GENERAL INTEREST

The ‘Ex’ Factor...Will They be Friends?: A Qualitative Analysis of Post-Dissolution Communication Among Former Premarital Cohabitating Couples

Connecting to Students: Self-disclosure as a Motivational Tool for Collegiate Forensic Coaches

Collaborative Theatre/Creative Process

“A Land of Make Believe that Don’t Believe in Me”: Dissent by Incongruity in Green Day’s “Jesus of Suburbia”

TEACHER’S WORKBOOK

Illustrating Tensions Using Stretchy String: Teaching Relational Dialectics in the Interpersonal Communication Class

Identifying Rhetorical Visions and Group Roles Through Role-play

The Semiotics of Teaching with Reality TV: A Theory-Based Approach to Teaching and Modeling Communication Theory
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The Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal (CTAMJ) is the scholarly journal of the Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota (CTAM). The journal is an outlet for articles related to issues of discipline-related importance including articles discussing innovative teaching methods. All theoretical and methodological approaches are welcome.

Authors should submit an electronic copy of their work as a Word document by e-mail to the editor. A separate, electronic title page should include a 100-125 word abstract of the article, author’s name and professional title, job title, the school or institutional affiliation of the author/s, a mailing address, and an e-mail address. Care should be taken that author identification has been removed from the manuscript itself for review purposes. All manuscripts should be prepared according to current APA or MLA guidelines.

CTAMJ encourages contributions from scholars and practitioners, who comprise all segments of the journal’s readership, including K-12 educators, graduate school, community college, and college or university groups. The journal welcomes theoretical and applied articles from both the theater and communication disciplines. Capable scholars in the appropriate field will blindly review all general manuscripts.

No work will be accepted or rejected purely on the basis of its methodology or subject. Author sex, race, ethnic background, geographical location or work affiliation (secondary/college level, department, etc.) of the author(s) are never considered in making editorial judgments. The demands of the disciplines of speech communication and theater are key factors in the editorial judgments made. All editorial decisions attempt to balance these demands with the needs and interests of the journal’s readers.

The journal is guided by three key principles:

- To provide an outlet for the expression of diverse ideas.
- To publish high quality scholarship in the disciplines of Speech Communication and Theater.
- To meet the journal-related needs of CTAM and its members.

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The call for Manuscripts goes out in the fall of the year and the deadline for submissions is in March of the following year. Details of how to submit are given in the Call which is sent to all members, departments, and announced in SPECTRA. Book review ideas should be queried with the editor in advance of the submission date. Book reviews are generally published if accepted on a space available basis. All articles are read anonymously by at least two associate editors. All author identification markings are removed from the articles and no editor reads the work of a colleague. Associate editors may submit articles to the journal, but their work must go through the process of blind review, just as any other submitter. The journal editor facilitates the process and makes final decisions based on the associate editor’s recommendations and comments. If there are any questions about the process, please direct them to the journal editor.

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The Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal is seeking manuscripts for Volume 39, scheduled for publication in summer 2012. The journal welcomes theoretical and applied articles and teaching suggestions from theater, communication and forensics professionals from secondary and collegiate levels. All general articles will undergo a blind review process by a minimum of two reviewers. Manuscripts may be submitted for one of two sections: general interest research and essays, and teacher’s workbook. Please indicate whether the manuscript is intended for the (1) general interest research and essays section, or the (2) teacher’s workbook section. Contact the editor concerning book review proposals.

Authors should submit an electronic copy of their work as a Word document by e-mail to the editor. A separate electronic title page should include a 100-125 word abstract of the article, author’s name and professional title, job title, the school or institutional affiliation of the author/s, a mailing address, and an e-mail address. Care should be taken that author identification has been removed from the manuscript itself for review purposes. All manuscripts should be prepared according to current APA or MLA guidelines.

Authors are reminded to keep the Journal audience in mind: students and teachers at the high school, community college, private college, and university levels. All manuscripts must be submitted by March 31, 2012. Please e-mail manuscripts and any questions to James P. Dimock, CTAM Journal Editor, james.dimock@mnsu.edu.
The ‘Ex’ Factor… Will They Be Friends? A Qualitative Analysis of Post-Dissolution Communication Among Former Premarital Cohabitating Couples

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ABSTRACT
This study explores the nature of the communication between former premarital cohabitating couples. Eight research participants (n=8) were interviewed to explore how and why they do or do not continue to communicate with their former partner since the relational termination. Four categories emerged from the qualitative analysis. First, couples “slid” into cohabitation for convenience-based purposes rather than deliberately decided. Second, they experienced a breakdown in or lack of communication before and/or during the disengagement. Third, the relational termination was a gradual process, and forth, the participants offered reasons for why they do or do not remain in communication with their ex-partner. An unexpected theme that emerged was the existence or possibility of a new partner negatively impacting friendship quality between the former partners.

The movie The Break-Up (2006) portrayed the difficulties a cohabitating couple faces when they break-up and must decide how to proceed, a scenario which according to Seltzer (2004) and Sassler (2007) has become more and more common in the past few decades. Seltzer asserted that, “Cohabitation before first marriage is now the behavioral norm” (p. 922). The National Survey of Family Growth (2006-2008) found that nearly half of all Americans (48.8% of men and 50.0% of women) had lived with a romantic partner at some point in their lives. Jayson (2010) reported that according to the US Census, the number of opposite-sex couples living together rose from 6.7 million in 2009 to 7.5 million in 2010, a 13% increase.

Existing studies on post-dissolution communication have explored several aspects of this phenomenon, but they had different purposes and looked at other factors than the present study. They did not differentiate between premarital cohabitating couples, non-cohabitating dating couples, and spouses. For this reason, along with the rising number of couples who cohabitate outside of marriage, this study focuses on whether and how a former premarital cohabitating couple continues to communicate with one another after relational termination. Using in-depth interviews with eight heterosexual research participants, the researcher used Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) constant comparative method to examine what factors influence whether or not former cohabitating couples remain in communication once the romantic relationship has ended. This study explores the connection, if any, between the nature of post-dissolutional communication and the reason for cohabitating, the reason for the relational termination, and/or the exit strategy employed.
Cohabitation

Rhoades, Stanley, and Markman (2008) proposed more and more couples choose to cohabitate before marriage or as an alternative to marriage for numerous reasons. They identified the most common reasons as: 1) a desire for more time together, 2) convenience-based purposes, 3) a test for the relationship, and 4) an opposition to the institution of marriage. Manning and Smock (2005) claimed that more couples tend to “slide” into cohabitation than “decide” to cohabitate, making it a non-deliberative, incremental process. These couples have reported that cohabitation “just happened” without either partner realizing the implications.

The rise in cohabitation may be closely tied to individuals marrying later in life than in the past (Newcomb, 1986; Sassler, 2007). Men and women now value individual development more than they used to. In the meantime, the need for close relationships persists; therefore, many individuals “settle” for cohabitation rather than marriage, whether temporarily or permanently. Past research suggests that cohabitation can serve as a balance between being single and being married. According to Newcomb, each partner perceives he or she has more autonomy than a married person but more connection to another being than a single individual.

Research has shown that premarital cohabitation leads to a higher divorce rate compared to couples who did not cohabitate prior to marriage (Newcomb, 1986; Phillips & Sweeney, 2005; Stanley et al., 2006). This may be attributed to relationship inertia, or the idea that some couples who would not have married end up marrying because they were cohabitating. It is difficult to terminate the relationship when a couple is cohabitating in comparison to those living apart because typically, constraints (e.g. financial dependence, few perceived alternatives, social pressures/obligations, etc.) will be greater, leading to a likelihood of a cohabitating couple maintaining rather than terminating the relationship simply because it is easier and more convenient. Thus, Stanley et al. (2006) and Surra and Hughes (1997) proposed that the relationship may progress toward marriage even if the couple is not ideally compatible.

Relational Termination & Post-Dissolutional Communication

Hill, Rubin, and Peplau (1976) concluded that couples are more likely to end a relationship prior to marriage if they have lower levels of intimacy, unequal involvement, and fewer similarities (socially, physically, and intellectually). Cody (1982) added that dissatisfaction, inequity, incompatibility, and the desire to date others also play a large role in the fate of a relationship. According to Bouchard (2006), cohabitating couples are more likely than married couples to end a relationship even if it is still relatively satisfying. Married partners differ from premarital couples because they are more connected emotionally, structurally, socially, and legally, therefore, making it more difficult and life-altering to disengage (Cupach & Metts, 1986). However, while studies compare the satisfaction and termination of cohabitation to marriage, few studies delineate cohabitating couples from non-cohabitating premarital couples.
In a benchmark article, Baxter (1982) labeled four strategies an individual can take to end a relationship: withdrawal/avoidance, manipulatory, positive tone, and open confrontation. Cody (1982) then developed five new strategies, in relation to the previous ones: behavioral de-escalation, de-escalation, positive tone, negative identity management, and justification. Baxter concluded that the disengager will consider relationship closeness and the perceived cause of the relationship failure when selecting a strategy. Banks, Altendorf, Green, and Cody (1987) proposed that trust, dyadic adjustment, partner desirability, and social network overlap influence which strategy one employs.

Knapp (1984) and Duck (1986) suggested that the final stage of relationship development and deterioration is the ultimate termination of the relationship. However, researchers have recently argued that even though the romantic relationship may have dissolved, the relationship may be redefined and communication between the former partners may continue (Busboom, Collins, Giverts, & Levin, 2002; Foley & Fraser, 1998; Lannutti & Cameron, 2002). Lannutti and Cameron wrote, “The majority of the romantic relationships we experience will fail and some form of post-dissolutional relationship may emerge” (p. 166). When a couple disengages from the relationship, the partners face the decision of whether to continue their relationship on a different level or terminate communication with one another altogether.

Banks et al. (1987) put forth that a major factor influencing whether partners, both marital and premarital, desire to continue a friendship is partner desirability. Foley and Fraser (1998) also included convenience or necessity and/or the possibility of missing the friendship they had before or during the relationship. Busboom et al. (2002) employed social exchange theory to predict whether romantic partners will remain friends after a break-up. The frequency of resources is positively correlated to friendship quality, and satisfaction with resources considerably moderates the relationship between frequency of resources received and friendship quality. Barriers such as lack of support and involvement in a new relationship negatively affect friendship quality. In concurrence with other studies, conflict experienced while dating and the exit strategy selected surprisingly do not significantly influence friendship quality. While comparing the responses of homosexual participants to those of heterosexual participants, Lannutti and Cameron (2002) validated that, in both populations, personal variables are a powerful predictor of post-dissolutional relationships while structural variables and whether the ex-couple were friends before the romantic relationship began surprisingly are not.

The purpose of this study is to expand upon prior research and provide detailed insight into the process of post-dissolutional communication specifically for former premarital cohabitating couples. Through in-depth interviews, the researcher explored aspects of the break-up and the nature of the communication between former couples since they terminated the relationship to answer the following five research questions:

**RQ1:** What reasons do the relational partners offer for why they decided to cohabitate?
RQ2: Do the former cohabitating partners report that there was a specific event or turning point in the relationship or, instead, did it slowly dissolve, eventually leading to the break-up?

RQ3: Did the cause of the termination (reason for the break-up) affect how the former cohabitating partners communicate, if at all, after the break-up? If so, in what way?

RQ4: Did the disengagement strategy used affect how the former cohabitating partners communicate, if at all, after the break-up? If so, in what way?

RQ5: What is the nature of the former cohabitating couples’ relationships now that the romantic relationship has been terminated and they are no longer living together?

Methodology

The researcher used in-depth interviews (n=8) to gather detailed information regarding the cohabitation, relational termination, and post-dissolution communication from individuals who had been in premarital, heterosexual cohabitating relationships. Interviews were warranted to collect in-depth and open-ended responses.

Research Participants

The research participants for this study included eight heterosexual individuals who had cohabitated with their former romantic partner outside of marriage before terminating the relationship. The relationship disengagements took place between one month and three years from the time of the interview. Following Patterson and O’Hair’s (1992) relational depth guidelines, no restrictions were placed on the duration of the relationship or of the cohabitation so long as both partners perceived the relationship to be serious and exclusive. To recruit participants who met the criteria, the research used network, snowball, and purposive sampling.

The eight individuals who participated in this study, four females and four males, lived in various locations throughout the United States: California (two), Montana, Georgia, Illinois (two), South Dakota, and Minnesota. Six participants identified their race/ethnicity as being White/Caucasian, one as Korean/Caucasian, and one as Black. The average age of the participants is 26, ranging between 22 and 30. The researcher assigned pseudonyms to each research participant. Half of the participants were paired couples while the other half were individuals from separate relationships. Danny and Rebecca were one couple, and the second couple was Ryan and Emily; the former partners of Cassidy, Jonathon, Jordan, and Angela did not participate in the study. The average length of the relationships was 57 months (4.75 years), and the average duration of the cohabitation was 10 months. Seven of the eight participants were engaged at some point during their relationship. Half of the sample (four participants) remained friends with their former partner after the relational termination, while the other half (four participants) no longer communicate.

The researcher conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews with each of the eight participants separately. The researcher conducted seven of the interviews over the telephone due
to different geographic locations. The researcher interviewed only one participant face-to-face. Prior to the interviews, participants completed a brief survey questionnaire containing biographical questions and general items about the past relationship. The goal of qualitative, or naturalistic, interviews is to acquire in-depth information in an attempt to unearth the reasons behind what the interviewee is saying, especially when the information is intimate or private (Adler & Clark, 2003; Reinard, 2008). The researcher used a nondirective approach, which Stewart and Cash (2006) contended grants much of the control to the interviewee in terms of length of answers, interview climate, and so forth. The interviews in this study were semi-structured with a guide consisting primarily of open-ended questions regarding the romantic relationship before the termination, reason(s) for the termination, strategies chosen to disengage, reaction to disengagement, nature of communication after the dissolution, and so on. The shortest interview lasted only 15 minutes while the longest took one hour and two minutes.

The researcher employed the constant comparative method consisting of the following four stages: 1) comparing instances related to each category, 2) integrating categories and their properties, 3) setting the limits of the theory, and 4) creating the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 105). The researcher noted specific words and general ideas that seemed to be common themes among all of the participants’ responses, such as having spent a great deal of time together or the term “communication.”

Findings

The researcher analyzed eight interviews (n=8) with Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) constant comparative method of qualitative analysis, identifying and comparing categories and the properties of each found in the data. The categories that emerged include: “sliding” versus “deciding,” communication breakdown, a gradual dissolution process, and the possibility of friendship. These categories will be discussed in the following sections.

“Sliding” Versus “Deciding”

Manning and Smock (2005) suggested that couples tend to “slide” into cohabitation in a nondeliberative, incremental process rather than “decide” to live together. Additional research conducted by Stanley et al. (2006) supported this idea. Rhoades et al. (2008) concluded that couples cohabitate for either internal reasons, such as desiring more time together, or external reasons, such as financial purposes. Comparable to internal and external reasons, Surra, Arizzi, and Asmussen (1988) identified two distinct commitment processes: relationship-driven and event-driven. A relational transition due to a relationship-driven (internal) reason will have more satisfying interactions and less risk of distress and relational termination than someone with an event-driven (external) reason (Stanley et al., 2006; Surra & Hughes, 1997).

The data collected from the interviews in this study are consistent with previous research presented above regarding the “sliding” effect in that cohabitation tended to “just happen” due to timing or other situational factors without an explicit decision or an internal reason. Most of the
participants began cohabitating as the result of some event, such as relocation or a roommate moving; in other words, they began cohabitating out of convenience. While some participants felt as though they were ready for the next step, their reasons for cohabitating tended to be largely convenient and external. This supports research by Rhoades et al. (2008) that listed convenience as the second most common explanation couples offer for cohabitating. Quotations from the interviews in this study are provided below to illustrate the reason(s) each participant offered for cohabitating and how, if at all, they discussed and made the decision.

Three of the research participants, Rebecca, Danny, and Jordan, began cohabitating due to relocation. Rebecca and Danny were in a relationship with one another, and she shared, “It was kind of what we both wanted, so it was kind of really assumed... There wasn’t a whole lot of talking about it. It was just the best idea.” Similarly, Angela’s cohabitation began out of convenience as well. She volunteered, “We decided to open a coffee shop, and it was very close to where he was living...so I moved in with him and his roommate when we opened our business.” This situation is unique because they opened a joint business; nevertheless, they did not actually deliberate about the decision.

Jonathon invited his former partner to move in with him because they discovered she was pregnant. Although he later learned that the baby was not his, they never actually talked about the decision to cohabitate.

Cassidy offered timing along with being ready to begin their lives together as the major reasons for cohabitating. She explained, “It was just kind of good timing...We were both ready to move to that next step...It was just kind of assumed...We didn’t actually sit down and talk about it necessarily.” Therefore, in agreement with Rhoades et al. (2008), the two most common reasons offered for cohabitating may have both been at play in this situation: a desire to spend more time with one another and convenience. Even so, they did not seriously discuss the decision.

The last couple is a partial exception to the idea of “sliding.” Ryan and Emily did discuss living together for a period of time prior, making it more than merely convenience-based. However, they began cohabitating when her roommate moved out, which shows that convenient timing played a role as well. Ryan said, “I guess it was more coincidental than anything, but it was something we had talked about prior to doing it,” and he later added, “We felt we were ready for that next step. We enjoyed being around each other a lot.” Emily shared, “We felt like it was time, like it felt right.” Hence, although they began cohabitating because the time was right, they discussed the decision because they both desired to spend more time together and wanted to move forward with their relationship.

The majority of these accounts strengthen the argument that many couples “slide” into cohabitation rather than seriously discuss it when they were ready, with the exception of one couple. This research supports the studies by Stanely et al. (2006) and Surra and Hughes (1997) that proposed “sliders” and those with event-driven commitment have a greater chance of experiencing distress and relational termination than those who take the time to think and talk about the idea of cohabitation.
Communication Breakdown

A breakdown in communication between the former partners before the break-up was also a common theme reported by the research participants. Although communication can never actually cease, the interview data revealed that the communication changed; the participants described a “lack of” and/or a “breakdown” in communication. In the time before and during the early stages of the break-up, all of the participants shared that there was a breakdown in communication. Examples are highlighted below.

Rebecca told the researcher, “He would leave at 7:00 p.m. and wouldn’t come home until 2:00 a.m. or 3:00 a.m. in the morning, and he wouldn’t communicate at all.” She further described the break-up: “I think he realized that he didn’t want to get married, and he didn’t know how to verbally tell me, so he went and had sex with another woman.” Danny, however, attributed the break-up to the fact that they had grown apart over time rather than to his infidelity, but he did agree that they did not communicate shortly before and during the break-up period.

In the same way, Jordan reported that his ex-girlfriend began staying out late, often with other men, without communicating the situation to him. He explained, “We always had problems with communication. We were both stubborn, and when we started talking about how we felt, it never went anywhere...We never really could talk about anything.” Jordan felt that poor communication was always their major downfall, and ultimately it led to the demise of their relationship involving a hurtful termination.

Jonathon blamed the break-up on the fact that he and his former partner both lied to each other, indicating a lack of honest communication. He remembers the break-up: “We both lied to each other a couple of times...There was a lot of arguing...the argument kind of carried out for awhile longer.”

Cassidy expressed how she felt there was unequal involvement in terms of communicating with her ex-fiancé about their relationship and their future. “In a relationship it should be open...and you should at least talk about it and weigh out the pros and cons together, and not say ‘No, I only want you to do this one thing.’”

Ryan and Emily both expressed that Ryan’s television habits hindered their communication. Emily said, “I could be having a conversation with him, and if the TV would go on, it was instantly...he would stop and was, like, completely not even listening anymore.” Ryan added, “Communication probably went downhill a little bit when we moved in just because we were to the point where we were close enough to talk to each other all the time, but we never did.” In terms of the cause of the break-up, Ryan revealed, “Mostly there was a communication issue. My interests weren’t the same as hers...so that kind of all worked into effect...” This goes along with the postulation by Hill et al. (1976) that having few similarities is a major reason why a couple may break up. Emily felt as though she and Ryan always had great communication except when it came to one issue: sex. She shared, “Even though he’s comfortable talking about
anything with me, like, I think [talking about sex] is uncomfortable for him.” This supports Hill et al.’s research which concluded lower levels of intimacy can lead to relational termination.

Angela described her communication with her ex-partner quite differently when they began living together. “Our commitment level went up drastically after we decided to have a business together and commit to live together...It was very dependent.” Angela felt that this connection and dependency was problematic for their relationship. Stanley et al. (2006) and Surra and Hughes (1997) contended that cohabitating couples may feel pressured or obligated to stay together even when the relationship is not great if they have resources invested in the relationship or financial obligations. Angela felt as though their relationship and their cohabitation had to work in order for the business to survive and to be able to afford her condominium. Further, a lack of honest communication when he cheated on Angela at the beginning of the relationship also played a role in the termination.

In summary, a breakdown in communication or a lack of honest communication throughout the relationship and especially before the termination played a role in the fate of the relationship and the ultimate disengagement. Interestingly, four out of the eight research participants claimed that one partner cheating on the other was a major factor in the relationship, if not the main determinant for the termination. Without further research, it is impossible to determine whether the breakdown in communication or the infidelity came first. On one hand, poor communication could have led to the infidelity, while on the other the infidelity may have resulted in a decrease in communication. However, sexual infidelity, dishonesty, or lack of trust has not been identified by past research as being a primary cause for relational termination. This discrepancy with past research should be investigated in future research.

A Gradual Dissolution Process

Baxter (1984) and Duck (1982) referred to relationship disengagement as a process that consists of different phases. Baxter coined the first phase the Intra-psychic, when one relational partner realizes his or her dissatisfaction and the desire to end the relationship. Many of the participants’ stories in this study included a relatively gradual break-up where one of the parties spent a great deal of time in the Intra-psychic phase. Baxter’s second stage is the Dyadic phase, which is when one individual announces to the other his or her wish to break up. A few of the participants also reported spending a moderately long period of time in this phase. The following accounts describe the relatively long dissolution process for each of the participants.

Emily shared that their sex life had been suffering for quite some time – years in fact – which in her opinion is one of the factors that lead to the break-up, along with having different interests. “I started being not that happy...So over the course of a month or so, and that might seem soon, but it had been a problem in our relationship pretty much the whole time.” Their dissimilar interests and intimacy issues drug along and eventually made Emily unhappy enough that she talked to Ryan about it, and they broke up. Ryan mentioned their time in the Dyadic
phase: “I’d say we talked about it for at least a couple weeks before we decided that it was a good idea to probably just split apart and live our own lives.”

Hill et al. (1976) listed unequal involvement as a reason for relational termination, which was the case with Cassidy’s and her ex-fiancé. She described the break-up as “a very long process... I kept trying to talk to him about it, and he wouldn’t want to hear it... I told him on several occasions, ‘You know I’m not happy.’” Cassidy began expressing her dissatisfaction with him in May; finally, she returned the engagement ring to him at the end of November.

In Angela’s relationship, “There were a couple reasons that [the break-up] was really building... We tried to work through things... It drug out for like a year until we had the conversation about breaking up.” After a year of trying to fix the problems of his dependency on her, she finally ended the relationship. The concept of relationship inertia introduced by Stanley et al. (2006) might shed light onto why Angela and her former partner held onto the relationship for so long when she clearly was not satisfied.

The remaining four relationships ended slightly differently than the previous because it seems that while they were a process, they also involved a turning point. Danny explained how his break-up with Rebecca occurred: “It was definitely a process... I guess it was kind of a downward spiral.” There was dissatisfaction with the relationship overall which carried on for some time. Rebecca felt as though the lack of communication and his dissatisfaction with it went on for a period of time before they finally broke up due to his infidelity. Danny had been employing Cody’s (1982) behavioral de-escalation engagement strategy, meaning he began to withdraw from the relationship and avoid his partner. However, Danny cheating on her was the turning point that actually ended the relationship. Therefore, in the end, it seems the break-up was imminent with a process leading up to it, but there was a specific realization (Rebecca finding out that Danny had been unfaithful) that actually caused the termination.

Jordan shared, “Things started getting weird, but we never really talked about it.” He reported that she began going out with other guys more frequently and decreased her communication with him. In a similar way as Danny and Rebecca, Jordan ended the relationship when he finally caught her cheating on him. However, there were issues leading up to it that drug out for quite some time. His ex-girlfriend began using Cody’s (1982) passive strategy of behavioral de-esclataion where she withdrew from the relationship but then turned to negative identity management, meaning she became inconsiderate and had no regard to Jordan’s feelings. Again, while it was an event that actually ended the relationship, there were problems beforehand that eventually brought about that turning point.

Jonathon is the exception to this pattern, as his break-up came about by a definite turning point: he found out the child was not his. They moved in together when they thought they were going to have a baby together, and they broke up once he discovered it was not his baby. While the arguing continued after the break-up, he had immediately decided to end the relationship. Although he admitted they both lied to one another throughout the relationship, this was the big lie that, in his mind, prompted the relational termination.
To recap, a few of the relationships ended due to a specific occurrence, such as a partner cheating or lying about a major issue. However, even in those relationships the participants reported problems prior to the incident that caused the break-up, consistent with previous research suggesting that terminating a relationship is a process. Barta and Kiene (2005) wrote that an individual’s physical infidelity may signal his or her first step in escaping an unsatisfying relationship. This means that had the individuals not cheated, the relationships likely would have ended eventually due to some other reason because at least one of the partners was not completely satisfied. Additional research is warranted to uncover the reasons the partners offered for cheating and to explore the connection between the period of time leading to the break-up and the final turning point.

What is different about relational disengagement of cohabitating couples and non-cohabitating dating couples is that those who cohabit have the added factor of deciding how to proceed with living arrangements after termination, making the relationship similar to a marriage in that respect. In some of the cases, they remained living together for a period of time (no longer than a month) after the relationship ended; in others, they moved apart immediately. Additional research could explore how continuing cohabitation after relational termination affects, if at all, post-dissolutional communication.

**Possibility of Friendship**

In this section, the researcher discusses whether or not the former partners remained in communication after the relational termination and the justification for their decision. Banks et al. (1987) offered that partner desirability is one factor that influences post-dissolutional communication. Foley and Fraser (1998) added convenience or necessity and/or the possibility of missing the friendship they had before or during the relationship as influencers. The latter was the reason offered by the four participants who continued communicating regularly with their ex-partner at the time of the interviews: they still cared for the other person and did not want to give up the friendship they had developed, even if the romance was over. It is difficult to categorize and generalize this section because each former couple and the circumstances surrounding their post-dissolutional communication are unique with different factors at play. Additionally, the researcher allowed the interviewees to interpret what constitutes a “friendship” in order to determine whether they consider their former partner a “friend” according to their own standards rather than to a definition provided to them. Each participant’s post-dissolutional communication with their former partner is examined below.

Emily and Ryan are able to remain friends and still talk to and see one another frequently. Emily explained that it was slightly awkward immediately after the break-up because they were cohabitating. “[Living together] made it harder. He ended up just moving out three weeks later. The dragging it out after the decision to break up was the hard part.” During the break-up, they agreed to remain friends. Emily said, “We definitely did talk about it, and we made sure that both of us understood that we had both been an important part in each others’ lives.” They now hang
out with each other typically once a week at friends’ gatherings, and occasionally they speak on the telephone, send funny text messages back and forth, or comment on one another’s Facebook pages. Supporting Foley and Fraser’s previous findings (1998), the overarching reason they continue to communicate is that they spent so much time together, still care for one another, and do not want to lose the friendship they had during the relationship.

However, Busboom et al. (2002) proposed that a new relationship is a barrier to the friendship between two former partners. In concurrence, Emily and Ryan both predict that their relationship will change when one of them finds a new romantic partner. Ryan said, “Neither one of us are blind in the fact that if either of us gets into a relationship again that [our friendship] may have to stop eventually.” Emily added, “I would assume that when his weekends are filled with another girl, she might not appreciate me in his life.” She continued, “And I can understand and respect that, so I would give him the distance and whatever he needs...”

At the time of the interviews, Danny and Rebecca had similar thoughts on continuing communication, but it did not begin that way. Rebecca stated, “He always said ‘I still want to be friends,’ but at that point I was like ‘No, forget that. That’s not gonna work.’” Because of Danny’s actions and the pain it caused her, she did not have any desire to be friends with him. Rebecca’s initial attitude contradicts past research by Busboom, et al. (2002), positing that conflict experienced while dating and the exit strategy used do not influence friendship quality. It was not until nine months after their break-up that Rebecca reflected on her past relationship and decided she would be open to supporting him in his life and be there as a friend. She explained, “About a year to two years afterward it completely shifted, and he actually opens up to me more now than when we were together for the six years.” They send sporadic text messages about family and mutual friends or just to touch base and see how the other is doing. Danny described their present communication as always very general. They check in just to say “Hi” or on a birthday or significant event. Danny and Rebecca now consider themselves friends because they had been together for so long and still want to support one another.

In agreement with Emily’s and Ryan’s predictions and past research by Busboom et al., (2002), Rebecca believes that Danny’s new relationship drives a wedge between their communication. She expressed, “[His relationship] is something that I respect...but it does affect our friendship.” Further, Danny willingly admitted, “It is never easy if you have a new partner...No partner likes their current partner talking a lot with their ex.”

The existence of a new partner may be primarily what stopped the communication between Angela and her ex-fiancé. For the two years following the termination, they continued to communicate frequently because they “were both people in each other’s lives that had made a very big impact.” Unexpectedly, one day he asked her to not talk to him anymore. Angela shared, “He said he wasn’t able to move on in his relationship because he felt like he was still stuck relating to me, being friends with me, but just not really completely over me.” Angela would be interested in maintaining a friendship with him, but she does not have much choice in the matter and will respect his wishes by not contacting him. In agreement with Foley and Fraser
(1998), she did not want to lose his friendship; however in the end, as Busboom et al. (2002) proposed, the inclusion of his new relationship did create a barrier.

Jordan had a similar situation as Angela, only he was in the reverse role. He and his ex-girlfriend spoke sporadically after the break-up. Eventually they began hanging out again – having lunch, going bowling, meeting for drinks, and so forth. However, in the end Jordan decided remaining friends was not going to work because there was still physical attraction and she was with a new partner. He said, “I think when someone is with a new partner it is just that added factor that can make it harder.” Further, he realized that he did not like the person she had become, so he had no desire to continue communication with the person who hurt him so badly and showed no remorse for it. “When you spend [five years] with somebody and they do that to you, you just have to move on and you can’t be friends.”

At the time of the interview, Cassidy was also not speaking to her ex-fiancé. After she moved out, she thought it would be best to break it off cleanly and not communicate for awhile since it was still “too raw.” “I think just to move on and to have that closure...I knew that it wasn’t going to work for us to keep talking to each other.” This supports Busboom et al. (2002) that stated a former couple is less likely to remain friends when there is a lack of support in the relationship. However, Cassidy is open to future communication with him. She would be willing to see and talk to him at a mutual friend’s gathering after time passes, which also confirms Busboom et al.’s (2002) supposition that former partners would remain friends out of convenience or necessity. She added, “...but I need to make sure that both of us are completely healed before we start doing that.”

Jonathon and his ex-fiancé did discuss whether they could be friends, and they came to the conclusion that it would be too difficult. Until a month before the interview, they had been communicating through text messages, usually just to see how the other was doing. During that time, he continued to communicate with her because he was “still caring about her, and wanting to know that she is ok, and wondering what is new in her life.” He imagines that if either of them were to begin dating someone new, the other would not be very happy with it, also supporting prior research (Busboom et al., 2002).

In conclusion, the analysis of the data involving former cohabitating couples largely supports past research on post-dissolutional communication between former non-cohabitating dating couples and marital partners. According to Foley and Fraser (1998), a desire to hold onto the friendship developed before and/or during the romantic relationship is one of the main reasons former partners wish to remain friends. Likewise, four of the participants continue to communicate because they were so close to their partner during the romantic relationship that they do not want to lose contact completely. Others, however, are unable to maintain a friendship with their former partner for that same reason. They feel that there are too many emotions and memories that they cannot remain friends if they want to be able to move on and get over the relationship. This was a new concept not discussed in past studies, which justifies future investigation. Similarly, Busboom et al. (2002) offered that a new romantic relationship negatively affects friendship quality for former dating and married couples, an idea verified by
the data for cohabitating couples in this study. The participants shared that a new romantic relationship would hinder (or already had hindered) their communication with their ex-partner.

Discussion

This study yielded themes about the nature of former premarital cohabitating couples’ post-dissolutional communication. Using a semi-structured in-depth interview guide, the researcher interviewed participants (n=8) and analyzed the data using Glaser & Strauss’s (1967) constant comparative method. The analysis revealed four significant categories: “sliding” versus “deciding,” communication breakdown, a gradual dissolution process, and the possibility of friendship. These categories help to answer five research questions, which will be addressed in the following discussion.

RQ 1: The notion of participants “sliding” into cohabitation answers RQ1, the reason why couples began cohabitating. Six participants reported that they slid into cohabitation rather than seriously deciding to live together. The participants in this study began cohabitating due to relocating, starting a business together, a roommate moving, and discovering a pregnancy. Rhoades et al. (2008) considered these external reasons. Only one couple reported talking about cohabitating due to a reason internal to the relationship; they wanted to be around each other more frequently and felt as though they were ready. The results of this study support the postulation that “sliders” and couples who make decisions based on events rather than internal purposes are at greater risk for experiencing distress and relational deterioration (Stanley et al., 2006; Surra & Hughes, 1997).

RQ2: Seven participants believed their relational dissolution was a process, even when a single event or turning point finally caused the termination. The dissolution process went on for a few weeks in some cases to as long as one year. Even in the relationships that ended due to one single event (e.g. a partner discovery the other’s infidelity), the termination seemed to be impending as communication suffered and the couple became more distant. All eight participants shared that a breakdown in communication was a barrier to the relationship and, in most cases, was an influential factor in the relational dissolution. Couples experienced poor communication regarding topics such as a partner’s whereabouts, dissatisfaction with the relationship, and their future together.

Although past research has not reported that lack of trust, dishonesty, or infidelity are reasons why couples disengage, four participants offered a partner’s unfaithfulness and subsequent dishonesty as a major reason for terminating the relationship. Barta and Kiene (2005) posited that partners who cheat may do so as a way to show their unhappiness with the relationship rather than openly talking about it. The partners who cheated were presumably unsatisfied with some facet of their relationship, so the termination was likely inevitable even had both partners remained faithful.

RQ3 & RQ4: While some of the participants did not offer the reason for termination and the exit strategy chosen as influencers of the way they communicate after ending the...
relationship, others did. One couple has thus far been able to stay friends because the termination was mutual and there were no hard feelings, indicating that the reason for and the strategy used in the break-up may affect communication afterward. Two participants disclosed that part of the reason they chose to end communication was because their former partners cheated on them. In these situations, the reason for termination (infidelity and dishonesty about it) influenced the decision to discontinue communication after relational disengagement. Therefore, while some individuals may or may not remain friends due to circumstances surrounding the reason for the termination and the strategy used to end the relationship, these factors do not influence the communication between other individuals. These findings highlight how the nature of the break-up can, but may not always, affect future interactions and the potential for a friendship.

RQ5: Four of the participants (from the two couples who participated) continue to communicate at some level with one another. One couple speaks quite frequently through text messages and Facebook, and they see one another typically once a week. The other couple communicates primarily through text messages or sometimes a phone call to see how the other is doing or to share news about family and mutual friends. Both couples remain friends because they spent so much time together and do not want to lose their friendship, which is in congruence with past research by Foley and Fraser (1998).

The remaining participants who were not communicating with their former partners at the time of the interviews are unable to remain friends because there is still physical attraction, they or their partner were hurt by the break-up, or one of them needs time to heal and move on with a new relationship. This may explain why only one partner in these relationships was willing and/or able to participate in the study, while the couples who continued communication are the two relationships in which both parties participated.

Therefore, post-dissolutional communication is very individualistic based on each couple and their unique circumstances. The sole reason former cohabitating partners offered as to why they do remain or would like to remain friends is simply because they had a significant impact on one another’s lives and wish to remain in contact to check in on each other once in awhile. On the other hand, the primary reason former relational partners may not want to continue communication is because they feel that they must completely let go of their past relationship in order to move forward with life and be able to develop a new romantic relationship. The existence or the possibility of a new partner was an interesting finding that emerged from the interview. Busboom et al. (2002) concluded that a new relationship may be a barrier to a former couple’s friendship. Even the participants who had not yet experienced this volunteered that their relationship with their ex-partner will change significantly when someone else enters the picture. Five of the participants said that they will respect any space the former partner may need in order to have a healthy relationship with his or her new significant other.

This study is important because it sheds light on the experiences of a growing population – dating couples who cohabitate prior to marriage (Bouchard, 2006; Sassler, 2007). The number of opposite-sex couples living together increased 13% from 6.7 million in 2009 to 7.5 million in 2010 (Jayson, 2010). Approximately one half of all Americans have cohabitated with their
romantic partner outside of marriage at least once (The National Survey of Family Growth, 2006-2008). In addition, romantic interpersonal relationships are a significant part of people’s lives and a relational termination can be one of the most stressful times in one’s life (Orbuch, 1992; VanderDrift, Agnew, & Wilson, 2009). What is more, according to past research couples who cohabitate prior to marriage are at greater risk for divorce than those who wait until marriage to cohabitate (Newcomb, 1986; Sweeney & Phillips, 2004; Stanley et al., 2006). Relationship inertia, explained by Stanley et al. (2006), offers a reason for this increased risk. It posits that couples may end up marrying even if they were not meant for one another simply because they were already cohabitating and had greater constraints, making it easier to stay in the relationship than to terminate it.

The results of this study are insightful to research in the area of interpersonal communication, as the researcher developed four emerging categories to explain the experiences of former cohabitating couples. Participants disclosed information on a personal topic, revealing that they “slid” into cohabitation, they experienced a breakdown or lack of communication, the termination was a gradual process, and finally, they explained the reasons for the nature of their post-dissolutional communication.

Limitations of the Study

This section identifies limitations of the present study. One limitation of the interview method is that it relies heavily on the openness and cooperation of the interviewee. Although most of the participants seemed to have disclosed their feelings and past behaviors in great detail, there were a few who may have held back certain information. Keyton (2011) discussed the notion of social desirability bias, which refers to an individual’s desire to be socially accepted and maintain positive face. The potential for social desirability bias may have been exacerbated in this study because the researcher used network sampling, meaning the interviewer shared a mutual friend or acquaintance with each of the participants. However, network sampling was necessary in order to recruit participants.

The researcher strived to find couples where both former partners agreed to participate in order to provide a complete picture of their past relationship, as recommended by Masheter (1997). While half of the participants made up the full couple, the other half were individuals from separate relationships, representing only one half of that relationship. Therefore, the researcher only heard these individuals’ account, which may not have been an entirely accurate representation. Without hearing the other partner’s version of the story, the researcher is unable to determine which information is complete and which information is an inaccurate depiction or missing details of how everything happened.

What is more, because the setting of an interview is so vital and it is essential for the interviewer to build rapport with each interviewee immediately, speaking to the participants over the phone rather than face-to-face may have made a difference in the interviews. Although the researcher does not perceive it was a problem, as the three most detailed interviews were over
the phone, the participants were less able to detect her nonverbal signals that indicated she was attentive and genuinely interested.

Additionally, studies using grounded theory tend to be starting points and call for further testing with larger and wider samples. Researchers have pointed out that their studies were preliminary first steps in a long process of refining and further developing the models created (Thompson, 2008; Weaver & Coleman, 2005). The sample size for this study was rather small (n=8), so a follow-up study using a larger, more diverse sample is warranted. This study included a homogenous sample which was comprised of an entirely heterosexual and largely White/Caucasian population. The researcher was, however, able to recruit participants from various regions of the country. Nevertheless, a fairly homogenous sample may have been appropriate for such a small sample size. Had each of the individuals been significantly different from one another in some way, it would have been difficult to summarize findings and draw conclusions. Regardless, since the researcher did not use a random sampling technique, she is unable to generalize her findings to the greater population.

Suggestions for Future Research

There are several aspects of this study that would benefit from further investigation. First, future research should include a larger sample size and diverse populations to determine if this experience occurs differently in various ethnicities, ages, and so forth. As previously mentioned, it would be advantageous to interview both partners of a former couple rather than only one party to be able hear both perspectives and complement each interview to fill in the other’s gaps.

Future research could directly compare post-dissolutional communication between that of former premarital cohabitating partners and non-cohabitating dating partners and/or divorcees. Including participants of these two other populations would enable the researcher to compare and contrast the experiences of the different groups and determine what factors account for the differences and what remains the same among all three.

Yet another suggestion is to examine if people’s individual characteristics and personality traits affect how they disengage from a relationship and whether they continue to communicate with their former partner. For example, future research could examine whether factors such as an individual’s attachment level and predisposition to forgive influence their post-dissolutional communication.

Another area for future research is to compare the commitment status of participants to determine whether differences exist between former dating cohabitating partners and former engaged cohabitating partners. Since all of the participants in this study were engaged with the exception of one (who had talked with his partner about marriage), the researcher was unable to examine if there are any significant differences. Similarly, the duration of the relationship and of cohabitation could be more closely examined to see if any differences exist between relationships and cohabitations that lasted for a short or long period of time. In addition, future researchers can explore whether owning or simply renting a residence together affects on how
the couple proceeds after relational termination, as none of the participants in this study owned a residence together.

References


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Connecting to Students: Self-disclosure as a Motivational Tool for Collegiate Forensic Coaches

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ABSTRACT
Forensic coaches spend a large amount of time with their students and often struggle to find effective methods of motivation; however, studies have shown that teachers (Christophel, 1990) and athletic coaches (Turman, 2008) can use immediacy as a way to increase student/competitor motivation. This paper examines how forensic coaches can use a specific interpersonal tactic (self-disclosure) to potentially increase student motivation. The review of literature covers self-disclosure and the link between immediacy and motivation in both educational and competitive settings; next, Petronio’s Communication Privacy Management theory is contextualized with forensic coaches; finally, suggestions are offered to forensic coaches who wish to effectively motivate students through self-disclosure.

The concept of motivation in competitive activities is vital to understand so that competitors can achieve success. Motivation has been examined through a wide grouping of lenses. With organizational communication, motivation is often examined on how to motivate workers; rhetorical scholars examine how messages are communicated to motivate specific actions in the public sphere; instructional communication scholars study how teachers can motivate students; sports communication looks at how coaches can motivate competitors. Of those mentioned, athletes and coaches interact in a unique way, as competition is taken into consideration as a different factor from the other studies of motivation; how the coach and competitor interact can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of motivational techniques used by the coach. Research has noted the different variables that influence athlete perceptions of their coaches’ leadership styles (Turman, 2001; Turman, 2003), including argumentativeness (Kassing & Infante, 1999), behavior modification methods (Parrott & Duggan, 1999), and instructional strategies (Heath, 1991). Competition and motivation go hand-in-hand; coaches must find ways to motivate their competitors in order to achieve the goals and success for which they aim.

Forensic coaches spend large amounts of time with the competitors on their team coaching their performances and simultaneously building interpersonal relationships. Forensic coaches may often wonder how to best connect interpersonally with their competitors in order to motivate them. When establishing interpersonal relationships with their competitors, coaches can use both verbal and nonverbal communication to enhance closeness, increasing what Mehrabin...
(1969) called immediacy. Mehrabin explained that immediacy is behavior that increases the feeling of psychological closeness with another person.

For some coaches, creating close interpersonal connections is something that comes naturally because of instinct or because certain techniques have been passed down from previous successful encounters as a coach or as a competitor. Other coaches struggle with how to successfully motivate their competitors through interpersonal means, especially when trying to deal with issues of self-disclosure and privacy. Regardless of previous success or failure among coaches, an interpersonal approach to understanding motivation between coaches and competitors can significantly improve the relationship as well as the competitive success of the competitor.

Since coaches are always looking for more ways to successfully motivate their students, examining interpersonal relationships, particularly a coach’s self-disclosure, makes sense. After all, self-disclosure is a form of immediacy, which acts as predictor of increased motivation in educational settings (Christophel, 1990). Also in a competitive setting, Dunn and Holt (2004) found team members have an increased potential for enhanced motivation after disclosing to each other. Due to the fact that forensics is viewed as both educational and competitive, analyzing motivation in forensics through self-disclosure as a form of immediacy is an ideal approach. This interpersonal approach to forensic research is certainly called for. Although potentially beneficial, cross over in forensics research and interpersonal communication is less popular than other approaches (Kerber & Cronn-Mills, 2005), although attempts have been made at examining interpersonal relationships in forensics (Friedley, 1992; Schnoor & Green, 1989). Since there is little to no forensic literature that relates to coach self-disclosure in coach/competitor interpersonal relationships, it is critical to conduct an analysis of how coach self-disclosure and privacy relates to competitor motivation. Due to the lack of theoretically based strategies to assist coaches in using self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships with their competitors, coaches should have a resource that helps outline theoretically based suggestions on how to motivate competitors through the interpersonal relationships that develop between student and coach. The goal of this analysis is to provide approaches to how coaches can use interpersonal self-disclosures to motivate their students to reach whatever they determine to be their end goal. This paper looks to first review literature in the related fields, examine trends in navigating self-disclosure, and offer self-disclosure applications for forensic coaches to use in their interpersonal relationships with students. Initially, literature involving self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships will be addressed, followed by a review of literature involving immediacy and motivation through the lenses of forensics as education and forensics as competition.

Self-disclosure and Privacy

Similar to teachers, forensic coaches spend a large amount of time working with students, which can result in exchanging feelings and opinions with students. Brookfield (2006) argued
teacher self-disclosure makes them seem more real to students. Teachers can achieve this through self-disclosure of their personal identities to their students. However, studies show that teachers need to believe they have an interpersonal relationship with students before they grant access to their private lives (Hosek & Thompson, 2009). Teachers who want to connect to a student should work on their interpersonal relationship; relational development with students is imperative to be seen as more real to students (DeVito, 1986; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Graham, West, & Schaller, 1992). Viewing forensic coaches as educators with interpersonal relationships in which they self-disclose can help us explore how best to approach forensic competitor motivation.

When forensic coaches and competitors initially meet, there is not much disclosure, much like most relationships. Eventually, however, privacy often begins to break down and self-disclosure occurs more frequently. Roloff (1987) hypothesized that “as the degree of intimacy associated with a relationship increases, the extent to which individuals disclose their needs in response to their partner’s need assessment behavior increases” (p. 27); basically, as people get to know each other better they are more comfortable with disclosure. Roloff’s idea is what further encourages partners to openly disclose to each other so that the relationship grows. The levels of shared self-disclosure need to be understood between partners and implicitly agreed upon to build and maintain a healthy level of communication in the interpersonal relationship; otherwise, dissatisfaction in the relationship might occur which could ruin the relationship. Forensic coaches and students should be comfortable with the level of disclosure that happens between each other. Relationships that do not have a shared understanding of the level of accepted self-disclosure can end up dissolving.

Maintaining interpersonal relationships with students is important for a forensic coach that wishes to field a healthy, functioning team. As Floyd and Wasner (1994) noted, “commitment to an intimate relationship results directly from feeling satisfied and rewarded in the relationship and perceiving that desirable alternatives are not easily available” (p. 71). If forensic students do not feel their interpersonal needs are being met by the coach, they can often seek relationships elsewhere, which may result in the student leaving the team. Forensic coaches that want to have and maintain interpersonal relationships with students should consider the role of self-disclosure in their relationships.

Self-disclosure, however, can be tricky. As Hosek and Thompson (2009) found, disclosures for educators are often intended to help students understand a concept or to build closer interpersonal relationships with them. Coaches that wish to build close interpersonal relationships with students can self-disclose to help achieve a goal; any coach across the country can probably provide an example of a time where they shared something about themselves to a student to help that student either understand a concept or to bring them closer together interpersonally. Self-disclosure can be beneficial, but managing privacy boundaries can be difficult. Knowing when to stop disclosing is a vital skill for a forensic coach to have—without this skill, coaches may inadvertently share information that may not be appropriate for a relationship with a student. Similarly, a coach can have a student that discloses at an
uncomfortable level. Over-sharing can lead to discomfort in the relationship if the disclosure reciprocation is not the same from both parties, as mentioned earlier. Understanding how to negotiate and maintain coach/student privacy boundaries will increase the likelihood of the relationship flourishing, and thus increase motivational effectiveness.

Petronio (2002) addressed privacy boundaries with her communication privacy management (CPM) theory. CPM explores how individuals negotiate and manage openness and privacy in relationships, which is something directly tied to forensic coaches and their relationships with their students. CPM has five basic principles explaining how people regulate the disclosure or concealment of private information and manage privacy in their relationships (Petronio, 2002). Principle #1: private information is perceived to be owned by the individual; a person’s thoughts are their own and no one else’s. Principle #2: the sense of ownership creates a want to control the flow of private information to others; thus, a person can decide whether to share the thoughts to others or not. Principle #3: privacy rules govern sharing of information; we construct guidelines for when we do or do not share information about ourselves. Principle #4: once private information is shared there is an assumption that both parties will follow existing privacy rules. Principle #5: managing the disclosure of private thoughts can be turbulent. As Petronio (2007) noted, “turbulence characteristically occurs when there is a disruption in the coordination of privacy rules or when someone’s privacy boundary is blatantly violated—for instance, when an identity is stolen. Boundary turbulence often results in mistrust, anger, suspicion, or uncertainty about sharing private information” (p. 219). CPM offers a framework to view self-disclosure though. Understanding the steps of self-disclosure can give forensic coaches a lens to view their interpersonal relationships with students in an attempt to motivate them.

Forensic coaches often juggle their relationship with their students, trying to help the student learn but also attempting to be competitive. Burnett, Brand, and Meister (2003) argued that forensics is merely about competition with education in the activity is a perpetuated fantasy that coaches use to soften the blow that not everyone can win. Hinck (2003) countered by arguing that competition and education hold a dialectical tension with each other and both can exist in the community. Most compellingly, Ehninger (1952) wrote while forensics does involve competition, it is a co-curricular activity that is grounded in communication studies curriculum. Essentially, forensic coaches should be considered in both the educational and competitive contexts.

**Forensics as Education**

Forensic coaches deal with disclosure in coach/student interpersonal relationships, but it is not just a single interaction that coaches must worry about. Often, how a coach approaches interpersonal relationships is indicative of how the team culture is acted out. In the activity of competitive collegiate forensic speaking, team dynamics and structure can play a large role in the overall happiness of team members, and how coaches interact with the students is a significant contributor to the team dynamic. Forensic programs that develop and maintain positive team
cultures generally have team members for longer and members who are happier (Miller, 2005; Worthen, 1995). As Mankowski and Thomas (2000) and Johnson and Watson (2004) pointed out, students who can find a connection with a group tend to have higher retention rates in that group because of their ability to feel a part of the culture. The motivation of the competitor is then driven by the pull to remain a successful part of the team culture. Following this line of thinking, the assumption that some forensic coaches have is that there is a positive correlation between level of motivation and the closeness of the interpersonal relationship between coach and competitor.

Bennetts (2002) found intimacy to be viewed positively and acknowledged as important to the mentoring relationship. It makes sense to conclude then, that many competitors who are actively engaged in the activity enjoy having close interpersonal relationships with their coaches. Friedley & Manchester (2005) noted that healthy team cultures need mutual respect to succeed; interpersonal relationships between forensic coaches and competitors are no different. Mutual respect and a sense of closeness in an interpersonal relationship are speculated to contribute to the effectiveness of motivational overtures.

As mentioned before, forensic coaches address both educational and competitive goals in a coach/student relationship. As an educator, coaches should embrace interpersonal means that bring a sense of immediacy to the relationship. Students benefit from a positive relationship with their instructor (Frymier, 2007) and can be motivated by simple immediate behaviors (displays of immediacy) such as public recognition (Elmer, 2004). While forensic coaches act as educators (Hinck, 2003), inside that role is often the role of mentor (White, 2005). Bennetts (2002) defined mentoring relationships, such as one involving a forensic coach/student, as "intimate learning alliances that happen naturally" (p. 155). This seems to reflect how many collegiate forensic coaches and students build interpersonal relationships; the relationships develop out of circumstance, but the depth of the relationship is developed with a more organic process. Regardless, coaches attempt to help their competitors any way possible. As White (2005) pointed out, “the coach as mentor seeks to guide the student to success in all aspects of life” (p. 89). Again, a level of immediacy is shared between the coach and student, which acts as predictor of increased motivation in educational settings (Christophel, 1990).

Instructional communication continues to add to the argument for close interpersonal relationships with students to boost motivation by suggesting educator self-disclosure can lead to an increase in non-mandatory time spent with the educator. For example, Fusani (1994) found teacher self-disclosure attempts (high verbal immediacy behaviors) to be a strong predictor for extra class communication (ECC), which is when students interact with their teacher outside of the classroom setting. For forensic students, interacting with their coaches outside of standard coaching appointments is often the norm. Nadler and Nadler (2000) noted, however, that ECC is not a regular occurrence for undergraduate college students. By seeking out communication with teachers, students demonstrate motivation to become better students. If a forensic student spends non-coaching time with a coach, it can demonstrate that the student enjoys the coach and has a close interpersonal relationship, thus potentially increasing the student’s motivation. The greater
Immediate behavior would seem to indicate more extra class communication initiated by the student, which is an indicator of student motivation to be a better student. Essentially, forensic students that spend more time with their coaches would seem to have a greater chance to be motivated due to the immediacy demonstrated by their coach in that interpersonal relationship. This is another example where immediate behaviors in an educational setting are linked to motivation.

Instructional communication studies show that by creating a positive rapport and classroom atmosphere with students, teachers can boost student motivation for educational purposes (Christophel, 1990; Frisby & Myers 2008; Meyer, 2009). These studies suggest that there is a positive correlation between teacher immediacy and student motivation. By understanding the interpersonal relationship they have with their competitors, coaches can assist in the motivational effectiveness of their interpersonal relationship. Additionally, Downs, Javaldi, & Nussbaum (1988) noted self-disclosure can be viewed as a form of immediacy, making self-disclosure a potentially valuable motivational tool in the educational process. However, the forensic coach/competitor relationship often goes deeper than merely an instructional setting (Hinck, 2003), which is why when examining the impact of showing immediate behaviors and sharing private information, competitive coaching studies need to be examined.

**Forensics as Competition**

Coaches of all types stand to influence competitors considerably by filling a leadership position that encapsulates both support and instruction (Smith & Smoll, 1990; Turman, 2001; Turman & Schrodt, 2004; Zhang & Jenson, 1997). Coaching can involve educational approaches, but the main focus of coaching is competitive success. The dialectical tension between education and competition in forensics is evident, so the focus shifts from education to competition.

Examining immediacy starting at the team level, Turman (2008) found that a coach’s verbal immediacy is a “significant predictor for athlete satisfaction, task and social attraction to the group, and social group integration” (p. 173). In the study, Turman concluded that coaches’ attempts to build team cohesion are further enhanced when coaches talk with athletes about issues beyond the sport and discuss these non-sport related things with them before and after practices or games, demonstrating that immediacy is a part of competition as well as education. Further, Turman and Schrodt (2004) concluded that athletes have higher affective learning when coaches are open to suggestions. More importantly, supportive feedback from coaches can lead to greater team cohesion and intrinsic motivation (Horn, 1985; Horn, 2002; Smith, Fry, Ethington, & Li, 2005) and self-disclosure increases motivation on teams (Dunn & Holt, 2004). As Turman (2008) argued, immediate verbal interaction between the coach and athlete may lead to higher levels of athlete satisfaction and cohesion, and potentially increasing motivation. The
literature seems to suggest coaches can increase motivation on competitive teams through immediacy.

Verbal immediacy may be more effective in motivating competitors than nonverbal immediacy. Even though nonverbal immediacy behaviors have been shown to motivate students (Christensen & Menzel, 1998), Turman (2008) found that nonverbal immediacy techniques, while effective in educational settings, may not be as effective for coaches who wish to build cohesion with competitors. Turman’s findings are not surprising as many studies confirm positive verbal behavior as increasing motivation among athletes. For example, coaches using messages that are positively reinforcing and encouraging can lead to higher self-esteem among their players (Smoll, Smith, Barnett, & Everett, 1993). Behavior alteration techniques are commonly used among coaches as well, with many effective results. Martin, Rocca, Cayanus, and Weber (2009) found that athletes reported when coaches encouraged them with immediate reward from behavior (e.g. “you will find it rewarding”) and encouraged them with self-esteem reminders (e.g. “you feel better about yourself if you work hard”), the athletes felt greatly motivated.

Immediate behavior in forensic coaches is seen nonverbally and verbally as they look to build interpersonal relationships with their competitors to increase their motivational prowess. Viewing coaches as mentors, White (2005) argued, “The friendship approach to mentoring views mentor and mentee as peers who are equals. There is no hierarchical distance between the involved parties. Mentor and mentee view each other as close friends without the presence of any professional distance” (p. 90). White claimed one of the main advantages of this approach to be that intense trust is established through high levels of intimacy. Many forensic coaches perform their tasks with this mentality; as Friedley (1992) argued about the coach/competitor dynamic, “the very nature of the dyadic relationship, a joint effort focused toward creating a product, lends itself to reciprocity” (p. 54), with coaches and competitors disclosing more private information as the relationship deepens. For forensic coaches, successfully managing self-disclosure and privacy in their interpersonal relationships with competitors may lead to greater motivational gains.

For instance, the close interpersonal relationships that can develop on a competitive team are highly encouraged by scholars, with Yukelson (1997) advocating that all teams should actively promote mutual understanding team building programs to increase the feeling of togetherness. Dunn and Holt (2004) found that self-disclosure can act as a positive enhancement of interpersonal connection between team members, bringing them closer together—2/3 of the participants in the study reported increased motivation to work harder for the team after a disclosing session. Forensic coaches can use exchanged self-disclosure as a way to motivate their students.
Trends

Forensic coaches can focus on education and/or competition, but motivation can be generated either way by displaying immediate behaviors. Nonverbally immediate behaviors include making oneself physically available to chat, gestures or touching that demonstrate positive feelings toward the other person, as well as instances that involve time use or proximity. Verbally immediate behaviors include talking about feelings, sharing words of encouragement, or even providing clear instructions. A teacher might attempt immediate behavior by encouraging students to come in during office hours to discuss or work on something, thus showing effort on the teacher’s part to be closer to the student with outside of class attempts at immediacy. A teacher could also work to develop immediacy with his/her students by giving instructions for an assignment that are clear and concise. A sports coach might engage in the physical nature of practice, perhaps joining the competitors during drills or simply words of encouragement during practices and games to bring a psychological closeness with the competitors.

Self-disclosure also fits into the verbal immediacy category as the use of self-disclosure and narratives has been shown to increase immediacy (Downs, Javaldi, & Nussbaum, 1988). However, self-disclosure itself does not promise immediacy in the relationship. At first glance, it may appear that being immediate is an easy task. However, we need to dispel the assumption that any attempt at immediacy, including self-disclosure, is inherently immediate. While immediate behaviors increase the psychological closeness with another person, self-disclosure may not automatically do this. As outlined with CPM, Petronio (2002) argued that disclosure can lead to turbulence which may or may not be resolved. Essentially, we must call into question the assumption of immediate competence with self-disclosure or, in other words, the belief that all coaches that self-disclose successfully achieve a closer interpersonal relationship with their students. Motivational success, or even gained immediacy, is not guaranteed if a person self-discloses. When attempting to build immediacy, forensic coaches should keep in mind the complication of navigating self-disclosure. To understand the boundaries of self-disclosure, we need to practically explain the theoretical connection between forensic coaches and CPM.

Navigating self-disclosure

It is important to note that this is not a remote phenomenon: educators in our society do use self-disclosure as a means to connect to students (Zhang, Shi, & Hao, 2009) and many make it a goal to have informal relationships with their students (Lee Grove, 1984). Self-disclosure is also used to motivate in a competitive setting (Dunn and Holt, 2004). When forensic coaches self-disclose, they need to be aware of how best to handle the situation; communication privacy management theory offers a framework.

To make sure self-disclosure is effective as a motivational tool, forensic coaches need to be conscious of immediacy when self-disclosing. Essentially, forensic coaches should be aware
of how the disclosure process works to make sure turbulence in the process does not occur, and if it does, how to best handle it. Petronio (2002) offers CPM as a lens to view self-disclosure, and forensic coaches should consider Petronio’s theory when attempting to motivate through self-disclosure.

Petronio’s first principle in CPM argues that a person’s thoughts are their own and no one else’s. Before forensic coaches self-disclose to students, coaches need to be aware that the student may not be thinking the same thing; whether that is the topic or the appropriateness of the situation, a self-discloser cannot assume that the other person is fully aware of the intention of the disclosure, nor can they assume the other person is comfortable with the topic breached in the disclosure. Essentially, a self-disclosing coach needs to be sure a student is on the same page as them. Disclosing personal feelings about a specific subject when the other person is not thinking about or aware of the subject can lead to ineffective self-disclosure as immediate behavior, thus losing its motivational effectiveness.

Petronio’s second principle states a person wants to control if or when they get to disclose their thoughts. Once a thought is determined to be potentially unique, a coach must choose if/when they want to share the thought. If a student is thinking similar thoughts, perhaps an analogous disclosure from a coach might be appropriate. However, if the coach does not want to share, nothing will happen. Due to the power structure of a forensic team, where the student is the subordinate, a coach may feel as if they have less to worry about by self-disclosing. Despite the hierarchal structure of teams, many coaches wish to share information about themselves on their own timeline. If something is extremely personal to a coach, he/she might not want to share it initially in the relationship. Controlling if and when to disclose personal thoughts can be precarious and if done improperly can lead to turbulence and maybe even a termination of the relationship.

The student needs to be ready to hear the disclosure from the coach. Trust must be established between the two people; otherwise, the disclosure might be too much for the relationship to handle. Not only must the coach trust the student when self-disclosing, but the student must trust the coach enough to hear what the coach has to say and not only not take offense to the disclosure but be brought psychologically closer to the coach.

Petronio’s third principle states there are rules that govern self-disclosing. Forensic coaches and students understand there are rules that guide how interactions are supposed to take place; these rules are not carved in stone for every coach/student interpersonal relationship, but much like any interpersonal relationship (or solutions in a persuasive speech) the rules are constructed from three frames: institutional, societal, and personal.

**Institutional:** Rules and norms govern how people interact and disclose. For a forensic coach who deals with undergraduate students, there is a specific code of conduct that he/she must adhere to. Where a person works highly influences their interpersonal relationships. Many higher education institutions have specific guidelines as to how to interact with undergraduate students, particularly if they are not legally adults. These rules are typically clearly laid out for coaches to
know and follow—students may not be aware of these rules, although the guidelines are often made publicly available.

**Societal:** Society has also laid out rules that shape how people interact with each other. Forensic coaches should be aware of the expectations that society has about their specific interpersonal relationship, particularly with what is appropriate to share in regards to their professional position and age difference to the student. What a graduate student in his/her twenties discloses with an undergraduate student can have different societal acceptance than what a faculty member might disclose to the same student.

**Personal:** Guidelines for disclosure are also defined by personal means. Each person has their own set of rules that govern how they disclose. Each person might also have different rules for different relationships. Likewise, each relationship must develop its own set of rules to govern self-disclosure. Much like the societal rules (and unlike the institutional rules), there is nothing written down for the personal guidelines, merely an implicit knowledge.

Petronio’s fourth principle is that once information is shared there is an assumption that both parties will follow existing privacy rules. With self-disclosure there is an assumption that the coach and student know how to behave, but as previously mentioned most rules that govern how to behave during self-disclosure are not explicit. The implicit nature of self-disclosure rules makes it difficult for coaches and students to successfully navigate a self-disclosing scenario. When self-disclosing, a forensic coach and student must have an understanding of the rules involved, including how to react to the disclosure as well as how to deal with it afterwards. Problems arise when either of the members of the disclosure exchange does not follow the same set of understood privacy rules. A violation can occur through disregard for established rules or through ignorance of a differing set of rules between the two parties. As with Petronio’s first principle, a self-disclosing party cannot assume that the other person is on the same page. To avoid turbulence, both parties must be in sync. Self-disclosing without generating much conflict is something that happens frequently, but there are times when privacy rules do not align within the interpersonal relationship—this leads into Petronio’s communication privacy management final principle.

Petronio’s fifth principle is that managing the disclosure of private thoughts can be turbulent. Turbulence can indeed occur, and managing it can be a struggle for some coaches and students. If there is some significant misunderstanding of the privacy rules, conflict can arise, which directly diverts from the goal of being motivational through immediate behaviors; if there is conflict between a coach and student, it is less likely that a coach will be able to successfully motivate the student.

**Application**

When self-disclosing in an attempt to build immediacy to motivate, forensic coaches should keep immediate behaviors in mind. Due to the lack of widespread forensic pedagogical training, self-disclosure cannot be formally integrated into coaching philosophies. Hopefully,
however, coaches can spread the effectiveness of their self-disclosures through word of mouth. To motivate students, forensic coaches can self-disclose as an attempted form of immediate behavior, but should take heed of the following suggestions offered:

I) Disclose on an escalating scale

From the very first moment a new member approaches a coach to potentially join the forensic team the coach needs to be on his/her guard. Disclosing too much early in a relationship may jeopardize the integrity of the relationship. If the novice and the coach have no established relationship, the interpersonal privacy rules have had no time to solidify, which means the entirety of the disclosure would be judged by institutional and societal rules. While it is true that it is up to the coach to make the decision if the relationship is ready for a particular type of disclosure, novices rarely are familiar enough with the coach right away to understand the coach’s personal privacy rules. Further, the forensic context (perhaps even the specific team) provides another layer of societal rules, where the team or activity acts as a subculture with its own set of expectations. By definition, the novice has little or no knowledge of the culture’s norms and would be blinded in a second privacy rule category. Essentially, novices do not have enough information and experience to properly handle and sufficiently process high-end self-disclosures from forensic coaches. The disclosures would end up either pushing novices away or the novices (without a frame to work with) would not experience the full impact of the potential immediate connection and would be less inclined to be motivated by said disclosure. Coaches need to be aware that novices may not handle self-disclosure as well as coaches might assume.

Interpersonal relationships that have been around for a while may be ready for more intimate disclosures and may be more capable of handling a privacy expectation breach and weathering the turbulence. Veteran members of the forensic team/community are better equipped to experience the immediate behavior and be motivated from the disclosure because of their familiarity with the societal and personal privacy rule expectations. Additionally, because of their familiarity with the coach, veteran students might be willing to forgive and/or ride out interpersonal turbulence because of the history and investment in the relationship.

Coaches should feel free to share what they feel comfortable with, but remember that not all members will feel the same impact. Self-disclosing to the team in a large group setting can help students get more familiar with the coach’s personal privacy rule expectations. When self-disclosing in a large team setting, the coach cannot possibly tailor the disclosure to each student, meaning the impact of the disclosure will potentially have less of an impact if certain members do not understand the assumed set privacy rules. In the group setting, a good way to help elevate the problem of varying perspectives on privacy rules is to explicitly state the intentions of the disclosure scenario. For example, before allowing each member on the team to say something at a pre-nationals retreat, the coach might lay some ground rules such as “what is said here, stays here,” “one person talking at a time”, and “respect what everyone has to say” as well as reminding students that this may get emotional. By framing the situation, the coach can
effectively set up all group members with the same disclosure rules and expectations, thus familiarizing students with the coach’s personal privacy rule expectations and increasing motivational effectiveness.

2) *Stay consistent with disclosures*

The problem with privacy rules is that often they are implicit. Personal and societal rules are not written down, which makes it difficult to determine the rules for a newcomer to the forensic culture or the interpersonal relationship. Coaches need to stay consistent with their disclosures to make the privacy rules somewhat explicit. Self-disclosure should be performed in ways that are repeatable by the coach. For example, a coach may self-disclose frequently or infrequently. The frequently disclosing coach may do so during coaching appointments, eating lunch, on van rides, or during team meetings. The infrequent disclosing coach may only self-disclose during highly emotional moments such as team reflective periods or farewell addresses. By being consistent, a coach (regardless of how often they self-disclose) can increase the chance that students will know what to expect from them. Of course, if the level of self-disclosure is dissatisfying to the student, steps should be taken to find a middle ground where both members of the relationship feel comfortable with the disclosure. Once comfort is reached in the relationship, coaches should aim for consistency.

Not only does consistent self-disclosure clarify expectations, the expectations can then be passed on through team members. When novices join the team they learn about the team and the coaches through storytelling. Veteran members of the team can pass on stories about and advice on how to deal with the coaches. By maintaining consistency, a coach can not only clarify personal privacy rules for his/her current team, but also for team members in the future.

3) *Self-disclose with immediacy in mind*

Part of what makes self-disclosure sometimes ineffective is that the intent often is not interpersonally focused. The goal of self-disclosure should be to grow psychologically closer to the other person. While it is true that immediate behaviors can increase motivation, and if you are in need of motivational tools self-disclosure might be a good bet, we must recognize that interpersonal relationships benefiting from self-disclosure is a fine achievement in itself.

To successfully motivate with self-disclosure, immediacy must be kept at the forefront of the action. Many coaches (especially young coaches) enjoy telling “war stories” about their days of competing; these self-disclosures must serve the purpose of bringing the two people closer together. If the outcome of the story is merely for entertainment and not to increase immediacy, motivational gains are less likely to be achieved. Keeping in mind how the student benefits from self-disclosure is imperative if a coach wishes to motivate them. Demonstrating that the self-disclosure is a caring act by the coach, and not merely a vainglorious demonstration, is critical to maintain immediacy; as instructional communication studies have shown, perceived caring can
boost student motivation (Frisby & Myers, 2008; Meyer, 2009). To show caring with self-disclosing, coaches can do a number of things:

- Select disclosures that directly relate to the interpersonal relationship with the student.
- Maintain positive nonverbal immediacy while disclosing, such as eye contact, physical closeness, and smiling.
- Monitor verbal and nonverbal feedback to determine if the student is feeling turbulent.

By keeping the focus on immediate behaviors with the benefit of the student in mind, coaches can effectively use self-disclosure as a motivational tool.

**Conclusion**

The potential benefits from increased immediacy between coach and competitors has been made apparent, with coaches, competitors, and the activity as a whole gaining another tool to increase the chances of reaching educational and competitive goals. Additionally, while this paper has addressed forensic activity as educational and competitive it has failed to mention another important element to why many students compete in, and why many coaches stay in, forensics: the friendships that develop with peers. Motivating students to work harder in the activity is a noble goal, but many students’ and coaches’ primary goal is to maintain positive interpersonal relationships in the forensic community. Self-disclosing can increase immediacy to help the quality of a team’s interpersonal relationships, effectively making coaches and students better friends. Perhaps an increase in immediate behavior will lead to a more inclusive forensic culture that, at times, is criticized as being difficult to access for outsiders.

It is also important to recognize that this approach to motivation looks at the interpersonal relationship as a one-way street, with the coach motivating the student through personal actions. This approach does not recognize other variables might motivate the student and that the interpersonal relationship between the coach and student might influence the coach as well. Further examination of both motivational techniques and interpersonal relationships in forensics would be an excellent avenue for continuing to understand human communication and the activity of competitive forensic speaking.

**References**


Collaborative Theatre/Creative Process

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ABSTRACT
Theatre production is a collaborative creative activity. Recent theory and research into group creativity recognizes the relationships between individuals, groups, and the contexts in which creativity emerges. It also suggests that between the interactive creative processes of the collaborators and their work, the work itself becomes a kind of creative entity. In this essay, I explain how all creativity is now seen as collaboration, outline this process, and illustrate the differences between seeing theatre as an aggregate, collective activity and the more integrated view, in which the process is synergistically collaborative. An understanding of the cognitive and behavioral processes of group creativity can enhance and facilitate any creative work, making it valuable to the field of theatre, not only for the director, who is primarily responsible for the process, but to anyone working on a production.

It seems clichéd to say that theatrical production is a collaborative creative process. It is clearly manifested through a community made up of theatre practitioners and their public rather than through any single individual. But what do we really mean by “collaborative?” Is this simply a collective activity or something more synergistic? And what do we mean by “creative process?” Is that the same thing as the process of production? Some might say that theatre production is interpretive, not creative; that the playwright alone is creative. Others might say that in a “director’s theatre” everyone, including the play, serves the director’s “vision” of the play. Actually, when examined in light of research into the cognitive and behavioral processes of creativity, not only are the terminology and questions clarified, but the answers are also far less subjective than one might expect. These answers point to two fundamental ideas: First, there is a cognitive and behavioral process of creativity that we all share as human beings; it is the same, though flexible, for all of us. Secondly, all creativity is collaborative. That is, no one individual is ever solely the originator of a creative work, because all creative work draws on a multiplicity of sources, a multiplicity of contributors who interact, either directly or indirectly, with both the creator(s) and the creative work itself.

Research into creativity generally and group process specifically indicates that, as Frank Barron puts it, “The lone creator is an insufficient metaphor. All creativity is a collaboration” (59). In a group activity like theatre production, one expects that a creative process is operating for every individual involved, and operating simultaneously. Every individual involved is both creative and interpretive, artist and craftsman. At the group level however, there is more to it.
The process that takes place in creating a work of theatre is not only “social” in the popular sense of the word, it is also organically synergistic, and well beyond the control of any isolated individual (even the director). By distinguishing “creative process” from the “rehearsal and production process,” and then comparing them, an understanding of the dynamics of theatrical collaboration begins to emerge that sheds light on what is actually going on in both processes combined. Awareness of how this collaborative process works can be extremely useful for anybody working in the field, not only for the stage director who is responsible for negotiating and facilitating that process, but to anyone working on a production. How that understanding is specifically applied to playwriting, design, rehearsal, and production practices will depend of course on the circumstances of the production and the practices of the individuals and groups involved. Nevertheless, being able to recognize the organic stages of this natural process – and seeing how they integrate (or don’t) with the production – will enable companies to apply them to what they are doing and to make adjustments when necessary, thereby facilitating and enhancing the work.

This essay outlines the creative process, first in a simplified, linear, individual way, and then by expanding it to a collaborative group process and demonstrating that it interacts with the broader field and culture of which it is a part. This will illustrate why we need to recognize theatrical collaboration as truly synergistic rather than simply as an aggregate creative activity, a group of individuals working at the same time on the same creative project. It is an activity in which each of the participants engages not only their own creative process and the processes of their collaborators, but they also engage their cultural, social, and professional contexts as well. Finally, the essay attempts to explain how, from a psychoanalytical perspective, theatrical collaborators are also interacting with the personality of the emerging production itself. The artwork as collaborator is not simply a personification or metaphor here. Not only is creative theatrical activity a synergistic activity among individuals, but looked at psychoanalytically, the emerging artwork has itself begun to function like another person, a creature in dialogue with the personality of the creative system.

The Creative Process

Before we can grasp the complexities of the collaborative group process, it will be instructive to look at a simplified linear explanation of that process. One of the earliest formulations was by Graham Wallas, who in 1926 theorized a simple four-stage process of preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification (41). By 1950, researcher J. P. Guilford had observed that “in the writings of those who have attempted to give a generalized picture of creative behavior, there is considerable agreement that the complete creative act involves four important steps” (451). Over the years, similar outlines of this process have been described in various numbers of stages. Though they may be characterized by different names, or elaborated in slightly different ways, by now there is considerable agreement about the actual stages of that process. And although it makes the process easier to understand initially, keep in mind that this is
really an oversimplification. The beginning of one process often proceeds directly from another, stages may overlap or even happen simultaneously, and the overall process seems to operate more like an organism than a linear rationality. In the same way that cell division and differentiation happen in an orderly way in an organism, this process, though multifaceted, also happens in an orderly way.

When applying it to the organism we call theatre production, it can be helpful to distinguish between the theatrical production process – what most theatre people mean when they talk about their “creative process” – and what creativity researchers and theorists refer to as the creative process, the cognitive and behavioral activity by which creative solutions to problems are achieved. When the two processes are compared, one can see that there are already similarities between traditional approaches to theatre work, for example in stage directing and production design as shown below, and the creative process as explained by researchers. When seen in the light of the creative process, the various approaches to production process can be understood in new ways.

The basic creative process of four stages first put forth by Wallas has been very simply stated by Harold Rugg this way:

First, a preparatory conscious period of baffled struggle; second, an interlude in which the worker apparently gives up, pushes the problem back or down or 'out of mind' – more properly into another compartment of 'mind' – leaving it for the unconscious to work upon; third, a sudden and unexpected 'flash of insight,' coming with such certitude that a logical statement of it can be immediately prepared; fourth, a period of verification, critical testing, and reconstruction. (6)

It is interesting to note that Dean and Carra, in their textbook, Fundamentals of Stage Directing, outline four periods of work in the traditional rehearsal process: study, blocking, enrichment, and verification (293). While this organization of the theatrical process skips over the second “unconscious” stage mentioned by Rugg (“incubation” in Wallas), their rehearsal process can be easily compared to his first, third, and especially fourth stages: the first being that of study, the third resulting in blocking and enrichment, and the fourth continuing the enrichment, testing, and reconstruction (when necessary) through verification.

In 1952 Brewster Ghiselin elaborated a seven-phase model in a more detailed way. The phases are comprehensive enough to include other formulations, detailed enough to account for gradations of experience and activity within that process, and more accessible in relation to theatrical production. They are explained more completely here to clarify what each one is. These seven phases are:

1. Impulse: “Creation begins typically with a vague, even confused excitement, some sort of yearning, hunch or other preverbal intimation of approaching or potential resolution” (14) to a perceived problem. This can be compared to the idea or desire for a play or production and the first formulations of a production concept. In fact, problem finding and problem stating are important keys to this part of the process. Ghiselin quotes playwright Anton Chekhov as saying
that "...to deny that artistic creation involves problems and purposes would be to admit that an artist creates without premeditation, without design, under a spell" (6).

2. Preliminary Labor and Preparation: This phase involves organizing, structuring, and researching the problem (the staging of a play or production idea). "The creative person," wrote Donald MacKinnon, "is one who in his intellectual endeavors reconciles the opposites of expert knowledge and the childlike wonder of naïve and fresh perception" (253). To do this, one needs preparation. MacKinnon also observed that either too little or too much information can hamper "the attainment of a creative solution" (253).

3. Incubation: Ghiselin calls this "the creative process in its unconscious action" (20). In this phase, further progress may be delayed for some time. This can be difficult when the search for a creative solution, either individually or in a group, is on a schedule. It is one area where awareness of process can be especially helpful. To recognize this phase when it presents itself and know what to do about it can both facilitate the work and reduce anxiety. Here one needs to trust the process, to have the courage to let it work. Researchers Dacey and Lennon caution, "In this stage, gathering more information or mulling over the problem further will prove counterproductive. Efforts to solve the problem must be abandoned and allowed to sink into the unconscious mind" (35). What can be done? Rudyard Kipling gave this advice: "Drift, wait, and obey" (Ghiselin 85). Research shows that the best approach is mental relaxation, especially in relation to the problem, with a certain amount of physical exercise. Eventually and often without warning the solution or the insight appears.

4. Intuition: In this phase, intimation on the fringe of consciousness alerts us that illumination may be imminent. "What is necessary, says Ghiselin, "is to be able to look into the wings where the action is not yet organized, and to feel the importance of what is happening off stage...." "Spontaneity is common," he notes, "but what is given is usually far from complete. Commonly the new element appears simultaneously with some such vague intimation of further development" (5). He describes this creative impulse as "the disturbance at the surface of the water which betokens activity beneath" (10). This is still a phase that requires some patience.

5. Inspiration or Illumination: Here is the sudden insight, idea, solution, or relationship so often referred to as a "light bulb moment." Rudolph Arnheim observes that many artists through the ages have "preferred to think of themselves as the instrument rather than the player" (285). This is often a symptom of the inspiration/illumination phase. It is important to point out as Ghiselin does that "one can save oneself much trouble by recognizing the limitations of the will in creation" (16). He cites general agreement on this, from "Picasso to John Dewey," concluding that "Will belongs to the conscious life only. It is effective in attaining objects in view, but it cannot enable us to move in directions that have not yet been discovered" (17). He cautions that "this is not to be taken as evidence that planning is detrimental, but only that plan must not be enforced by will. Plan must come as a part of the organic development of a project, either before the details are determined, which is more convenient, or in the midst of their production, which is sometimes confusing" (17). Plan for it; build some flexibility into your rehearsal schedule.
6. **Organic Development:** Here craft and work are applied in collaboration with the emerging ideas, insights, and associations. Here the varieties of approaches to production that characterize contemporary theatre are all accommodated within the same human creative process. Obviously important to the work itself, it is even more important to creativity than one might think. Beyond the phase of incubation, the process must, as Ghiselin puts it, “crystallize in terms of some medium in which the worker is adept. Without craft, it will escape” (25).

7. **Verification, Correction, or Revision:** Largely conscious, this is a process of testing, refining, and consolidating. This is traditionally facilitated in theatre with run-throughs or the addition of various production elements like props, costumes, sound, etc. It is the second of two predominately conscious phases in the process cited by Ghiselin, the other having been the preparation phase. Once the application of the craft begins to give shape and substance to the work, "management of the medium becomes more complex and the technical processes merge indissolubly with the creative process" (18). The emerging production, the result of organic development, "begins to be guided by a sense of sufficiency or insufficiency in formulating insights and attitudes” (18).

Again, in theatrical terms, compare this seven-phase approach to the design process outlined by J. Michael Gillette in his textbook *Theatrical Design and Production*: commitment, analysis, research, incubation, selection, implementation, and evaluation (21). While Ghiselin’s “intuition” and “illumination” are assumed in Gillette’s “selection” phase, Gillette’s “selection and implementation” fall into Ghiselin’s “organic development.” The different purpose of each outline accounts for the slight differences, but the comparison helps clarify the creative nature of the design process.

Obviously there are many approaches to theatrical production. There are some, like those just mentioned, that are firmly rooted in traditional modern methods, others that are much more contemporary or experimental. Whether the approach is collective, collaborative, or autocratic however, the actual process of creativity, the cognitive and behavioral human process that takes place in the creation of a work of theatre, is the same. As a group process it is also organically interactive in ways that are functionally beyond the control of any isolated individual. It functions because the individuals do. The understanding of the creative process outlined above was originally formulated in relation to individual creativity. It can also be applied to social or group creativity. In order to do so, the characteristics of the creative group need to be considered.

**The Creative Group**

In the introduction to their edited volume *Group Creativity: Innovation Through Collaboration*, Paul Paulus and Bernard Nijstad observe that “Most research and writing on creativity has focused on individual creativity, the ‘lone genius,’ with little recognition of the social and group factors that influence the creative process” (3). During at least the last fifteen years, however, there has been a growing interest and research in what is referred to as either
group or social creativity (e.g. Sawyer 2007; Uzzi and Spiro 2005; Paulus and Nijstad 2003; Montuori and Purser 1999; Purser and Montuori, 1999; Amabile 1983, 1996). As early as the 1994 update to her 1983 study, *Creativity in Context*, Teresa Amabile notes in relation to the emergence of literature on the subject that “it appears that the case for a social psychology of creativity has been made successfully” (16). Studies in this area have also been applied to stage performances in theatre, music, dance, and improvisational theatre by people like R. K. Sawyer (1997, 2003, 2007).

In relation to traditional professional theatre methods, an evolving systems case study (a method put forth by Gruber and Wallace in 1999) of the collaborative creative process was conducted in 2000 at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Oregon (Bickerstaff) utilizing a DIFI (domain-individual-field interaction) framework suggested by Feldman, Csikszentmihályi and Gardener. It found that the processes and creative activities of the theatre company, at the individual, group, and organizational levels, were consistent with findings and theories about the creative process, but that something more complex was taking place in rehearsal and production at the group level. On the surface, this group process can simply appear to be social interaction that exerts influence on the individual creative processes that are done collectively. On closer examination however, the group as a group has characteristics beyond the individuals involved and proceeds organically through its own creative process as well. Taking the individual creative process to the group level raises questions about the interaction of those processes and about the group process as well. Is group creativity simply collective or is it actually collaborative, truly synergistic, originating and developing from a confluence of individual sources? Some in the field of theatre might say collaboration depends on the individuals; sometimes theatre activity seems more collaborative than at others. It seems less collaborative when old autocratic approaches are used and more so when a group of peers are working openly and organically to “solve” a production. In fact, our use of the word “collaboration” often reflects that assumption, but even that assumption skirts the original question.

Peter Hall, in his 1999 book *The Necessary Theatre*, makes the observation that “In this century, the theatre has become more and more a collective activity” (46). Acknowledging changes in the role of the stage director, he recognizes that it is “the spontaneous work done on the hoof which is creative,” and that “how that text is expressed is always a matter of spontaneous group creation” (48). In fact, describing “the organic process” of theatrical work he asserts that “work based on collaboration and consensus... must surely make a return to autocratic ways impossible” (50-51). Cognitive research in this area, from a wide variety of approaches, combined with emergent theoretical assumptions, theatre practices, and experience in the field, points to a collaborative, synergistic process that includes, yet functions beyond the individual. It is a process that engages and synthesizes individual processes into a holistic creative activity, what Keith Sawyer calls “group genius” (Creativity in Performance ix). As Charles Marowitz noted in *The Other Way*, after a stage director works with the same actors for an extended period of time, “a group intelligence is engendered which becomes greater than the director’s and actor’s intelligence combined” (224). This “group intelligence” is characteristic of
true collaboration and symptomatic of group creativity. Beyond understanding the individual creative process and the collaborative nature of the creative group, it is important to understand that “all creativity is a collaboration” (Barron 59). One way to understand the synergy of collaboration is through the intersection of contemporary literary theory and creativity research.

The Creative Collaboration

As noted earlier (The Creative Group), traditional western approaches viewed creativity through the individual while current study and emerging theory recognizes the inherently social nature of creativity. Two important theoretical works that do so, one by James Ogilvy, the other by Frank Barrett, challenge the assumptions of individualism that underlie the focus on the individual in early creativity research. As Ogilvy stated, “Maybe we need to decouple our concepts of creativity and individualistic genius” (220). He demonstrates this “decoupling” in his essay through deconstructionism, scientific studies of intelligence, Jungian psychology, and philosophy. Barrett lays out a very clear explanation of the social “dialogic” nature of knowledge creation from a constructionist perspective, extending it to “activities such as thinking and creativity” (Barrett 133). He begins by observing that “postmodern critiques have challenged the accepted centrality of the individual subject. Even the notion of individual authorship of ideas and books has been undermined” (133). Ultimately he concludes, “the constructionist perspective, in proposing that knowledge is a relationally embedded activity, allows us to see how our daily lives are shaped by dialogic interaction and the immensely creative power of language to configure and fashion our activities” (149). Foucault, for example, places what he calls the “author function” within a cultural discourse “depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse” (118). These understandings of the collaborative nature of creativity then go beyond attributing what was formerly considered an individual function to a group of individuals. Instead, the group and its individuals participate in a creative synergy within a larger context.

In relation to theatrical activity, an essay by Roland Barthes may serve as an appropriate analogy for the synergy of group collaboration in that larger context when he speaks of the “death of the author.” Not only is theatrical creation in this comparison beyond the level of the individual, it is beyond the authorship of the group as well. “We know now that a text consists not of a line of words, releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God), but of a multi-dimensional space in which are married and contested several writings, none of which is original: the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture” (Barthes 52-53). Any act of writing is a result of more than a single author or artist; it is really the result of social processes, cultural influences, and works of numerous others, including the “reader” (audience), “a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture” (Barthes 53). If we were to think of the collaborative theatrical process as a kind of “writing,” resulting in a performative text, then in any act of theatre, as with any act of writing, the “text”
that we see and hear is also attributable to the work and influence of numerous others, even to others beyond the immediate collaboration of that production and its audience.

Closer to the immediate experience of the group and within that much broader cultural and historical context, there is a creative system that exerts influences on the synergy of the group and its individuals before and during the process. The creative group that is aware of that system and its influences can more adequately integrate it into the process. An examination of this system demonstrates the dynamics of the group’s engagement with their cultural, social, and professional contexts.

The Creative System

A multiple-perspective framework for the study of creativity developed by Feldman, Csikszentmihályi, and Gardener describes the interrelation of individuals, fields, and domains throughout the creative process. “Domain” in this context is defined as “the formally organized body of knowledge that is associated with a given field” (20). In a separate essay, Csikszentmihályi further defines a domain as “any symbolic system that has a set of rules for representing thought and action” (Domain of Creativity 153). The discrete domain that is theatre is likewise “made up of its own symbolic elements, its own rules, and generally has its own system of notation” (Csikszentmihályi, Creativity: Flow 37).

The term “field” in popular usage refers to an entire area of study or kind of activity, like the “field of theatre.” In this systems context however it is defined in a more narrow sense, referring only to “the social organization of the domain” (Csikszentmihályi, Implications 315). A field is made up of those practitioners who decide what belongs to a domain and what does not. In theatre, this domain would include people like designers, actors, directors, producers, critics, artistic directors, teachers, boards and foundation officers, award committees, and other editors and chroniclers of the art.

It is the interaction between these three systems – within the broader cultural context – that more adequately characterizes the synergy of influences on both the individual and group creative processes. For example, individuals in theatre may come from a variety of backgrounds, experience levels, training, working methods, and assumptions about the domain. Their position and influence within the field and their beliefs about how the domain is to be managed is usually negotiated within the context of the production process and may either influence or be influenced by the field at large, which in turn has the potential to affect the domain. This systems approach is useful to theatre because it not only helps us begin to recognize the relationships between creative groups and their environments or contexts, like production companies within producing organizations, but also suggests that the dynamics between collaborating individuals are also an interactional synergy of processes.

Theatre is a complex manifestation of creative behavior, one that includes individual, collaborative, and cultural levels that are relational and integrated. As Murdock and Puccio point out, “A primary characteristic of a multifaceted concept is integration: Parts are not necessarily
distinct from the whole, and even if parameters are theoretically well-defined, in application there are natural relationships and conceptual overlaps” (251). This is an important point in the case of theatre where the individuals involved are by necessity integrated with the whole.

Within this complex of interrelationships however, the fundamental process of creativity outlined in the second section of this essay remains the same for each individual and for the group. Those processes need to be integrated with each other and with the group process overall. One component in this system of relationships that also goes through a creative process, one that has not been accounted for yet (perhaps because it is assumed to be a result of the process) is the emerging production itself. It too, should be considered a “collaborator,” a part of the synergy of process. Using a psychoanalytical approach we can understand how, in Anton Erenzweig’s words, “Any work of art functions like another person, having independent life of its own” (102).

**The Creative Work as Creative Collaborator**

Psychoanalytical approaches to the study of creative process, which focus on mental operations that result from personality traits, consider creativity to be a process of the artist’s personality. Erenzweig (102) outlines that process in three phases: (1) fragmentation of parts of the artists self that are then projected into the work, (2) structural integration of the work through unconscious scanning of fragments, and (3) structural re-introjection leading to better integration of the artwork’s “self”. It is in this third phase he states, that the independence of the artwork is most noticeable: “The work of art acts like another living person with whom we are conversing” (104). By characterizing a creative group as a collective artist, the group creative process can be seen to develop along Ghiselin’s outline as the production’s “self” emerges. In the Oregon Shakespeare Festival study mentioned earlier (Bickerstaff) an example of this approach is used to summarize the OSF process:

…if we consider the company to be a creative entity, then as the differentiated individual personalities of that entity are integrated into the process, they each become sources of dissociated fragments called production elements. They each contribute to the overall effect of this first stage in the fully collaborative part of the work. As this process continues, the members are gradually integrated into a shared discovery of the play through their individual working processes. The dissociated fragments of [each person’s] experience, personal associations, intuitions, and understandings about the play and its evolving performance were being projected into the work along with other production fragments in the form of text, visual, and aural elements.

This in turn allowed closer examination of the work, and an exploration of those elements. Sometimes, when discoveries were made in rehearsal, they were a result of precipitous combinations or juxtapositions of information, elements, conditions, etc., like those described in the incubation and inspiration phases of organic development. When this happened, fragments came into alignment in a way that ‘worked,’ that seemed appropriate and true to the majority of experiences and associations brought to the play by the collaborators. These discoveries then
became matrix points on which further decision-making were based. Artistically and creatively, the performance reality developed organically within the social system of the production company and its interaction with the play, using elements of the symbol system, or domain, that were called into use by inspiration and discovery.

…the collective ‘scanning’ of fragments in rehearsal contributed to the organic development and integration of those fragments that were then taken back (re-introjected) into the [emerging production], contributing to ‘the better integration of the previously split-off parts of the self” (Ehrenzweig 102). During this elaboration process, periodic evaluations occurred (i.e. run-throughs), that provided opportunities for verification, evaluation, and/or adjustment within the overall organic development. In the context of this phase, new discoveries were often made. …. Intuitions may suggest new inspirations or insights that then lead to future elaboration. These may require additional preparation, but generally several levels of creative process were in evidence simultaneously: incubation, intuition, insight, and evaluation, all influenced before, during, and after by both field and domain. (289-290)

In relation to the emerging production then, the integration of the creative group from its disparate members in the first stage of the process brings together dissociated fragments of the collective artist’s self that are projected into the work. These fragments are then collectively scanned in the design, rehearsal, and mounting processes (structural integration) bringing about re-introjection of choices into the emerging, better integrated, performance. Remember too that certain members of the collective artist (i.e. actors and crew) become thoroughly integrated into the emerging performance. As such they are integral to the personality of the performance that an audience experiences in their interaction with the performance. In a very concrete way the artwork as it emerges begins to function like another collaborator in the organic development, through the creative group’s interaction with and experience of it.

Conclusion

In a collection of essays on stage directing published in 1976, editor J. Robert Wills saw fit to include Donald MacKinnon's 1970 essay, "Creativity: A Multi-faceted Phenomenon." In Wills's introduction, he explained that this and two other articles related to the creative person and the creative process were included “because most available information about directing sidesteps these issues, which are in the end most central to a director's possibilities” (17). “Too often,” he goes on to say, creativity is treated as a mystery “in the mistaken assumption that knowing will confine the creative impulse” (17). He recognized then what this essay attests: research indicates that awareness of one's creative process does not inhibit its flow; in fact, it facilitates it. Because it is a collaborative creative process, awareness of that process in a theatrical context is valuable, not only to the director, but to the entire production team as well. How that understanding is specifically applied to individual or group playwriting, design, rehearsal, and production practices will depend of course on the circumstances of the production and the practices of the individuals and groups involved. Circumstances and approaches vary
widely. Nevertheless, recognizing and understanding the creative process and its contextual influences and interactions in relation to work in the theatre can enable groups and individuals to apply that information to what they are doing, thereby facilitating and enhancing the work.

This essay has drawn distinction between “creative process” and “rehearsal and production processes” as a way to clarify the one and then to apply it to the other. Using Ghiselin’s seven-phase outline of the creative process as a foundation, one can see that on the level of the creative group, the confluence of individual processes becomes truly synergistic, greater than the sum of its constituent parts. Likewise, the group too is a part of the broader field and domain in which it practices, and the field and domain are in turn part of an influential cultural discourse. Finally, the artwork itself is presented as a collaborator in this process, recognizing that participant’s interactions with the performance as it develops is not simply a personification or metaphor, but a necessary two-way interaction wherein certain members of the creative group become integrated with the performance of the production. Not only is creative theatrical activity a synergy among individuals in a group, its activity engages the product of the collaboration and the milieu of which it is a part. As theatre has always been, it is deeply communal and profoundly human. This study can help us begin to understand how and why.

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“A Land of Make Believe that Don’t Believe in Me”: Dissent by Incongruity in Green Day’s “Jesus of Suburbia”

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ABSTRACT

Following the September 11 terrorist attacks there were increased demands in America for patriotism. This attitude of hyper-patriotism, in accordance with the Bush Administration’s appropriation of the American civil religion, precluded many discursive possibilities for dissent. Yet there were some who still utilized the available outlets of public discourse to dissent from Bush Administration policies. Green Day’s 2004 song, “Jesus of Suburbia,” is just such an exemplary dissent discourse. What follows is divided into four sections. First, I analyze the ideological circumstances which preceded the release of “Jesus of Suburbia.” Second, I reflect on the respective conceptual insights of Ivie’s humanizing dissent and Burke’s perspective by incongruity; ultimately, I suggest their programs be joined into an individual construct: dissent by incongruity. Third, I examine how “Jesus of Suburbia” employed dissent by incongruity to critique imperialistic policies. Finally, I argue Green Day’s use of dissent by incongruity reorients the direction of dissent discourse.

Few events in American history have shaped politics as profoundly as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In addition to redefining America’s political role in the world, most noticeably its foreign policy approach, 9/11 also distorted the tenor of U.S. political dialogue. According to Parameswaran (2006), the 9/11 terrorist attacks marked an opportunity “for tabloid and mainstream news media to engage with broader issues of U.S. foreign policy, national identity, religious freedom, free speech, and patriotism” (p. 42). In reality, though, that opportunity was squelched by intense public demands for patriotism. Even artistic outlets such as music were affected, falling victim to stringent standards of censorship. Taken collectively, the Bush Administration’s domestic legislation, foreign policy approach, and zealous nationalist rhetoric, galvanized a restrictive ideological apparatus. The Administration’s post-9/11 security policy of preventive war, which would come to be known as the “Bush Doctrine” (Dunmire, 2009, p. 195), strongly emulated a phenomenon which Bellah (1967) identified as the American civil religion.

The years following 9/11 were plagued by considerable partisan bickering and tenuous communication. Central to this contentious climate was the U.S. response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks: full-scale military involvement in both Iraq and Afghanistan. In the wake of such polarizing politics, Ivie (2007) proposed a peaceful approach to war resistance, a practice he
termed “humanizing dissent” (p. 219). An egalitarian practice, humanizing dissent places the responsibilities of deliberative democracy “squarely on the many who are ruled by the political elites” (Ivie, 2009, p. 454). In this sense, the citizenry is not only responsible to act, but to do so in a way that resists the toxicity of vilification. According to Ivie (2007), humanizing dissent is dedicated to “contesting language that demonizes rather than participating in rituals of reciprocal recrimination, by fostering the humanizing language of political friendship, by endorsing a positive for-peace perspective, and by apprehending the adversary’s perspective” (p. 219).

Critical insights can be drawn from juxtaposing Ivie’s framework with Burke’s (1984a) perspective by incongruity—a communicative style he characterized as “‘verbal atom cracking’” (p. 308). Perspective by incongruity occurs when “a word belongs by custom to a certain category—and by rational planning you wrench it loose and metaphorically apply it to a different category” (p. 308). Synthesizing humanizing dissent and perspective by incongruity provides a new vantage point for analyzing the discursive possibilities of dissent.

On September 21, 2004, just over three years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Green Day released their seventh studio album, American Idiot. The album was arranged as a rock opera, a genre which Entertainment Weekly’s David Browne (2004) characterized as “songs with multiple sections, lyrical darts aimed at the Man, and [a] story that periodically makes no sense” (p. 105). Describing the album specifically, Browne characterized American Idiot as the tale of “two characters (the television-glazed Jesus of Suburbia and the more nihilistic St. Jimmy) as both struggle through a war-torn world and an ‘information age of hysteria’” (p. 105). John Pareles (2004) of The New York Times similarly described the album as “nothing less than a rock opera about a ‘Jesus of Suburbia’ adrift in an America that’s brainwashed by mass media, debased by materialism and facing Armageddon” (p. 2.31). Indeed, American Idiot, particularly the song “Jesus of Suburbia,” employed symbolic inversions and incongruent imagery to contest the status quo of mainstream America. For Green Day, the album marked a critical turn in their songwriting, an evolution front-man, Billie Joe Armstrong, articulated as a more direct engagement with politics, which, starting in 2004, “really started coming across in the music a lot more” (Maher, Gurvitz, Griffiths, Grey, and Carter, 2010). The political content Armstrong referenced, signaled a self-conscious dissent from the establishment, especially Bush Administration policies.

In this essay, I examine Green Day’s incongruently titled song, “Jesus of Suburbia.” The song sharply critiques the Bush Administration’s application of religious rhetoric to political matters. An unabashedly political anthem, “Jesus of Suburbia” artistically challenges the attitudes and practices of American life—from elected officials down to average Americans, but does so without degradation. Rather than demonizing through ad hominem, the song dissents from the dominant discourse by inverting ideological myths and symbols. In effect, “Jesus of Suburbia” circumvents the vilification cycle of modern political discourse, and, instead provides an artistic critical commentary.

My analysis is divided into four sections. First, I examine the ideological conditions which preceded the release of American Idiot. Second, I consider the respective theoretical
insights of humanizing dissent and perspectives by incongruity; ultimately, I propose the
approaches be fused into a singular rhetorical construct: dissent by incongruity. Third, I analyze
the way “Jesus of Suburbia” employed dissent by incongruity to critique imperialistic policies.
Finally, I contend Green Day’s use of dissent by incongruity reorients the direction of dissent
discourse.

The Bush Administration, Civil Religion, and American Idiot

America has been viewed as a sacred land since its discovery. Even in its earliest days,
convictions about America were so strong that many Europeans truly believed it was “a
promised land where everyone lived happily ever after” (Olehla, 2010, p. 26). Time has served
to only further cement the myth of America as a chosen nation. America’s complex web of
religion, mythology, and national pride, served to establish what Bellah (1967) dubbed a civil
religion. Bellah observed that even in the earliest years of the republic, American life was
permeated by a civil religion, or, “a collection of beliefs, symbols and rituals with respect to
sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity” (p. 8). Redefining Bellah’s concept of civil
religion, Hart and Pauley (2005) suggested a contractual framework called civic piety; in their
understanding, “[c]ivic piety in the U.S. emerges not so much from blind, momentary passion
but from a knowing, pragmatic understanding of what is required when God and country
interact” (p. 45). From time-to-time, however, that contract has been amended. Most recently,
the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 altered the contract in such a way that political policy
became inundated by religiosity. Such an intersection of faith and politics is emblematic of a
providential belief system. According to Glazier (2011), providential believers “see the
intervention of the divine in daily and global affairs”(p.7). Historically, American providentially
has served both constructive and destructive purposes. As Hughes (2004) pointed out, divine
providence has been valuable when rooted in feelings of responsibility “to other human beings…
but, the myth of Chosen Nation easily becomes a badge of privilege and power, justifying
oppression and exploitation of those not included in the circle of the chosen” (p. 41). In
contemporary American politics, providential beliefs have manifested less as a feeling of
responsibility, and more as a warrant for invasive foreign policy actions.

The Post-9/11 American Civil Religion

From 2001-2008, providential themes of manifest destiny permeated the Bush
Administration’s rhetoric. Taken collectively, the Administration’s mixture of religiously
charged rhetoric, national zeal, and political policy, consummated an era of theocratic
government which served to further highlight the religious myths of the American civil religion.
In the wake of 9/11, religious rhetoric was frequently utilized to shape legislative and military
actions, most notably the U.S. occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. On September 20, 2001, nine
days after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush (2001b) delivered the following remarks to a joint session of Congress:

I will not forget this wound to our country or those who inflicted it. I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people. The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them. (para. 25)

Bush’s depiction of the U.S. as the virtuous defender of freedom and justice, utilized religious language to implicate that God supported the U.S. in its righteous conquest. His rhetorical approach oozes with what Jewett and Lawrence (2004) have characterized as “zealous nationalism”—a worldview that “seeks to redeem the world by destroying enemies” (p. 8). In contrast to the zealous nationalist perspective, Jewett and Lawrence identified “prophetic realism”—an outlook that “seeks to redeem the world for coexistence by impartial justice that claims no favored status for individual nations” (p. 8). Although both attitudes are intricately woven into the American ideology, Jewett and Lawrence concluded:

prophetic realism alone should guide an effective response to terrorism and lead us to resolve zealous nationalist conflict through submission to international law; and that the crusades inspired by zealous nationalism are inherently destructive, not only of the American prospect but of the world itself. (p. 9)

Thus, the Bush Administration’s foreign policy approach was not only destructive to America, but to the entire world it swore to defend.

While the nation endured a climate of heightened anxiety, the Administration made fierce pushes to escalate defense legislation. One such bill was the brazenly titled Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001, otherwise known as the USA Patriot Act—a policy Bush signed into law on October 26, 2001. The Patriot Act, which greatly expanded law enforcement agencies’ latitude to search an individual’s communications and personal records, was viewed by many as a massive violation of Constitutional rights. As Cohen (2002) noted, “Civil libertarians, newspaper editorial boards and others warned that the new legislation gave government worrisome new powers to pry into peoples’ private lives” (p. B9). The name of the bill alone created an oversimplified dichotomy—either you are “pro-defense legislation” or you are “anti-America”—which vigorously reinforced the hegemony of the American civil religion. In this way, defense legislation, the Patriot Act in particular, became a sacred object in the landscape of American life. As much is apparent in President Bush’s (2001) remarks from the day the act was signed into law: “This legislation is essential not only to pursuing and punishing terrorists, but also preventing more atrocities in the hands of the evil ones” (as cited in Lehrer). Bush’s (2002) tone in the following passage is even more indicative of how the Patriot Act, and other national security measures, became nearly sacrosanct:

Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the
immediacy of today’s threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries’ choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first. (para. 8)

The overall tone of Bush’s discourse is emblematic of the Administration’s preferred defense strategy: preemptive aggression.

The Bush Doctrine finally drew to a culmination when U.S. military forces bombarded Baghdad, Iraq on March 20, 2003 (CNN, 2003). President Bush (2003a) justified the actions with the contention that it was a U.S. responsibility “to disarm Iraq, to free its people, and to defend the world from grave danger.” What ensued was a full-scale occupation of the country, an exhaustive search for weapons of mass destruction, and a zealous quest to capture Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. The bullets and bloodshed did not finally cease until August 31, 2010.

Introducing the American Idiot

The punk-rock trio Green Day splashed onto the American music scene in 1987. Consisting of Billie Joe Armstrong (vocals/guitar), Mike Dirnt (bass), and Tre Cool (drums), Green Day first achieved mainstream success with their 1994 release, Dookie. Groom (2007) described Dookie as an album that “blasted a hole in the moody grunge” that had enveloped the music world during the early 90s. Following the release of Dookie, Green Day’s music became synonymous with “punk-pop … sarcasm, self-deprecation, humor, and pop-guitar hooks” (Groom). Their next three albums—Insomniac (1995), Nimrod (1997), and Warning (2000)—followed in much the same style, and enjoyed moderate success, but not nearly the acclaim of Dookie. But their seventh studio album, American Idiot, would redefine Green Day’s songwriting and become an instant classic in the process.

American Idiot was overwhelmingly successful; the album enjoyed five hit singles—“American Idiot,” “Boulevard of Broken Dreams,” “Holiday,” “Wake Me up When September Ends,” and “Jesus of Suburbia”—and extensive critical acclaim (Browne, 2004; Pareles, 2004; Sheffield, 2004). Resulting from that success, American Idiot was adapted for the Broadway stage under the artistic direction of Michael Mayer, and premiered at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre on September 4, 2009 (Itzkoff, 2009). Theater critic for The New York Times, Charles Isherwood (2009), offered this interpretation of the show: “Mournful as it is about the prospects of 21st-century Americans, the show possesses a stimulating energy and a vision of wasted youth that holds us in its grip” (p. C1). Moreover, he noted:

This distrust of (and disgust with) the way language is manipulated today is signaled when we hear the voice of George W. Bush as the curtain slowly rises: “Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.” It doesn’t take long to figure out which side the boys in “American Idiot” are on: nobody’s, maybe not even their own. (p. C1)

Although the show was originally scheduled for only a few performances, it was so well received that it remained on Broadway until April 24, 2011, and even won a Grammy that year for “Best Musical Show Album.” American Idiot, both the album and the musical, mark a rare
achievement in contemporary music and entertainment. Very seldom does an overtly political work enjoy the level of mainstream success as *American Idiot*. While discussing the policies of the Bush era during a 2010 interview on *Real Time with Bill Maher*, Armstrong remarked, “When George Bush was creating this war and his war on terror, I thought there would be a lot more anarchy that was going to happen” (Maher et al., 2010). Armstrong’s statement sheds light on Green Day’s political approach to *American Idiot*.

In the same interview with Maher, when asked about the religious principles of contemporary America, Armstrong responded, “I think that’s something ingrained into us, it’s been beaten into us as a society that we fear God” (Maher et al.). Armstrong’s tone, particularly his juxtaposition of Bush policies and fear politics, insists the notion of *American Idiot* as a rhetorical response. More pointedly, *American Idiot* can be interpreted as a repudiation of the Bush Administration’s religious-based fear politics.

**Dissent by Incongruity**

According to *Webster’s Dictionary* (2011), dissent is defined as: “to differ in sentiment or opinion, especially from the majority.” In essence, to dissent, is to openly diverge from the establishment or mainstream society. As a discursive practice—barring times of political protest, national crisis, or war—dissent often goes unexercised, and, thus overlooked. Even when there is great demand for dissent, the fear of becoming a persecuted minority dissuades many people from rallying against the dominant discourse. However, as Thoreau (1983) pointed out, “A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight” (p. 399). Although there are inherent dangers to dissent, it is vital to protecting the principles of democracy. Without concerted, demonstrable acts of dissent, minority viewpoints are rendered mute and incapable of inducing social change. Thus, critical engagement is fundamental to the effective practice of dissent. In this spirit, Achter (2010) contended, if we are to uphold the values of free speech, we must “interrogate dominant class strategies in order to evaluate how public discourse ‘renews and recreates the social order’” (p. 47). The critical engagement of dissent is an instrumental stimulus to penetrating the ironclad barriers of ideological apparatuses.

Though essential to the maintenance of democracy, not all forms of dissent are constructive; with the wrong mindset or approach dissent is susceptible to malice, and in some instances, dissidents actually reinscribe the very hegemonies they confront. History has proven that public controversies typically model the Burkean (1969b) paradigm of compensatory identification and division: discourse simultaneously unites and divides, valorizing one constituency, while condemning another. For this reason, dissent must be conducted thoughtfully and dissidents must construct a framework that resists perpetuating the conditions they aim to counteract.

To remedy this cycle of denigrating discourse, Ivie (2009) promoted a mode of dissent in which dissidents “critique society in a humanizing instead of demonizing idiom” (p. 455). His
approach champions the idea that regressive policies and actions can only be transcended by way of a progressive vision. In other words, for societal changes to occur, changes must first occur at the discursive level. A vital tenet to this practice is the notion that “[o]nly the vernacular voices of a dissenting demos speaking in a humanizing idiom about those who have been designated enemies of the state offer some possibility of escaping the regression from lively politics to deadly passivity” (p. 458). Indeed, without the observance of civil dialogue, competing constituencies devolve from agonistic rivals to antagonistic nemeses. If rhetorics of dissent are to produce revolutionary change, their practitioners must avoid the pitfalls of scapegoating, and instead reject oppressive structures through ethically responsible rhetorical invention. For, although the Burkean paradigm of “identification” and “division” may accurately characterize conflict as an unavoidable byproduct of the human condition, in the same token, each individual is accountable for their discursive response to such conflict.

In Ivie’s (2009) assessment, the fundamental challenge of humanizing “dissent is to develop a quotidian art of tactics that enable nonconforming speech to avoid being captured and contained within the ruling paradigms of governing regimes” (p. 457). As a rhetorical practice, however, humanizing dissent fails to satisfy that challenge in two ways. First, though philosophically admirable, humanizing dissent relies upon eschewing ideology. But as McGee (1980) argued, ideology is maintained through “ideographs,” or rhetorical vocabularies that “constitute excuses for specific beliefs and behaviors” (p. 16). Ivie’s insistence that humanizing dissent should avoid being captured by the dominant discourse creates challenges for dissolving the linkages between rhetoric and ideology. According to Parry-Giles (1995), rhetoric operates “first, to construct and define issues for the ‘public’s’ attention, and second, to respond to those issues as they have been constructed and defined” (pp. 183-184). Thus, instead of avoiding ideology, effective programs of dissent must, rather, actively challenge ideology. Second, Ivie’s demand for a conventional program which simultaneously resists the power structure and garners mass approval, overlooks the basic principle that dissidents, by definition, work in opposition to the conventions of mainstream society. Chomsky (2008) similarly addressed this matter, only in more pragmatic terms: “Resisters…must select the issues they confront and the means they employ in such a way as to attract as much popular support as possible for their efforts” (pp. 70-71). Though seemingly identical to Ivie’s perspective, Chomsky’s approach does not advocate that dissidents inconspicuously assimilate their strategies into everyday activity. Chomsky’s approach, rather, encourages dissidents to seek out the controversies and platforms which provide the most exposure to mainstream society. Dissent need not adhere to conventional society, it must only confront it.

The First Amendment right to free speech, namely the freedom to openly deliberate public policy, is an essential pillar of American democracy. Within the arena of deliberative dialogue, public arguments are typically evaluated on logical grounds. As such, arguers are expected to “move from reasons to conclusions using what logicians call ‘inference’ or a system of logical rules and processes that enables them to move from one idea to another” (Dimock & Dimock, 2009, p. 10). In short, if arguments do not make logical sense they are usually rejected.
As an alternative to this perspective, however, Burke (1984b) identified a rhetorical mode called perspective by incongruity. Contrary to typical discursive standards, perspective by incongruity upsets the logical associations of language “by taking a word usually applied to one setting and transferring its use to another setting” (p. 90). Though at first glance the statement or argument may appear illogical, and thus nonsensical, beneath the surface its incongruities give life to new meanings. Whedbee (2001) asserted perspective by incongruity constitutes “a violation of our common sense assumptions about what properly ought to go with what, and [subsequently] reveals hitherto unsuspected linkages and relationships which our customary vocabulary has ignored” (p. 48). Moreover, in “violating our expectations and introducing ambiguity into our vocabulary, perspective by incongruity serves as an ‘opening wedge’ that fractures our sense of how the world does and ought to function” (p. 48). To this end, perspective by incongruity performs two primary functions. First, it demonstrates how language creates symbolic relationships, simultaneously, pointing out how violating those relationships creates dissonance. Second, it illustrates how rigid systems of understanding are, in actuality, wholly a product of language, and thus, subject to interpretation. Whedbee’s assertions support Burke’s (1969a) contention that “it is in the areas of ambiguity that transformation take place” (p. xix). As a rhetorical device, perspective by incongruity creates opportunities to engage symbol systems and transform ideological constructs.

Though it is possible for a perspective by incongruity to occur naturally, Burke (1973) identified what he called a planned incongruity, or “a rational prodding or coaching of language so as to see around the corner of everyday usage” (p. 400). Planned incongruities mark strategic attempts to achieve rhetorical inversion. According to Burke (1984b), “every linkage,” regardless of a symbol system’s rigidity, is “open to destruction by the perspectives of a planned incongruity” (p. 91). Consequently, perspective by incongruity has limitless rhetorical potential in the hands of dissidents; however, its practice comes with constraints. One such obstacle is its sheer intellectual complexity. Though tropologically linked to metaphor, in many ways perspective by incongruity closely resembles the convolutedness of irony in that its usage can result in “unresolved symbolic tension” (Olson & Olson, 2004, p. 27). If applied to the wrong context, perspective by incongruity can create confusion in an audience and, thus, fail rhetorically.

Though humanizing dissent and perspective by incongruity each possess considerable theoretical value, as rhetorical practices, they lack critical substance. Fusing the two strategies together, however, produces a vehicle well-suited for the rhetorical demands of contemporary American culture. This synthesis could aptly be termed: dissent by incongruity. Guided by the ethical principles of humanizing dissent, but animated through the inversion and redirection of perspective by incongruity, dissent by incongruity can be harnessed to critique ideological beliefs and conditions while still avoiding the pitfalls of vilifying discourses. But as with any rhetorical situation, rhetors must consider “in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Aristotle, 2001, p. 181). As such, dissent by incongruity is not appropriate in every context; however, there are certain venues where it can flourish. As Ivie (2007) contended, there exist
limitless possibilities for humanizing dissent in “poetry, art, literature, theatre, cinema, and music” (p. 93). Burke (1973) similarly asserted that “even the most practical of revolutions will generally be found to have manifested itself first in the ‘aesthetic’ sphere” (p. 234). In this way, the creative arts present an ideal genre for confronting mainstream society through dissent by incongruity.

The remainder of this essay applies the concept “dissent by incongruity” as a way of analytically framing Green Day’s song “Jesus of Suburbia.” In the song, Green Day inverts resonant American symbols and myths, most conspicuously traditional views of Jesus, to artistically render an alternative vision of America. With its ironic treatment of ideological constructs, the song functions as a robust dissent discourse. Simultaneously, “Jesus of Suburbia” upholds ethical standards by circumventing the trappings of rhetorical demonizing. The song’s incongruent imagery compels listeners to re-conceptualize the consequences of American exceptionalism.

“Jesus of Suburbia”

“Jesus of Suburbia” emerged from American Idiot as a consummate example of dissent by incongruity. A nine-minute-and-eight-second ballad, the song consists of five distinct movements: I) “Jesus of Suburbia,” II) “City of the Damned,” III) “I Don’t Care,” IV) “Dearly Beloved,” and V) “Tales of another Broken Home.” Resistant to mainstream society, “Jesus of Suburbia” presents an alternative sketch of America—an America that defies the Bush Administration’s jingoistic rhetoric. In grand departure from President Bush’s (2003b) description of America as a land of benevolent people who “exercise power without conquest, and sacrifice for the liberty of strangers” (para. 43), Green Day (2004b) asserts America is “a land of make believe” where “[e]veryone is so full of shit.” While neither view is wholly accurate, I am not concerned with testing the validity of such claims; rather, I seek to analyze how Green Day harnessed dissent by incongruity to contest the Administration’s use of religious rhetoric.

Aside from “Jesus of Suburbia,” other songs on American Idiot also utilize dissent by incongruity. Indeed, instances of dissent by incongruity are salient in the song “Holiday.” Green Day’s (2004a) lyrics in the following verse are indicative of such:

Hear the dogs howling out of key
To a hymn called “Faith and Misery”
And bleed, the company lost the war today

The lyrics obliquely address the political landscape which followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The imagery, however, provides an incongruous perspective for understanding the circumstances. First, there is the reference to “the dogs howling out of key”—a clear allusion to politicians. The portrayal rejects the reverence which elected officials are typically regarded. Second, Green Day associates those politicians with a fictional hymn entitled “Faith and Misery.” The ironic pairing of the words “faith” and “misery” undermines the conventional associations of those concepts,
and suggests a blurring of two supposedly distinct realms: religion and politics. Finally, the vignette is completed when Green Day offers the incongruent image of a “company” losing a “war.” In merely a verse, Green Day propels their audience toward a critical space where dominant conceptions are preferably challenged. Such techniques are emblematic of their stylistic approach to “Jesus of Suburbia.”

Its song title alone positions “Jesus of Suburbia” as an ironic discourse. Without hearing a single guitar riff, or lyrical verse, the disparate coupling of “Jesus” and “Suburbia” primes the audience for incongruous arguments. Since the very notion of a “Jesus of Suburbia” violates traditional views of Jesus as a divine figure, comingling Jesus’s divinity with the secularity of “Suburbia” functions to merge the sacred and the profane. In this way, though roundabout, Green Day imposes on their audience the very phenomenon which they critique: the amalgamation of religion and politics. Green Day’s (2004b) employment of this tactic is evident from the song’s opening verse:

I’m the son of rage and love
The Jesus of Suburbia
The Bible of none of the above
On a steady diet of
Soda pop and Ritalin

Contrasting sacred symbols, such as “Jesus” and “The Bible,” with materialistic symbols such as “soda pop” and “Ritalin,” frames Jesus of Suburbia as somewhat of an antihero. Although Jesus of Suburbia functions as the protagonist of the rock opera (Browne, 2004; Moss, 2004; Pareles, 2004), he also embodies the downfalls of American exceptionalism. This counter-narrative defies traditional perspectives of Jesus and transitively defies conceptions of America as a sacred land. Though many Americans view the country’s foreign policy program to be magnanimous, by contesting the religious discourse which has justified U.S. military actions, Green Day suggests the possibility that America may actually be culpable for wrongdoings.

By and large, “Jesus of Suburbia” employs dissent by incongruity to expose the contradictions which permeate the American civil religion. Specifically, the song critiques the Bush Administration’s injection of religious themes into the political sphere—a domain which is supposedly governed by the separation of church and state. Accordingly, “Jesus of Suburbia” critiques this paradox by embodying the very conditions it contests, as demonstrated in the chorus of Part I:

And there’s nothing wrong with me
This is how I’m supposed to be
In a land of make believe
That don’t believe in me

One is unavoidably drawn to the ironic tension which surrounds “a land of make believe” that refuses to acknowledge a Jesus of Suburbia. Green Day’s rhetorical juxtaposition compels its audience to consider the pliability of definitions. In other words, Green Day points to the biases of self-reflexivity—the fallaciousness which pervades a discursive situation where one party is
empowered to manipulate definitional tenets, while the other is forced to respond to ever-changing operational definitions. Though Jesus of Suburbia may not actually be real, the matter of existence is not the issue at hand, hypocrisy is. In essence, Green Day’s verse questions the definitions which the Bush Administration applied to foreign policy actions. Such a move undermines the religious-laden discourse which established the War on Terror.

In the second movement of the song, “City of the Damned,” the tone drastically changes. Green Day moves away from broad ideological commentary and hones in on the scenic contradictions which a Jesus of Suburbia might actually observe in this alternate America. The following passage typifies Green Day’s (2004b) approach:

At the center of the earth
In the parking lot
Of the 7-11 where I was taught
The motto was just a lie
It says home is where your heart is
But what a shame
’Cause everyone’s heart
Doesn’t beat the same
It’s beating out of time

The verse applies dissent through a barrage of incongruous imagery. One such resonant incongruity is Green Day’s portrayal of the “center of the earth” as a “parking lot”; in many ways, such a depiction violates contemporary expectations of “place.” Especially since the 9/11 tragedies, Americans have been conditioned to respond to “the rhetoricity of places” (Endres & Cook, 2011, p. 257). Donofrio (2010) described this rhetorical phenomenon as “place-making,” an instance where a “newly made ‘place’ functions as a rhetorical symbol invested with mnemonic value and the capacity to inform identity construction” (p. 152). In this way, Green Day inverts the concept of place-making through a simple syllogism: America is the center of the earth; the center of the earth is a parking lot; therefore, America is a parking lot. This enthymematic argument constitutes a sharp criticism of the American exceptionalist attitude, an attitude which Ivie and Giner (2008) characterized as feelings of “national autonomy and superiority” (p. 360). As a result of such sentiments, Americans regularly “imagine themselves as a morally elevated people set apart from the rest of the world and living in a land of opportunity that is the envy and aspiration of humankind” (p. 361). Working from this premise, by stripping America down to nothing more than a parking lot, Green Day contests the valorized notion that America is engaged in a perpetual “heroic mission to conquer evil and advance civilization” (p. 361). Rather, by reframing the connotations of America as the center of the earth, the verse reveals the narcissistic attitudes which surround such a view. Thus, American exceptionalism is rendered a decidedly toxic worldview.

Perhaps the most striking incongruity from the aforementioned verse, though, is Green Day’s (2004b) contention that “7-11”—the popular convenience store chain—not only functions as a site of education, but that the motto of its education was “just a lie.” There are two elements
to this statement which demand closer analysis. First, to synonymize 7-11 as a site of education, greatly challenges conventional expectations and induces rhetorical interpretation. As Wilson (2010) pointed out, the rhetorical constraint of conventionality, otherwise known as decorum, is both “a determinative aspect of being human and a consistent willingness to challenge propriety for the sake of intellectual growth or personal pleasure” (p. 699). On the surface, Green Day’s description of education may appear uninformed and indecorous, however, since decorum is governed by “flexible standards of evaluation” (Hariman, 1992, p. 155), from the context of dissent, the incongruity possesses rhetorical potency. For, such a clear violation of mainstream decorum challenges preconceptions and provides the opportunity to invent new meaning. The resulting discord signals the existence of layered textual meanings and reaffirms the audience to view the text through an ironic lens. Though this signaling does not safeguard against misinterpretation, it at least orients the audience to read the text “with an air of cool detachment” (Terrill, 2003, p. 216).

Second, Green Day’s contention that the education’s “motto was just a lie,” comments on the penchants of mass consciousness. From this position, the lyrics incongruously contest nationalism, especially zealous nationalism, by illustrating its inherent contradictions. Whereas the advent of modern nationalism ushered in the “transformation of an older ‘patriotic consciousness’ into something of a tremendous new force of lasting importance” (Newman, as cited in Abbott, 2010, p. 107), Green Day (2004b) contests the Bush Administration’s distinctly zealous nationalism through a simple contradiction:

They say home is where the heart is
But what a shame
’Cause everyone’s heart doesn’t beat the same
It’s beating out of time

Although the lyrics may appear cliché, or cutesy, beneath their simplicity, there exists a keen understanding of rhetoric’s constitutive function. As McGee (1975) asserted, “the people,” or constituencies, “are more process than phenomenon” (p. 242)—they exist through rhetoric until the rhetoric used to conjure them loses force. Green Day’s anti-nationalist arguments, when bracketed by the premise that “the motto was just a lie,” invokes fundamental American mottos, such as The Declaration’s “unalienable Rights.” This conjuring of essential American principles functions to indict the Bush Administration’s protection of such rights. Moreover, Green Day’s duplicitous statement that a “heart” is “beating out of time,” further textures the scene. On the one hand, “beating out of time,” especially when juxtaposed with the statement that “everyone’s heart doesn’t beat the same,” may imply the diversity of beliefs which America was founded upon. The very same phrase, however, might be interpreted to convey a pressing urgency—a critical situation that, if left unchecked, might result in catastrophe. Overall, the verse’s undertones cast doubts about America’s future position under the direction of the Bush Administration’s policies.

Green Day’s (2004b) concerns about the direction of America’s foreign policy approach are further articulated in the following prophetic incongruity:
I read the graffiti in the bathroom stall
Like the holy scriptures of a shopping mall
And so it seemed to confess
It didn't say much but it only confirmed that
The center of the earth is the end of the world
And I could really care less

The statement, in many ways, crafts the prophetic argument that America faces imminent calamity. According to Darsey (2007), prophetic discourse is “both of the audience and extreme to the audience” (as cited in Terrill, p. 34). By infusing the scene with competing images such as “the holy scriptures” and the “shopping mall,” Green Day simultaneously relates to, and challenges their audience. Ultimately, their conclusion that “the center of the earth is the end of the world,” implicates that the Bush Administration’s uniquely religious exceptionalism will result in the nation’s downfall and destruction. This line of argument contests the Administration’s audaciously named policies, such as “Operation Iraqi Freedom” and “USA PATRIOT Act,” and identifies them as integral accessories to impending hardships America might face.

With the stage set for future disaster, Green Day finally collapses their incongruous depictions and poses their audience with a moment of decisive judgment. Particularly in the final movement of “Jesus of Suburbia”—“Tales of Another Broken Home”—Green Day’s (2004b) lyrics become less descriptive and more prescriptive:

To live and not to breathe is to die in tragedy
To run, to run away, to fight what you believe
And I leave behind this hurricane of fucking lies
I lost my faith to this, this town that don't exist
So I run, I run away to the lights of masochists
And I leave behind this hurricane of fucking lies
And I walk this line a million-and-one fucking times
But not this time

Green Day manufactures for their audience what rhetoricians refer to as “kairos,” or an opportune moment to act. According to Crosby (2009), “kairos denotes the unique and contextualized moments of import that take place within a given day or period of time; it characterizes what happens in moments of propriety or occasional fitness” (p. 262). As such, Green Day propels their audience into a sphere of “krisis,” or rhetorical judgment. As citizen-critics and agents of change, listeners are forced to assert their social position. In essence, will they “die in tragedy” or “fight what they believe”? With this album, and this song specifically, Green Day presents a critical question: To dissent, or not to dissent? By inverting dominant societal themes and metaphors, Green Day calls into question how these themes and metaphors have been appropriated, and argues for an ideological renovation. Reflecting upon their incongruous ballad, Billie Joe Armstrong (2005) contended that there is a lot of “emotion at stake” in a song like “Jesus of Suburbia,” and ultimately, that is what the song’s performance is
all about: exercising “the emotional baggage” (as cited in Bayer) that people carry around every
day. In this regard, “Jesus of Suburbia” is subtly situated at the intersection of the personal and
the political—its employment of dissent by incongruity, contests conventional ideological
boundaries and subverts the mechanisms which construct those boundaries.

Conclusion

Much like the myths and metaphors which have fortified the American civil religion,
dissent is deeply engrained in the American spirit. In many ways, dissent has initiated great
American achievements: the fight for colonial independence, the struggle to abolish slavery, and
the civil rights quest for equality. By in large, however, dissent continues to be viewed
negatively, and remains immensely neglected by communication scholars. This lack of critical
attention has led to dissent’s manipulation and malpractice in several instances. In the tragic
wake of Malcolm X’s assassination, Martin Luther King Jr. (n.d.) poignantly asserted, “The
assassination of Malcolm X was an unfortunate tragedy. And it reveals that there are still
numerous people in our nation who have degenerated to the point of expressing dissent through
murder, and we haven’t learned to disagree without being violently disagreeable” (as cited in
Papers). Of course, the wisdom of King’s statement was tragically confirmed merely three years
later when he suffered the same fate as his controversial contemporary. Sadly, not enough has
changed since King’s astute observation—violence still pervades our words and actions.

By fusing Ivie’s (2007) humanizing dissent with Burke’s (1984a) perspective by
incongruity, I have attempted to show how Green Day’s (2004) song “Jesus of Suburbia”
productively harnessed what I have termed dissent by incongruity. Green Day’s use of dissent by
incongruity functioned to contest the Bush Administration’s zealous nationalist rhetoric,
particularly American exceptionalism. While vigorously critical of Bush Administration
tendencies, “Jesus of Suburbia” circumvents the downfalls of demonizing discourse, and in so
doing, exemplifies a peaceful alternative to the divisive vortex of vilification. In essence, Green
Day’s use of dissent by incongruity critiques through ideological inversion, and thus avoids
particular engagement with any specific agents. This resistance of ad hominem arguments not
only upholds the tenets of ethical argumentation but also strengthens “our faith as citizens in
-[the] processes” (Dimock, 2008, p. 2) of democracy.

In sum, Green Day’s use of dissent by incongruity performs two critical functions. First,
their inversion of ideological constructs serves to contest the propriety of dominant conceptions.
Second, their demonstration of consciously ethical invention extends the acceptable boundaries
dissent. In our rapidly expanding technological landscape, dissent can now be performed via
nearly limitless channels and platforms. Subsequently, now, more than ever before, dissidents
may confidently assert their position without fear of violent repercussions. Though several
complexities to this phenomenon demand critical attention, this increased freedom of expression
especially requires thorough examination. For, although the advent of technology creates the
potential for a dramatic proliferation of dissent discourse, it also creates the potential for an
unheralded increase of unethical dissent. However, if Green Day’s use of dissent by incongruity demonstrates anything, it is that ethically conscious dissent not only maintains high moral standards, but is also capable of garnering widespread support for minority viewpoints. Moving forward, those are the standards dissidents must strive for.

References


Bush, G.W. (2002, June 1). Prevent our enemies from threatening us, our allies, and our friends


Illustrating Tensions Using Stretchy String: Teaching Relational Dialectics in the Interpersonal Communication Class

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this activity is to increase students’ knowledge of Relational Dialectics by illustrating dialectic tensions in a tangible way. Relational Dialectics, which focuses on different dimensions in relationships, is an important concept for students to understand because it highlights the messiness of interpersonal relationships. This activity illustrates dialectical tensions through the use of colored stretchy craft string, providing students with a physical manifestation of an abstract concept.

Description

The objective of this activity is to increase students’ knowledge of Relational Dialectics by illustrating dialectic tensions through the use of colored stretchy craft string. Each student is tethered to a partner with stretchy string while the instructor reads examples of real-life scenarios to the class. Students are asked to push the string toward their partners or pull the string away from their partners in order to illustrate the tension noted in each scenario. This activity provides students with a physical manifestation of the abstract concept of Relational Dialectics.

Approximate Time Required

For this activity, the instructor will need fifteen minutes of preparation time outside of class and twenty to thirty minutes of class time.

Courses

Introduction to Interpersonal Communication, Communication Theory, Small Group Communication, Advanced Interpersonal Communication

Materials Needed
The instructor will need to obtain three pieces of stretchy elastic craft string, each of a different color, for every two students. The instructor will also need several pairs of scissors and a list of scenarios (A starter list is provided as an appendix to this activity). Stretchy elastic craft string can be purchased at most craft stores.

Rationale

Good interpersonal communication skills enable us to communicate effectively with different people in different contexts. In order to allow students to understand how interpersonal communication occurs in the real world, instructors should illustrate interpersonal communication through a relationship that mirrors the complexity that exists in everyday life. The recognition of the intricacy of interpersonal relationships allows students to be more mindful in their daily communication. Relational Dialectics is one theoretical construct that addresses the complexity of such relationships.

Relational Dialectics draws attention to the complex contradictions and disagreements in relationships. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) articulated the understanding of relationships through “simple binary oppositions” such as “connection-autonomy,” “routine-novelty,” and “openness-privacy” (p. 43). Dialectic tensions are shared by individuals who are engaged in a particular relationship (Baxter, 2004), and they “involve the constant interconnection and reciprocal influence of multiple individual, interpersonal, and social factors” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 7).

Because different individuals think and behave differently, relationships are always in flux. Tensions differ by relationship and context. For example, two individuals may be friends, but one of them may favor openness in a particular situation, whereas the other may prefer privacy in the same situation. In a different situation, they may both prefer privacy. The complexity of their relationship becomes even more apparent when additional relationships are considered. For instance, Anna and Mary have been friends since high school. Besides her relationship with Mary, Anna has relationships with her family members, workplace colleagues and other friends and acquaintances. Dialectic tensions exist in each of her relationships. The dialectic tensions that occur between the different relationships in Anna’s life illustrate that interpersonal relationships are both complex and multi-faceted.

The complexity of Relational Dialectics is not an easy concept to illustrate merely through verbal explanation. It is with this realization that this class activity has been constructed. This activity serves to enhance students’ understanding of the complex concept of Relational Dialectics.

What to Do Before the Activity

To prepare for the activity, the instructor should cut three pieces of stretchy string for every two students. Each piece should be about a yard in length, and each of the three pieces should be a different color. The instructor should also prepare a list of scenarios to read to the
class. For example, one scenario might read: “Partner A and Partner B have just started dating. Both partners want to spend more time together.” A sample list of scenarios is provided at the end of this activity as an appendix.

During class, the instructor should teach Relational Dialectics to the class. It is important that the students understand the many different kinds of tensions that exist in every relationship. After explaining the theory to the class and reviewing the concept of tensions, the instructor should ask the students to pair up. After everyone has found a partner, the instructor should lead the class to the hallway or push the desks to the side of the room to provide the students with enough space to perform the activity.

**What to Do During the Activity**

The instructor should designate a Partner A and Partner B in each pair. This will eliminate some confusion later in the activity. Each pair should receive three pieces of different-colored stretchy string. The instructor should ask students to tie one end of each stretchy string to their wrists and ankle, so that the partners are tethered together in a “relationship.” After the students are tethered together, the instructor should advise them to stand about a yard away from their partner. This distance should be wide enough that the students can feel tension in the string.

The instructor must then tell the students which colored string represents which tension. For example, red may illustrate connection-autonomy, blue may illustrate routine-novelty, and green may illustrate openness-privacy. The instructor may wish to put up signs or write on the blackboard to remind students of the representation of each string. The instructor should also note which way to push or pull the string for each tension. Students should pull their strings away from their partner if they disagree with their partner regarding a particular tension. For example, the students should tug the red string away from each other if one wants more connection in the relationship, but the other wants more autonomy.

Next, the instructor should read a scenario to the students. The students should be instructed to move their stretchy strings accordingly. For example, if the scenario suggests that both partners want more privacy in their relationship, both partners should push the green string toward one another. Multiple scenarios should be used to allow students to see how tensions arise from different situations.

**What to Do After the Activity**

Once all the scenarios have been read, the students should cut their strings to detach themselves from each other, and then return to their seats. The instructor should ask the students questions regarding how they felt about the tensions and the scenarios. Possible discussion questions include: “How did it feel when your partner wanted more privacy when you were happy with the way things were?,” “Did you find any of the scenarios uncomfortable to adjust
with the tensions?,” and “How could you tell when your partner wanted to change the relationship?”

Finally, it is crucial that the instructor remind the students that these are merely three of many tensions that exist in every relationship in our lives. It is also important that the instructor emphasize that every relationship has tensions. The instructor may ask the students to imagine that they are tethered to every person in their lives. These comments will illustrate the complexity of Relational Dialectics and allow the students to envision tensions in a more intricate way than the activity can physically illustrate.

Assessment

Generally, students appreciate this activity because it allows for activity-oriented learning as a break from the typical lecture/discussion format of many classes. Judging from verbal student feedback, we have found that this activity allows for students to clearly see how a complex theoretical concept works through a concrete example. Test scores suggest that this activity may increase their ability to remember these concepts as well.

Alternative Uses

In additional to using this activity for introductory level interpersonal communication classes, instructors of communication theory, small group communication, and advanced interpersonal communication classes may also find this activity useful. In communication theory classes, it can be used to introduce students to the theoretical construct of Relational Dialectics. Small group communication instructors may find this activity useful when illustrating the tensions found in dyads within specific groups. Furthermore, instructors of more advanced interpersonal communication classes may choose to expand this activity by allowing students to choose a maintenance strategy for the tensions and offering them a “toolbox” containing tape, scissors, additional string and other tools that could be used to illustrate tension maintenance through the stretchy strings.

For safety reasons, the instructor should have multiple pairs of scissors handy in case the students would need to leave the building in a hurry.

References


Suggested Readings


Appendix: List of Scenarios

1. Partner A and Partner B have just started dating. Both partners want to spend more time together.
2. Partner A and Partner B have been dating for a long period of time. Partner B wants to become engaged to Partner A, but Partner A is happy with the current status of the relationship.
3. Partner A and Partner B have been dating for several months. Partner A wants to know that the relationship has a future, and wants to spend more time with Partner B. Partner B is happy with the way things are.
4. Partner A and Partner B are dating. Both partners feel that there are certain secrets that they don’t want to share with one another. When Partner B decides to break the rule and share one of his/her secrets, Partner A feels uncomfortable and begins to spend less time with Partner B. Realizing that something is wrong, Partner B wants to spend more time with Partner A in order to solve the problem.
5. Partner A and Partner B are dating. Both partners agree not to talk about past relationships.
6. Partners A and B have been dating for a while. Both partners miss the spontaneity that existed when their relationship was new.
7. Partner A and Partner B are friends. While Partner A is very popular and has a lot of friends, Partner B only has a few friends. Partner B becomes jealous when Partner A spends time with his/her other friends. This causes Partner A to want to spend less time with Partner B.
8. Partner A and Partner B are friends. Partner A feels very close to Partner B, but wishes they would do more spontaneous activities together. Partner B feels that he/she can always count on Partner B, but that Partner B can be too dependent at times.
9. Partners A and B are dating. As both partners begin to share more about themselves, Partner B becomes embarrassed of a mistake he/she made in the past, and is afraid that if he/she shares it with Partner A, Partner A will no longer want to continue the relationship. Partner A, unaware of Partner B’s struggle, is happy that the relationship is becoming more open.
10. Partner A and Partner B are married. Partner A would like to start a family. Partner B enjoys the way things are currently, and wants to postpone starting a family for a few years.
Identifying Rhetorical Visions and Group Roles Through Role-play

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ABSTRACT

This classroom activity allows students to experience small group communication components firsthand. Students will be divided into groups of five, with each member receiving a character background that the member will role-play. The character backgrounds are to be kept hidden from other members, and each member has an ulterior goal that the member will try to achieve, unbeknownst to the other members. The character backgrounds are designed to force conflict among the group members. At the conclusion of the activity, students will discuss how the different character roles affected the group, and what unifying message might have worked in uniting the group members.

Objectives

This activity has three objectives. First, students will experience group division firsthand in order to realize the need for a common unifying purpose. Two, students will craft a hypothetical rhetorical vision as a means of unifying group members. This rhetorical vision will be a motivating theme or idea to which all members can feel connected despite the conflicts between members. Third, students will witness, firsthand, the impacts of task, maintenance, and deviant roles on the group decision making process.

Courses

This activity is suited for a small group communication course or an introduction communication course that covers small group communication.

Rationale

When a small group focuses on a specific task, it is imperative that the group function together successfully in order to avoid lackluster results or groupthink. Bormann (1982) provided a theoretical perspective regarding how a small group functions successfully through the framework of symbolic convergence theory by outlining how individuals form unique groups through shared fantasies. These shared fantasies are identified by the communal communicative
messages, or rhetorical visions, that group members use to construct reality. A rhetorical vision reflects a community’s inclusive fantasy with which all members of a community identify. Group members will reinforce the fantasy, and, in turn, the uniqueness of the group, by reiterating the rhetorical vision when communicating with each other. In addition, Sharf (1978) integrated Bormann (1972) and Burke (1969) to explain how a successful group leader overcomes divisions within a group by crafting a rhetorical vision that unites group members together. The following class activity plays off of Sharf’s application of rhetorical analysis to discover the strategies utilized by leaders in small groups. Sharf concluded that a successful leader emerges from a list of potential candidates after the leader crafts a rhetorical vision that transcends group differences.

Aside from rhetorical visions, when working in small task groups, members take on task, maintenance, and deviant roles (Benne & Sheats, 1948). Students take on task roles when directing their behavior toward solving the task at hand. On the other hand, students take on maintenance roles when they attempt to establish a positive group climate by developing the personal relationships of the group members. Lastly, group members take on deviant roles when they act in a selfish manner that has a detrimental impact on the group. This class activity will also force students to engage in task, maintenance, and deviant roles firsthand. In this manner, students will witness the positive and negative effects of the different group roles. Communication textbooks (Myers & Anderson, 2008; Adler & Rodman, 2008) provide students with specific examples of each of the three types of group roles, and this activity will help students learn the impacts of the roles through active role-play.

**Activity**

Assign students into groups of five for the assignment. Prepare one Rhetorical Vision Assignment Worksheet for each group before the start of class. Begin by cutting along the dotted lines to separate the different components of the assignment: group role-play goal, backgrounds for each role-play character, post role-play discussion. Then, during class, pass out the group role-play goal to each group. Next, distribute one background for each role-play character to each member of the groups while informing the students that they are not to reveal their character backgrounds to anyone. After the initial 25 minute time period, distribute the post role-play discussion to each group, and have the students develop group answers to the four questions.

**Rhetorical Vision Assignment Worksheet:**

**Group Role-play Goal**

Directions: Use 25 minutes to engage in group role-play. Each group member will be assigned a character background that is to be kept private from the rest of the group. Some characters will have character elements that they must conceal from the group, as well as
character elements that they are allowed to reveal to the group. The group is to develop a
marketing slogan and promotional poster design to entice campus students to major in
communication. In addition, each group member is expected to fulfill the individual ulterior goal
specified on the assigned character background before the end of the 25 minutes.

Kari: The other members of your group take too long to get anything done. You despise people
that spend too much time deliberating, and less time acting.

Reveal: Reveal that you think the group should finish as quickly as possible, as well as any
conflicting opinions you might have with another group member.

Conceal: Conceal your ulterior goal of wanting to be the first group to finish.

Ulterior goal: Be the first group to finish the task at hand. If this fails, then have the group finish
the task at hand as quickly as possible. For example, try to get the group to spend one minute
deliberating ideas, as well as only a few minutes sketching the promotional poster design.

Tim: You feel that Kari is always trying to rush the entire group into making decisions. This
gives you the impression that Kari does not care about the group. So, you feel it is necessary to
teach her a lesson by dragging out all group discussions as long as possible.

Conceal: Conceal your ulterior goal and the fact that you are trying to make the group take as
long as possible. If Kari accuses you of attempting to slow down the group process, deny that
that is the case. In addition, do not reveal the conflicting opinions that you have with Kari or that
you are trying to infuriate her.

Ulterior goal: Make sure the group reaches the 25 minute deadline without finishing the task at
hand. Drag the discussion out as long as possible to infuriate Kari. For example, suggest that
each group member should contribute at least ten ideas, and ask each group member to elaborate
on every idea.

Chantelle: You see yourself as a leader, and you feel it is your responsibility to make sure
everyone in the group gets along. You sense tension between Kari and Tim, so you feel it is
necessary to bring it to the attention of the entire group in order to resolve the problem. You are a
very relationship-oriented person, and enjoy exchanging emotional intimacy with your fellow
group members. You feel the group cannot focus on the task at hand until the conflict between
Kari and Tim is resolved.

Reveal: Reveal to the group that you would like to settle the conflict between Kari and Tim, once
the conflict is apparent.

Ulterior goal: Find out what is causing the conflict between Kari and Tim, and help them resolve
the issue. For example, once the conflict between Kari and Tim is apparent, have the group stop
what it is doing to hear the points of view of Kari and Tim and explicitly telling the group that
the task at hand cannot be solved successfully until the conflict between Kari and Tim is
resolved.
Mannie: You are very competitive. You want your group to be the best. So, you will appoint yourself leader of the group. You feel threatened by Chantelle, and will attempt to discredit her in order to make yourself appear as a better leadership candidate.  

*Reveal:* Reveal that you think you should be the leader, as well as reasons why other members should not be the leader, when opportunities present themselves.  

*Conceal:* Conceal that you are threatened by Chantelle, and deny any accusations of sabotaging her because of this.  

*Ulterior goal:* Get all group members to acknowledge that you are the leader. For example, make explicit statements to the entire group about Chantelle not being dedicated to solving the task at hand, as well as making explicit statements to the entire group that you are a natural group leader.

Sarah: You find the tension between Kari and Tim entertaining. On the other hand, you do not respect Chantelle’s desire to fix everybody’s problems.  

*Reveal:* Reveal that you do not agree with Chantelle’s efforts to fix the conflict between Kari and Tim.  

*Conceal:* Conceal that you find the conflict between Kari and Tim entertaining.  

*Ulterior goal:* Disrupt Chantelle’s attempts to solve Kari and Tim’s conflict. For example, make explicit statements to Chantelle to stay out of everyone’s personal life and to focus on the task instead.

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**Post Role-play Discussion**

Directions: Provide answers to the following statements that pertain to your group role-play experience.

1. Identify the divisions that existed within the group.
2. Identify the recurring verbal/nonverbal messages used by group members in efforts to achieve compliance by other group members.
3. Identify the rhetorical vision that had the greatest chance of uniting all group members. If one did not exist, create a rhetorical vision that would unite all group members.
4. Identify the impacts that task, maintenance, and deviant roles had on the group experience.

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**References**


The Semiotics of Teaching with Reality TV: A Theory-Based Approach to Teaching and Modeling Communication Theory

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ABSTRACT

This article begins by establishing a rationale for not only teaching with reality television in the communication classroom, but also taking a theory-based approach to doing so. A theoretical framework for the pedagogical use of reality TV—semiotic theory, based on the work of Peirce—is presented. The discussion then moves to a specific outline of a sample classroom activity that demonstrates a semiotic approach, using the BRAVO TV website as a means of illustrating and teaching Cultural Studies Theory. The author concludes by qualifying the case for using reality TV as one—but not the only—means of teaching communication, and offers other alternative texts and media sources that can also help instructors illustrate abstract communication theories and concepts for their students.

Interest in reality television has exploded in the past few years; a genre that began with young-adult programming such as MTV’s The Real World has developed its audiences, topics, and cultural outreach exponentially. While some researchers of this phenomenon, such as Nabi, Biely, Morgan & Stitt (2003), have dismissed reality television viewing as being merely typical of the voyeuristic American mindset, communication scholars are more and more frequently agreeing that something of more cultural significance than mere entertainment is indicated by the viewership and popularity of this type of programming. Researchers and cultural reporters variously argue that reality TV is manipulating audience’s values, privileging the dominant culture, creating a new outlet/form for parasocial relationships, or changing expectations of interpersonal interactions and civility (see, for instance, Dyer, 2010; Kraidy & Sender, 2011; Rodriguez, 2011; Rose & Wood, 2005). Americans watch everything from Bridezillas to Extreme Home Makeover to The Real Housewives of [fill in the affluent city of choice] with passion and dedication, so naturally our interest as scholars and teachers is piqued, and our temptation to jump on this cultural bandwagon is considerable.

Reality TV is not only popular for mass audiences—it is also of interest to scholars/teachers for several reasons. First, many teachers already find it exciting, effective, and just plain fun to incorporate reality television into our classrooms. However, for teachers who
have never considered utilizing reality TV as a part of their classroom instruction, this essay also argues that reality TV can be extremely useful in helping students connect abstract theories with actual observable behavior—therefore making communicative concepts and theories even more intriguing and relevant for our students. Finally, the informed and deliberate use of reality TV in the classroom can be a way to apply sound theoretical perspectives in order to simultaneously demonstrate and extend scholarship in communication theory. Given this, we need to think carefully about the most appropriate pedagogical approaches and theory-based reasons for utilizing this genre as a part of our teaching. This article provides suggestions and guidelines for incorporating one particular perspective into the use of reality TV in a communication theory course. Although these suggestions are based on use in a sophomore-level general education course, several aspects of these exercises can be adapted for general speech courses at the high-school level or entry-level college course.

This article proceeds as follows: beginning with a brief review of semiotic analysis as one appropriate theoretical framework to guide the pedagogical use of reality TV, the discussion moves to giving examples of the indexical and symbolic use of reality television in the classroom. The article, then provides specific examples of programs that can be used to demonstrate communication theories and concepts, and breaks down one sample activity that utilizes a semiotic approach to teaching Cultural Studies theory. This essay concludes with suggestions for other kinds of artifacts that can complement the use of reality TV in the classroom so that students are not given the mistaken impression that communication is so easy to understand and master that they can simply watch TV and ‘get it.’

**Semiotic Analysis: A Very Brief Introduction**

The framework for taking this particular a theory-based approach to using reality television in the communication course and classroom is drawn from research on semiotics, which is essentially the study of verbal and visual communication as ‘signs.’ Based on the work of philosopher Charles Peirce, semiotic analysis (which is central to rhetorical studies but appears frequently in fields such as advertising and marketing in addition to communication studies), examines three functions of signs: 1) **Iconic** (the sign looks like what it represents; for instance, the little icon on a women’s room is supposed to resemble a woman); 2) **Indexical** (the sign indicates that some process or activity will take place or has already taken place; yield and stop signs tell us that we are supposed to direct our cars in a given way); 3) **Symbolic** (the sign has a deeper conceptual meaning we have learned or will learn; the Pepsi company was able to gain such recognition for its circular symbol with waves of red, white, and blue that the company does not even use the word ‘Pepsi’ in many ads utilizing the logo). In one of his early essays, Peirce explains in more depth:

A regular progression of one, two, three may be remarked in the three orders of signs, Likeness, Index, Symbol. The likeness has no dynamical connection with the object it represents; it simply happens that its qualities resemble those of that object, and excite
analogous sensations in the mind for which it is a likeness. But it really stands unconnected with them. The index is physically connected with its object; they make an organic pair. But the interpreting mind has nothing to do with this connection, except remarking it, after it is established. The symbol is connected with its object by virtue of the idea of the symbol-using mind, without which no such connection would exist (http://www.iupui.edu/~peirce/ep/ep2/ep2book/ch02/ch02.htm).

Peirce saw this process as so essential to human consciousness that he indeed claimed “All thought . . . must necessarily be in signs” (p. 34). If we believe in the centrality of communication to human existence, then it seems logical to draw on a theory that claims its essentiality in understanding human thought.

To examine more closely how the semiotic perspective applies to utilizing reality TV as a teaching tool in the communication classroom, consider the following examples. We might consider not employing the iconic perspective if we are concerned that students are already too easily convinced that reality TV is reality (due to the edited, compressed, and even scripted nature of the genre, of course, this is rarely true, but less worldly students can confuse the two realities more easily). There are certainly a few cases in which the iconic perspective is useful; for instance, episodes of John and Kate Plus 8 (a reality TV show chronicling the day-to-day interactions of a husband, wife, and eight children) show two iconic figures, a husband and wife, in frequent conflict. The dysfunctional relationship presented on-screen looks exactly like the reality of a family in tension (often painfully so).

The other two perspectives, however, might offer an even more insightful understanding of how to utilize reality TV as a teaching tool in the classroom—the indexical and the symbolic aspects of semiotics. By using this framework in combination with reality TV program excerpts, teachers can variously ask, “Does what’s going on here remind you of something we covered in Theory X?” (the indexical approach), or “Is there something represented here that you think we should resist or disagree with? Is there a hidden message here?” (the symbolic approach). This approach helps students link the abstract concepts and theories we teach in communication to observable, practical events more effectively in a memorable and accessible way. To demonstrate the potential use of the semiotic perspective in the classroom, we can review a sample activity designed to help students understand and utilize the theory of Cultural Studies. This particular exercise is an example of the symbolic approach, because it is focused on helping students to understand ‘what lies beneath.’

No Bravo, BRAVO: A Semiotic Approach Using Reality TV to Teach Cultural Studies Theory

This activity that invites students to review many examples of reality TV shows in light of Cultural Studies theory—a theory that examines the way in which mediated messages either establish hegemony (the power one social group has over another) or can be counter-read to resist the values of the dominant group in power.
Goals/Objectives

1. Students will be able to identify the basic concepts of Cultural Studies Theory.
2. Students will engage in the practice of ‘oppositional reading.’
3. Students will be able to define and differentiate among the concepts of dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional readings.
4. Students will be able to recognize examples of embedded cultural values in mass-mediated messages.

Courses

Communication Theory, Introduction to Mass Media/Media Literacy, Television and Film Studies, Rhetorical Theory (this exercise could also be used in a high-school or undergraduate public speaking course if the PowerPoint were revised to eliminate the specifics of Cultural Studies theory and just focused on how mediated messages affect audiences’ beliefs, values, and attitudes).

Resources Needed

Internet connection and ability for students to work in groups on laptops/desktops with Internet connection; PowerPoint/LCD projector

Rationale

The author chose this particular example of using reality TV to illustrate and teach a communication theory because Cultural Studies is often one of the more difficult perspectives for students to grasp, especially if they are members of the dominant cultural group. Doing this kind of in-class activity also provides students with the practice in critical thinking and theory application that they need later in the course to write their final analysis paper.

Activity Directions

The instructor first takes students through the basics of Cultural Studies theory in a PowerPoint presentation. This is a regular part of our communication theory course, so students are used to seeing the background/history of the theory, basic assumptions, basic concepts, and then doing an application of the theory of the day.

Once this content is covered, students are invited to get into groups of 4-5 and look online at the Bravo TV website at http://www.bravotv.com/shows. The students are asked to discuss in their group questions such as, what values are being consistently promoted by these reality programs? Who are their targeted audiences? Who benefits from promoting these values
to these audiences? What are the economic motives behind producing these kinds of reality TV programs? What cultural values promoted by these programs do and do not resonate with the group?

Students are given 10-15 minutes to discuss in small groups, and then report their findings back to the class as a whole. The instructor summarizes the key points and moves on to discuss the strengths and limitations of the theory.

Time Frame

The PowerPoint takes approximately 20 minutes to cover with students; discussion in small groups and then with the entire class takes 20-25 minutes. This activity is planned for completion within a 40-minute time period, but additional discussions or follow-up assignments could certainly fill a 50-minute time period.

This is certainly not the only activity, program, or theory that can benefit from the application of semiotic theory and reality TV. The following is a list of examples of other communication theories and concepts that have been successfully explained and demonstrated in an undergraduate communication theory class with the help of reality TV programs (these examples are primarily indexical, since they are used to demonstrate the existence of concepts taught within communication theories):

- Using the program “Millionaire Matchmaker” to illustrate the differences between covering-law, rules-based, and systems perspectives on communication (Matchmaker Patti Stanger has an unbending set of ‘rules’ that she requires her clients to follow to find their dream mate—who also happens to be very, very wealthy); students then determine their points of agreement and difference with Patti’s rules to create their own rules-based or systems theories of dating. This program could also be used in a high school or undergraduate public speaking course to reinforce more basic concepts such as self-disclosure and impression management.

- Using the program “Extreme Makeover” to illustrate the concept of the creation of self in Symbolic Interaction Theory (in this program, people receive the opportunity to have free plastic surgery based on their claims of how the procedures could change their lives; the MTV program “Totally Obsessed” is also useful but must be retrieved from online archives on the MTV website); students discuss how strongly the creation of a self-image is anchored to one’s physical appearance and the reactions of others to that appearance. This program could also be used in a high school or undergraduate public speaking course to provide evidence of more basic concepts such as the importance of non-verbal communication and impression management.
• Using the program “Intervention” (where addicted people are profiled, being told they will appear in a documentary, but are actually confronted in a group intervention led by the program’s hired facilitator/counselors, then are offered the opportunity for free treatment at a sponsoring rehabilitation center) to illustrate Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory. In particular, this program can be used to indicate the concept of ‘charmed’ vs. ‘strange’ loops; interactions between the addicted subjects and their families are viewed and discussed in light of the dysfunctional reasoning often used on both sides to justify unhealthy behavior, compared to the ‘charmed’ loops of message creation and interpretation that occur after the intervention. This program could also be used in a high school or undergraduate public speaking course to illustrate more basic concepts such as effective listening and providing/responding to feedback appropriately.

• Using the program “The Bachelor” (where various women compete for the attentions of one single man) to illustrate the various tensions explored in Relational Dialectics Theory; interactions between the bachelor and his various potential partners are examined for evidence of tensions such as the real vs. the ideal, autonomy vs. connectiveness, and novelty vs. predictability. This program could also be used in a high school or undergraduate public speaking course to demonstrate more basic concepts such as the transactional model of communication and shared vs. personal fields of experience.

• Using the program “Survivor” (where people from very varied backgrounds and even cultures are placed in a remote location and given ‘challenges’ to meet both individually and in teams) to illustrate Groupthink; team dynamics are discussed to determine where a team is failing to think beyond its prior experience, as well as to illustrate how a team under tension is more likely to engage in groupthink (as well as the tendency to ostracize members who do not get along and go along with the rest of the group). This program could also be used in a high school or undergraduate public speaking course to teach more basic concepts such as group roles and team working.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the communicative concepts and theories that reality TV can illustrate, but it does demonstrate that reality TV has a clear semiotic application in our classrooms.

Whether we take the indexical or the symbolic approach, then, semiotic analysis provides a sound theoretical grounding for our use of reality television in a communication classroom. Like any other tool or technique, however, reality TV certainly can be—and perhaps is already—overused as a way to ‘jazz up’ our classes; therefore, a list of other potential ‘signs’ that can help us explain and illustrate communication theories and concepts follows next.

What Else is There? Semiotic Alternatives to Using Reality TV Programs
One good reason to limit our use of reality television as a teaching tool is very practical. Chances are that psychology, sociology, and social work classes are utilizing these same programs to help teach their theories and concepts. Therefore, if reality TV is all that we use, we will probably be encouraging our students to disengage from, not engage in, theory-based and conceptual discussions.

A second good reason for limiting our usage of this genre of programming as an exemplar of communication is that if we limit our use of reality TV in our teaching, we can better enable our students to use reality TV as their own ‘space’ for exploring communication theories and concepts, perhaps in course individual papers or individual and group presentations. A sample assignment description designed to allow students their own ‘read’ of reality TV programming is as follows:

**Individual Research Paper:** You will conduct research on the theory that is of greatest interest to you and apply it to a naturally-occurring event, popular culture artifact, famous person, etc. to write an 8-10 page research paper applying the theoretical and conceptual frameworks discussed in class (8-10 pages of text, not counting cover page and bibliography). Your research must include a complete bibliography of at least five sources **cited in the text of your paper** (online publications and sources count for only half value, so a bibliography using only online sources must have at least 10 entries). These must be scholarly sources (such as journals and textbooks/research publications in the field of communication studies, psychology, sociology, education, etc.). Your course text does **not** count as one of your required bibliography entries, although you should cite it if you use information from the textbook in writing your paper. This assignment will be divided into several stages; your professor will establish due dates for your proposal, rough draft, and final draft.

As a part of your grade for this assignment, you will prepare a 5-10 minute ‘trade show’ presentation which summarizes the following: 1) the event/person/artifact/group under study; 2) review of theoretical/conceptual frameworks applied; 4) research conclusions about the communication dynamics of the group under study; 5) suggestions for further study and research. You will be required to create a visual for this presentation (could be a PowerPoint on your laptop, a poster board, a clip from a relevant video, a display of objects—whatever you think will best help to intrigue the audience and illustrate the topic of your paper).

Although students are not required to analyze a reality TV program, they often find this a very manageable artifact to examine in an undergraduate communication theory course; therefore, they have a wider range of programs/artifacts to choose from if the instructor is **selective** in using examples in everyday class discussions.
Perhaps an even better reason to use reality TV selectively in the communication course/classroom is that we should model the broad-ranging interests and scholarship that we hope our students will demonstrate in the course. Examples of other kinds of ‘signs’ that can serve a parallel function to reality TV programs are as follows:

- Online dating sites
- Self-assessments (instruments and online quizzes)
- News stories, newscast clips, online articles
- Company websites/ads
- Blogs
- Transcripts of political speeches
- Contemporary and classic novels
- Artists and gallery shows

As with any new cultural event or experience, reality television programming offers an exciting addition to our discussions of communication theories and concepts. As experienced teachers know, however, the best-engaged students are those who are given a diverse range of ways to explore communication. The purpose of this essay has been not only to offer ideas and examples for those interested in utilizing reality television, but also to present a theoretical perspective for the more informed and deliberate use of reality television—and the many other cultural artifacts well within the reach of both teachers and students.

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1 A very accessible discussion of semiotics for high school and undergraduate students can be found in Borchers’s (2006) text on rhetorical theory, specifically Chapter 10 on Rhetoric, Media, and Technology.

2 Because BRAVO features so much more reality TV programming than other networks, this website provides a convenient place for students to evaluate a number of reality TV programs in one listing. The nature of BRAVO’s reality TV programming, which often emphasizes lifestyles of the rich and famous (or the wanna-be rich and famous), also allows students to see readily the value-laden aspects of reality TV.

3 In my classroom, any online source, even journal articles found through EBSCO, counts for a half-credit. Students usually have little or no difficulty finding sufficient sources once we conduct an online database session early in the semester.

References


