with 961 participants, Bhattacharya and Stockdale (2016) indicated that evidence—and not the gender of the accuser—in sexual harassment cases “had a stronger effect on women’s, feminists’, and feminism supporters’ perceptions” of sexual harassment scenarios. This evidence illustrates criticism that women and feminists “are unable to reach fair judgments of [sexual harassment] complaints” (p. 594) as incorrect. The arguments stating that accounts of sexual harassment are false or fictionalized despite the evidence is a way of framing evidence as unimportant. #MeToo and the Me Too movement, however, shift the frame. In this respect, framing theory allows the prevalence of sexual violence to resonate with audiences while also factoring in the critical issues of race, class, and privilege. Additionally, framing theory allows for an interrogation of counternarratives, such as false accusations and fictionalized accounts, so that ideas by movement entrepreneurs like Tarana Burke and Alyssa Milano can be effectively communicated to promote social change.

### ***Framing Theory and Feminist Social Movements***

Framing theory refers to how the media presents, or frames, information to mass audiences (Johnston & Noakes, 2005). The theory

allows us to better understand movements like #MeToo and how those movements motivate audiences to participate. A social movement formulates when individuals and groups identify a social change and seek to make that change (Buechler, 2011). According to Johnston and Noakes (2005), “mobilizing people to action has always been a subjective component, and in recent years this subjective component—the element of perception or consciousness—has been conceptualized as a social-psychological process called framing” (p. 2). For example, the American women’s suffrage movement effectively used a variety of frames to increase the capacity of the movement and to gain and organize new members (Johnston & Noakes, 2005). Those frames included a justice frame emphasizing the equal rights of men and women, a societal reform frame arguing that women should have a place in politics, and a home protection frame highlighting the importance of women’s voices in caring for other people. In short, framing information is the way in which the story is told to illuminate an issue—and for the #MeToo hashtag to evoke participation.

Mass media affects public views of various movements, but depending on the framing of the information, perceptions by audience members differ. Some believe that mass media may change the message behind activism and protest, resulting in the distortion of the message to the general public, because “journalistic and editorial norms may distort movement messages” (Sisco & Lucas, 2014, p. 494). For example, in a study analyzing how the media framed feminism in portrayals of Clinton, Obama, and Palin during the 2008 U.S. presidential election, Sisco and Lucas (2014) found the construction of feminism and the intercession of the news media to simplistically frame the movement, which could also undermine movement unity by exacerbating conflict. This framing also takes the message out of the hands of activists. Movement actors may want to reconsider their media strategies to respond to this changing political environment (Sisco & Lucas, 2014). Additionally,

most movements contain multiple frames simultaneously, as in the American women's suffrage movement. Better understanding the frames used and whether those frames resonate with audiences allows for an evaluation of the movement as a whole.

Movements may begin offline or online, but they all begin the same way: by identifying an injustice and framing the injustice to elicit support. When considering a movement on social media, the identification of dissonance as shared can create a community or movement, an affective solidarity that serves as the impetus to generate alternative values and different ways of thinking that, in turn, allow people to feel differently. To become political, these dissonances must be related to social injustices and resonate with the experiences of others (Rudolfsdottir & Johannsdottir, 2018). An example of this is the feminist hashtag campaign called #FreeTheNipple, which circulated on social media prior to #MeToo. In studying #FreeTheNipple in March 2015, Rudolfsdottir and Johannsdottir found that "young women manage to claim space as agents of change but highlight the importance of the support or affective sustenance they received from older feminists" (p. 133). Understanding how to sustain feminist campaigns and movements through social support is especially critical when mass media begins reporting on, and changing—or reframing—the original message of that campaign or movement.

Importantly, those who engage in feminist campaigns must consider the online and offline consequences of such actions. For example, "when women have used social media to raise consciousness on particular issues, such as . . . stopping the daily objectification of topless women . . . , they have faced a barrage of abuse, and rape and death threats on social media platforms" (Locke, Lawthom, & Lyons, 2018, p. 4). This idea is echoed by Chun (2016), who argued that social media "blames the user—*her* habits of leaking—for systemic vulnerabilities, glossing over the ways in which our promiscuous machines routinely work through an alleged 'leaking' that undermines the separation of the personal from the networked"

(p. 145). Women are often stigmatized for communicating sexual behavior, sometimes known as being “slut shamed,” when they “embrace publicity as a means of empowerment” (Chun, 2016, p. 145). Despite these negative consequences for women, the value of social media to begin movements and inspire change proves too important.

The argument about the media made by Sisco and Lucas (2014) should not be ignored by activists if they want their messages to be received by the public as they intend; despite perceived distortions, others have argued that activism and protests require mass media. According to Haunss (2015), social media are well suited to reach sympathizers and activists, but social movements usually can only be successful if they reach and get support from a broader audience.

This general public still can only be reached reliably through mass media; therefore Internet and social media tools can complement and not replace other media strategies. Importantly, across all platforms, framing not only the issue but also the solution to that issue must be effectively communicated. However, Johnston and Noakes (2005) pointed out that “frames evolve over time as they confront alternative interpretations of events, sometimes being co-opted and used for purposes unintended by their originators” (p. 7). As such, activists must work hard to ensure that frames are constructed in a meaningful and purposeful way and that when frames change, the meaning and purpose are not completely changed from the original injustice. Additionally, while frames may allow for an issue to be publicized and better understood, action requires the use of strong motivational framing. Buechler (2011) argued that motivational framing “provides a rationale for action, a call to arms, and vocabularies of motive supporting that action” (p. 148). Motivational framing, then, works to show audiences that change is possible. This is especially important in the political and legal arenas when changes to society, culture, and law are required to address an issue.

Certainly the framing of #MeToo by Alyssa Milano on Twitter

resonated with a large audience, which reveals the importance of social media to modern-day social movements. In considering how a social media campaign may supplement traditional media strategies, one must keep in mind the cheap, easy, and spontaneous nature of social media. Dencik (2015) said, “The power of social media is said to lie in the spontaneous and unpredictable ways in which networks of protest and solidarity can emerge,” and social media power “provides new opportunities for political activism, for people to organize and mobilize in new and easier ways with fewer necessary resources” (pp. 203–204). #MeToo is one example of a powerful social media movement—born from a spontaneous, single tweet and unpredictably sparking a network of protest and solidarity around sexual violence. However, #MeToo was so powerful that it translated across social media to mass media, including news coverage on television and online.

Prior to #MeToo and the swell of voices on social media speaking out against sexual harassment, news coverage tended to be limited. News coverage of sexual harassment prior to #MeToo has been studied by Saguy (2002), who conducted a quantitative content analysis of news stories in the United States and France. Her findings reveal that “American press coverage of sexual harassment tended to focus on cases involving high-profile political figures and institutions” (p. 120). Additionally, Saguy found that articles “presented sexual harassment as an important social problem, a woman’s issue, an abuse of power, and a form of discrimination, despite the focus on political scandals” (p. 134). These political scandals included prominent figures such as President Bill Clinton and Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas. According to Saguy, Anita Hill’s accusations against Thomas prompted the first questions in the media about sexual harassment and “raised public consciousness about a problem that was, before then, little known among the American public” (p. 110). Fifteen years later, however, media coverage of sexual harassment exploded during and after the presidential election in the United States due to sexual harassment

allegations against Donald Trump, which once again brought the issue to the forefront of media coverage, including social media (Calfas, 2017; Parker, Berman, & Sellers, 2017; Shear, 2017).

To contribute to the literature on #MeToo and on the framing of feminist movements, the present study explored the communication of #MeToo by three specific news outlets, the BBC, CNN, and *Fox News*, in December 2017. These three outlets have prominent audiences on cable news television but also utilize online print news articles to reach their consumers. As McIntosh and Cuklanz (2014) argued, analyzing print news media is important since “mainstream print media purport[s] to be objective and, thus, the operation of power within print news is both unacknowledged and subconscious” (p. 270). This argument applies to the present study even though the focus is on digital news media. To gather a large corpus of data to analyze, these three outlets were selected due to their popularity among Americans as cable news sources with strong online presences (Pew, 2011). The present study examined online articles published by these outlets and sought to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: How do articles from three news outlets, the BBC, CNN, and *Fox News*, frame sexual violence against women using #MeToo?
- RQ2: How do those articles communicate issues of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and/or gender inequality?
- RQ3: What are the similarities and differences in communicating gender inequality based on the news source?

## METHODOLOGY

To answer the study’s research questions, a qualitative content analysis was conducted of 78 articles published by three online news outlets in December 2017. Data collection included 14 text-only articles from the BBC, 38 articles from CNN, and 26 articles from *Fox News*. Data analysis began with codes from Saguy’s (2002)

quantitative analysis of news articles on sexual harassment. Codes were then adapted, changed, and expanded based on the data collected from December 2017.

### ***Data Collection***

The media sample of 78 total articles was drawn from three online news sources: 14 articles from the BBC,<sup>1</sup> 38 articles from CNN,<sup>2</sup> and 26 articles from *Fox News*.<sup>3</sup> The sample was collected by searching the term “#MeToo” in the search function of each news website. Articles from December 1 to 31, 2017, were archived for analysis. It is important to note that searching “#MeToo” with a hashtag on the *Fox News* website resulted in a search error glitch. The search term “metoo” was adapted to effectively search *Fox News* articles. Video results were removed from the analysis; only articles with text were included in the sample to align with the study’s focus of content analysis of text only. Text-based articles included news and opinion pieces.

### ***Qualitative Content Analysis***

According to Berg and Lune (2012), “content analysis is a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings” (p. 349). Although content analysis may be qualitative or quantitative, a qualitative approach “focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text” and “goes beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). To answer the present study’s research questions, a qualitative content analysis allows for interpretation of the focus of news articles featuring #MeToo; how those articles communicate issues of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and/or gender

inequality; and the similarities and differences in communication based on the news source. A qualitative, rather than quantitative, approach was also selected because feminist media research of news media seeks to “elucidate and elaborate on how dominant ideologies are supported through patterns of repetition and omission” (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014, p. 270).

Although Hsieh and Shannon (2005) argued that qualitative content analysis should “avoid using preconceived categories” and instead “allow the categories and names for categories to flow from the data” (p. 1279), the present study began with Saguy’s (2002) codes from her prior quantitative analysis of news articles on sexual harassment. This approach provided the research team with a more focused starting point that we then expanded as outlined by best practices of qualitative content analysis. We felt that an established set of codes based on the literature was an important starting place for our coding of the online articles, and we then added codes as they emerged from the study of the articles. This process included first reading the data—the 78 news articles—then identifying instances of Saguy’s codes to obtain new codes. We “highlight[ed] exact words from the text that appear to capture key thoughts or concepts” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279), made notes about impressions of the data while reading, and edited and changed code labels and titles. Then, codes were clustered together based on similarities in categories. Through these clusters of codes, we analyzed the study’s research questions.

### ***Data Analysis***

For the present study, the first 10 codes were developed from Saguy’s (2002) study on sexual harassment communication in media messages; however, as outlined by Hsieh and Shannon’s (2005) explanation of qualitative content analysis, these original 10 codes were expanded, adapted, and changed as the research team examined the news articles. The research team divided the

articles based upon source, and each team member conducted a close reading of all articles from one news source, and coding categories were adapted to flow from the data. During the close readings, new codes emerged and were documented on a shared Google Sheets spreadsheet listing all coding categories. A total of 43 codes were considered, ranging from article tone and word choice to specific content references to Alyssa Milano and backlash. Data were sorted by category and news source.

After the initial close read and development of codes, the research team sought intercoder reliability by coding the first 10 articles from the other two news sources. Determining intercoder reliability is important because it illustrates a methodological process of determining coding agreement by the research team (Saldana, 2016). Throughout this process, the research team made additional notes while reading the other 10 articles and highlighted key words and phrases from the news articles that best reflected examples of codes. Once the researchers read and coded these articles from the other two news sources, final codes emerged. After finalizing coding categories based on the intercoder reliability exercise, the research team coded all 78 news articles from all three news outlets and subsequently analyzed the sorted data together to identify themes.

## RESULTS

As a result of the qualitative content analysis, two themes originally appearing in Saguy's (2002) work reemerged during the present study: public figures and institutions. Additional themes that emerged were the lack of mentions about Tarana Burke, founder of the Me Too movement; denial; #NotMe; and backlash.

### *Saguy's Codes: Public Figures and Institutions*

Despite Saguy's (2002) focus on quantitative content analysis, the research team highlights this study as the only previous content

analysis of news coverage related to sexual harassment in America. Most of the 10 codes were not well represented when coding news articles from December 2017, but this may be attributed to the fact that #MeToo is not linked to sexual harassment only. Articles from all news sources used a variety of phrases to describe that which #MeToo sought to bring to awareness; terminology included “sexual abuse,” “sexual harassment,” “sexual harassment and assault,” “sexual harassment or assault,” “sexual harassment and abuse,” and “sexual misconduct.” The assortment of repeated phrases, most often without definitions of these terms, reveal that #MeToo has been reported by the media in a variety of ways to encompass all sexual violence and harassment. Without clear parameters or differentiations between these terms, readers may be confused as to what actually transpired, and with an already context-driven construction of sexual harassment episodes, the need for clarity is evident. In some specific cases, clearer words, such as “rape” or “grope/groping,” were used to describe an incident of sexual assault and abuse; however, specific cases and descriptions were in the minority.

The first of two important findings from Saguy (2002) emerged from the present study. Like Saguy’s original findings, yet again in December 2017, American and British news coverage focused on prominent figures in the United States—including politicians, talk show hosts, and professional athletes—as well as institutions such as Hollywood, Washington, and academia. Harvey Weinstein specifically was the public figure mentioned most often across all news articles. Articles typically communicated issues of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and/or gender inequality through the lens of public figures being accused and, often, public figures accusing other public figures. According to a CNN article published on December 6, 2017, “the [#MeToo] hashtag took off last month when a slew of high-profile men were publicly accused of sexual misconduct” (Disis, 2017, para. 6). Disis linked the viral nature of

#MeToo with the public figures accused, which mimicked findings by Saguy (2002). A large percentage of the BBC, CNN, and *Fox News* articles referenced celebrities and public figures, as evidenced in Table 1—greater than 75% of articles in all cases. This illustrates the media's obsession with celebrities and public figures, and the framing of the #MeToo movement in this manner could lead the public to believe that this is not a woman problem but instead a celebrity problem. This framing ignores the sexual harassment faced by nonpublic figures in other industries.

The second important finding in this study based on Saguy's (2002) codes is references to institutions. According to a *Fox News* article published on December 8, 2017,

while the floodgates on reporting abuse and sexual harassment have opened with high-profile cases in Big Tech, Hollywood and Washington, it's not yet clear whether the effects of the #metoo movement have trickled down to day-to-day offices, factories and other places regular people work. (Ortutay, 2017, para. 2)

Ortutay argued that the prevalence of sexual abuse and harassment allegations in high-profile cases related to American institutions has propelled stories into public consciousness. With respect to institutions, like Saguy's (2002) original findings, 66% of CNN articles and 42% of *Fox News* articles referenced American institutions. Zero articles from the BBC referenced American institutions, also illustrated in Table 1; however, this may be because the BBC is headquartered in the United Kingdom versus the United States. This is also ironic in that the BCC articles referenced celebrities but did not reference Hollywood as an entity.

The focus areas of articles from the BBC, CNN, and *Fox News* largely skewed toward reporting about public figures and institutions (CNN and *Fox News*), including, most prominently, Harvey Weinstein, but issues of race, class, and privilege could be seen in

Table 1. Relevant Saguy Codes

Article reference	BBC News		CNN		Fox News	
	No. articles	%	No. articles	%	No. articles	%
Harvey Weinstein	8	57	11	29	10	38
Other celebrities/public figures	11	79	34	89	20	77
Institutions (Hollywood, Washington, academia, sports, media)	0	0	25	66	11	42

Note. From Saguy (2002).

Table 2. Burke and Milano Mentions

Article reference	BBC News		CNN		Fox News	
	No. articles	%	No. articles	%	No. articles	%
Milano	1	7	0	0	3	12
Burke	0	0	1	3	1	4
Both Milano and Burke	2	14	2	5	2	8

the data analysis process, as stories about public figures embroiled in sexual misconduct dominated news stories versus reports about “everyday” people. A majority of news articles tended to remain neutral in tone and content; however, this just-the-facts approach understood the value of increasing viewership and audience, which is likely why the present study and previous findings of Saguy (2002) did not reveal news stories about the “everyday” person in favor of stories about public figures like Al Franken, Matt Lauer, and Russell Simmons as well as the prevalence of sexual harassment in institutions like media, sports, and politics. With overwhelming news coverage on public figures and the industries employing those public figures, significant research and awareness efforts on sexual harassment outside of those realms are critical to ensuring the safety of the “everyday” person’s work environment.

Although not overtly written about in the news articles analyzed for this study, certainly news story after news story spotlighting men in positions of power exploiting those roles to sexually objectify and harass women does harken back to Saguy’s (2002) finding that news articles “present sexual harassment as . . . an abuse of power” (p. 134). However, the absence of “abuse of power” language in all articles may indicate that from 2002 to 2017, public opinions on sexual harassment have shifted, which may very well include the opinion that sexual harassment is so clearly an abuse of power that it goes without saying.

### ***Tarana Burke and Alyssa Milano***

Despite the prevalence of news coverage on public figures accused of sexual misconduct, abuse, and harassment, Tarana Burke’s name was noticeably absent from most news stories. Burke was mentioned by herself in two articles and with Alyssa Milano in six articles. Milano by herself was mentioned twice as frequently as Burke—in four total articles, as illustrated in Table 2. *Fox News* was more likely than the BBC and CNN to mention Burke and Milano. The prevalence of Milano’s name over Burke’s could be

due to two reasons: first, Milano is more well known to the public, and second, an issue of race could be at play. Either way, the media perpetuated the highlight of Milano over Burke, indicating a clear framing of their interpretation of what is important and what should be reported. In one example, Heavey (2017) used a direct quote from Burke in the one *Fox News* article that mentioned her name by itself as associated with #MeToo:

“I could never had envisioned something that would change the world. I was trying to change my community,” Tarana Burke, who created the hashtag, told NBC. “This is just the start. It’s not just a moment, it’s a movement. Now the work really begins.” (para. 5)

Although this is the only time *Fox News* used a Burke quote in its articles, it at the very least illustrates Burke’s intention accurately.

The lone CNN article mentioning Burke’s name by itself was labeled as an opinion piece called “How Black Women Saved Alabama—and Democracy.” In the article, Bolton (2017) wrote, “The invisibility [of Black women] was perhaps most acutely obvious in the *TIME* magazine ‘Person of the Year’ print cover in which Tarana Burke, the founder of the #metoo movement, was not included” (para. 10). This assessment of the invisibility of women of color is important for a feminist movement about sexual violence; however, given that two women of color are on the cover, this argument must be interrogated further. Burke does not appear on the cover but instead appears inside of the magazine referenced by Bolton. Bolton argued,

The article took over 1,000 words to finally get to Burke’s story, even though her hashtag led to an ongoing, national conversation about sexual assault and harassment and resulted in the toppling of powerful men in Hollywood, politics and media. (para. 10)

Although this article about the #MeToo movement showed the power of women uniting to bring awareness to a worthy cause, it also reinforced the argument by hooks (2015) that feminist movements must continue to evaluate what “equality” means while always considering issues of race, class, and privilege.

Articles mentioning both Burke and Milano tended to accurately report the cadence of the Me Too movement, illustrating an awareness of the purpose of the hashtag and the movement. For example, one BBC article reported,

In 2007, the US activist Tarana Burke started the Me Too movement that would be rekindled in 2017 by the hashtag #MeToo. . . . The term gained momentum after actress Alyssa Milano took to Twitter to ask victims of sexual assault to come forward in a show of solidarity. (“#MeToo, #TakeAKnee,” 2017)

This quote illustrates Burke’s original purpose in the use of “Me Too” as showing support for those who have been victimized. Similarly, *Fox News* reported,

The roots of #MeToo are in a movement started over a decade ago by activist Tarana Burke to harness “empowerment through empathy” for victims of sexual assault. . . . The hashtag #MeToo began trending on social media last month after actress Alyssa Milano asked victims of sexual harassment and violence to let their voices be heard. (Rogers, 2017, paras. 5–6)

Both of these articles, in addition to mentioning the involvement of Burke and Milano and the evolution of the movement, also focused on the victims of sexual assault, which is what should be highlighted. Although both Burke and Milano are important figures in the history of #MeToo, the empowerment of the victims is vital.

**Denial and #NotMe**

Few articles featured the denial of claims by the men accused of sexual harassment and abuse; in fact, only four total stories featuring the denial by Russell Simmons specifically were published. The BBC featured one story about the New York Police Department (NYPD) investigating claims of rape against music mogul Russell Simmons; according to the story, Simmons vehemently denied all allegations, and “Simmons posted to social media with the hashtag #NotMe in a play on the #MeToo campaign” (“New York Police,” 2017, para. 7). The use of #NotMe was also seen in one CNN article and two *Fox News* articles—all three also featuring Russell Simmons.

Despite Simmons’s denials, some news stories reported on the negative consequences of his being accused of sexual misconduct and depicted Simmons in a negative light. According to *Fox News*, “HBO said it would edit out any link to Simmons in its ‘All Def Comedy’ show after a sexual misconduct allegation by a screenwriter” (“Russell Simmons,” 2017, para. 4). One BCC article focused on the evidence against Simmons, including mentions of a formal investigation by the NYPD and the fact that a number of women had come forward to accuse Simmons, including five accusers reported by the *New York Times*, three accusers reported by the *Los Angeles Times*, and a new accuser—also a public figure—who said “she chose to come forward with her alleged story because she was horrified by Simmons’ #NotMe social media campaign. ‘The #NotMe thing? I’m going to do a #YeahYou,’” she said (“New York Police,” 2017, paras. 12–13). The same BBC article also linked Simmons with Weinstein: “Simmons is not the only celebrity facing accusations of sexual impropriety. The NYPD is also investigating Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein for allegations of rape” (“New York Police,” 2017, paras. 16–17). By providing a quote directly from one of Simmons’s accusers, the BBC gives a voice to an alleged victim and does not allow Simmons’s denials to be the only voice heard in the news story.

On the other hand, one CNN article reporting on Simmons included language that seemed to show Simmons in a more favorable light. For example, CNN reported that the NYPD was investigating Simmons after he had been accused of sexual misconduct, including rape, by three women, but CNN included this paragraph after its summary of events: “The NYPD can open an investigation without a complaint made directly to them, which is the case with Simmons. A group of women told their stories to the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*” (France & Gingras, 2017, para. 2). While not overtly stating that Simmons’s accusers were seeking fame, the CNN article makes sure to point out that the women accusing Simmons of sexual misconduct did not go to the NYPD and instead went to the press. The article also focused several paragraphs on Simmons’s denials in his own words and denials by Simmons’s attorney and did not include any direct quotes or statements from Simmons’s accusers. Additionally, the article stated, “CNN has not independently verified the women’s stories and has reached out to them for comment” (France & Gingras, 2017, para. 5). This particular news story reported the facts but also included language that could be construed as favorable toward Simmons with the overabundance of direct quotes from Simmons and the Simmons team in denying the allegations; the omission of direct quotes from Simmons’s accusers; and word choice highlighting the accusers’ choice to speak to the press—but not to CNN—with their stories versus going to the police.

### ***Backlash***

Backlash against accusers and against the #MeToo movement could be found in only one article from the BBC, while an additional two articles from *Fox News* highlighted backlash against two public figures, both women, in light of #MeToo. In “Why Women Fear a Backlash Over #MeToo,” Kay (2017) wrote,

The biggest backlash risk is **a fake accusation** that will undermine genuine accusers. . . . The next fear is that men will get so nervous that they're going to be accused of harassment that they will simply stop hiring, meeting or socialising with female colleagues. (paras. 6–7)

It is important to note that the bolding of “a fake accusation” is original to the text, which highlights Kay’s biggest concern. With the singular fake accusation, other victims could be undermined. Her rhetoric of “accusers” rather than victims is also noteworthy in that it diminishes the violence on the individuals. Despite research indicating the low prevalence of false reporting on sexual harassment and sexual violence, narratives in the media do not always reflect these data (NSVRC, n.d.). Fortunately, as evidenced by the lone BBC article in the sample featuring backlash, news stories covering #MeToo in December 2017 did not concentrate on backlash against accusers or against #MeToo.

On the other hand, backlash against women, especially those considered as having flaunted their sexuality during #MeToo, could be seen in two *Fox News* articles. Social media examples embedded within both of these news stories highlighted the abuse two women faced online, including the slut shaming and threats seen in previous research (Chun, 2016; Locke et al., 2018). Two *Fox News* articles depicted backlash on Twitter against women in instances not directly related to #MeToo. For example, a woman named Addie Zinone who was previously employed on *Today* disclosed her prior affair with Matt Lauer. Images of tweets were included in the article to show the response to Zinone’s revelations. One Twitter user (as cited in Savitsky, 2017) posted,

Addie Zinone just wanted some 5 minute attention . . . her affair with Matt Laurer [*sic*] was 100% consensual and she honestly

should have never brought it up. She made the choice to be a homewrecker and gives a bad name to the real #MeToo people. (para. 5)

Other tweets accused Zinone of “playing the victim,” being a “whore,” “trying to sleep [her] way to the top,” only wanting to be famous, and being a homewrecker. Additionally, Zinone reported that she was told to “go get hit by a bus” (para. 8). Although Zinone’s affair with Lauer was consensual, and although she did not accuse him of any form of sexual misconduct, she did receive backlash for speaking to the press at the same time as the #MeToo movement. A second *Fox News* article depicted Twitter backlash about a recent Jimmy Choo advertisement starring Cara Delevingne that included cat-calling. Tweets called the ad, and Choo and Delevingne, distasteful and tone-deaf due to being aired at the same time as #MeToo. While neither Zinone or Delevingne has been involved directly with the #MeToo movement, these two *Fox News* stories depicted Twitter backlash against women discussing or showing sexuality deemed as inappropriate in light of #MeToo.

## CONCLUSION

In hooks’s (2015) call for a common vision of what equality means for women, we must continue to bring in voices from all races, classes, and privileges when examining sexual harassment, especially since the most prevalent stories in the news feature prominent figures according to Saguy’s (2002) quantitative content analysis and the results of the present study 15 years later. Although Milano, Simmons, and Lauer are all important media figures, their perspectives and information about them should not be at the forefront of the media articles; instead, the victims’ stories should be highlighted.

In addition to defining a more inclusive vision of equality for women, a more concrete definition of sexual harassment is needed

versus the current, contextually driven definition, which is dependent on many factors that may be interpreted differently on a case-by-case basis; that adapted definition may allow for citizens—and news organizations—to communicate more adequately about the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence against women, which may, in turn, allow for a deeper understanding of the issues. One of those issues, as Gervais and Eagan (2017) pointed out, remains the sexual objectification of women, a contributing factor to the violence against women. Despite the important message of #MeToo, the present study encountered some examples of the sexual objectification of women through bullying on Twitter. This reinforces the idea that not only news organizations but also many people on Twitter participate in sexual objectification of and violence against women. The present study's findings reinforce Chun's (2016) argument that social media often blame, threaten, and shame women when and if they seek empowerment through publicity, such as telling one woman to get hit by a bus for bringing up her prior consensual affair with Matt Lauer on television. This shows the perpetuation of objectification and violence against women that leads to the cycle of abuse.

Finally, while most articles communicated issues of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and/or gender inequality in an overall unbiased fashion, opinion articles revealing persuasive language published under these news websites tended to view the #MeToo movement as positive, focusing on the positive outcomes of the movement and calling for change as a result of #MeToo. Opinion pieces focused on the potential backlash of #MeToo perpetuate narratives about fictionalizing sexual harassment episodes, which research indicates is a very low number (between 2% and 10%, according to NSVRC).

Limitations of the present study included a focus on only three news outlets. While findings of the present study did reveal important themes, directions for future research may include expanding

to all six of the popular broadcast/cable news sources with online presences in the United States, including MSNBC, ABC, and CBS in addition to CNN, *Fox News*, and *BBC News*. Additionally, collecting data from news articles over a longer period of time may also reveal interesting and important trends in news coverage related to #MeToo.

## NOTES

- 1 <http://www.bbc.com/>
- 2 <https://www.cnn.com/>
- 3 <http://www.foxnews.com/>

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## Excavating the “Man Cave”: Commodification of Masculine Space

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In this article, I argue that masculinity is commodified through the symbolic and material (re)productions of man cave space, constituting subject identity positions, including traditional domestic/work roles and gender essentialism. I conducted a critical discourse analysis of the DIY Network show *Man Caves*, which obfuscates socioeconomic realities while conjoining consumption with constructions of “authentic” masculinity. The show simultaneously evaluates men’s worth by their proficiency in carpentry. The necessity of these private, residential retreats from anxiety-inducing challenges to patriarchy is legitimated through discourses of dichotomization and domesticity.

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**KEYWORDS:** Masculinity, commodification, discourse, space, gender

Space is gendered, sexualized, classed and racialized; and ease of access and movement through space for different groups is subject to constant negotiation and contestation, and is embedded in relations of power.

—Green & Singleton, 2006, p. 859

In 2012, the term *man cave* was officially added to *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, delineating a coming of age for the cultural phenomenon of a room or rooms being allocated to the man/husband/father in the house to meet his “manly” needs. According to interior designer Chet Pourciau (as cited in Brooks, 2011), “the man cave is to the 21st century what the gentlemen’s parlor was to the 19th century and the gentleman’s study to the 20th century—a refuge and a retreat.” Whether referred to as a manuary, manland,

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or man cave, these spaces are framed as “a guy’s retreat from the pressures of the world . . . a hideaway from the responsibilities of daily life and an indulgent celebration of everything a man loves” (“Creating the Ultimate,” 2014). It is not coincidental that the rise in man caves has coincided with gains in gender equality, which have triggered backlash manifested in claims that traditional masculinity, and, in particular, white masculinity, is “under attack.” Rollo (2018) wrote, “Masculinity in crisis emerges from a feeling of lessening hegemony, a supposed disenfranchisement that centers injury in masculine self-figuration” (p. 425). As a response to the perceived aggrieved status of masculine identity, commodified man cave space becomes one vehicle for the reification of gender essentialism and domestic/work roles and the disciplining of “authentic” masculinity. In the next section, I examine extant research on the commodification of masculinity.

### COMMODIFICATION OF MASCULINITY

Recent communication scholarship has theorized social constructions of gender as (neo)capitalist strategy in the areas of advertising (Kluch, 2015) and reality television (Sender, 2006; Winslow, 2012). In her article on the reality program *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, Sender (2006) argued that the show identifies consumption (or lack thereof) as critical to the male subjects’ lifestyle deficiencies. In Winslow’s (2012) examination of a reality program’s makeover of the intersex track athlete Caster Semenya, he traces social constructions of the South African’s gender to practices of consumption (manifested in the objects of attire, hairstyle, and makeup) rather than to her individual agency:

Consumption undergirds identity transformation because one can try on a new and improved self and parlay that new identity into the driving force of consumption: social capital. There is

only so much we would buy if we only bought what we needed. But there is more to consumption than need; there is exchange value. (p. 308)

Through purchasing power, the Olympian's gender transformation is made complete and her performance of femininity receives societal approval. For both of these programs, self-improvement, and the idealized response to gender insecurity, is stylistic, not substantive (such as the development of interpersonal skills in the former or hormone therapy in the latter), achieved through consumption. Commodification as a rhetorical strategy reinforces dominant interests through such means as muting group solidarity (Koffman, Orgad, & Gill, 2015) and obfuscating inequality (Kymlicka, 2013; Rogers, 2007).

Perhaps even more prominent than reality programming in articulating commodification as protection from a threatened gender identity is advertising messaging. Commercials target male consumers by questioning their masculinity—insecurity that can only be restored through the product being sold (Kluch, 2015; Krauss, 2011). Said Kluch (2015), “The male viewer is herewith expected to feel the urge to become more masculine—and the . . . product as the ultimate signifier for masculinity is constructed to act as a bridge to achieve this goal” (p. 372). These advertisements seek to reinforce hegemonic masculinity—messages asserting physical force and control, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, frontiersmanship, and heterosexuality (see Trujillo, 1991). They demonstrate the power of neoliberal capitalism in interpellating identities (Winslow, 2012) underlined by the dominant beliefs in gender essentialism that define “male” and “female” difference as transmitted through evolution and genetic predetermination. The illusory stability afforded by embracing commodified identification is partly activated by the uncertainty fostered by neoliberal formations, including the predominant privatization of public

services, corporate consolidation, automation, outsourcing, depleted job security, and growing economic inequality (Lair, Sullivan, & Cheney, 2005).

Articles in various newspapers and magazines imbricate man caves with consumption of goods such as refrigerators, stereo systems (Brooks, 2011), furniture, kitchen appliances (Swisher, 2004), and home theater equipment (Broida, 2010), which in turn reify the symbolic meanings of those spaces:

Do you have to be a cave man to have a “man cave”? . . . The idea is to have a room that is essentially a lair of testosterone—a place to veg out with stuff within arm’s reach, to rock and roll in a comfy chair and to blend drinks for sports-watching buddies. Men are usually considered the bottom of the retail food chain when it comes to products for the home. Except for outdoor grills and tools, most sellers target women (and even children) first and tend to ignore males almost entirely. That’s because of copious studies showing that buying decisions related to the home are mostly made by the female of the species. (Swisher, 2004)

Man cave articles, like this one in the *Wall Street Journal*, constitute man cave owners as essentially consumers who have been neglected (yet represent a significant market) by corporations, because they are not viewed to be involved in domestic decision-making. Instead, men can purchase items like refrigerators and personal vending machines that enable remaining in their spaces for longer periods of time. A *PC World* article advised its readers that once they have purchased a cable box, an HDTV, a DVR, a Blu-ray player, a stereo amplifier, a remote control, Netflix, a DVD burner, an Xbox 360, and a couch-friendly home theater, “you have the makings of a killer entertainment center. Now you need just a few accouterments” (Broida, 2010). These accouterments include not “skimp(ing) on the speakers,” as “no man-cave home theater

is complete without a world-class (well, den-class) audio system,” such as upgrading your sound card and installing a 5.1 channel setup with five satellite speakers and a subwoofer (Broida, 2010). The *PC World* article names these “accessories” as critical to the creation of a man cave, which would not measure up without these objects of consumption. The greatness of the man cave, and thus of the performance of masculinity, is directly correlated with the quality of equipment purchased to fill the space. Or, as an *Ebony* article put it, “every cave must have a few key essentials to qualify as a *legit fellas’ fort*” (“Creating the Ultimate,” 2014). The acquisition of all this “stuff” to fill one’s man cave can take a lot of time (Brooks, 2011), not to mention financial means, ensuring a continuous cycle of consumption.

The development of a chic, high-end product line departs from the man cave archetype as a “dark, dank room . . . cobbled out of a basement or the bowels of a house,” revealing contested views of the cave metaphor (Brooks, 2011). Whereas some might see the basement as epitomizing masculinity (Bounds, 2010), instead, these high-end products allow for, according to Brooks (2011), “environmental privacy and ‘solitudinal’ peace of mind.” These characterizations of man caves materialize “hermitic escapism” as a strategy of retreating from societal pressures and a mode of maintaining one’s masculinity (Bennett, 2013, p. 643). And while certain products, such as junky furniture, pornography, and guns, do not belong in the caves designed for the 21st-century man (according to Brooks, 2011), masculinity apparently is authenticated through other stylistic purchases, such as toilet seats with racing flames (Bounds, 2010).

Consumer publications peddle these products, for spaces designed to be gender segregated (Bounds, 2010; Brooks, 2011), as heteronormative relationship protection. For example, an interior designer quoted in Brooks (2011) said that man caves enable husbands to “express [their] own sense of style and design without

risking divorce.” Rev. Run of the hip-hop group Run DMC says of his man cave, “If I don’t have that place where I can pull away, then I won’t have the energy to do the things I should do as a man, husband and father” (“Creating the Ultimate,” 2014). Rev. Run adds that his “kid-free zone” man cave, which enables him to isolate himself from the rest of his family, is integral to “successful fatherhood and husbandhood” (“Creating the Ultimate,” 2014). Critical to relationship integration is balancing time in the man cave and time with the family—and negotiating those parameters with spouses (Bounds, 2010).

In recent years, however, the *man* in *man cave* has begun to be subverted. According to industry professionals, husbands and wives are sharing their space, watching sports, playing games together, and so on, so long as certain objects of consumption (e.g., potpourri, decorative pillows, scented candles, kiddie toys) are excluded (Bounds, 2010). The incorporation of higher ticket items, according to Bounds, makes the space more inviting for women not only to inhabit but to take ownership of, such as inviting girlfriends into the space to hang out, contesting man caves as spots for men’s isolation from the rest of the family. She referred to this phenomenon as “female cave envy,” a play on the patriarchal notion of penis envy. The redefined space provides an opportunity for women to enjoy some freedom away from the obligations of their domestic roles as “a little getaway from the rest of the house. When I’m in there, I’m not reminded about dishes or laundry” (Bounds, 2010). This cultural transition is also evidenced in home improvement shows and advertising campaigns on women caves, despite resistance from those who believe these spaces unnecessary as “that’s what the rest of the house is” (Bounds, 2010).

Recognizing the contested, fluid, and dynamic man cave discourse, does the commodification of masculine space, as manifested through multimedia furniture that encourages immobilization, appliances that don’t require cleaning (Swisher, 2004), pictures of

bucks to be hunted (Bounds, 2010), hair-blowing sound systems (Broida, 2010), and quiet reading times (Brooks, 2011), reinforce and/or challenge hegemonic masculinity, which constitutes men as active (Craib, 1998), providers/protectors/hunters (Macnamara, 2006), masters of nature (Strate, 2003), and sports enthusiasts (Bryson, 1987; Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015)? Do these gender stereotypes inform the construction choices made by/for man cave owners? While numerous scholars have examined the exclusionary constructions of workplaces as off-limits, masculine space (Clason & Turner, 2011), this article examines the intersections of hegemonic masculinity with the man cave phenomenon. Masculine identity is unstable and elastic (Rogers, 2007), made even more precarious by neoliberal transformations. However, this uncertainty, in addition to progress made in the area of gender equality, does not render hegemonic masculinity impotent. Therefore I pose the following research question:

RQ1: As a response to the perception of masculinity as aggrieved, how do man caves, as both discursive and material sites, construct masculinity?

## METHOD

To investigate this question, I conducted a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the DIY Network show *Man Caves*. CDA examines the relationship between power structures and language (Fairclough, 1989, 1995, 2001; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Rogers, 2011; van Dijk, 1993), moving beyond description and interpretation of a discourse to explanation of its intersections with text production and consumption. CDA emphasizes the dialectic tension between the social dimension of discourse with the “nondiscursive,” investigating taken-for-granted assumptions and hegemonic power relations that are discursively produced, sustained, and challenged. This article’s

method was specifically informed by feminist CDA. According to Lazar (2007), “the task . . . of feminist CDA is to examine how power and dominance are discursively produced and/or (counter-) resisted in a variety of ways through textual representations of gendered social practices, and through interactional strategies of talk” (p. 149). A central premise of this approach is that critique can enable the dismantling of patriarchal systems that disadvantage and disempower (Lazar, 2007).

The show *Man Caves* was originally broadcast on the DIY Network from 2007 to 2016 for 14 seasons and continues to be rebroadcast on the cable channel. DIY’s audience comprises 61% male viewership, with a median household income of \$84,000 (Altice Media Solutions, n.d.). The show features two hosts, Jason Cameron and Tony “Goose” Siragusa, who remodel a room (aka the man cave) for one fortunate guy each 30-minute episode. The show consists of four predictable segments: (a) introduction to the homeowner and his need for a man cave, (b) the hosts presenting their blueprints to the recipient, (c) construction of the space, and (d) the reveal. I randomly selected 15 episodes for analysis. I examined each episode through the following thematic framework: (a) what the show espouses a man cave needs, (b) what the show espouses a man cave should be used for, and (c) what the show espouses a man cave should not have or be used for. In addition to these three focal points, I analyzed the structure of the show and the interaction between the two hosts. Whereas Jason tends to play the role of the more straitlaced professional, Tony (a retired football player) is often the voice of masculine id, as is evidenced in the next section. Jason does the lion’s share of the work in the design and construction, while Tony, who refers to himself as a “man cave specialist,” often focuses his energy on a “special” project for the remodeled spaces. While Jason and Tony are front and center, the construction crew often works in the background, with no backstory or personalities developed. As a CDA, I explored the hosts’

“everyday talk” and the production, maintenance, and resistance to systems of power.

## ANALYSIS

The commodification of masculinity in the show *Man Caves* is achieved through a discourse of customization. In every episode, homeowners are assured of a “custom” man cave with high-end products, such as custom bars; kegerators; big-screen, high-definition televisions; refrigerators; DJ systems with mixers, headphones, and speakers; custom flooring; shuffleboards; pool tables; Ping-Pong tables; basketball hoops; antique arcade games; wainscoting; fireplaces; and new furniture. The hosts demand that the materials be of the highest quality, nothing “outdated” (Season 13, Episode 2), “nothing but the best” (Season 13, Episode 4). In an episode titled “Command Center Cave” (Season 14, Episode 5), Jason asserts, “You got to dress things up on *Man Caves*. You can’t just put up paint.”

### *Commodified Masculinity*

While the connection between the commodification of the man cave space and masculinity is often subtle, in a number of episodes, this construction was explicit. For example, in a remodel of roast comedian Jeff Ross’s New York apartment, Tony tells Jeff that wainscoting is going to make his apartment “look manly. You’re going to be sitting down in your leather chair and it’s gonna be like Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr. are going to be walking in.” The contractors install a custom-built cabinet for cigars and LP records, a humidor, and a faux bronze statue of Jeff. Jason and Tony tell Jeff that he will feel proud of his new masculine space. In various other episodes, commercial items like stainless steel (Season 13, Episode 5), a particular style of speakers (Season 13, Episode 6), big-screen televisions, “man-trim” molding, and quartz countertops (Season 13, Episode 4) are equated with manliness. Jason states, “Goose is

the biggest baby in the world, if we don't have quartz or at least granite on the countertop, he's kicking it out." Tony, who tends to embody the masculine id on the show, believes that any other material threatens the man cave mojo to the point that his partner derides his masculinity with the term "baby" for his perceived "whiny" protestations. In an argument with Jason about the height of a shuffleboard table in a later episode, Tony responds, "This is *Man Caves*, anything below 30 inches is like woman caves. You got to be at least this tall to be a man" (Season 14, Episode 2). The message disseminated to the viewer is that one's masculinity is produced, performed, and protected through high-end, customized consumerism. Thus the man cave functions as a modern-day manifestation of "marketplace manhood" that validates masculinity through "the acquisition of tangible goods as evidence of success" (Kimmel, 2016, p. 62). Customization, symbolized by artifacts like the bronze statue, not only centers male identity but buttresses its social position.

Integral to customization is individualization. Each man cave is tailored to the homeowner's unique profession and interests. Although the man cave serves a recreational function, the remodeled spaces often affirm the professional identities of the homeowners, indicative of the ideological gendertyping of men as provider. "We tend to get guys who want things that are what they do" (Jason, Season 13, Episode 6). Some examples include man caves inspired by the men's careers as lineman (Season 13, Episode 6), K9 trainer (Season 13, Episode 7), metal fabricator (Season 14, Episode 2), and emergency services technician (Season 14, Episode 5). For the latter homeowner, for example, a vault door and surveillance cameras were installed. In the episode with Jeff Ross, his apartment was designed to be both a place to entertain and a creative space for his professional work as a comedian. Research on the workplace as masculine, bureaucratic space that (re)produces systems of domination (Acker, 1990; Ashcraft, 1999, 2000; Buzzanell, 1995;

Clason & Turner, 2011; Marshall, 1993), and “the persistence of normative assumptions and gendered experiences of exclusion and marginalization . . . riddling everyday perceptions of experiences in the workplace” (Clason & Turner, 2011, p. 53), is well documented. The reproduction of professional identity in these recreational spaces, therefore, harkens to the historical definition of “American” manhood in terms of one’s production in the public realm of marketplace competition (Kimmel, 2016). The homeowners’ remodeled man caves subsequently function as extensions of their gendered identities and as performances of masculinity. The personal branding achieved by individualized man cave spaces reinforces traditional conceptualizations of gender relations. As Lair et al. (2005) argued, “the highly individualistic nature of personal branding resonates strongly with the by-your-own-bootstrap mythos that has historically played a central role in American culture . . . as well as with the neoliberal economic philosophy that has become so prominent” (p. 322).

Through customization, the show *Man Caves* reproduces the notion that an individualized man cave is the fulfillment of every man’s dreams and desires, highlighted by the show’s consistent message that no man cave is complete without a high-end bar. Or as the hosts put it, “no better way to accomplish that [your ideal space] than to have the best crew come into your basement and do the most unimaginable things possible” (Season 13, Episode 2). Unlike that small, select group fortunate enough to have Jason, Tony, and crew come to their homes, or to their businesses, such as the Orlando Magic (Season 14, Episode 3) and DirecTV (Season 14, Episode 2), this ultimate dream, of course, is not equivalent for those watching from home, whose commensurate reality, omitted by the show’s discursive representation, can only be achieved through consumption. This perceptual gap produces very different significations of advice given by the hosts to the homeowner who is receiving a complimentary remodel, advice such as this tidbit

about doors: “A lot of clients skimp on that, but it really makes the difference between something that looks 100% and something that’s not quite there.” In a remodel for singer Kevin Jonas, the transformation included a 1952 De Soto converted into seating with storage for his vinyl records. “Impressing a guy of this kind of stature and celebrity, when you go and blow his mind, it is a huge payoff” (Jason, Season 13, Episode 4). The obfuscation of socioeconomic realities of a celebrity remodel versus a DIY project for the average viewer at home, combined with the prevalent ideology of hegemonic masculinity, becomes a powerful vehicle of commodity fetishization. The omission of socioeconomic class signifiers is consistent with the genre of reality television representation (O’Sullivan, 2016; Skeggs & Wood, 2011), “in which the myth of the classless society, rugged individualism and the potential for upward social mobility is preserved” (O’Sullivan, 2016, p. 203). Hence the fantasized representations of man caves encourage the act of ignoring the perceived threats to masculinity that played an initial role in cultivating the desire for the recreational spaces.

Amid the customized and individualized spaces, a commonality between the episodes is the location of the man cave in the basement. In one episode, the DIY crew had to dig an egress in the Delaware River for the man cave to be placed in the basement (Season 14, Episode 2). Comprising a discourse of dichotomy, the prevailing rationale driving the construction of these basement spaces is that the rest of the house is not men’s space, thus legitimating the necessity of the man cave. Looking at an upstairs room in one home, for example, Jason remarks, “Up here it’s fine, this color will not be down in the man cave, just so we can get that straight right now” (Season 13, Episode 4). In many of the episodes, either the hosts or the homeowner articulated the man cave as urgent and essential, with the homeowner “in dire need of rescue” (Season 14, Episode 5), needing a place to “get away.” While the indirect objects are often omitted from these sentences, in that the hosts

and homeowners usually don't say exactly what they need to get away (and rescued) from, at times what is implied (i.e., the feminine, both in flesh and function) is articulated. For example, in an episode titled “Indoor Outdoors Man Cave” (Season 14, Episode 5), the host asks the homeowner what the basement was used for prior to the makeover, and the homeowner replies, “When I get in trouble with my wife, she tells me to go down there and watch TV” (Season 14, Episode 1). In another episode, the narrator assesses the need as “Brett wants to escape from the flowers, pillows and scented candles in his home. Our homeowners just moved in and already he needs his own space”; Brett adds, “I need a man cave because I need a place to escape, enjoy myself, and get away from everything” (Season 14, Episode 2). In the “Command Center Cave” episode (Season 14, Episode 3), Tony introduces the man cave recipient: “Miko is a man's man with a whole lot of ladies.” Jason concurs, “Miko needs a man cave because he has got five girls, three dogs that are girls, and a goldfish that I think is a girl,” and Miko agrees, “I have no space that is my own, everything is girl bands, Taylor Swift, One Direction, 5 Seconds to Summer, and there is no place for Josh (his son) and I to hang out.” In the reveal, Tony reinforces the point: “Miko is a guy's guy who has a house full of estrogen and needs testosterone so bad that we felt obligated to come and give him a man cave” (Season 14, Episode 5). The necessity (and thus not constituted as a luxury) of the man cave is evidenced in the following excerpt:

HOMEOWNER: Every guy needs a man cave, right.

NARRATOR: Paul, a rookie homeowner, just moved in with his fiancée Kelly, and he *needs* his space to party with the boys.

In this episode, a lacrosse player laments that he is not able to display his jerseys anywhere else in the house. In the reveal, Paul is shown “four stools for your boys” (Season 13, Episode 2). In a

pirate-themed man cave episode, the homeowner says, “I desperately need a man cave. I just moved out of my parents’ house after 25 years, moved into this house with my girlfriend, and she completely took over” (Season 13, Episode 9). Whereas hegemonic masculinity is defined in terms of having and exerting power, historical landownership, and public performance (Harris & Hanchey, 2014; Kimmel, 2016), the man cave becomes a private, residential space of retreat from the perception of (and anxiety toward) that power being “caved” in on and thus an avenue for the reassertion of control intrinsic to hegemonic masculinity.

The separation and dichotomization enacted by the man cave are both social and spatial. As one homeowner, who received an Irish pub-themed space, explained, “It’s a place to get a drink with someone. It’s a social thing. You gotta create a door so that you can be separated.” This separation produces serenity, likened to a “vacation at a fishing lodge” (Season 14, Episode 1). The separation, however, is not just from the feminine but from the domestic and kids. Homeowner Julio desired a man cave because his 5-year-old son had monopolized the television and he was going to be the father of a second child soon. Later in the episode, this ideology is reproduced by the selection of products. For example, Jason objects to placing a particular type of bowl on the countertop: “If you put a stainless steel bowl on the countertop, it looks like someone is cooking something” (Season 12, Episode 4). The implication here is that the man cave is not for cooking, immune to the domestic tasks that occur in the rest of the house. The hosts also articulate a preference for basements that are blank (“noncontaminated”) canvases. Tony celebrates this fact with one of the homes: “We don’t have to move any baby toys or anything stupid left behind” (Season 14, Episode 2).

In addition to designs inspired by homeowners’ professional identities, the man caves are tailored around recreational interests, such as college football team gear, a zero-edge fish tank for a man

who loves the Jersey shore (Season 13, Episode 9), and a boxing ring with a graffiti-laden couch for a pugilism fan (Season 12, Episode 4). In a pirate-themed remodel that includes a countertop in the shape of a boat deck, Jason comments, “This is what we love about doing this, because every guy’s got his thing” (Season 13, Episode 9). As such, the show *Man Caves* constructs an “authentic” masculinity divorced from domesticity for both recipients and the audience, which is both implicit throughout the series and explicitly articulated in some episodes (e.g., Season 14, Episode 20; Season 13, Episode 6). In other words, the space where men can be their authentic selves is one where they are removed from domestic responsibilities. Similar to Matwick’s (2017) study that found Food Network stars’ cookbooks to perpetuate traditional gender roles of cooking and caring for others while promoting female achievement and self-fulfillment, thus composing a complex and contested discourse, discursive construction in the DIY show nuances the dominant binaries of public–masculine and private–feminine (Harris & Hanchey, 2014) yet reproduces dominant notions of gender roles.

Concomitantly, the man cave is designated to be off-limits, “a place to chill out for the guys” (Season 13, Episode 9), a place where buddies can spend the night if they drink too much (Season 14, Episode 2). In the episode titled “Cork Island Cave” (Season 14, Episode 1), Tony says that Donny had sacrificed his basement to his kids but now gets it back. During the reveal, Tony tells the family that while there is no literal lock on the door, they should “take a picture today because tomorrow no one’s allowed.” Interspersed with this sentiment is the men’s fear that their space, which represents the husband’s “livelihood,” will be invaded. As the lacrosse-playing Paul explained, “I don’t know how long she’ll [Paul’s fiancée] be spending in the man cave. Hopefully she doesn’t take over” (Season 13, Episode 2). In the episode with Kevin Jonas, Jason says, “With a newborn daughter coming any day now, we’re here to make sure Kevin’s house doesn’t get overrun by the ladies.”

The man cave thus becomes “a place to escape” from the domestic, as the downstairs is to be “left to the guys”—the double meaning here being that *guys* signifies the construction crew during the show and the homeowner’s friends after the show. In this way, the man cave is discursively positioned as a space of gendered (un) belonging. Or as Kimmel (2016) explained marketplace manhood, “it reconstituted itself by the exclusion of others . . . and by terrified flight into a pristine mythic homosocial Eden where men could, at last, be real men among other men” (p. 62). The search for an authentic, fixed masculinity through commodified space is a partial reaction to living within an era of globalization (Massey, 1994).

The show legitimates the creation of a man cave through a discourse of domesticity. First, the man cave is proffered as having a benefit for the whole family. For example, in Episode 6 of Season 13, a pellet stove is installed in the man cave, heating the entire house. As Jason remarks, “Now he knows his family is taken care of.” A second facet of the discourse of domesticity is that recipients fulfill their domestic roles as husbands and fathers and thus deserve a place where they can escape those responsibilities. The homeowners are often described as “family men” *deserving* of a man cave. For example, in Season 14, Episode 5, Tony says, “Let’s give this deserving dad and his stepson the man cave of their dreams.” This rationale is reiterated later in the episode when Tony says, “Miko wanted to escape from the estrogen, but not totally disconnect from the family.” Similarly, the men are commended by the hosts for fulfilling their professional responsibilities. For example, the head dog trainer for a sheriff’s office “needs” his man cave, a converted kids’ playroom, “to kick back after a long day of training” (narrator). In the reveal, Jason frames the new man cave as the missing piece for the homeowner’s life. “You got the whole family, you got your partner, you got your girls, and you got your man cave” (Season 13, Episode 7). While these familial and professional justifications are dominant themes, an episode titled “Direct TV Red Zone Man

Cave” (Season 14, Episode 6) provided one counternarrative. In this episode, the “family man cave” is prefaced as a place for the father to spend time with his technologically distracted teenager kids before they leave for college. “His kids are teenagers and they’re taking off all the time. He wants a space to have them back and spend some time together” (Jason). However, this inclusivity is not extended to his wife:

WIFE: Can we leave the kids upstairs for a while?

HUSBAND: It’s gonna be members only.

WIFE: Who’s a member?

HUSBAND: It is a man cave.

WIFE: OK, if you use it, you clean it.

HUSBAND: OK, you can come.

And thus the overarching representation of the man cave is preserved, where the wife’s presence is permissible through the domestic role of cleaning.

While wives’ voices are generally excluded from the remodeling work taking place in their homes, a few of the episodes do interview them. However, these edited segments further bolster the dominant discourses being discussed in this article. At times, the women are quoted in support of the discourse of necessity: “When he’s home, he really needs a place to relax.” Why? Because she “is excited to get [her] kitchen back,” which will cease to be the hangout for her husband’s friends after the neighborhood bar has closed, thus reinforcing the discourses of dichotomy and domesticity (Season 13, Episode 7). Necessity, as illustrated previously, often manifests in the form of escape: “My husband wanted a man cave, to get away from me probably” (Season 14, Episode 2). Another wife is quoted offering the justification of professional and familial role fulfillment: “Ken is very devoted to his job, his family; he deserves a man cave” (Season 13, Episode 6). In a few episodes,

these gender-normed narratives are deviated from, however. In “Jonas’ Main Street USA Cave” (Season 13, Episode 5), Jonas’s wife is excited because she is “going to enjoy it, as much as it is his man cave,” and in a second episode, “Steampunk Cave” (Season 14, Episode 2), the wife is also included in the construction work. Jason responds, “Why not? You can’t let him have all the fun. Look at you. You’re focused like a laser beam.” Jason then gives a knowing look to the camera that communicates “wow, look at her go.” Jason then looks back at the husband; “she’s taking over,” perhaps reflecting the frequently communicated anxiety, an anxiety to be addressed through consumerism.

### ***Masculinity Check***

As an aggrieved identity, the show *Man Caves* also constructs “rituals of performing manhood through homosocial validation” (Rollo, 2018, p. 424). For example, the show represents masculinity as physical competition, reflective of extant research on the intersections of masculinity and sport (see Trujillo, 1991). The hosts are often pitted against one another, such as in hurling (Season 14, Episode 1) and lacrosse (Season 13, Episode 2), during which they seek to one-up each other. In their lesson on lacrosse, Tony gets annoyed with Jason’s performance, saying, “The ball can’t bounce more than once, now you’re changing the rules. It’s the same for you as it is for me. I’m taking a walk, this is *Man Caves*. This isn’t HGTV.” In this passage, Tony asserts the masculinity signified by the show and the spaces it produces to question his costar’s masculinity, as demonstrated by his competency in the sport of lacrosse, a sport both men were playing for the first time in this episode. Furthermore, Tony’s attack includes a slight about HGTV, a cable channel that also engages in commodity fetishization in its shows on home improvement, gardening, and crafts. The not-so-subtle insinuation is that these activities are feminine and thus Jason is acting “like a girl.” As Gieseler (2014) argued, “fear, shame, and

silence emerge as men take painstaking efforts to police themselves and each other to prove masculine worth. The language and performance of sexism and homophobia in sports becomes [*sic*] buttressed by these rules of manhood” (p. 338). In a second feat of physical competition, Jason volunteers to put on protective wear and be bit by a police dog (Season 13, Episode 7). However, this act of manliness is deemed insufficient by his cohort. Expressing disdain for Jason wanting to protect his legs from a dog bite, Tony says, “You’re going to wear the whole suit, are you kidding me, bro? This is *Man Caves*; act like a man.” Afterward, Tony reiterates, “Did you need that big ridiculous suit for that?” The value placed on competition is inevitable, according to Lair et al. (2005), as a way to cope with the economic turmoil fomented by neoliberal policies and practices.

While the hosts rarely interact with the recipients’ offspring, in “Command Center Cave,” Tony engages in a karate sparring session with army vet, retired cop, and EMT specialist Miko’s daughter Valentina. “You know when you talk to little girls, they’re all cute and Barbie dolls, but I met Valentina and that’s not what she’s about.” Tony not only essentializes gender in this passage but illustrates his reluctance to engage with femininity, and only does so in this rare episode as the child passes an acceptable benchmark of masculinity—physical competitiveness.

Throughout the series, Tony and Jason engage in a second ritual—playing practical jokes on each other, such as Tony asking an electrician to pose as an inspector or intentionally failing to correctly mark table saw measurements. At the end of this episode, the homeowner had two lacrosse helmets made up, one in Baltimore Ravens colors for Tony and the second in pink for Jason (Season 13, Episode 5). Gieseler (2014) argued that mediated pranks such as these “re-envision masculinity, mocking hegemonic adult manhood through a putting on of perpetual adolescence” (p. 340). The inclusion of these pranks on *Man Caves* also reinforces the discourses of

dichotomy and domesticity. Specifically, it is a form of privilege to be afforded the opportunity to abandon one's domestic responsibilities for adolescent fun with friends and coworkers, which is made possible by patriarchal structures (Gieseler, 2014). Gieseler described "pranktainment" as discursive resistance to threats to patriarchy incurred by progress in gender equality. While Jason often chastises Tony for his immaturity (e.g., "he's a 5th grader, we're building boy caves apparently"; Season 14, Episode 1), together they perform a synchronized masculinity. In the beginning of each episode, Jason gives a "serious" but abridged rundown for the homeowner of the plan, whereas Tony mocks Jason for providing too many details. In Season 14, Episode 2, Tony makes a mistake and gouges a board but blames one of the other members of the crew. Jason tells an assistant, "I think he was going to walk away crying. The responsibility falls on the babysitter," and the assistant replies, "You have to give him [Tony] the router without the bit, [and] just make noise." Thus Tony's role on the show as the immature jester who requires babysitting evokes laughter from the crew and prompts discussion about the effects of working with Goose, such as losing one's hair.

The masculinity competition also expresses itself in sexual innuendo. After Tony finishes some gluing, Jason hits the wood to test the adhesiveness; "I'm gonna finish building this man cave, you keep playing with your wood" (Season 13, Episode 4). In setting up a Ping-Pong table for a different reveal, Tony boasts, "Package for ya . . . you brought our balls," and Jason replies, "You know I wasn't going to say that, but we'll let that lie" (Season 13, Episode 5). This routinized joking, hazing, and sexual innuendo are expressions of masculinity (Crawford, 1995; Iacuone, 2005) that not only establish solidarity in male-dominant workplaces but function as forms of gender control and discipline (Collinson, 1992).

In addition to competition, the show *Man Caves* constructs a dynamic tension between customization and the incorporation of high-end commercial products, with the rugged acceptance

of imperfection in design and construction. Masculinity, while commodified through the man cave space, cannot be too polished or too perfect but instead is certified by the presence of rugged imperfection. Jason illustrates this point while describing some mistakes in the remodel for Kevin Jonas: “Messed up a little bit, put some nicks and cracks in there, but you know what, it’s a man cave, it can’t be perfect. If it was perfect, it would be upstairs, the whole point of downstairs is to be a little rough around the edges, just like Tony. . . . Imperfection is beauty.” In Season 13, Episode 7, Tony summarizes, “It may not have been pretty, but in typical man cave fashion, we got the job done.” In quibbling over a foot rail in the “Cork Island Cave” episode (Season 14, Episode 1), Tony argues, it “doesn’t have to go all the way to the end; it’s *Man Caves*, keep it simple.” Some of the imperfection is actualized through the preference for economical rather than luxurious options, such as hardwood flooring for countertops rather than marble (Season 13, Episode 9). However, these choices often operate in dialectic tension, such as utilizing plywood in one part of the man cave but real stone for another area (Season 13, Episode 7).

While the interaction between the two hosts provides the primary driving action of the show, homeowners are often included in the remodeling work, which Jason refers to as “homeowner warranty—the homeowner helps build it; if it breaks, don’t call us” (Season 14, Episode 2). Despite recipients’ acknowledgment of needing the help of professional contractors (Season 13, Episode 9; Season 13, Episode 4; Season 14, Episode 5), in these moments the men’s masculinity is measured in terms of their carpentry skills, testing their knowledge of (and proficiency with) tools. Homeowners were asked to participate in installing shelves and collection displays (Season 13, Episode 6), sanding down signs (Season 13, Episode 4), and building a fireplace (Season 13, Episode 1). Emblematic of the heroic artisan masculinity described by Kimmel (2016), recipients who demonstrated adeptness were rewarded by the hosts with

assessments of their capacity as husbands—“Look at you, you’re like the handyman, huh? You gotta make sure you let your wife know that you’re a pretty good catch” (Season 13, Episode 4); as worthy of a man cave—“Donny’s enjoying this, I love working with guys who want to be a part. Guys are 50/50, sometimes they want to help and sometimes they help for a little bit and then leave” (Jason, Season 14, Episode 1); and as men—“He’s pretty handy. A whole new respect level” (Jason, Season 13, Episode 9). In “Steampunk Cave,” the husband’s wife is quoted in support of this measurement standard: “Brett is really handy and I’m really lucky, because if anything breaks around the house, I can depend on him.” This measurement standard is further evidenced in a question Jason condescendingly/jokingly asks one of the homeowners: “Are you sure you wanna work with us and actually get your hands dirty?” Through getting his hands dirty, the homeowner became “man-cave approved” (Season 14, Episode 2).

Recipients who don’t measure up to the standard are needed for their use of tools and even their pronunciation of the tools’ names (Season 12, Episode 4). Tony berates the Orlando Magic owner, who is building a luxury man cave–style box, for not having a single callus on his hands. He then assures the owner by saying he has a “very manly little project” for him to complete, once he exchanges his suit and tie for steel-toed shoes and a belt. Despite the owner’s objections that he is not a handyman, the hosts insist that he build something for the man cave (Season 14, Episode 3). When Paul, the lacrosse player, admits his limitations in the area of carpentry, Jason responds, “Your fiancée is probably happy we’re here, not only to give you a man cave, but to show you the ropes, you know, for future projects” (Season 13, Episode 2). In one of the episodes where the husband’s wife is quoted, her voice contributes to this regulative discourse. She chastises him: “Yeah, Julio, tell him about the pool I told you to fix” (Season 12, Episode 4). In a number of episodes, the hosts say they will mentor the man cave recipients in developing

their masculinity through carpentry: “We’ll teach him all the tricks of the trade, cutting wood, drilling holes” (Jason, Season 12, Episode 4). And to hammer home the point, Tony tells homeowner Miko during one of these mentoring sessions, “You can smell the testosterone.” In this same episode, Tony includes the recipient’s son in the construction, reinforcing the notion that this skill set be passed down from one generation of man to the next, buttressing masculinity in its “vulnerable” state. Jason expresses his pleasure: “Maybe I’ll turn the show over to him in 10–15 years” (Season 14, Episode 5). This representation, similar to constructions of an “authentic masculinity” as blue-collar workers who hunt and fish in other reality television programs (e.g., O’Sullivan, 2016), connotes symbolic and material power, particularly in reifying gender roles. In particular, these narratives reaffirm the individualism and social mobility fundamental to neoliberal ideology (Skeggs & Wood, 2011).

## DISCUSSION

“Like all spaces, homes reproduce the politics of gender as they construct our sense of boundaries and borders, of what is acceptable and forbidden” (Reynolds, 2004, p. 152). In this study, I have analyzed the discursive constructions of masculinized space through recreational remodels on the DIY Network. Man caves, as both material and discursive sites, center and buttress masculinity, while providing a coping resource amid perceptions of an aggrieved male identity. Furthermore, commodification is one outlet for grappling with the uncertainties posed by destabilized economic conditions (Lair et al., 2005). Discourses of space matter because they constitute, reinforce, and fragment identity formation, shaping gender performances (Conlon, 2004; Harvey, 1996; Hetherington, 1998; Modesti, 2008; Nelson, 1999). The show reifies hegemonic masculinity in myriad ways. First, consumerism is integral to the symbolic and material productions of these rooms, constituting

subject identity positions, including traditional domestic/work roles and gender essentialism. Whereas subaltern experience is often commodified in service of patriarchal ideology, and in response to feminist advocacy (Nettleton, 2018), the accumulation of high-end, custom goods for one's man cave ensures a cycle of consumption critical to performances of masculinity. In other words, masculinity is authenticated through the purchasing power necessary for the creation of a deluxe, customized man cave.

The illusion of a home design show like *Man Caves* is that while the selected recipients are benefiting from a complimentary remodel, what is obfuscated is the reality that viewers must access their financial resources to actualize their man cave dreams, neoliberal spaces that (re)produce the homeowners' identities. Commodity fetishization thus is achieved through the minimization of socio-economic factors combined with the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity. The result, as Lazar (2007) argued, is that "the convergence of capitalist consumerist and patriarchal systems . . . co-opts and subverts progressive discourses while maintaining the social status quo" (p. 159).

However, idealized masculinity is constructed not only as a commodity through customized consumerism but as physical competition and as ruggedly imperfect. The show consistently regulates masculinity in terms of proficiency in carpentry and "getting one's hands dirty," with evaluations of men's worth as husbands and as men and as worthy of a man cave. On the show, this authentic masculinity is disciplined through routinized joking, hazing, and sexual innuendo. Kimmel (2016) argued,

Masculinity must be proved, and no sooner is it proved than it is again questioned and must be proved again—constant, relentless, unachievable, and ultimately the quest for proof becomes so meaningless that it takes on the characteristic . . . of a sport. (p. 60)

While previous research has articulated the commodification of masculinity and the privileging of blue-collar self-reliance, this article has demonstrated how these two discourses work conjunctively in service of neoliberal patriarchal structures, in which both “civilized” and “primitive” performances of masculinity function as reactions to the perceived emasculation engendered by globalization and challenges to patriarchy (Ashcraft & Flores, 2000). It is conceivable that one or the other side of this tension could be normalized. Men could engage in the consumerism required of a man cave without participating in the construction of these spaces. Likewise, men could engage in the handiwork required in the construction of these spaces without engaging in high-end customization. However, as the show *Man Caves* illustrates, both aspects are integral to the constitution of an “authentic” U.S.-located masculinity.

Second, hegemonic masculinity is reified through the imbrication of professional identity with the recreational nature of the man cave space. This discursive articulation reanimates the masculine ideal of marketplace identification (Kimmel, 2016). Complicating the public–private, work–home binaries, the show *Man Caves* legitimates the necessity of these private, residential retreats from anxiety-inducing challenges to patriarchy through the rationale that the rest of the house (i.e., nonbasement) is feminine space. While on a societal level, women’s presence is becoming more normalized in these spaces, the show constitutes the man cave as off-limits through symbolic representation and material selection of objects. As such, *Man Caves* dichotomizes “authentic” masculinity from domesticity, reproducing traditional gender roles. This dichotomization is justified through claims of men fulfilling their familial and professional roles, with the implicit privilege to abandon one’s domestic responsibilities for adolescent fun with friends and coworkers—a privilege not enjoyed by all.

## CONCLUSION

This article does not argue for the abolition of man caves but offers a theoretical unpacking of the ideological underpinnings of the evolution of this spatial phenomenon. Within a context of contested gains in gender equality, these discursive constructions of man cave space collectively reassert hegemonic masculinity amid perceived threats to patriarchy and claims that masculinity is under attack. While the implications of commodification are complex and multidirectional (Balaji, 2009; Watkins, 2004), the perception of aggrieved status plays a critical role in the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity (Kelly, 2016). As Kimmel (2016) explained, “the very definitions of manhood we have developed in our culture maintain the power that some men have over other men and that men have over women” (p. 63). Man caves, as illustrated by the show’s constructions of masculinity, (re)produce this power as both discursive and material sites.

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