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CTAM JOURNAL MISSION STATEMENT

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.

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*.

EDITORIAL POLICY

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.**

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 editors' recommendations and comments. If there are any questions about the process, please direct them to the journal editor.

PERMISSIONS STATEMENT

FROM THE EDITOR

Another year, another issue of the CTAM Journal has been published. I am always appreciative of the authors and reviewers who continue to make this journal a success. The CTAM Journal is a great place to help authors refine their manuscripts for publication. Even if the article was not accepted for this issue, I am proud that the authors got detailed feedback to guide the manuscripts toward an eventual home.

We have five articles that were accepted this year. Butler & Modaff's article on challenges for students with physical and mental health conditions is a thought-provoking piece to help all educators improve the inclusivity of our campus environments. The articles by Gruber & Schrader, Robinson, and Ferrell all connect the communication discipline to popular culture. Respectively, these articles address film, music, and social media to show how communication theories are present in all places in our society. The remaining article by Dillard & Skjaret is targeted toward theater educators by showcasing an activity to delve into character creation. All five articles add much value to our publishing landscape while enhancing the communication and theater disciplines.

I appreciate our readers who help the articles take on further meaning in academia. As I review the public metrics of journal readership, I see that we have had almost 30,000 articles downloaded in the last year. We have readers across the world who value the work being created by our journal. Thank you to everyone who has been a part of that process.

Sincerely
Bradley

Bradley Wolfe, Ed.D.
Editor, *Communication & Theater Association of Minnesota Journal*
Communication Faculty, Ridgewater College

GENERAL INTEREST ARTICLES

"Like Grasping at Wisps of Smoke:" Interactional and Educational Challenges for College Students with Invisible Chronic Physical and Mental Conditions

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Abstract

Past research has explored the experiences of college students with chronic conditions from a variety of methodologies; however, student-driven, longer-term qualitative data is needed to explore how students with chronic conditions describe the challenges they face in attempting to manage their conditions and succeed in college. The current study gathered qualitative data in the form of daily journal entries over a 14-day period (pre-pandemic) from 23 college students who self-identified as having a chronic physical or mental condition. The themes were discussed through the lens of communication theory of resilience. We envision the management of student chronic illness as resiliency work with a focus on (re)triggering events and forward an additional resilience process to the five original processes in CTR—protective avoidance.

Approximately one in four college students reported having been diagnosed with a mental illness although the rate may be much higher as mental illness is often undiagnosed and untreated (Taniguchi-Dorios et al., 2023). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018) reported that chronic mental and physical conditions impact students in a variety of ways including daily functioning and ability. To that end, Carroll et al. (2016) found that undergraduate students with chronic illness have a 16% graduation rate versus a 50% graduation rate for students without chronic illness, while Serbic et al. (2021) suggested that students with chronic pain have lower psychological, social, and academic functioning than those who do not report chronic pain. First-year students with health issues are also at "more significant need for

assistance in addressing social, physical, and emotional barriers; dealing with stress of self-managing health tasks and issues; and accessing disability services for appropriate accommodations" (Davis & Paro, 2020, pp. 15-16). Clearly, college students with chronic mental and physical conditions experience their educations differently and must negotiate their challenges in ways that healthier students do not.

Emerging adulthood is a unique development stage in which to understand chronic illness because it is a time where many young adults are in a liminal period, caught between adolescence and adulthood (Houman & Stapley, 2013). Adolescent individuals with chronic illness often have many educational aspects of their illness managed by caregivers throughout their K-12 years and are financially and/or emotionally dependent on a particular family member. In early adulthood, however, these individuals may shift emotional investment from family to friends or romantic partners, although dependence on family members for help with health issues may conflict with the goal of increasing independence (Arnett, 2010; Martire & Schultz, 2007). Communication with others is central to how college students with chronic conditions manage their conditions and their education (e.g., Smith & Applegate, 2018); however, health related stigma and disclosure further complicate the college transition and experience for those navigating chronic illness (Rohde et al., 2018).

Past research has explored the experiences of college students with chronic conditions from a variety of methods including interviews (Frost et al., 2019; Woodhead et al., 2021), online surveys (Hamilton et al., 2023; Woodhead et al, 2021), and email-based surveys at regular intervals (Ravert et al., 2017). However, student-driven, longer-term qualitative data is needed to explore how students with chronic conditions describe the challenges they face in attempting to manage their conditions and succeed in college.

Review of Literature

Students with Chronic Illness

Although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2013) argued that the literature does not support a single uniform definition for chronic disease, recurrent themes include: non-self-limited nature, the association with persistent and recurring health problems, and a duration that is measured in months or years as opposed to days or weeks (Goodman et al., 2013). Woodhead et al. (2021) forwarded a definition of mental health conditions that is particularly applicable to a broader range of chronic conditions faced by college students, which is "any self-reported health concerns that had a significant impact on the student's academics" (p. 734). Chronic conditions (mental and/or physical) as related to college students, therefore, are recurrent health problems that are persistent, long-term, and impact the student's interactional and educational goals.

College students with a chronic condition are less likely than their peers without a chronic condition to graduate and while in college report a vastly different college experience. In research on first-year student health-related quality of life and loneliness, only 7% of first-year students with chronic illness reported knowing another student at the college with a chronic illness and 57% knew no other chronically ill students (Herts et al., 2014). Approximately half of the students in that study had told fewer than five friends about their own health condition. Woodhead et al. (2021) reported that students may have more difficulty disclosing their condition to faculty than to peers, but if college students disclosed their conditions to a faculty member, it tended to be for the purposes of securing accommodation rather than social support (Frost et al., 2019).

While some conditions exhibit physical manifestations, peers are often unaware of another's chronic illness due to it being invisible. The invisibility of chronic conditions for some college students contributes to the college experience being even more challenging than it already is for the typical student (de Beer et al., 2022; Sowinska & Pezoa; Tudela, 2023). As their condition is not necessarily noticeable to outsiders, students with invisible chronic conditions must make decisions regarding if and when they will share their health information, to whom, under what circumstances, and for what purposes (Kline & Davidson, 2022).

Communication with relevant others (e.g., peers and professors) becomes yet another aspect of their chronic condition that students must manage (Woodhead et al., 2021). Choosing to keep silent about the chronic illness may be a coping mechanism (Christian & D'Auria, 1997) or students may hope that college is a fresh start where they can leave any stigma associated with their atypical experience behind them (Houman & Stapley, 2013). Herts (2014) found that only 17% of first-year students registered with their college's disability support service program, which is consistent with findings reported by Houman and Stapley (2013) that many students with chronic illness were unaware of available accommodations. Furthermore, many who are aware of the services did not register for them until they were experiencing academic difficulty (Preece et al., 2007).

The current research addresses the calls for more investigation on the challenges faced by students with invisible chronic conditions and the communicative management of those conditions by the students (Rudick & Dannels, 2018; Smith & Applegate, 2018). The communication theory of resilience (Buzzanell, 2010; 2017; 2019) is used to reframe the experiences of the students and to explain the challenges they described.

Communication Theory of Resilience

Communication theory of resilience (CTR) defines resilience as a fundamentally communicative and constitutive process "through which people reintegrate and actively construct their new normal through language, interaction, networks, and attention to their identities and identifications" (Buzzanell, 2019, p. 68). Resilience is activated when a trigger event creates upheaval, a sense of disruption, loss, or chaos, in a person's life. Trigger events can be impermanent (e.g., a short-term, acute illness) or permanent (e.g., chronic illness) and can be a single event or a series of events that provoke both uncertainty and negative emotions (Wilson et al., 2021). While Buzzanell (2017) described the process activated by trigger events as an ongoing "dynamic activated when humans experience distress and disaster" (p. 103), similar to Golden and Jorgen's (2023) research on precarity, we envision the management of chronic illness as resiliency work with a focus primarily on distress rather than disaster.

Unlike previous models that locate resilience as an individual characteristic or deficiency models, CTR focuses on the ways individuals create resilience through interaction and relationships (Buzzanell, 2017). Once a trigger event occurs, people create resilience through one of five processes: crafting normalcy, affirming identity anchors, maintain and using communication networks, constructing alternative logics, and foregrounding productive action while backgrounding negative feelings (Wilson et al., 2021). Individuals might craft normalcy by behaving or interacting in ways to get back to their routine or create a new routine in the face of the disruption. People affirm identity anchors by performing identities that, while threatened by the triggering event, also provide meaning and guide action in the face of the event (e.g., student, employee, friend). Constructing alternative logics is a strategy for thinking about and reacting to disruptions in an alternative manner, such as looking for positives (e.g., the silver lining) or using humor, while maintaining and using communication networks involves reaching out to both

strong and weak ties in a person's social network (e.g., going to the disability resources on campus). Finally, individuals may try to foreground what they view to be productive actions while they may background what they deem as negative thoughts. These strategies are not mutually exclusive and are intertwined in complex ways as individuals work to integrate a new normal into their daily lives, which in turn recursively shapes the interactions and resources available to them (Buzzanell 2010; 2017).

Research Question

With a significant percentage of college students attempting to manage invisible chronic mental and physical conditions while pursuing their education (Carroll, 2016; Herts et al., 2021; Serbic et al., 2021; Taniguchi-Dorios et al., Woodhead et al., 2021), it is necessary to gain a deep understanding of the challenges they face. To that end, the following research question was posed:

RQ: How do students with chronic conditions describe the challenges they face in attempting to manage their conditions and succeed in college?

Method

The current study gathered qualitative data in the form of daily journal entries (digital audio or written) over a 14-day period during an academic semester (pre-pandemic) from 23 college students around the U.S. and Canada who self-identified as having a chronic physical or mental condition. The authors used a combination of personal networks, snowball sampling, and administrator-approved postings to chronic illness Facebook pages to recruit participants. The diary method was chosen to afford maximum control of the reporting process to the student and to allow them to speak in their own voice without the pressure of responding directly to a researcher.

To be eligible as a participant, three criteria had to be met: they had to be 18 years or older, be currently attending college part- or full-time, and identify as having a mental or physical chronic condition. Thirty-six people responded who met the criteria, and 23 of them completed the study. Nine percent of those 23 participants identified as male (n = 2), and 91% identified as female (n = 21). The participants were from various years in school, pursuing 13 different majors, were from colleges in 10 states in the U.S. and one province in Canada. All participants reported more than one chronic condition. All participants were assured confidentiality, and all research procedures were approved by the appropriate institutional review board.

Data Collection

When a possible participant expressed interest via email to one of the researchers, they were sent an email response asking them to sign the informed consent form and provide demographic information. The potential participant could choose to do a written diary or an audio diary. In the case of an audio diary, a small digital audio recorder was mailed to the participant with operating instructions and a return envelope for sending the recorder back to the researchers. Three of the 23 final participants chose to use the audio diary method, while the remaining 20 participants wrote journals and emailed them back to the researchers.

Participants were asked to take approximately 10 minutes at the end of each school day for two weeks to respond to the prompt: “how did your education and your chronic condition intersected that day, focusing particularly on any interactions you had with professors or peers.” Audio diaries were transcribed by the authors into Microsoft Word and those files were combined with the written diary files to yield 130 pages of data.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers read each diary entry several times and then made notes in the margins regarding coherent ideas that addressed the research question. A coding system based on those initial notes was created, which resulted in the data being reduced to 171 coded units. Similar coding units were grouped together until the data could no longer be reduced. The remaining groups formed five themes, which served as answers to the research question posed.

Results

The five themes that emerged from the data were: *chronic conditions as impediments to education, difficulties with peers, missing education-related obligations, complications with professors,* and *accommodation and testing concerns*. To set the stage for the detailed description of results, we offer the following quotation from Sally, a 25-year-old graduate student with three chronic physical conditions:

> I had to learn with chronic illness and academics—not every test is going to land on a good health day, actually most won't, so as long as I do the very best I could for THAT DAY that's all I can do. Does it always reflect what I am capable of? No, but it was the best I could do despite the limitations and symptoms of that given day … Sometimes you need to concede a battle to win the war.

Chronic Conditions as Impediments to Education

The theme of *chronic conditions as impediments to education* (n=66 codes) represents cognitive, physical, and emotional challenges to academic success that the students experienced internally. First, students described how they faced cognitive challenges that they felt limited their ability to be successful in college. Phrases such as "impossible to think straight," "difficult to focus," and "distracting me and stopping me from being at my 100% potential" illustrate how

students' chronic conditions made it hard for them to perform at the levels they knew they could. As Sally explained, "I know the material and on my good days I can rattle off the information without trying but today it was like grasping at wisps of smoke." This was a common realization for the students---knowing how successful they *could* be, but the realities of their conditions did not allow them to be. These cognitive challenges associated with the students' chronic conditions significantly impacted their ability to perform academically.

Second, students articulated physical challenges they felt impeded their progress in college. While different chronic conditions manifested differently for the students, they articulated the common point that physical symptoms were going to affect them negatively and that this was something about which they were always painfully aware. Arlene, a 19-year-old student with multiple physical chronic conditions, summarized this well when she said, "Since pain is something I deal with on a daily basis, it's something that I am always thinking about, either consciously or maybe less consciously whenever I'm in pain because that's just the nature of pain."

Concentrating on and succeeding in academics can be more complicated for students with chronic conditions. The never-ending process of attempting to manage the physical challenges of chronic conditions resulted in many of the students just trying to get by. Leslie encapsulated this point perfectly when she stated, "I am reaching a point in the week … when I just cannot do any more than the bare minimum."

Finally, while college can be a stressful time for any student, students with chronic conditions described how the emotional challenges were particularly problematic. Philip, a 25-year-old with narcolepsy, ADHD, borderline personality disorder, and major depression, described the debilitation when he could not find his classroom:

> I was going to be on time for class, but I forgot which room it is in since it isn't on my schedule, and I forgot to write it in. I thought I could find it in my email as I walked to the third floor, but it was nowhere to be found. At this point, I am starting to get sweaty, tense, and very frustrated. I know the syllabus is buried in my backpack and this may have the room number on it. For some reason, in my anxious state I thought it would be quicker to go to the department office to ask. I ran into the chair of the department…I politely ask if she could assist me in figuring out where my class is located. She said, "you've been in the class before, haven't you?"

The anxiety of not remembering where his classroom was led Philip to be involved in an interaction with the department chair that resulted in a face-threatening situation for him. He was unable to recover from this set of circumstances, missed class, and became more emotionally upset than he was earlier.

Though enumerated separately here, the cognitive, physical, and emotional challenges are interrelated for college students with chronic conditions. The sum can create additional challenges or the need to alter educational plans altogether. For Haley, the challenges became too much, and she had to change from her traditional college to one that she could complete online from her family's home. "Although it was a really difficult decision, in retrospect, I see that there is no way that I would have been able to take care of myself at school given my current condition and circumstances."

Difficulties with Peers

Students with chronic mental and physical conditions articulated that *difficulties with peers* was an interactional challenge they faced (n=41 codes). One difficulty involved the complexities regarding the conscious choice not to discuss their conditions with peers. The

students felt they could manage perceptions and be perceived as a peer rather than a peer with a chronic condition. For example, Samantha, a 21-year-old with generalized anxiety disorder and Arnold Chiari malformation said,

> I used to not want to talk about it and for a while would refuse to talk about it. I think it was easier for me to deal with it that way because I could pretend that I was healthy and that I didn't have something "wrong" with me…I just wanted to be normal and my fear of standing out I think is what I really struggled with.

At times, not talking about their conditions with peers was rooted in the fear that no one would want to interact with them once they learned of their health situation. Arlene, a 19-year-old with postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS) and medium-chain acyl-coenzyme A dehydrogenase deficiency (MCAD), described it this way, "If I were to actually vocalize my thought processes with my peers and talk about it, nobody would really want to talk to me anymore, right?" Regardless of the reason for not talking with peers about their conditions, the unintended consequence of this choice for some was that they experienced dissonance between the self they performed and the self they knew they were.

A second type of difficulty with peers involved the student feeling they had to explain their chronic condition despite their desire not to do so. In some instances, the explanation was needed to account for an accommodation about which the peers asked. Mindy, a 22-year-old with dysautonomia, endometriosis, and diverticulosis, provided an example of such a situation:

> I brought my lunch to the lab (because I didn't have time to bring it anywhere else) and everyone was commenting on it or asking where I got it from, to which I replied that I got it from the cafeteria. The cafeteria, however, does not give out to-go boxes (which everyone on campus knows), so I then answered the follow-up question of how I was

> able to get it by explaining how I have food allergies. People often respond with jealousy that I get specially prepared foods and can take it to-go and/or with a follow-up sense of pity that I have so many food restrictions.

In other situations, the explanation was necessary to account for behaviors they needed to engage in that their peers did not understand. Samantha described this when she said, "Since the weather was nice today, one of my peers wanted to work on our class project outside. I had to discuss with them why I couldn't spend extended periods of time in the sun/heat due to my illnesses." Finally, descriptions of chronic conditions were necessary for the students to account for the presence of symptoms they were experiencing. Caroline, a 20-year-old with dysautonomia and POTS, wrote:

> I did physics homework with three close friends although my brain wasn't working well. When I have a lot of brain fog and cognitive issues, I say that "my brain isn't working" and my friends are understanding of this and that I might need to work a little more slowly.

As with Samantha and Caroline, several of the students said they often oversimplified the explanations to peers. This satisfied the need to account for the behavior or accommodation while making the students feel they had done what they could to protect their privacy and mitigate negative relational implications.

Third, the peers did not understand the chronic conditions or the extent of them, despite the students' best efforts to explain. This lack of understanding often led to deepened feelings of frustration and hopelessness for the students with chronic conditions. Jane, a 19-year-old with anxiety, depression, ADD, and insomnia, described how a class-based project group she worked

with critiqued her for how anxious she "got about nothing" even though she explained her conditions to them. She summed it up as "another battle lost."

Missing Education-Related Obligations

The third theme, *missing education-related obligations* (n=28 codes), is related to the first theme (*chronic conditions as impediments to education*) but involves specific disruptions of daily college life rather than a more general concern with academic progress. Missing class due to symptoms or effects of chronic conditions was a challenge for several students. The students often found themselves having to be late for class, leaving class early, or missing class. Hatty wrote:

> I didn't sleep again … I skipped both classes. I didn't email either professor to let them know … I always feel guilty when I don't attend class … It's days like today where I really reflect on how my anxiety can control my life. I know that when I don't sleep, my anxiety is extra severe, and I wouldn't get anything out of class by attending. I should consider telling my professors why I'm skipping class, so they know it isn't out of laziness.

Hatty's story illustrates the experiences of many students regarding how chronic conditions do not just lead to missing class, but begin a cycle where anxiety builds about the missed class, which prompts increased symptoms.

In addition to missing part or all of classes, students with chronic conditions found themselves missing other activities related to their college experience, such as group meetings, meetings with professors, or student events. Hannah, a 23-year-old with generalized anxiety disorder and bipolar, missed group project meetings because of her "anxiety and depressive episodes," while Leslie unintentionally missed meeting with her professor. She wrote, "I was

intending to go to my teacher's office hours after work, but again felt like I may pass out at any moment … My memory and concentration were so bad that I completely forgot my intention to go."

Complications with Professors

Students discussed *complications with professors* (n=25 codes) as a challenge. Complications were perceptual, based on fears or anxieties they had regarding the professor, or relational, based on prior interactions with the professor. In both cases, the complications served to further motivate many of them not to interact with the professor.

Perceptual complications sometimes took the form of students feeling awkward or uncomfortable about potential interactions. For example, Mindy, a 22-year-old with dysautonomia, endometriosis, and diverticulitis, was uncomfortable with the thought of having to communicate with her professor about her chronic condition:

> In Chapel today, I had the same difficulty with standing-up during the entire hour … I feel that it would be beneficial to ask the instructor if I may sit due to my dysautonomia, but I feel embarrassed about asking her. I would rather be uncomfortable standing than be uncomfortable explaining my entire medical history with her.

For students with chronic conditions, the perceptions they had about interactions with professors led them to try to avoid those interactions as much possible.

Students voiced concerns about interacting with professors out of fear professors would develop negative perceptions of them. Coral, a 24-year-old with post-concussive disorder, stated, "If I tell them all the different things that my disability limits me from doing … you worry that they'll think less of you as a clinician."

Relational complications were often rooted in prior negative interactions with the professor. These negative experiences exacerbated an already stressful situation. Sally wrote, "I already had some difficulty with this professor last semester for being 1-2 minutes late to the 8 am lab … I got locked out a few times since on bad pain mornings I tend to move a bit slower." The negative interactions students reported were often based in the students' perceptions that the professors do not understand or do not care to understand their conditions. Interactions surrounding absences and lateness policies were touchpoints for these perceptions. This is summed up well by Laura, a 25-year-old with POTS, fibromyalgia, depression, and anxiety, who said, "I don't think the instructors are very understanding of different kinds of people."

Accommodation and Testing Concerns

The final theme is *accommodations and testing concerns* (n=9). Though consisting of fewer codes than other themes (in most part due to the wording of the journal prompt), the data were powerful, consistent with other themes, and represented an institutional-level challenge students faced. Students indicated, despite having accommodations, they often did not use them for a variety of reasons, such as problems with the office facilitating accommodations, problems concerning exams, or not wanting to expose their conditions. A vibrant example of students not using accommodations was relayed by Sally:

> I hate it so much that it's the main reason I don't use my disability accommodations even though I have them. It's such a hassle, the online booking rarely works, there are forms you have to fill out and take to your professors EVERY assignment and test, the lines are long, and I get sick standing for more than a few minutes, and the people that work there are extremely condescending.

As indicated by students, concerns with the institutional office designed to facilitate accommodations often resulted in students not using their accommodations.

When students did take advantage of the accommodations, they reported that they sometimes felt disadvantaged in doing so, especially with exams. At times, the professor would forget to send the exam to the center and no one at the center was able to ensure ahead of time the exam had been sent. In other instances, students indicated that they felt they were disadvantaged when they needed to take an exam in a separate, quiet location because no one was there to help them if they had a problem. As Kyra said, "if you are taking a test and you have a disability and you have no one to ask questions to while you are in the middle of the test that's a bit unfair."

Finally, students found the processes involved in using their accommodations outed them as having a chronic condition, and this was not something with which they were comfortable even though academically they knew it was in their best interest. As Cali, a student with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, eosinophilic esophagitis, and complex regional pain syndrome wrote:

> While I do have accommodations through my university, I don't use them. While they would probably benefit me in the long run, I don't like to be different or expose my illnesses to those who don't absolutely have to know.

As with other challenges, using accommodations rightly afforded them conflicted with their desire to control their health information and the perceptions of others.

Discussion

This study explored how students with chronic conditions described the challenges they faced as they attempted to navigate their college careers. In many ways, the results of the study support existing research. For example, the student diary data reinforced the findings of

Woodhead et al. (2021) that students may have more difficulty disclosing to faculty than to peers. Extending that research, the diary data indicated that the students often have complex reasons for not disclosing or for not disclosing fully to peers, faculty, or the institution. Their reasons were often related to privacy boundaries (Petronio, 1991) and their desire to control their information and therefore the perceptions of the relevant other, which is in line with the findings of Hamilton et al. (2023).

While the results of this study in many ways support past research, the application of communication theory of resistance affords a different perspective. CTR posits the need for resilience is enacted by the occurrence of a trigger event, whether that be a temporary or permanent event (Buzzanell, 2017; Wilson et al., 2021). In this study, although the permanent trigger event (i.e., chronic condition) typically occurred before the student entered college, the combination of uncertainty around the mental and/or physical condition when coupled with the novelty of college demands created a dynamic environment that required ongoing resilience (Buzzanell, 2010; 2017; 2019). This reality poses an interesting amendment to CTR since the triggering event should not necessarily be considered a single event that calls into play resilience processes; instead, the data point to a more long-lasting impetus for resilience processes. Perhaps the label "permanent triggering event" is more accurately described as a "(re)triggering event" because the chronic illness is not a one-time event and it does not set-off resilience processes in response to the singular event. Instead, considering chronic illness to be a (re)triggering event acknowledges the long-term, recurring need for resilience processes, both currently and anticipated in the future.

While this research offered support for several of the five resilience processes outlined in CTR, including crafting normalcy and affirming identity anchors (Buzzanell, 2017), we forward

a new resilience process, protective avoidance. Students used the process of crafting normalcy to create resilience throughout the theme of *chronic conditions as impediments to education*. Students had limitations as to how much they could handle either in a day or the course of their weekly schedule. When they hit that limit, they knew for their health that they had to accept those limitations. Leslie signaled this when she said, "I'm reaching a point in the week." Sally summarized the process of re-envisioning normalcy to mean doing what you can and accepting that as your new normal when she said, "conceded a battle to win a war." CTR processes are not mutually exclusive, and Sally's reference to winning the war is also a nod to foregrounding productive action while backgrounding negative feelings. This was also true for students such as Haley who ultimately left her traditional program in favor of an online program; while she mentioned that it was a difficult decision, she focused on the ways she was better able to complete the online program from her family home.

The theme *difficulties with peers* posed myriad challenges for students. Many students utilized the resilience process of affirming identity anchors (Buzzanell, 2017) to create or salvage identities they felt were threatened by their chronic conditions during interactions. This was particularly relevant when students felt they had no choice but to explain their condition (e.g., in the instance of Mindy who received boxed lunches when they were not widely available to other students) or when they needed to engage in behaviors that their peers did not understand (e.g., Samantha who could not work outside in the sun with her peers). Oversimplification (Buzzanell, 2017) was one way students created boundaries and felt as if they were maintaining control over their health identities in the situation. This is also an example of maintaining communication networks (Buzzanell, 2017) since students recognized the relational value of the conversation to occur.

A new resilience process emerged from the data as students were faced with the need to interact with others—protective avoidance. Students engaged in this process with peers, professors, and accommodation/testing centers on campus. When students did not want to be "the sick kid" or did not feel as if the interaction was going to be beneficial or positive for them, they actively engaged in protective avoidance processes. These protective avoidance processes were active ways individuals worked to create a new normal in their daily lives, which shaped future interactions and resources available to them. In this way, protective avoidance processes were a duality (Giddens, 1979) in that they provided a resource for students to employ in their current situation and, which in turn, could mediate and constrain similar interactional situations that could occur later. Protective avoidance processes are relevant when triggering events are reframed as (re)triggering events, thereby incorporating a longer-term, recursive perspective on resilience for college students with chronic conditions.

Sometimes students used protective avoidance processes by intentionally not sharing any information about their condition with their peers. Samantha did this when she indicated she wanted to pretend that she was healthy, as did Arlene who feared her peers would view her differently if she disclosed her conditions. The concerns also prevented several students from communicating with professors either because it would have been uncomfortable to share medical information or because they were worried about negative perceptions. Similarly, although many of the students had accommodations, they reported not utilizing them. While some of their concerns were logistical in nature, more of the concerns were with how the accommodations or disability staff made the students feel. Not using these services became a protective avoidance process for students to create resilience.

The protective avoidance process did create unintended consequences (Giddens, 1979) for some students. As students were attempting to create a new normal, they inadvertently created a structure with additional stressors for themselves. Frequently missing class was a norm for many of the students due to their chronic conditions, but students also noted that they did not email professors to let them know about the absence. Their journals frequently noted anxiety about missing notes and class, as well as an indication that they should contact their professors, but never that they actually contacted them. Anxiety over missing class increased anxiety symptoms and the previous lack of communication (use of protective avoidance) did not create communication networks that students were comfortable using. Many of the students did not have a comfortable communication network within their accommodation or disability services center so they did not have that to rely on either. Students who were already struggling with many aspects of college life were left without the typical rules and resources provided by universities, such as professors and university services. Research has called on higher education institutions to create a culture of wellness (e.g., Amaya et al., 2019), while well-intentioned, would benefit from recognizing that students' protective avoidance processes could serve as a barrier to them taking advantage of the available resources.

Limitations & Future Directions

The process and results of this study revealed limitations and accompanying directions for future research. First, while 23 participants yielded a significant amount of rich qualitative data, more participants could have provided a broader and deeper understanding of the challenges college students with chronic illness face. From a demographic perspective, only two participants identified as male and none as non-binary, and very little other demographic information was secured so future studies should ensure a representative participant pool that can

provide comparative groups. Second, data were collected pre-pandemic, and it is possible the pre-pandemic challenges have morphed or changed in some way. Future studies should replicate the prompt-driven diary method in the current post-pandemic environment. Finally, the diary method proved to yield excellent data across the 23 participants; however, the cumbersome reality of keeping track of a hand-held digital recorder that had to be sent back to the researchers could have limited the use of that diary method. Future studies should consider asking student participants to use their existing digital recording devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets, computers) and post their files daily to a secure cloud storage site to provide the researchers access to the audio diaries.

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"You Are More Than Just Your Gift:" Facework and Idealization in Disney's *Encanto*

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Abstract

In this rhetorical analysis, we apply Goffman's theory of facework to the Disney film Encanto, arguing that Encanto provides important lessons regarding facework and advocates for using facework in moderation. Encanto tells the story of the Madrigals, a family who experiences a miracle that results in each member of the family having a special gift – all except for one, the teenage protagonist, Mirabel. When Mirabel recognizes that both the miracle and her family are in danger, she realizes that her individual family members are using facework in order to fit in with the rest of the family and impress the community, even though they feel confined by their gifts. Mirabel's sisters use idealization to mask feelings of insecurity as well as their own creativity, while her aunt Pepa and cousin Camilo experience difficulties engaging in facework due to the nature of their gifts. Furthermore, Mirabel's uncle Bruno is shunned by the family because he fails to properly engage in facework. We contend that Encanto provides a cautionary message for its young audience: facework should be used in moderation and that maintaining face, idealization, and front at the expense of expressing one's emotions can have negative consequences on not only the individual engaging in facework, but also those around them.

Disney's *Encanto*, featuring music by Lin-Manuel Miranda and direction by Byron Howard, Jared Bush, and Charise Castro Smith, was released in United States' theatres on November 24, 2021, earning over $27 million in its opening weekend ("Encanto," 2021; "Encanto," n.d.). Featuring the voices of Stephanie Beatriz as the teenage protagonist Mirabel, Maria Cecilia Botero as the family matriarch Abuela, and John Leguizamo as the family

scapegoat Bruno, *Encanto* tells the story of the Madrigals, a family who experiences a miracle that results in each member of the family having a special gift. Mirabel's mother can heal people with her cooking, her sisters Isabela and Luisa have the gifts of beauty and strength, her aunt Pepa can control the weather through her emotions, and her cousins Dolores, Camilo, and Antonio can hear things at a great distance, shapeshift, and talk with animals, respectively. Mirabel's uncle Bruno has been ostracized by the family because his gift, the ability to predict the future, unnerves the family and the community. When the miracle and the family are in danger, Mirabel, the only family member without a special gift, takes it upon herself to uncover the problem and save her family and the miracle that has empowered them and their community.

Encanto has received mostly positive critical reviews, with many critics noting the political and family-oriented messages in the film. Maya Phillips (2021) of the *New York Times* praises the film's use of diversity and computer animation, noting that the film's creators "subtlety incorporate an important political message" about "displaced people who build a home from nothing" (para. 7). She states that the Madrigal family's "history is the source of their magic, and they use that magic to selflessly improve their community, without needing to assimilate into it. Given our nation's track record on these subjects, to see such a tale in a children's movie is quietly extraordinary" (para. 7). Although she critiques Miranda's songs for being too similar to his previous work, Kristen Page-Kirby (2021) of the *Washington Post* applauds *Encanto*'s visual and voice work, as well as its "simple yet powerful" overarching message: that "people are worthy of love because of who they are, not what they do" (para. 4). Richard Roeper (2021) of the *Chicago Sun-Times* calls *Encanto* "vibrant, gorgeous, eye-popping, colorful and, well, enchanting" and notes that it contains "lovely messaging about the importance

of family" (para. 2-3). He claims that "if you could hug a movie, this is the kind of movie you'd want to hug" (para. 3).

While the movie offers the political and family-oriented messages noted by critics, many of the characters in *Encanto* also engage in facework. Defined by Erving Goffman (1967), facework consists of "the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face" (p. 12), which is "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself…in terms of approved social attributes" (p. 5). The idealized front expected of each member of the Madrigal family is primarily determined by their gift and is reinforced by the family matriarch Abuela (see Appendix A for the full family tree). The Madrigals use facework to protect their family and the community, but this leads to several family members feeling confined by their gifts. In this essay, we argue that *Encanto* serves to teach lessons regarding facework. Luisa, Isabela, Mirabel and Abuela engage in facework that is detrimental to their mental health and to their interpersonal relationships. Through Pepa's and Camilo's inability to use facework and Bruno's refusal to engage in facework, viewers learn that putting on a face in certain situations has value. We contend that *Encanto* provides an important message for its young audience: that facework should be used in moderation and that maintaining face, idealization, and front at the expense of expressing one's emotions can have negative consequences on not only the individual engaging in facework, but also on those around them.

To date, few scholars have examined the messages in *Encanto*. Play therapist and trauma scholar Sydney Conroy (2022) studied how the film portrays intergenerational trauma, suggesting how therapists might use the film to help families communicate their experiences with trauma. Film and media researcher Katie Potter (2022) compares *Encanto* to another popular Disney film, *Frozen*, observing how *Encanto* diverges from traditional Disney themes in

order to bring to light anxieties that exist in families. In another comparison study, film scholar Manuel Betancourt (2022) explores the different depictions of Colombia in *Encanto* and in the mystery film *Memoria*. Our study on *Encanto* seeks to contribute to the scholarly literature on this unique Disney film by exploring the messages concerning facework in the film through rhetorical criticism as a research method.

Rhetorical criticism is "one means through which we expose our structure or reasoning, acknowledge the agency of our interlocutors, and sustain our commitment to the ongoing practice of argument itself" (Browne, 2007, p. 109). Instead of focusing on measurement, rhetorical criticism explores meanings in text and requires interpretation and judgment (Zarefsky, 2006, p. 384). The role of a rhetorical critic is to try "to understand what is going on in order to interpret more fully the rhetorical dynamics involved in the production and reception of the message" (Andrews, 1983, p. 6). Rhetorical criticism involves forming logical arguments about a specific text and supporting these arguments with evidence from the text and theoretical framework. In this rhetorical criticism study, we apply Goffman's facework to *Encanto* in order to better understand the messages in the text and how they have the potential to impact young audiences.

Literature Review

In his book *Interaction Ritual*, Erving Goffman (1967) defines face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself…in terms of approved social attributes" (p. 5). He describes facework as "the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face" (p. 12). Facework consists of the ways in which face is created and maintained, particularly when challenged with a "face threat." Goffman (1967) explains that individuals use facework to "counteract 'incidents' - that is, events whose effective symbolic implications

threaten face" (p. 12). When these "incidents" occur, face-saving is needed in order to prevent embarrassment or loss of social standing.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) describes a person's face as a mask used to conceal imperfections: "this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves—the role we are striving to live up to—this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be" (p. 19). Facework takes place in the "front region," while anything the individual wishes to hide is left in the "backstage." The front region is "the place where the performance is given" (Goffman, 1959, p. 66). Performances in the front region "may be seen as an effort to give the appearance that [an individual's] activity in the region maintains and embodies certain standards" (p. 67). In contrast, the backstage is "a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course" (p. 69). It is "where the suppressed facts make an appearance," and it hides anything that is "inconsistent with the appearance fostered by the performance" (p. 82).

Goffman (1959) explains that performances of face are "socialized, molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented" (p. 35). This act creates the idealization of face, which he describes as "an idealized view of the situation" (p. 35). Goffman (1959) contends that "when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole" (p. 35). The idealization of face is something individuals strive for in order to maintain or increase their social standing, to present themselves as credible or flawless, and to avoid embarrassment.

Goffman (1967) explains that facework is performed in two ways: the avoidance process and the corrective process. When engaging in the avoidance process, an individual attempts to

"avoid all contacts in which…threats are likely to occur" (p. 15). If the individual is unable to avoid such contacts, he/she/they may engage in defensive measures, such as not discussing topics that may reveal backstage information, or protective measures, such as being overly polite or making jokes. If a face threat occurs, an individual may engage in the corrective process in order to reestablish face. The corrective process involves the challenge (where the face threat occurs), an offering (where the individual is given the opportunity to correct the "offense"), acceptance (in which the other party accepts the individual's offering), and thanks (when the individual "conveys a sign of gratitude to those who have given him the indulgence of forgiveness" (p. 22)).

Goffman (1959) also describes the expressive equipment that is "intentionally or unwittingly employed by an individual" to project face – this is referred to as "front" (p. 22). There are three components of front: setting, which consists of the scenic components such as time and place; appearance, which is how individuals express themselves physically; and manner, which includes an individual's behavior and presentation of emotions. A conflict front, or inconsistent front, may also occur if one component of front contradicts another (Goffman, 1959).

Several scholars have examined how facework can be used in intercultural contexts. In 1988, Stella Ting-Toomey used Goffman's concept of facework to develop face negotiation theory. Influenced by the individualism-collectivism dimension of culture, face negotiation theory focuses on intercultural conflict styles (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) state that "cultural values shape our meanings and punctuation points of salient facets of social self and personal self," noting that the use of facework, particularly when engaging in conflict, varies by culture (p. 188). Cocroft and Ting-

Toomey (1994) observed differences in the use of facework between Japanese and United States respondents, as well as between male and female respondents. Oetzel et al. (2000) examined facework behaviors in conflicts between best friends and conflicts between strangers in both the United States and Japan; they observed thirteen unique clusters in the analysis: "aggression, apologize, avoid, compromise, consider the other, defend self, express feelings, give in, involve a third party, pretend, private discussion, remain calm, and talk about the problem" (p. 397). Using a questionnaire to study self-reported usage of facework by participants in four countries, Oetzel et al. (2001) found that facework and face concerns vary by a culture's power distance and level of individualism and collectivism. In a later study focusing on parents and siblings' interactions in Germany, Japan, Mexico, and the United States, Oetzel et al. (2003) noted that, while there were cultural differences in the use of facework, there were also similarities across all cultures; for example, they found that participants who engaged in conflict with parents used facework differently than those who engaged in conflict with siblings. In her study that utilized questionnaires completed by respondents from six different cultures, Merkin (2006) observed that the power distance dimension of culture played a prominent role in what type of communication strategy respondents used when managing face threats. Jwa (2017) examined facework among second-language speakers and found that they used face in three ways: "self-mocking humor, group embarrassment, and attempts to build group cohesion" (p. 517). The literature regarding facework in intercultural communication suggests that the use of facework varies by culture, the power dimension of each culture, and by the relationship of the participants in the facework encounter.

Goffman's concepts of facework and front have been explored in other ways by scholars of both communication studies and sociology, including how facework is used by friends

(Durham & Friedman, 2016; Manusov et al., 2004; Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2017), how musicians utilize facework strategies when handling face threats during performances (Scarborough, 2012), and how facework is used by instructors to provide written feedback to students (Gardner, Anderson & Wolvin, 2017). Several studies have examined how facework is used in social media settings (Lim et al, 2012; Romo et al, 2017; Schuller & Schrader, 2017; Sharkey et al., 2012). However, to date, few scholars have published studies examining how facework is portrayed in fictional texts and what lessons can be conveyed regarding facework to an audience through these texts. In a 2014 study, Schrader explored how the use of facework in the musical *Wicked* contributed to messages regarding leadership in the musical. Del Saz-Rubio and Gregori-Signes (2013) studied how facework strategies are utilized in the court martial cross-examination scene in the film *A Few Good Men*. We hope that this study contributes to the growing body of literature regarding how popular culture texts convey messages about facework to mass audiences.

Analysis

In this essay, we analyze the use of facework by several characters in the film *Encanto.* Appendix A includes a family tree that outlines the three generations of the Madrigal family and the magical gifts of each family member. This analysis, which focuses on the characters who best demonstrate Goffman's concept of facework, has been organized in three sections. The first section includes Luisa and Isabela, as the storylines of these two characters are similar in regards to their use of facework. Next, Mirabel and Abuela are discussed together as the interactions between these characters provide various examples of facework. In the third section, we explore how a pair of parent/child characters, Pepa and Camilo, are unable to engage in facework due to the nature of their magical gifts. Finally, we examine how the character of Bruno is rejected by

his family when he refuses to engage in facework and how this refusal leads to his self-imposed exile in the film. Through this analysis, we suggest that the portrayals of facework in this film serve as pedagogical tools regarding healthy expression and the portrayal of self.

Luisa & Isabela

One example of facework in the film is demonstrated by Luisa, one of the oldest Madrigal grandchildren, whose gift is her physical strength. Luisa's name, which means "renowned warrior," aligns with her gift. Luisa describes herself in the song "Surface Pressure" in the following terms:

> "I'm the strong one, I'm not nervous.
> I'm as tough as the crust of the Earth is.
> I move mountains, I move churches.
> And I glow, 'cause I know what my worth is.
> I don't ask how hard the work is.
> Got a rough indestructible surface.
> Diamonds and platinum, I find 'em, I flatten 'em.
> I take what I'm handed, I break what's demanded" (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 34:19).

Luisa's presentation of self to her family and community reinforces and bolsters her image as "the strong one." In public and in her home, she is perpetually performing physically demanding tasks, sometimes even anticipating what physical task people will ask of her before they ask it. For example, in one scene, a man in the community approaches her, asking her to fix the church. While he is asking, she already has the building on her shoulder and is engaged in the task he is requesting. In addition to performing this role in public, she is also constantly taking on all the

physical tasks in her home. However, as Luisa continues her self-description in the song "Surface Pressure," viewers learn that backstage, Luisa is tired, anxious, and filled with self-doubt. She sings,

> "But under the surface, I feel berserk as a tightrope walker in a three-ring circus.
> Under the surface, was Hercules ever like, 'Yo, I don't wanna fight Cerberus?'
> Under the surface, I'm pretty sure I'm worthless if I can't be of service.
> A flaw or a crack, the straw in the stack
> That breaks the camel's back, what breaks the camel's back?
> It's pressure like a drip, drip, drip that'll never stop.
> Pressure that'll tip, tip, tip 'til you just go pop.
> Give it to your sister, your sister's older
> Give her all the heavy things we can't shoulder
> Who am I if I can't run with the ball?
> If I fall to pressure…" (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 34:45)

Luisa only makes this confession to her sister Mirabel after Mirabel's persistent prompting. While Luisa's frontstage maintains her face of being "the strong one," she confides her backstage doubts and concerns to her sister only. Mirabel responds to this confession by stating, "I think you are carrying way too much" (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 37:40).

This musical conversation shows that, for the community, Luisa illustrates a consistent front, which Goffman (1959) notes occurs when setting, appearance, and manner align with one another. When she confides her backstage feelings to Mirabel, she physically moves away from their home and walks through the community, leaving the populated area before she will address

her sister's questions about her nervousness. By adjusting the setting before addressing backstage concerns, Luisa is able to maintain the idealization she has created for the community.

However, with her sister, Luisa begins to display a conflict front, where one or more of the elements of front do not align with the others (Goffman, 1959). Luisa's appearance begins to change as she develops an involuntary twitching in her eye. This physical manifestation of stress is the clue that leads Mirabel to reach out to Luisa to discuss her concerns about the family's magic. A drastic change in manner also occurs in this interchange when Luisa confesses her fears and insecurities. Luisa later admits that she has been feeling "weak" and she tells Abuela that she is "losing [her] gift," noting that when she was asked to carry donkeys, they "felt heavy" (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 38:00). The donkeys, which feature in Luisa's song as well, are symbolic of Luisa herself, who is expected to do manual labor for the family and the community. While Luisa is able to maintain her face in the community, she confesses to her family what she sees as her failures, including her family members in her backstage concerns.

At the end of the film, Luisa's situation is resolved when she regains her physical strength. She learns to take on challenging tasks in moderation, rather than trying to do everything for everyone. Her family also learns to support this healthy decision. As the family rebuilds their house and Luisa takes on her normal physically-daunting tasks, her cousin Antonio pushes her into a hammock and hands her a drink to keep her from taking on too much. Luisa's storyline illustrates the importance of including trusted individuals in backstage concerns and cautions against maintaining idealization at all times.

Another example of facework in the film comes from Mirabel's other sister Isabela. In the opening song of the film, "The Family Madrigal," Mirabel introduces Isabela as "graceful, perfect in every way. Isabela grows a flower, and the town goes wild. Isabela, she's the perfect

golden child" (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 7:30). Like Luisa, Isabela maintains a face that is consistent with her gift: she appears to be "perfect" in both her home and in public life. Her gift is to add beauty wherever she goes, either by just being present or by growing stunning flowers out of thin air.

Like Luisa, Isabela is also prompted to reveal elements of her backstage in a conversation with her sister Mirabel. Mirabel, who resents and dislikes her seemingly-perfect sister, attempts to reconcile with Isabela in order to save their family miracle. Mirabel accuses Isabela of being selfish and self-centered, to which Isabela responds, "Selfish? I have been stuck being perfect my whole entire life." She confesses that she does not want to marry the man who her family has picked for her, saying, "I never wanted to marry him, I was doing it for the family" (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 1:08:29). As in the conversation with Luisa, the conversation between Mirabel and Isabela takes place in a private setting – Isabela's bedroom. This enables Isabela to maintain her idealized face publicly while sharing backstage concerns privately with her sister.

Isabela's choice to reveal her backstage to Mirabel results in her usage of all three components of front. While these components are consistent with one another, they are inconsistent with the idealization Isabela has created and maintained in front of the family and community. When she admits her reluctance to marry in her song "What Else Can I Do?," she accidentally creates a cactus, which is vastly different from the traditionally beautiful flowers that she had previously created. In response to this new creation, she sings, "I just made something unexpected, something sharp, something new. It's not symmetrical or perfect, but it's beautiful" (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 1:08:52). As the song progresses, Isabela admits that she is tired of being perfect and maintaining an idealized face, and she wants to

explore what else she can do with her powers. As Isabela creates different flowers, including vines and carnivorous plants, these new flowers change her physical appearance, causing her to appear messy, artistic, and covered in splatters of colors from her new plants. Furthermore, Isabela changes the appearance of her environment, first in her bedroom and then in other parts of the home, such as the roof, the front yard and the courtyard. Lastly, Isabela's manner changes. In most of her interactions with Mirabel leading up to this song, Isabela is sharp and high strung. However, throughout the song, she learns to "let go" of her perfect image. By the end of the song, she is much more relaxed and even jokes with Mirabel saying, "you're a bad influence" (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 1:11:39). While Isabela's new setting, appearance, and manner are consistent with each other, they are inconsistent with her previous idealized front, suggesting that Isabela's idealization was preventing her from expressing other parts of her personality, such as her creativity.

After revealing her backstage to Mirabel, Isabela does not continue to maintain her perfect image. For the remainder of the film, she embraces her messy appearance and takes joy in creating cacti, carnivorous plants, vines, and other less traditionally beautiful flora. She does not move forward with the marriage arranged by her grandmother and supports the relationship between her ex-fiancé Mariano and her cousin Dolores, who has harbored a secret crush on Mariano throughout Isabela's courtship. Isabela's story suggests that too much focus on idealization can result in suppressing other parts of one's personality and encourages viewers to consider their own needs and not just what is expected of them.

Mirabel & Abuela

Like her sisters, Mirabel provides an example of facework in the film; however, Mirabel's use of facework contrasts that of her grandmother, Abuela. In the opening song of the

film, viewers learn that Mirabel is the only member of her family without a magical gift. Mirabel's communication with both her family and the public indicates that she is fine with being different from her magical family members. Even in the face of skepticism and insensitivity, she maintains her face of being a good sport. After the disclosure of her lack of magic at the end of "The Family Madrigal" opening song, one the village children questions her use of face, saying, "if I was you, I would be really sad." Another says more critically, "I wonder if your gift is denial." The village store owner says that Mirabel can have the "not-special special" since she is the only Madrigal without a magical gift (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 9:10).

Throughout "The Family Madrigal," Mirabel practices the avoidance process. Goffman (1967) explains that when individuals cannot avoid situations where a face threat is present, they may engage in defensive or protective measures (p. 15). In "The Family Madrigal," Mirabel uses both. At first, she employs defensive measures, successfully avoiding answering the village children's question of "what is your gift?" fourteen times. She also uses protective measures, especially deflection, when she changes the topic, dances, and walks away. She also employs the protective tactic of making jokes, quipping "I never meant this to get autobiographical" (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 8:12).

Ultimately, Mirabel is unsuccessful in avoiding the topic, and confesses that she has no magical gift. She then begins the corrective process, assuring the village children that she is not upset by this and that she is happy being the only Madrigal without a special gift. However, viewers are aware that Mirabel is putting on a front by the end of the second song, her solo, "Waiting on a Miracle." During this song, she discloses her backstage to viewers by explaining that she is really hurting and very much wants a magical gift like the rest of her family. Like her

sisters, Mirabel displays an idealized front that differs significantly from the emotions she is experiencing backstage (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 22:29).

Abuela, the family matriarch, is focused on the image of the family as a whole and on the ability of each magical family member to maintain their idealized front. She believes it is her family's duty to maintain a perfect image and use their gifts to help the community. She explains this through a vow in the opening song:

> "We swear to always
> Help those around us
> And earn the miracle
> That somehow found us
> The town keeps growing
> The world keeps turning
> But work and dedication will keep the miracle burning
> And each new generation must keep the miracle burning" (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 6:47)

Through these lyrics, Abuela illustrates that she feels it is the responsibility of her family to uphold an idealized image because they have been granted power through the miracle. Goffman (1959) notes that facework is especially useful for individuals who hold positions of power. In *Encanto*, the Madrigal family members are in positions of power because of their miracle, and these positions of power come with expectations on how to behave. Abuela pushes her family members to maintain face and attempts to employ corrective practices to maintain the image of the family. For instance, when Mirabel interrupts her cousin Antonio's gift ceremony party to tell everyone that she sees cracks in their home, she is presenting a challenge to her family's face.

Her grandmother engages in the corrective process by first providing an offering to partygoers, assuring them that "there is nothing wrong with the Casa Madrigal, the magic is strong," and that there is plenty to eat and drink (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 27:12). Accepting this offering, the partygoers continue eat, drink, and enjoy themselves at the celebration.

Later, at a special dinner with the Guzman family (the family of Isabela's fiancé, Mariano), the entire Madrigal family experiences loss of face when they all learn that Mirabel has gone into Bruno's tower and recovered his final prediction before he disappeared. Mirabel begins by telling her father, who is visibly agitated and distracted during the meal. When Luisa is asked to move the heavy piano, she struggles to move it and weeps because she feels weak. Camilo is unable stop shapeshifting, and this lack of control results in him changing into different people within seconds. Pepa has a storm cloud forming over her head, and Dolores, who is exceptionally soft spoken, shouts. Again, Abuela attempts to employ the corrective process on behalf of her family members, saying that "everything is okay." However, her attempts are not received positively this time, and the Guzmans quickly depart, with other villagers looking on with concern.

Mirabel and Abuela find themselves at odds with one another, as Abuela's chief concern is maintaining the idealization of the Madrigal family, while Mirabel is focused on revealing her family's backstage in an attempt to save the miracle, the house, and her family. This results in an argument between the two where Abuela accuses Mirabel of acting out of spite due to not receiving a gift, and Mirabel accuses Abuela of seeing Mirabel as a disappointment and for forcing an impossible idealized front onto her family members. Mirabel runs away, and when Abuela finally finds her, the two reconcile after Abuela admits that Mirabel was right in that she forced an idealized front onto her children and grandchildren in a desperate attempt to preserve

the miracle. Mirabel and Abuela's story arcs serve as a cautionary tale regarding idealization: constantly expecting oneself and others to live up to an idealized standard is unhealthy and detrimental to interpersonal relationships.

Pepa & Camilo

Pepa, Mirabel's aunt, and Camilo, Mirabel's cousin (Pepa's son), experience unique challenges maintaining face in the film due to the nature of their gifts. Pepa's gift is to control the weather, but her emotions also trigger volatile changes in the weather. This means that her backstage is always on full display to everyone around her; Pepa cannot put on a front or hide her emotions because the weather reveals her backstage feelings. When she gets upset talking to Mirabel about Bruno, a dark thunder cloud forms over her head and she says, "Great, now I am thundering" (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 45:22). The song "We Don't Talk About Bruno" also tells the story of how Pepa's emotions on her wedding day caused a hurricane. Since Pepa cannot hide her feelings, she cannot engage in facework.

Pepa's son Camilo has the gift of shapeshifting, meaning that he is able to change his appearance to look like other people. Because of his gift, he often pretends to be other people; this presents a challenge in appearance as there are some scenes when people are talking with Camilo, thinking he is someone else. For example, Mirabel is talking with who she assumes to be her cousin Dolores about her concern about the loss of their family miracle, but Dolores is just staring at her, because it is not Dolores – it is Camilo. Felix, Camilo's father, then comes into the scene and scolds Camilo for taking his sister's form in an attempt to get more to eat. Camilo is, in effect, the opposite of his mother. While Pepa cannot put on a face because her backstage is always revealed, Camilo is never seen sharing his backstage because he is almost always putting

on some else's face. This has the same result: neither Pepa nor Camilo can properly engage in facework because of their gifts.

Pepa and Camilo's inability to use facework provides an interesting contrast to the rest of the Madrigal family. Because their gifts are always on display, they cannot achieve the idealization that Abuela seeks for her family. Pepa cannot engage in facework due to her gift, and although Camilo is essentially engaging in constant facework, he is not achieving idealization because he cannot be trusted to be genuine. Their storylines suggest something different from the other storylines in *Encanto*: that facework, front, and idealization serve important purposes. Just as an obsession with idealization causes problems for many of the other characters in the film, Pepa and Camilo suffer the effects of not being able to properly engage in facework. This suggests to viewers that facework is something to be used in moderation; it should not be used excessively or avoided altogether.

Bruno

Unlike Pepa and Camilo who cannot engage in facework, Bruno could engage in facework but refuses to do so. Bruno has the magical gift of having visions of the future. The controversial nature of Bruno's gift leads to him being ostracized; prior to the plot of the film, Bruno abandoned the family. In "The Family Madrigal," Mirabel introduces the absent Bruno by singing, "My Tio Bruno...they say he saw the future. One day he disappeared" (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 5:59). Mirabel has a desire to learn more about what Bruno saw that made him leave when she learns that it may be related to her family losing their magical gifts. Mirabel pushes her family for more information in the song "We Don't Talk about Bruno." Through the song, various characters share their negative experiences with Bruno's predictions, including a hurricane on Pepa's wedding day, a fish dying, someone gaining weight, someone going bald,

and difficulties with Isabela's and Dolores' love lives. At the end of the song, Mirabel learns that she was at the center of the prophecy that triggered Bruno's disengagement with his family. Dolores, whose gift is enhanced hearing, has a line in the song that notes the difficulties that Bruno had maintaining face while practicing his gift. She sings,

> "It's a heavy lift, with a gift so humbling
> Always left Abuela and the family fumbling
> Grappling with prophecies they couldn't understand
> Do you understand?" (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 47:11)

As the plot evolves, viewers learn that Bruno never actually left his family but has been living inside the walls of Madrigal family's magical home, Casita. Bruno's physical retreat serves as a metaphor for the backstage; he refuses to engage with his family and community, and therefore lives only in the backstage, as there is no one for whom to put on a face.

Mirabel discovers where Bruno has been hiding and pleads with him for help understanding his prophecy concerning her. In their interactions, Bruno continues to resist engaging in facework, but, ironically, he utilizes front in his attempts at avoiding facework. Mirabel's and Bruno's entire conversation takes place in the space where Bruno has been hiding for a decade. His physical appearance is meant to be scary; when Mirabel first sees him, he is a hooded figure in the shadows with green eyes holding rats. Bruno's manner and personality are depicted as eccentric; he runs away from Mirabel when she first sees him and then continues to try to get her to leave throughout their interactions. He is superstitious, often jumping over cracks and tossing salt over his shoulder. He shares his mental health challenges with Mirabel as well, showing her how he engages in obsessive-compulsive behaviors and introducing Mirabel to two of his additional personalities, Hernando and Jorge. Though Bruno works to avoid putting on

a front, he nevertheless depicts a consistent front, as his appearance and manner reflect his isolated setting.

In their discussion, Bruno reflects on why he left after having a foreboding prophecy about Mirabel and the fate of the family's magic. He explains, "I knew how it was going to look. I know what everyone would think. Because I am Bruno and everyone always assumes the worst" (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 59:43). Just as other members of the family were forced into maintaining an idealization, Bruno was forced into the role of family scapegoat. In this way, his storyline parallels Luisa's and Isabela's; all three characters were assumed to be nothing more than their gifts, and it was expected that their use of facework would reflect the roles they were assigned to play. Bruno's storyline differs from his nieces, however, in that he chose to disengage with the family and the community, isolating himself through his refusal to engage in facework.

This isolation likely contributed to Bruno's deterioration in mental health. Studies have shown that social isolation and loneliness can lead to mental and physical health problems (Fakoya, McCorry, & Donnelly, 2020; Lovell & Webber, 2024; Murthy, 2023; Trew et al., 2023). Trew et al. (2023) noted that this was particularly prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic during lockdowns, and that it disproportionately impacted certain communities. While Bruno's relationship with his family may have led to his initial choice to refuse to engage in facework and to isolate himself in the walls of Casita, it is likely that his self-isolation and lack of social interaction is what led to his declined state of mental health.

At the close of the film, Bruno comes out of hiding and rejoins his family. He initially resists engaging in facework again, telling his mother Abuela, "I don't care what you think of me" (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 1:23:39). He is surprised when Abuela greets him

with affection. His interactions with his sisters Pepa and Julieta illustrate the corrective process: he apologizes directly to Pepa for upsetting her on her wedding day and then notes that he has a lot of apologies to say to other members of his family. However, Julieta brushes off his apology and embraces him, saying she is just happy to have him back. Bruno's attempts at the corrective process reinforce the message illustrated in Pepa's and Camilo's storylines: that facework in moderation can be a positive thing for relationships. The interaction between Bruno and his sisters notes a shift in the family as they move away from the unhealthy facework practices demonstrated by the family in the past.

Conclusion

Encanto provides viewers with a number of lessons regarding facework. Through Luisa's and Isabela's characters, viewers learn that consistently maintaining an idealized front can lead to exhaustion and frustration. Abuela's and Mirabel's storylines suggest that fixation on idealization is detrimental to one's interpersonal relationships. Through Pepa's and Camilo's inability to properly use facework and Bruno's refusal to engage in facework, viewers learn that putting on a face in certain situations has value. Bruno's and Abuela's character arcs, as well as Mirabel's relationship with Isabela, emphasize the importance of the corrective process and the value of forgiveness. When taken together, the lessons conveyed through *Encanto*'s characters highlight the importance of facework in moderation; facework can be useful in some situations and problematic in others, but ignoring one's backstage or avoiding engaging in facework altogether is detrimental to individuals' mental health and to their relationships with others.

It is important to note that *Encanto*'s primary audience is children. While children will likely not understand the nuanced messages regarding facework in the film, *Encanto* provides valuable messages in terms they can easily understand. The film teaches that it is important to

recognize one's own value and not to define oneself by a particular trait. It warns against trying to be perfect and against judging others without fully understanding their situations. It highlights the values of forgiveness and balance. These lessons connect to the more nuanced lessons regarding facework but are in terms that are easily understood by young viewers.

Additionally, *Encanto* may be used as a teaching tool in undergraduate communication classes, especially in classes focusing on communication theory or interpersonal communication. Undergraduate students, who often enjoy learning communication concepts through popular media, may recognize how idealization, front, backstage, and the corrective and avoidance processes are portrayed through the characters and storylines in *Encanto*. For this reason, instructors who teach facework in their courses may wish to incorporate *Encanto* into class exercises or perhaps as an assignment to help students apply the theory.

Like all studies, there are limitations to this study. Because we used rhetorical analysis as our research method, we focused only on the messages in *Encanto* and how those messages are conveyed, rather than audience response. Future studies may wish to utilize quantitative surveys or qualitative focus groups and interviews in order to better understand how viewers receive the messages concerning facework in *Encanto*. We also focused solely on one movie due to our method; future research may involve comparison studies of similar texts that may include messages about facework, such as Disney/Pixar's *Inside Out*.

Disney's *Encanto* provides its young viewers with important messages regarding facework, balance, self-care, and forgiveness. Through the many members of the Madrigal family, viewers can learn about the detrimental effects of fixation on idealization as well as problems that arise from refusing to engage in facework. By recognizing the lessons in *Encanto* and connecting them with Goffman's theory of facework, viewers are assured that, as Mirabel

sings in the final number of the film, they are “more than just [their] gift” (Bush, Howard & Castro-Smith, 2021, 1:25:39).

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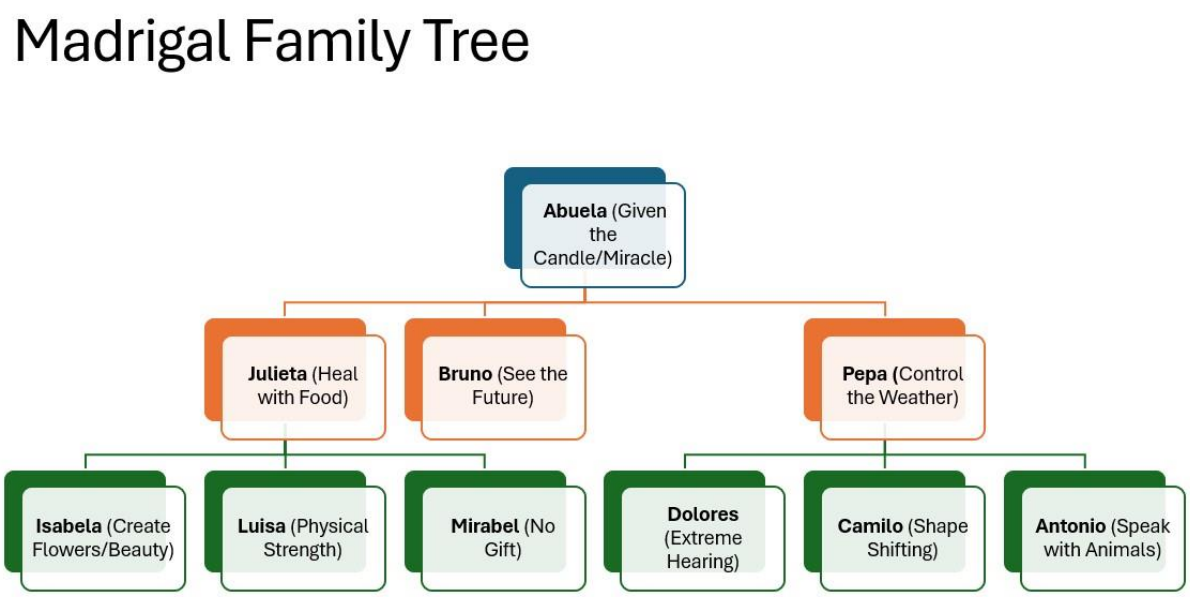
Appendix A



You Never Walk Alone: BTS As A Symbol of Light For Youth

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Abstract

This essay examines how the South Korean music group, BTS, has utilized their platform to bring awareness to mental health in youth. I specifically analyze the use of their personal stories and experiences as a means of communication or outreach to their fans, also known as the ARMY. Exploring the theory of identification, or a direct sense of connectedness between a speaker and an audience, I argue that through their music and personalized rhetoric speech patterns, BTS seeks to allow their fans to view their experiences as the same. This has created a dynamic encompassing a sense of friendship and understanding rather than a typical artist-to-fandom phenomenon. Finally, I consider the implications of how this work has impacted the youth overall and inspired a change in systematic pressure for future generations, despite the group's language distinction.

On June 13, 2013, the South Korean music group, BTS or Bangtan Sonyeondan, debuted with seven members: RM, Jin, SUGA, j-hope, Jimin, V, and Jung Kook, under the music label Big Hit Entertainment, which as of 2021, has been renamed HYBE Entertainment. The name comes from the phonetic sound of the English word "hive", reflecting its newer vision as a multipurpose content company. Big Hit Entertainment was founded in 2005 and between the years of 2005 - 2010, the small company was perceived as producing groups and subunits that only created R&B and pop music. It was not until mid-late 2010 when current BTS member, RM, joined Big Hit as a rapper and songwriter at 16. Impressed by RM's style of rap and complex lyricism at such a young age, former CEO and current chairman of HYBE, Bang Si-hyuk better known as "Hitman Bang" decided to form BTS, previously known as BPB or Bullet Proof Boys, as a hip-hop crew that would center RM as the leader in 2011. However, as the lineup of the group had been finalized by the arrival of Jimin in May of 2012, Si-hyuk

considered the context in which groups had become successful in the Korean music industry and believed that "a K-pop model made more sense".[1] This was due to the extensive growth and popularity of "Hallyu" or the wave of South Korean popular culture, which includes Korean pop music and its influence across both Asian and some western music markets, such as the world's largest and most influential music market, the United States.

K-pop or Korean pop music is often described as being "designed to be enjoyed visually as much, if not more, than it is meant to be heard",[2] which alludes to the fact that the popularity of the genre stems from the music videos that are produced on the YouTube platform. While these videos contain powerful visual styles and intense choreography, the lyrics that the artists are trained to perform are often empty and meaningless, relying on the instrumental to carry the "catchiness" of the tune, pushing for the idea of popularity through mainstream sound.

As a team, BTS has taken a different approach to this genre. During his interview with TIME Magazine in 2019, Bang Si-hyuk stated that he believes that the factor that has set BTS on its unique path was "their sincerity, consistency, and ability to embody the spirit of the times…They don't shy away from speaking about the pain felt by today's generation. They respect diversity and justice, the rights of youths and marginalized people."[3] Therefore, since their debut, BTS has focused on and built their platform around becoming a force that would capture the youth's voice within several sectors of their lives, which began in South Korea and

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[3] Bruner, Raisa. 2019. "The Mastermind behind BTS Opens up about Making a K-Pop Juggernaut." Time. Time. October 8, 2019. https://time.com/5681494/bts-bang-si-hyuk-interview/.

has expanded across the globe. Their name, "Bangtan Sonyeondan", translates to "Bulletproof Boy Scouts" in English, with a special meaning of being resistant to or blocking out stereotypes, criticisms, and expectations that aim at adolescents as bullets, while preserving the values and ideals of them as well.[4] To truly capture the vulnerability and situational aspects of youth culture, specifically within the realm of mental health, BTS has incorporated their personal stories and experiences as a means of communication that would bridge the gap and close off the social stigma surrounding youth concerns. This essay will explore ways BTS has utilized their platform as musicians, through their songs and a public speech rhetoric in particular, to address and bring awareness to the mental health crisis that youth aged 16 to 29, have been facing since the early 2010s.

Literature Review

The current research and conversation surrounding the character and advocacy of BTS lies within two pivotal aspects of their career. The first echoes the widened curiosity of how their fandom, the ARMY, has become incredibly massive and widespread within the last 10 years. This is almost unheard of for a non-western and non-English speaking act. The second aspect confirms that BTS has been exercising its platform as a tool for bringing awareness to social issues and structures in South Korea. In her essay, "Mental Health, Community, Commitment, and the Growth of Individual Identity in the Participatory Fandom of the BTS ARMY", Haulenbeek focuses on the size of the BTS ARMY and how basic elements within their physical lives, including financial and social habits, has been impacted depending on their level of commitment and participation in the digital fandom culture. She suggests that "ARMYs who

[4] Trabasso, Giovanna. 2016. "BTS Is Tackling Problems That Are Taboo – Affinity Magazine." Affinity Magazine. May 29, 2016. https://affinitymagazine.us/2016/05/29/its-about-time-you-know-why-bts-is-trending/.

spend more time involved in the fandom and fandom activities experience a higher positive impact on their habits, and are more involved in their physical communities"[5] and that much of what separates ARMY from other large fandoms, resulting in the development of these positive endeavors for both themselves and the world around them, "has to do with the group, BTS, that they follow".[6] ARMY internalizes BTS as a form of strength that has been able to call attention to and impact so many lives outside of their own. Their mission as a fandom then, has become a force that both stands behind BTS and emulates their positive behaviors.

Being that BTS does act as a guide for how the ARMY carry themselves through their lives, the majority of the contributions that the ARMY has made to their social environment thus far, originate from causes that BTS has shown are important to them, which includes donations toward charitable organizations, such as UNICEF and their #ENDviolence campaign in 2017. Haulenbeek also mentions that "BTS' albums encompass messages about mental health, youth, society, struggles, and more recently, in their "Love Yourself" series, self-love"[7] and how those messages have been embraced by ARMY. However, she admits that there has been a gap within research regarding "the impact that being involved in the BTS ARMY has on the individual, particularly concerning committed participants' mental health and their community outside the fandom",[8] meaning that there has been little done to analyze how BTS has been able to have an

[5] Haulenbeek, Sydney. 2022. "Mental Health, Community, Commitment, and the Growth of Individual Identity in the Participatory Fandom of the BTS ARMY." *Journal: ODU Undergraduate Research Journal OUR Journal: ODU Undergraduate Research Journal Haulenbeek, Sydney K* 9: 5. https://doi.org/10.25778/rd1r-ep02.
[6] Haulenbeek, Sydney. 2022. "Mental Health, Community, Commitment, and the Growth of Individual Identity in the Participatory Fandom of the BTS ARMY."
[7] Haulenbeek, Sydney. 2022. "Mental Health, Community, Commitment, and the Growth of Individual Identity in the Participatory Fandom of the BTS ARMY."
[8] Haulenbeek, Sydney. 2022. "Mental Health, Community, Commitment, and the Growth of Individual Identity in the Participatory Fandom of the BTS ARMY."

impact on ARMY's mental health and what implications that these types of methods could have on such a mass group of people, specifically the youth. This research will be able to add to the conversation of the voiceless young people who have found their comfort through the personal experiences of the BTS members and echo how the use of music and public speech advocacy can become a medium of aid.

Mental Health in South Korea: The Factors Within

In the late 1990s, South Korea began to develop a severe mental health crisis, which only worsened over the last 20 years. According to a report released by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2014, "South Korea ranked first in suicide rates among developed nations, with 29 in every 100,000 people committing suicide"[9] and "of these suicides, around 60 percent are said to have resulted from depression and other mood disorders"[10] due to the factors of economic pressure, occupational stress, social stigma, and lack of access to health services that involve mental strain. In comparison, the United Kingdom, which is similar in size, has a lower rate of suicidality at "10.7 deaths per 100,000 people"[11]. The following three years were just as strenuous, as the Korean government reported that in 2017, 1 in 4 individuals suffered from a mental disorder, though only 1 in 10 pursued or received professional help and treatment, culminating in the country having the highest suicide rate of any

[9] Toohey, Kylan. 2018. "South Korea's Mental Health Crisis." Korea Economic Institute of America. December 12, 2018. https://keia.org/the-peninsula/south-koreas-mental-health-crisis/.
[10] Toohey, Kylan. 2018. "South Korea's Mental Health Crisis."
[11] Office for National Statistics. 2023. "Suicides in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics." www.ons.gov.uk. December 19, 2023. https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesintheunitedkingdom/2022registrations.

OECD member nation,[12] which is sensible because within that same year, 95 percent of adults in South Korea reported being under stress of some kind, along with staggering rates of depression among the elderly.[13] Despite mental health being such a huge issue nationwide, it is rarely discussed, often neglected, and labeled as "taboo", which is deeply rooted in the public conscience, allowing the state-funded inpatient facilities to be both underfunded and underutilized.

Although suicide has been classified as the fourth leading cause of death in the South Korean general population, it has become the number one cause of death for youth aged 9 to 24. The issues that the youth have been facing in particular, lie within an "increasingly competitive and stressful culture",[14] that surrounds aspects of intense education systems, family pressure of idealistic living, and an unemployment rate that is three times higher than the national average, even before the strike of the pandemic.[15] Furthermore, as conversations about mental health are perceived as taboo to the general population of Korean citizens, this idea has been conveyed even more among young individuals, as they often get blamed and victimized for their mental health problems or told that they do not have "nothing to be stressed about" from both immediate and extended family and often, friends as well. This position of thought has led to the youth feeling as if they are voiceless, misunderstood, and that the issues they face do not matter to anyone, burying the pain even from themselves.

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[12] Nagar, Sarosh. 2022. "The Struggle of Mental Health Care Delivery in South Korea and Singapore." Harvard International Review. March 11, 2022. https://hir.harvard.edu/the-struggle-of-mental-health-care-delivery-in-south-korea-and-singapore/

[13] Nagar, Sarosh. 2022. "The Struggle of Mental Health Care Delivery in South Korea and Singapore."

[14] Nagar, Sarosh. 2022. "The Struggle of Mental Health Care Delivery in South Korea and Singapore."

[15] Nagar, Sarosh. 2022. "The Struggle of Mental Health Care Delivery in South Korea and Singapore."

Mediums of Aid

This essay will attempt to understand how BTS has been able to use its platform as a tool that both spreads and brings awareness to the mental health of youth and the severity of this aspect within their lives. This piece of writing will analyze several songs within the discography of BTS and one public speech considered one of their most powerful. Therefore, when thinking about the approach that this research would take, the specific analysis of their use of their journeys as both their persona as individual musicians and their natural state appealed as a method of safe communication between them and their fans because there seems to be a clear emphasis on how "human" BTS is.

The songs that will be explored are as follows: N.O., Tomorrow, Louder than Bombs, Reflection, The Last, Promise, Epiphany, and Life Goes On. The speech that will be discussed is the speech that was given at the launch of the "Generation Unlimited" and "Youth 2030" campaigns at the United Nations General Assembly in 2018. This specific combination of artifacts has been chosen due to their ability to capture various aspects of mental health through the window of interpersonal communication and vulnerable life experiences to help others who may have encountered similar circumstances. The timeframe in which the artifacts have taken place is critical to the analysis of this research because although the mental health crisis for youth began in the late 1990s, the situation had become worse entering the 2010s and was severely impacted during the earlier stages of the COVID-19 pandemic within the on set of the 2020s.

Finding the Common Ground: BTS' Resonation with ARMY

Kenneth Burke defined rhetoric as the use of words, symbols, or symbolic language by human agents to form attributes or ideas to induce actions in other human agents,[16] in other

[16] Burke, Kenneth. "A Rhetoric of Motives." (1950), p. 41.

words, how humans use symbolic language as a form of persuasion. Burke also had various major perspectives and strategies in which rhetoric could be used as a tactic or guide that helps form connections between the audience and the speaker. One key perspective of Burkean theory that lies within building this connection is what he defined as "identification". Identification surrounds the idea that "if our opinions match those of the speaker, we identify with the speaker's rhetoric—therefore identifying with the speaker…Based on how much we identify with the speaker, we may be moved to accept the conclusions that the speaker comes to in an argument, as well as most of its implications".[17] Burke has established this element as being critical for influencing action amongst other human agents due to the nature of constant human interaction and conversation, simply, as we listen to others speak, we often are intrigued about how similar the ideals and opinions of the speaker is to our own. This can also therefore be described as the inverse of "ethos" or the act of persuading an audience through one's credibility or authority toward a certain subject. To analyze how BTS has been able to utilize their platform as an instrument to both spread and bring awareness to the mental health crisis in youth culture, I will be applying the method of identification.

In September 2018, BTS was invited to the Grammy Museum in Los Angeles to indulge in an intimate conversation about their process as songwriters, their success, and how they have been able to connect with their fans. During the said conversation, BTS member SUGA detailed the founding principles and motives of the group and how before their debut, Big Hit Entertainment founder, Bang Si-hyuk, would emphasize that they should "sing about our own

[17] Keith, William M.; Lundberg, Christian Oscar (2008). "The Essential Guide to Rhetoric."

experiences, our own thoughts, our own feelings"[18] and how that piece of advice became "the center of the music that we made".[19] However, the use of their personal stories, thoughts, and feelings was only half of the principle of their music and general platform, the other half though, lies within their age. In June of 2013, the ages of the BTS members ranged from 15 to 20, meaning that when it came time for them to be introduced to the music industry, they were also considered "youth", which generally ranges from age 9 to 24. SUGA also commented on this factor stating, "When we first started out, some of us were still in our teens. I was in my early twenties. We talked about the issues that we faced, and that's made BTS what it is today."[20] This aspect then, in combination with sharing vulnerable pieces of their lives, became a door or passageway for young people to feel as if they are being heard or understood by a peer with a voice that carries rather than seven young superstars.

Therefore, because identification resonates with how a connection between a speaker and an audience can move one in a certain direction of how they may navigate their lives, this method will serve as the appropriate approach to the analysis. BTS has made it clear through their lyrics and public speech rhetoric that they constantly live through a similar struggle with mental illness and know firsthand how living as a young person in the world is not an easy task, acknowledging that the journey of gaining a positive sense of mental health and loving oneself can be difficult, but that it is not impossible. This sense of age and experiential identification then, is used to encourage youth to reach out and seek help for their mental strain because there

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[18] Calixto, Joshua. 2018. "BTS on Why Their Music Speaks to Young People and Their Collaborative Creative Process." MTV. September 12, 2018. https://www.mtv.com/news/2f24mt/bts-grammy-museum-conversation-recap-quotes.
[19] Calixto, Joshua. 2018. "BTS on Why Their Music Speaks to Young People and Their Collaborative Creative Process."
[20] Calixto, Joshua. 2018. "BTS on Why Their Music Speaks to Young People and Their Collaborative Creative Process."

is someone who understands them, is willing to listen, and can guide them through that pain to a more positive awareness of what their lives can become.

The Tuneful Bandage

Since the release of their first single album "2 Cool 4 Skool" on June 12, 2013, BTS has released a total of 16 albums, which include mini, compilation, and full-length versions. Each album has its own color and distinct message that is conveyed throughout, which can vary across several social issues that young people may be facing, such as the difficulty of finding love, economic disparities, and the severity of the educational system. However, because the focus will be on the awareness that they bring to the mental health of youth, the eight songs chosen represent the identifying factor and message that they want to convey not only to the youth but to the world as well. Those songs are as follows: N.O., Tomorrow, Louder than Bombs, Reflection, The Last, Promise, Epiphany, and Life Goes On. The specific lyrics have been chosen and organized to present the themes that will be discussed, including the strict educational system of South Korea, social disparity and uncertainty of one's future, personal turmoil of losing oneself and finding a purpose, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and how to navigate those circumstances.

"N.O." was released on September 11, 2013, as the title track of their 1st mini album, "O!RUL8,2?". This song is not only an encouragement to youth, but also a comment on the education framework in South Korea as a whole as it discusses the unhealthy and harsh disadvantage of the educational system for Korean students, which spans from K-12 to college students. The framework and aggressiveness of this system are one of the prominent causes of the alarmingly high rates of suicide and mental illness in the youth of South Korea. This is

because education is considered "South Korea's backbone"[21] and "It is such that high levels of responsibility and stress drive parents not only to invest large amounts of financial resources in their child's education but also to remind their kids that how they do in school affects the whole family."[22] This stems from the idea that many Korean parents often consider their children an extension of themselves, which both drives and makes the child's academic success not only a high standard of individual achievement but also a form of family honor. As one would assume, this type of educational lifestyle can be emotionally draining and both anxiety and pressure-inducing for the children, which most of the parents are too naive and caught in an egotistical cycle to notice. It also places adolescents at a higher risk of mental strain as 46% of mental illness amongst students is caused by academic stress related to social expectations and success,[23] commonly leading to depressive behavior and high attempts of suicide, which as stated before, is the number cause of death amongst young children and adults in South Korea.

Although youth may often feel misunderstood or silenced by their parents about their feelings, through "N.O.", BTS has channeled the voice of the students who live in the different forms of the education system each day and speak in frustration about how difficult and stressful that culture can be on a young life. This thereby encourages students to both reflect and stand up against social expectations due to the indication that they would be much happier and healthier if they pursue their dreams instead of following the social norm that their parents and other outside figures have placed upon them. Additionally, there are a few lyrics that convey these ideals, such

[21] Henao Ruiz, Evelyn. 2021. "Post-Industrial Challenges In Modern South Korea: Educational Pressures And Their Impact On Young People". *Online Journal Mundo Asia Pacifico* 10 (18):24-42. https://doi.org/10.17230/map.v10.i18.02.
[22] Henao Ruiz, Evelyn. 2021. "Post-Industrial Challenges In Modern South Korea: Educational Pressures And Their Impact On Young People".
[23] Henao Ruiz, Evelyn. 2021. "Post-Industrial Challenges In Modern South Korea: Educational Pressures And Their Impact On Young People".

as “Dream is gone, no time to breathe/School, house and PC room is all we have/We live the same life/And have to become number one/For us it's like a double spy between dream and reality”[24] and “Who is the one who made us into study machines?/It's either number one or a failure/They trap us in borders, the adults/There’s no choice but to consent/Even if we think simply, it’s the survival of the fittest/Who do you think is the one who makes us step on even our close friends to climb up? What?”[25]. The use of the words “we” and “us” here is very critical because through verse 1, they are displaying the sense of tiredness that the young people are feeling on an individual level, while also executing the idea that “we live the same life” or live under the same circumstances of being a student and constantly feeling suffocated by the pressure of “dream and reality” that needs to be balanced. However, verse 2 is meant to open the minds of the youth while using the word “us” multiple times to demonstrate that they should operate under a collective mindset instead of against one another and realize that they are not suffering alone when millions of other companions are facing the same fight and fear, including the members themselves. In other words, they should be upset with the South Korean school system rather than one another because there is strength in unity. Therefore, living as 16-20-year-old students in 2013, BTS has unraveled the depressive and harsh reality of schooling in South Korea and the thoughts that accompany the minds of young people. Using phrases that contain “we” or “us” allows students to associate themselves with a voice that, at the time, could be understood as more powerful than their own.

“Tomorrow” was released the following year on February 12, 2014, within their second mini album “Skool Luv Affair”. This song in particular tackles the theme of uncertainty and

[24] Genius. 2014. “BTS - N.O (English Translation).” Genius. 2014. https://genius.com/Genius-english-translations-bts-no-english-translation-lyrics.
[25] Genius. 2014. “BTS - N.O (English Translation).”

navigation in the face of entering your 20s and speaks directly to young people who may believe that they are stuck in a repetitive cycle of questioning if the hard work that they have put in is worth it. However, BTS is also urging these people to understand that it is okay to pause and take a break from what has been weighing them down but to never stop pursuing what they believe in just because things may seem to be becoming too difficult because that is a part of personal growth. The lyrics both reflect the feelings of anxiety and frustration, but also the fact that there is a sense of hope within the constant sea of worry. Two examples of the lyrics are the following: "I have a long way to go but why am I running in place?/I scream out of frustration but the empty air echoes/I hope tomorrow will be different from today/I'm just wishing"[26] and "Tomorrow, keep walking, we're too young to stop/Tomorrow, open the door, we see too much to shut the door/When the dark night passes, a bright morning will come/When tomorrow comes, the bright light will shine so don't worry/This isn't a stop but just a pause in your life for a break/Turn up your thumbs and press play so everyone can see".[27] As examined in the first set of lyrics, there is the use of "I" statements, which is connected to the act of personal experience, however, just as within "N.O.", BTS utilizes the "I" statements as a form of "we" or conveying that the voice of both them and the youth act as one. The inner thoughts displayed in the first set of lyrics then, are to mirror the minds of the listeners, displaying a sense of connectedness amongst other people who may have the same thought process when reaching this point in their lives. The second set of lyrics follows a similar pattern, however, "I" actually becomes "we" and brings the idea of encouragement into the fact that because "we" are so young, we should not

[26] Genius. 2014. "BTS - Tomorrow (English Translation)." Genius. 2014. https://genius.com/Genius-english-translations-bts-tomorrow-english-translation-lyrics.
[27] Genius. 2014. "BTS - Tomorrow (English Translation)."

give up on ourselves and although today was difficult and disheartening, tomorrow may not be, so we have to keep going.

"Louder than Bombs" was released on February 21, 2020, as part of their 4th full-length album, "Map of the Soul: 7". This track is considered one of the group's saddest and most personal songs to date since the song was not only written to showcase the growth of the sadness and fear that the group has encountered since beginning their journey as musicians, but member RM also commented on the piece stating, "When I wrote the song, I thought about the letters…when I read posts on Weverse, fans share sad things they had. They didn't do it to make us feel sad..talking about said things can lessen the burden...when I read fans' postings about sad things in their lives, I thought about the feelings that we have, or the emotions".[28] What RM is referring to is when fans use Weverse, HYBE's social platform for artists and fans, they often share what they are going through as an outlet, but to also build connection with other ARMY because they all believe that although BTS may not reply to them, they are listening and they feel a sense of security in the fandom. Therefore, RM, in collaboration with the other members, wrote this song thinking of the countless circumstances that the ARMY must be going through and conveyed their sincerity by telling their story. Here are just a few lyrics from the song: "Now it has grown to be so clear/The unfamiliar shadow amidst those cheers/Perhaps I wouldn't be able to believe the words: "Let's see and hear only good things" no more/Your silent sadness, it shakes me/In my quiet sea, waves would sometimes rise"[29] and "You and I, we feel it together/Sadness and pain/It's not a coincidence/Yeah, we picked this game"[30] Within both parts

[28] Run BTS. 2020. "[ENGSUB] BTS Live Kim Namjoon {Namjun's 7 Behind} Full." YouTube. March 10, 2020. https://youtu.be/FxbUHj6SZgc?si=GrS8Gnwgk14LT6ju
[29] Genius. 2020. "BTS - Louder than Bombs (English Translation)." Genius. 2020. https://genius.com/Genius-english-translations-bts-louder-than-bombs-english-translation-lyrics.
[30] Genius. 2020. "BTS - Louder than Bombs (English Translation)."

from the song, there is a clear pattern that although the group may be feeling massive amounts of despair at times, they know from the continuous posts that they have come upon, that behind the screams and cheers that fans let out, there is also a massive amount of despair within their lives as well. However, when both parties meet as one, the environment becomes vulnerable, yet safe because those emotions affect the band in a similar light.

"Reflection" is a solo track by member RM, which was released alongside their second album "WINGS" on October 10, 2016. This song looks into the story of how the said member has reflected upon himself and realized that he is within a deep emotional spiral of trying to find self-love through the countless mistakes he has made and the hatred that has been received. Here are just a few of the lyrics: "But you know, sometimes/I really really hate myself/To be honest, quite often/I really hate myself",[31] "People look happier than the day/Everyone else knows where they're supposed to be/But only I walk without purpose/But still, blending in with them is more comfortable,"[32] "I wish I could love myself".[33] As the lyrics convey, this song is drawing into RM's battle with mental illness as Kim Nam-joon and how although self-reflection can be very heart-wrenching to deal with, it is important to do so when trying to find yourself. This song illustrates a tremendous amount of vulnerability and courage to speak up when you are unhappy with yourself, which most youth often have an issue with expressing. Therefore, this song acts as a passageway into showing that if RM can deliver his voice to the world as a young adult, the youth should be able to do so as well.

[31] Genius. 2016. BTS - Reflection (English Translation)." Genius. 2016. https://genius.com/Genius-english-translations-bts-reflection-english-translation-lyrics.
[32] Genius. 2016. BTS - Reflection (English Translation)."
[33] Genius. 2016. BTS - Reflection (English Translation)."

"The Last" was released within member SUGA's first mixtape "Agust D" under his alter-ego "Agust D" on August 16, 2016. This track is considered to showcase one of the most vulnerable places that the rapper has gotten within his music because it expresses his anxieties, fears, mental illnesses, and details on a traumatic accident that he was involved in at just 20 years of age. The following lyrics convey his emotional and mental strain that can connect to the youth: "On the other side of the famous idol rapper/Stands my weak self, it's a bit dangerous/Depression, OCD/They keep coming back again from time to time",[34] "Around the age of 18, I developed social anxiety/Right, that was when my mind was gradually polluted",[35] and "On the first visit to psychiatric ward/My parents came up with me/We listened to the consultation together/My parents said they don't truly understand me".[36] Just as bandmate RM, SUGA has taken a courageous approach to let ARMY in on very vulnerable parts of his life as Min Yoon-Gi instead of the idol superstar "SUGA" and has allowed them to perceive that he understands their mental pain severely, while also pushing that it is okay to voice your emotions because you may be able to help someone else who is struggling with a similar issue, just as they have done with ARMY.

"Promise" is a solo track by member Jimin, which was released on December 30, 2018, as a gift to fans. This song captures the emotions of Jimin having a conversation with himself and wondering when he began to become depressed, not realizing that the act that he speaks of is self-inflicted. However, he makes a promise to himself and encourages the fans to do so as well, in trying to take better care of themselves, seek out help if needed, and realize that self-love is an

[34] Genius. 2016. "Agust D - 마지 막 (The Last) (English Translation)." Genius. August 16, 2016. https://genius.com/Genius-english-translations-agust-d-the-last-english-translation-lyrics.
[35] Genius. 2016. "Agust D - 마지 막 (The Last) (English Translation)."
[36] Genius. 2016. "Agust D - 마지 막 (The Last) (English Translation)."

important piece when trying to evolve your character. These lyrics come to mind as the most prevalent to the message: “You're hurting me too cause you're mine/I just want to blow your mind/We're drifting apart again/“I don't even feel it” That's what I say/But to be honest that's not it”,[37] “I want you to be your light, baby/You should be your light/So that you won't be in pain/So you can smile/I want you to be your night, baby/You could be your night/I'll be honest with you tonight”,[38] and “Now promise me, oh, oh/Several times a day, oh, oh/Though you feel alone, oh, oh/Don't throw yourself away, oh, oh”.[39] These lyrics, in particular, use many “I” and “you” statements to once again solidify the unity of speaking to oneself, but also speaking to others. The “promise” then, is between himself and the ARMY to be careful to watch for self-inflicted pain amongst oneself, never beat themselves about feeling mentally drained, and that they can become their own light in the darkness through proper self-care and awareness.

“Epiphany” was released on August 24, 2018, as part of their 1st repackage album “Love Yourself: Answer”, which is the third and last album that is connected to their Love Yourself series. This track is often thought of as the one with the “perfect title” because it takes the listener through the journey of member Jin who realizes that he should not hide his broken self behind a mask anymore and that even though he is not perfect, he should still love himself as he is. These few lyrics convey those ideas: “I'm shaking and afraid but I keep going forward/I'm meeting the real you, hidden in the storm/Why did I want to hide my precious self like

[37] Genius. 2018. “Jimin – 약속 (Promise) (English Translation).” Genius. 2018. https://genius.com/Genius-english-translations-jimin-promise-english-translation-lyrics

[38] Genius. 2018. “Jimin – 약속 (Promise) (English Translation).”

[39] Genius. 2018. “Jimin – 약속 (Promise) (English Translation).”

this?/What was I so afraid of?/Why did I hide my true self?"[40] and "I'm the one I should love in this world/Shining me, precious soul of mine/I finally realized so I love me/Not so perfect but so beautiful/I'm the one I should love".[41] In this instance, Jin wants the youth to internalize the idea that living behind a mask filled with self-hatred is not healthy and very self-limiting and that they should love their true selves under all circumstances because no one is perfect, as Jin emphasizes for himself even though he lives as an idol.

"Life Goes On" was released on November 20, 2020, as the title track of their fifth full-length album, "BE". I believe that this song was important to mention because it was released during the pandemic, which is when cases of mental illness, especially for young people, skyrocketed all over the world due to extreme worry and isolation. "BE" as an entire album was set to provide comfort to people all over the world during a time when they felt there was no hope left. "Life Goes On" serves as the best title track for the album because within the song, BTS opens up and expresses their mixed feelings about the situation of the pandemic and how it has impacted their lives as both normal people and musicians. However, they also offer an extra hand of support to ensure people that although the circumstances were extremely unexpected, there is still hope and if one believes, they will be able to overcome all of the pain and struggle that has come with it. The lyrics selected are as follows: "One day, the world stopped/Without any warning/Spring didn't know to wait/Showed up not even a minute late/Streets erased of footprints/I lie here, fallen to the ground/Time goes by on its own/Without a single apology,

[40] Genius. 2018. "BTS - Epiphany (English Translation)." Genius. 2018. https://genius.com/Genius-english-translations-bts-epiphany-english-translation-lyrics.
[41] Genius. 2018. "BTS - Epiphany (English Translation)."

yeah",[42] "I'm in a world of pain/This cold the damn world gave to me (Woo)",[43] and "Close your eyes for a moment/Hold my hand/To that future, let's run away/Like an echo in the forest/The day will come back around/As if nothing happened/Yeah, life goes on"[44] With this, BTS wanted to communicate that though they are superstars, they too felt huge amounts of fear and anxiety about COVID-19, which had taken a toll on their mental health, but want to reassure that living in that mindset is not healthy and leads to pessimism. Therefore, they push the idea of becoming optimistic and living the best way possible because life can improve, but it is up to you to make it that way.

Speech As An Identifying Factor

BTS's speech at the United Nations General Assembly occurred in New York City on September 24, 2018. The members were invited to speak as a part of the newly launched campaigns at the time, "Generation Unlimited" and "Youth 2030" due to the circumstances a year prior when they launched their "Love Myself" campaign in collaboration with UNICEF on November 1, 2017. The speech was given by the group's leader, RM, who began by speaking about himself as a normal citizen, Kim Nam-joon, who just grew up as a curious young boy. He then moved into how even after joining BTS, he still had much learning to do about himself and how to navigate through self-hatred that had risen due to mistakes in the past. The final piece of his speech that stood out to most fans, including myself, is how he mentioned that after the release of their "Love Yourself" album series, he and the other bandmates began to see many stories about the impact of the messages within their music and how that has helped them

[42] Genius. 2020. "BTS - Life Goes On (English Translation)." Genius. 2020. https://genius.com/Genius-english-translations-bts-life-goes-on-english-translation-lyrics.
[43] Genius. 2020. "BTS - Life Goes On (English Translation)."
[44] Genius. 2020. "BTS - Life Goes On (English Translation)."

overcome their hardships and begin loving themselves. The prominent takeaway of this speech though, is how many young ARMY identified with the content and messaging throughout.

There are multiple excerpts of the speech that I would like to highlight, which are the following:

"I was born in Ilsan, a city near Seoul, South Korea. It's a beautiful place, with a lake, hills, and even an annual flower festival. I spent a happy childhood there, and I was just an ordinary boy…I would look up at the night sky in wonder and dream the dreams of a boy. I used to imagine that I was a superhero, saving the world."[45]

"I'm sure that I, and we, will keep stumbling and falling. We have become artists performing in huge stadiums and selling millions of albums…But I am still an ordinary, twenty-four-year-old guy…Maybe I made a mistake yesterday, but yesterday's me is still me. I am who I am today, with all my faults. Tomorrow I might be a tiny bit wiser, and that's me, too. These faults and mistakes are what I am, making up the brightest stars in the constellation of my life. I have come to love myself for who I was, who I am, and who I hope to become."[46]

"After releasing the "Love Yourself" albums and launching the "Love Myself" campaign, we started to hear remarkable stories from our fans all over the world, how our message helped them overcome their hardships in life and start loving themselves. These stories constantly remind us of our responsibility…I would like to ask all of you. What is your name? What excites you and makes your heart beat? Tell me your story. I want to hear your voice, and I want to hear your conviction. No matter who you are, where you're from, your skin color, gender identity: speak

[45] Kim Nam-joon. 2018. "'We Have Learned to Love Ourselves, so Now I Urge You to "Speak Yourself."'" UNICEF. September 24, 2018. https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/we-have-learned-love-ourselves-so-now-i-urge-you-speak-yourself.

[46] Kim Nam-joon. 2018. "'We Have Learned to Love Ourselves, so Now I Urge You to "Speak Yourself."'"

yourself…Find your name, find your voice by speaking yourself…I'm Kim Nam Jun, RM of BTS. I'm a hip-hop idol and an artist from a small town in Korea. Like most people, I made many mistakes in my life. I have many faults and I have many fears, but I am going to embrace myself as hard as I can, and I'm starting to love myself, little by little."[47]

This speech not only conveyed how "normal" or "ordinary" the members carry themselves and their origin but also because of the sense of "ordinary", they are not afraid to acknowledge that they have and will make mistakes as most humans do and their "idol" status does not define who they are as people or how they perceive others around them. RM's specific piece stating, "But I am still an ordinary, twenty-four-year-old guy…Maybe I made a mistake yesterday, but yesterday's me is still me. I am who I am today, with all my faults. Tomorrow I might be a tiny bit wiser, and that's me, too." stands out a tremendous amount because he felt that it is important to acknowledge his age as he too is a young person and is a representative of young people as well. This helps the youth to be able to both identify with BTS as a whole, but also with RM as a speaker because it defines how although they have made mistakes that have placed them in dark places in their lives, they are still young and human as the next person. This then encourages youth to acknowledge their mistakes as a part of themselves because accepting your faults and mistakes are some of the first steps to gaining a better mental consciousness, self-awareness, and acceptance for both themselves and others in their lives who care for them.

Our Platform, Your Voice

This analysis reveals that both music lyrics and public speech have become tools that BTS has utilized to reach and empower young people who are suffering from mental illness and

[47] Kim Nam-joon. 2018. "'We Have Learned to Love Ourselves, so Now I Urge You to "Speak Yourself."'"

those in power who may have an influence and ability to help change the outcome for future generations. Though their career begins with touching on internal issues in South Korea that have influenced the severity of mental illness, such as the educational system, BTS has expanded their message globally as they have understood that this problem has affected youth in several countries other than their own. The first language of the group is Korean, however, along with fans of Korean descent translating for ARMY in other places in the world, the development of websites that can process lyrics in multiple languages, and even international ARMY learning Korean themselves, BTS have been able to create a connection through stories of shared experience rather than letting their language dictate their relationship amongst global fans who also need their help.

Another aspect of this though, is associated with establishing partnerships that extend beyond the scale of their homeland. Their partnership with UNICEF, which began on November 1, 2017, has allowed them to get in touch with powerful global leaders who have the potential to make a difference within their respective living spaces. The campaign partnership titled "#LoveMyself", has garnered around "five million tweets and more than 50 million engagements, such as likes, retweets, replies, and comments"[48] on the Twitter platform. This amount of exposure has ensured the organization of the group's following and the power behind what they want to convey to young people: "unity" or standing together amid troubling times, ensuring that there is someone who walks alongside them and understands the difficulty of

[48] Wylie, Helen. 2021. "UNICEF and BTS Celebrate Success of 'Groundbreaking' LOVE MYSELF Campaign." www.unicef.org. October 5, 2021. https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-and-bts-celebrate-success-groundbreaking-love-myself-campaign.

seeking help and finding love for oneself. Therefore, when BTS was first summoned to attend the United Nations General Assembly, this allowed them to not only use their individual story to speak on behalf of the youth but also encouraged them to speak up for themselves and share their experiences. This began with a simple hashtag, which created the idea of a safe community that believes in the importance of mental stability, while also recognizing that mental illness has become a global pandemic in itself.

As previously mentioned, the exploration that has often been done involving BTS has primarily been focused on the curiosity of how their fanbase has been able to grow as massively as it has for a non-English speaking act or seeks to confirm that they have been using their platform to bring awareness to multiple social issues that take place on South Korean soil. However, there was an important addition that needed to be addressed regarding how BTS has been able to make an impact on ARMY's mental health and what influence these types of methods or methodological approaches could have on such a large group of people, specifically the youth. My research has been able to capture how the use of Kenneth Burke's theory of identification within the group's music and public speech, has been able to grasp the attention of young people and allow them to feel as if their voice matters in a world that has tried to silence them due to their age or economic circumstances. Taking into consideration the age of the members and personalization of their rhetoric patterns and work that they have produced, the youth have found seven unique individuals that symbolize a form of "home" or comfortability in helping them understand that they too have struggled or are struggling to understand themselves through mental strain. However, they have made it clear that growth in that area is possible and that one person's story or experience can be the next prevention of self-harm or the inspiration of someone wanting change for themselves.

Conclusion

Mental illness is one of the most undertreated and overlooked diseases in the world. It has caused young people, beginning at the age of 9, to perish in the arms of that darkness and watch it consume their peers one by one. Korean music group, BTS, has made it their mission to bring awareness to this problem and built their platform around supporting the youth population in their troubled circumstances because they too, have experienced what it is like to feel as if they are alone, lost, and misunderstood. Kenneth Burke's theory of identification offers an interesting perspective of how young people have connected with the BTS members through their stories of mental turmoil and signs of encouragement. In retrospect, these young people have been able to find a friend who recognizes the factors of their journeys and how to navigate themselves during those times. Therefore, BTS has established to both ARMY and the general youth population that they should not and will never have to walk alone again.

TEACHER'S WORKBOOK

Gemstoning:
Character Creation Exercise for The Classroom & Production

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Abstract

In the summer of 2023, we participated in an online training course with the Stella Adler Studio of Acting titled Awareness Without Judgement: A Teacher Training Intensive. Over the weeks, we studied with three main teachers at the Studio on Character, Technique, and Script Interpretation with 'master classes' led by actors and scholars scattered over the weeks. The course is designed for theatre practitioners who want more in-depth experience and exposure to the more pedagogical side of acting and performance; in other words, for acting teachers who want to use the techniques of Stella Adler within their teaching. Given this gap in our training and a shared desire to better our ability to teach budding actors and performers, we participated. However, we also knew that we would need a lot of repositioning, from how they teach the material to their students to how we would have to teach the material to our students. This pedagogical translation is the impetus of our Great Ideas of Teaching. We want to create a method for bringing Adler's ideas to our educational institutions. Our G.I.F.T allows students to create their character, starting from an impulse of a single emotion for both in-person and online settings. It is part written exercise and part physicalization exercise. The resulting approach to character creation is a sense of individualized ownership in the students in the characters they create and interpret.

"*Your job as actors is to understand the size of what you say, to understand what's beneath the word*." — Stella Adler

In the summer of 2023, we participated in an online training course with the Stella Adler Studio of Acting titled Awareness Without Judgement: A Teacher Training Intensive. Over the weeks, we studied with three teachers at the Studio on Character, Technique, and Script

Interpretation with ‘master classes’ led by actors and scholars. The course is designed for theatre practitioners who want more in-depth experience and exposure to the more pedagogical side of acting and performance; in other words, for acting teachers who want to use the techniques of Stella Adler within their teaching. Many of our classmates were alumni of the Studio, either through their conservatory certificate program or partnership with New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts. While we are both stage directors by trade and training, neither of us self-identify as ‘actor’ or have any direct training with the Studio. Our artistic praxis occurs off-stage and within the classroom. Given this gap in our training and a shared desire to better our ability to teach budding actors and performers, we participated. As Stella Alder once said, one’s talent is in their choice. We wanted to better the choices for our students.

Early during the training, we both realized how different conservatory-style teaching was compared to what we experienced as undergraduate and graduate students. By ‘conservatory,’ we refer to artistic institutions that solely teach within an artistic discipline. While they are more common outside North America, theatre conservatories require students to focus on one area of theatre-making, so acting students only study acting. Within North America, this often means conservatory students do not matriculate with a degree but instead a certificate or other similarly named credential. This contrasts with university undergraduate training programs for theatre arts, both B.A. and B.F.A., as there is general education coursework and commonly required classes outside of the student’s preferred emphasis. These programs also award a full bachelor's degree instead of a certificate. Conservatories usually cater to students ranging in age and background. These types of students would be called ‘non-traditional’ in university parlance, and some participants might hold degrees in theatre arts or other fields of study. The Stella Adler Studio, which has offices in New York City and Los Angeles (The Art of Acting Studio), offers a 3-year

Professional Conservatory – their principal program – in addition to a shorter 'evening conservatory' programming and various short courses for teens and professionals.

For decades now, The Stella Adler Studio of Acting has partnered with New York University's Tisch School and other similar studies within the city. This partnership is structured so students graduate with an undergraduate degree (B.F.A. in Drama) from N.Y.U. yet receive their arts training from one of those professional studios (often kept separate from other conservatory students and classes.) While students in other more traditional departments might take coursework outside their focus, these undergraduate students solely focus their theatre training within the studios and learn. Stella Adler Studio of Acting has produced many famous and well-regarded actors, both through their conservatories and partnership with Tisch.

Because of this structure, conservatory classes are often far longer than the 50 or so minutes that our classrooms provide. In addition, the students who attend these types of training programs often begin with more experience or raw talent; that is not to say that undergraduate training programs lack talented beginners, but conservatories have highly competitive auditions, which only a handful of universities could compare within that regard. This is echoed in that many undergraduate students are fluid in their desires and academic expectations, while conservatory students have a narrower focus on their professional and career ambitions. In turn, the Studio's pedagogy presented during our summer intensive was crafted for a type of student not commonly found within our classrooms and rehearsal halls.

Despite these differences, we both felt very positive towards the training presented; as working artists, we saw great value in the exercises and approaches to performance. However, we also knew that we would need a lot of repositioning, from how they teach the material to their students to how we would have to teach the material to our students. This pedagogical translation

is the impetus of our Great Ideas of Teaching. We want to create our own way for bringing Adler's ideas to *our* classrooms and like-minded educational institutions.

While the three key courses provided a lot of exercises and training regimens, we felt strongly about their exercise in gemstoning a character. As the course title is "Awareness without Judgment," the entire course's motto is not to judge within our work. While this connects to many aspects of arts education, it primarily warns actors not to make value judgments about their character – even those who play the villain must not moralistically condemn them as such. However, a more nuanced interpretation of the term "judgment" relates to an actor's awareness of deciding *who* a character is too early. Just like gemstones have different faces that look inward to the jewel, actors must examine their characters from various angles to avoid any hasted analyses or proclamations. Only once the actor completes this multivalent character examination can they truthfully - and with great dimensionally - embody their character, honoring all their complexities and contradictions. This idea of gemstone is meant to allow the student to approach character creation thoughtfully and holistically by investigating the pluralistic connotations, definitions, and meanings of words.

In the Classroom: How to make a gem of a character

"Growth as an actor and as a human being are synonymous." — Stella Adler

Regardless of the activity's modality (online or in person), students may come in with little to no experience in the actor's approach to character development. This activity can be used in class and production to create original characters (i.e., generative theatre-making) or expound upon an existing scripted character (i.e., interpretative theatre-making).

In practice, this activity was presented as the first acting project of the semester in a regional university where students come with a range of understanding of theatre and acting

practice. The starting element was given to them. Students also worked through an example element together. The activity for an original character is ideally facilitated with 12 students over three weeks, meeting for an hour and a half twice a week. The activity for a scripted character is ideally facilitated during the first week of rehearsal during table work over one to three days and referred to throughout the rehearsal process. The activity for both iterations is described below. While describing the activity, this article uses an informative speech to explain the process.

Gemstoning: The Basics

When an actor takes on a role to play a character, they strive to present someone else's truth paradoxically. This ultimately presents a challenge for them: how to understand another to truthfully perform the narrative fully? Character work is a tool for actors to embody another; it dually holds dramatic analysis and creative imagining to promote a verité within an actor's portrayal of another's lived experience. While the student may identify with some aspects of the character, they nonetheless should work to create somebody that is not themselves. This gemstoning exercise offers actors an actionable sequence to incorporate their artistic and creative impulses within the accuracy desired within performative storytelling.

To begin, the instructor asks their students to sit in a circle as much as possible. Speaking to the group in a circle creates an equitable space for all to hold the same amount of space in a room. The instructor should either provide the worksheet detailed below or ask that students bring blank paper or a notebook. The instructor should provide their understanding of character work and Stella Adler's history with character instruction.

Step One: Exploring Adjectives

To start the *gemstoning*, instruct the students to show being shy performatively. Give them space to explore, if they wish, to physically find 'shyness' first. The instructor may coach

through their exploration or give time in silence for the students to investigate and experiment. This first step should be done collectively and last about 3-5 minutes. After the allotted time, have the students come back to the circle. Then ask the prompt: what did you do? They should feel free to discuss this openly in conversation with the class and/or jot down notes on the worksheet or in a notebook. Have them observe and report on what they did. Try to walk them back if they begin to psychoanalyze; encourage them to respond more and think less.

Once they've started this conversation, have them answer or discuss what they noticed notice others do in the class. Note together similarities and differences in each student's interpretation of *shyness*. If choices were especially exciting or intriguing, have the class explore those choices, either verbally or through presentation. Some potential guiding questions to ask during this portion are: 1. What stimulates you? 2. What is something that appears ordinary but is extraordinary and external? 3. How can this work be a rigorous investigation? Once you have had them attempt to perform the concept of shyness, move on to Step Two.

Step Two: Looking On All Sides

Instruct the students to consider how one looks at a diamond or gem. Explain that when looking at the stone from all sides, you slowly start to see new facets or elements of the stone. Instruct them to hold an imaginary gemstone in their hand. As they turn the gemstone, the light catches the sides differently; the clarity varies, and the color seems to move. We are going to apply this same idea to character work. Inform the students that we will begin creating a character who, at their core, is shy.

Utilizing *shy* as a primary character trait or element, instruct your students to take a moment and write down a time when they felt shy. After 2-3 minutes of silent contemplation, ask a few students share their personal moments. After this brief sharing, instruct your students to

then write a synonym for *shy*. Go around the circle and have them list their classmates' responses. If a student has the exact synonym as another, have the group brainstorm an additional or similar synonym. If a student has more than one, have them jot them all down but only allow them to share their most exciting word for the time being. After everyone has gone, explain that through language, and have a comprehensive list of vitalizing words for *shy*. From this list, they will begin to craft a never-before-seen character. While right now, they do not have the character, they are exploring the concept of *shyness* as the character's foundation.

Step Three: Finding Impressions

At the end of this class, assign your students' homework. They must write out 5 impressions of *shy* by continuing to *gemstone* the word. Now that they have a list of synonyms as inspiration, they can begin to add a more creative and narrative aspect to the character trait. This will work to complete section 1 of the character breakdown: Shy Statements. While they may write more, each student will need at least at least 5 for each category.

1. Synonyms – ex. "Shy is unobtrusive."
2. Metaphors – ex. "Shy is a flower that only blooms a night."
3. Physicalizations – ex. "Shy is nervous twitching fingers."
4. Insights or Folk Wisdom – ex. "Shy is the groundhog seeing their shadow."

Encourage your students to leave space between each impression so that it stands out on its own. They may choose to use the synonym they already came up with for class but do encourage them to explore other synonyms if possible.

Step Four: Rehearsing the Statements

When your students return to class, inform them that we are now moving into a rehearsal phase with our character breakdown. To start, ask for a volunteer. For their first rehearsal, instruct the student to read impressions from category 1 (synonyms.)

Shy is…

Shy is (then read out an impression)

Shy is (then read out an impression)

Shy is (then read out an impression)

Shy is (then read out an impression)

Then have the same student go again. For their second rehearsal, they should share their impression from the first-person perspective.

Shy is…

I am (then read out an impression)

I am (then read out an impression)

I am (then read out an impression)

I am (then read out an impression)

I am shy.

Instruct your students to have their senses feel for a spark as they offer their impressions. Coach them to take their time to explore them; they should physicalize and live in the moment through this personal I-statement. In this dual format, you will go through each category (synonymies, metaphors, physicalizations, and folk wisdom).

If a student is struggling, ask: How do we make it feel truthful? Suggest that they do not read it from the page but look and speak the impression. Memorized. This often helps them fully

embody the declarative statement as they are 'in the moment.' The student may look down after each statement to quickly memorize the next one. They can take as long as they need going from impression to impression. Have the students star or circle the impressions to which they connect.

Additionally, you have them include a full-body action for each impression. For example, the impression written down might be "shy is hiding behind a full glass at a party." The student can start the second rehearsal silently with pantomimed glass in their hand, maybe tilting their head down, furtively looking around the circle with just their eyes; they want to make sure everyone can see that they are occupied as not to be approached by a partygoer. Or maybe they hunch their shoulders around the glass, even hold it with two hands giving a closed-off body posture, avoiding eye contact while barely sipping so no one can assume they need a refill. After the impression is explored physically, have the actor say, "I am hiding behind a full glass at a party" while executing this action.

Impressions should not be lengthy or wordy. We do not want to create overly complex, multi-stepped impressions. Let the character be embodied through physicalizing rather than just the declarative statement. Be judicious in how much time you allow each student to explore each impression physically. As an instructor, if a moment excites you, or if a student struggles to explore their impression fully, you should coach them to live in the moment, one impression at a time. Once the student have stated their impression, they would stop just a moment and then start to physicalize the next impression entirely as their own exploration. Once the student has gone through all five impressions, they would end their turn of exploration by stating, "I am shy." For example, a list of 5 impressions might look like this:

Shy is...

Shy is taking acceptable risk.

Shy is scoping the lay of the land first before leaving the treeline.

Shy is letting eyes and sentences drop.

Shy is the bird that wants the breadcrumbs just thrown.

Shy is a toy at the bottom of a cereal box.

I am shy.

After a few students have gone, instruct the group to talk about the impressions most excited them. What felt different between 'shy is' and 'I am'? Which of your statements felt most alive to you? It can be more than one. For homework, instruct the students to complete Section 1 of the Character Breakdown (included below) and introduce two other character traits or elements. Instruct your students to work on gemstoning one of the primary character traits. A suggestion might be 'meticulous' or 'gregarious' but feel free to include any adjectives you like. You may also allow your students to continue to explore 'shy.'

Remind the students that the form in their notebook should be "Shy is…" or "Meticulous is…" or Gregarious is…" or any other character trait you select. Refrain from jumping to the "I am" statements as we want to first embrace the panoply of possibilities about the trait. Instruct the students that they will add the "I" when they bring the work into the rehearsal space for the next class session. Your students' *gemstoning* should embrace synonyms, metaphors, insights, and physicalizations. Encourage your students to try to create a very robust list of impressions for their list. Then, select from that robust list their top 10 for the on-the-feet work they will do next class. They do not need to pre-rehearse the on-your-feet exploration. Lastly, continue to encourage them to consider what they perceived and appreciated from watching others at the end of each student's presentation.

Step Five: Adding Another Trait

When your students return to class, they will each share their chosen character trait. Depending on the time and the number of students you have, this may take more than one class period. In a non-conservatory style class that meets twice a week for an hour and fifteen minutes with 12 students, part 2 may take two days of instruction.

Remind and instruct the students to read each impression to themselves one at a time, memorize it, and then start to present once they see and feel something. They should share roughly two per category but be flexible depending on what they bring to use in class. One at a time have them share in the following format:

I am (Character trait)

I am (then read out impression 1)

I am (then read out impression 2)

I am (then read out impression 3)

I am (then read out impression 4)

I am (then read out impression 5)

I am (then read out impression 6)

I am (then read out impression 7)

I am (then read out impression 8)

I am (then read out impression 9)

I am (then read out impression 10)

I am (character trait)

Again, after 2-3 students have gone, they discuss what they already appreciate. Remind them that they are looking for that new character amid this work, which is this character trait they are gemstoning.

Step Six: Declarative Statements

Once all the students have gone, ask them to turn to a new blank page in their notebooks. Considering all they have personally explored so far with their character trait. they will begin to flesh out their character's "I" statements. Have the students write at least ten "I like …" statements that might come from a person informed by their chosen character trait and their impressions. Start by having the students consider the impressions they starred or circled that light them up the most. They may then informally share by reading the statements aloud.

Have your students for homework complete Part 2: Sections 3 – 8 of the worksheets. Ask them to think about what this character might wear and bring it to class. Sections 3- 7 are similar to section 2, following the same format but with a different prompt. Instruct your students to write out and list 'I' statements for each section:

Section 3: "I dislike…" or "I don't like…" (10)

Section 4: "I want…' statements (10)

Section 5, "I don't want…" statements 10)

Section 6, 3-5 "I need…" statements. (3-5)

Section 7, 3-5 "I don't need" statements (3-5)

Discuss how wants and needs differ for these characters your students are discovering.

Lastly, have your students complete section 8 of the worksheet. Instruct your students in 2-3 paragraphs to write a recounting of what this person mostly does in a day. Have them write

it/tell it from a 1st person recounting. Hopefully, with this last section, we start to hear this character's voice. They should think about what this person might wear after they have completed the writing portion of their homework and come in costume to the next class.

Step 7: Meeting the Character

When your students return to class, they should come with their written sections of material and in costume. Again, depending on time and the number of students, this may take more than one class period. In a non-conservatory style class that meets twice a week for an hour and fifteen minutes with 12 students, this may take two days of instruction. Before beginning, explain that today they are going to be meeting their character in circumstance. The student who goes first may be the most coached in this first exploration. To present, the student will return to Section 1. They will start by sharing their character trait choice in the following format:

I am (Character trait)

I am (then read out impression 1)

I am (then read out impression 2)

I am (then read out impression 3)

I am (then read out impression 4)

I am (then read out impression 5)

I am (then read out impression 6)

I am (then read out impression 7)

I am (then read out impression 8)

I am (then read out impression 9)

I am (then read out impression 10)

I am (character trait)

Again, they should explore each impression before reading or stating it out loud. From there, they should stay "in the zone of exploration" but now read out loud their Section 2-7 statements aloud as "I" statements.

For example, a student, from their impressions of gregarious, might create the following statements:

I like wearing high heels

I like laughing loudly

I want my hair down nice and big

I want to live authentically

I want to make other people laugh

I don't want to come off as too much

I don't want to be a people pleaser

I need community

Once they've read all of them, or if you choose, they may memorize them if you have time; they should stay in the mindset of this character as we begin to meet their character.

I suggest taking notes of your students' impressions as they present. Once they've completed the reading, ask them to put their paper down and embody the character. Instruct the students to explain what they are wearing today as their character. If they are not wearing exactly what they wish to take on this character, ask them to discuss it imaginatively. The key is to see what they are wearing rather than describing it. Remind them to stay in the character mindset.

In showing off their attire, this 'gregarious character' might describe themselves wearing contoured make-up, high heels, flared pants, and a sequin top. After they describe their outfit, I, as the instructor, am still trying to meet this character in circumstances. From the students'

impressions and statements, improvise a location and circumstance where they might be asked: "What do you mostly do in a day?" For example, if a student chooses gregarious, and they've described some of the statements above, you, as the instructor, will start to imagine them in a circumstance. For this example, you may have the student describe going to a party, how they want to make people laugh at a comedy club, or how long it takes them to prepare for the day. As the students just come up with these answers in character, you might see how you can improve a circumstance to meet this new character and might ask a few clarifying questions: Are you a working adult? Do you live in a bustling city or a small town? Do you do comedy in your off hours? Feel free to improvise what you feel best to help the student fully explore the character through improv. They should be given the space to answer.

Next, you would then introduce the circumstance without names or pronouns. You will need to develop a circumstance based on their previous answers. For example: *You are in the back of a comedy club in a green room. You are set to perform tonight; scouts are here to see the show. This event is set up as a competition and there are other competitors in this space and someone with social media is attempting to interview you before you go on.* You will ask them to describe what they see in detail. Let the student work through what they see, coach them to see it, and potentially ask about the flooring, walls, and furniture to help them build their space. Then, coach the student to describe the other competitors and people in the room in this example. Lastly, ask them to describe the social media reporter in front of them. You will need to adjust and customize the questions for each specific character situation that you guide.

As the instructor, you will then embody a character that would be in the same situation as the student's maturing character. For example, they might tell you are a social media reporter. You will need to describe yourself to the character briefly but with detail. As the instructor, you

join the circumstance from the sidelines and engage with the character. For example, the instructor, as their character, might say: *Hey! Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me before the show. It's been so great to get to know you so far; the last thing I need for my article is more on the personal side. You know, we've been following your journey through this competition, and our followers are just dying to know, what do you mostly do in a day?"* The student should then respond in character with their response to Section 8. The last question, in character, should be you asking for their name. At the end of the presentation, ask the student to take a moment in stillness and then shake their character off. You would then move to the next student and a new circumstance to meet their character.

Again, after 2-3 students have gone, ask the class what they appreciate about these new characters as we meet them in circumstance. Students often appreciate this exercise as it is a way to explore character without treading into psychoanalysis or overworking a moment. Students see a lot of freedom in this exercise, which is also quite creatively rigorous; affirm that this is a lot but highly rewarding. Often, we ask the students to consider how gemstoning a scripted character might help them in rehearsal and production work. You can use characters from published dramatic texts or expand to literary figures. We will explain sample ways to use gemstoning for actors working on a production.

In Rehearsal: how to *gemstone* one's character

"By taking elements you observe in life, you can develop qualities in your acting life that you don't ordinarily call upon in your personal life." — Stella Adler

Gemstoning as a means of character development can and should be used with pre-scripted or published texts. In doing so, the actor would gemstone the character's name rather than define a character trait in this case. For example, if the working text is Lewis Carroll's *Alice*

in Wonderland, you would have the students reach the text or story first. Then, you would gemstone the character's name utilizing given circumstances and other script interpretative exercises. Following the same process described above, you would gemstone each word for characters with two names – like the Mad Hatter. As they work through and present the impressions, those that ignite or illicit the most robust response for the actor are what they would continue with through sections 2 through 7. Literary figures and other short and known stories are great places to incorporate as continued practice for the students.

On productions, gemstone can be a useful director's tool when working with actors on character development. The activity helps to uniquely discover aspects of character that might not be explicitly written in the text or even on a well-known character within the canon. However, like all good character development and script interpretation, it is 'mined' from the text.

For example, in Jordan Tannahill's Concord Floral, the actor portraying the character Fox, named after the animal, can gemstone the word 'fox' as a starting point in their actor's praxis. Gemstone is a solid first step in anthropomorphizing more abstract characters for performance. What does 'fox' mean to that actor? The actor might be inspired by a more archetypical connotation, such as 'sly,' 'trickster,' or 'cunning,' or they might gravitate towards other more personal interpretations of 'fox.' Regardless of their decision, it still provides a word to investigate. By considering the various traits of foxes; the actor can choose a trait to gemstone. With gemstoning, they might need to research or draw on previous knowledge. In the previous example, the actor might know or discover that foxes burrow in scavenged places. This insight could lead the actor to choose to have a strong friendship with Couch and Greenhouse, other characters inspired by the thing they're named after, who act as literal and metaphorical refugees

for the other characters. When gemstoning, it can be either director-driven or actor-driven. While an actor has a high likelihood of working with a director unfamiliar with Stella Alder and gemstoning, they can still include this as part of their private praxis. While these discoveries and choices might not ever appear fully and clearly on stage during a performance, they still provide insight for the actors into who their characters are, which ultimately manifests in some form on stage, even if it is layered or abstracted.

One can also find traits drawn more literally from the text. For example, in Anton Chekhov's Three Sisters, he describes each sister as wearing a specific color (blue for Olga, black for Masha, and white for Irina.) In rehearsals, the director can ask the actors to gemstone these colors. What does blue mean, and how does that begin to shape their Olga? One could also have them gemstone the etymology of their names, which can often be a strong choice particular choice. For example, Irina means 'peace.'[49] The actor playing Irina could gemstone that word. Conversely, this inquiry into the name's etymology might reveal insight into the saint bearing the same name and who is often prayed to for a "swift happy marriage."[50] Within *Three Sisters,* marriage is a core part of Irina's character arch. While this discovery could be a coincidence on Chekhov's part, they still began the character development process, which can change and pivot as rehearsals continue, and new discoveries are made. Because of this, there is still value in gemstoning white or marriage when approaching Irina, one of the modern Western canon's most known and tragic characters. Gemstoning name etymologies connect as well with Shakespeare's characters. Juliet, for example, means 'youthful' or 'Jove's child.'[51] This approach provides the

[49] Mike Campbell, "Meaning, Origin and History of the Name Irene," Behind the Name, accessed February 2, 2024, https://www.behindthename.com/name/irene.
[50] "Great Martyr Irene," accessed February 2, 2024, https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2007/05/05/101297-great-martyr-irene.
[51] "Juliet - Baby Name Meaning, Origin and Popularity," accessed February 2, 2024, https://www.thebump.com/b/juliet-baby-name.

actor with an actionable technique to begin their praxis; it is an accessible first step in their personal sequence. While this approach can be useful for generative character creation, the same principles and methods readily apply to interpretative performances.

Challenges

This exercise was created for a conservatory and its structures. Time can be a tremendous pressure on the success of this exploration. In utilizing this in class or rehearsal, one should consider the time needed for the first round. Also, like any activity involving student participation or students with less acting experience, some will be reluctant to participate, given its in-depth approach. One might find that newer acting students will try to bring in their own unique persons into a character, and this will feel laborious or intimidating to them to share their own selves in the process. Expectations should be reiterated that the intention is to either create a new character, form a scratch, or approach scripted character work from a fresh perspective – a perspective still tied to them as it comes from their own interpretations of the traits. It is sometimes comforting to find connections to these characters, but they are not themselves. Gemstoning is character development through an individualistic understanding and one that is distanced enough for sustainable storytelling. This process should not draw parallels to emotional recall work or 'Method Acting' but instill privilege (and celebrate) the multivalency with characters, even those who have walked across stages for decades or centuries before.

At the time of this publication, we should note that this exercise has only been utilized in intermediate and advanced acting classes as well as during tablework with casts of collegiate productions. This worksheet may be overwhelming for beginning actors or for students required to take acting courses with no personal motivation to pursue performing arts. If you are interested in teaching this to more novice actors, we might suggest you gemstone an example

character as a group and then have the students develop their own. During the Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC) 2024, we taught this worksheet as a workshop and created one 'shy' character with suggestions from our participants. As a group we quickly worked through the worksheet and explained how they could spend additional time in creating or developing their own. We encourage you to adapt gemstoning as you need in order to meet them where they are in their training and process.

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"These lyrics but it's the opening of a Ted Talk" - a Public Speaking Activity Inspired by TikTok

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Abstract

This activity encourages students to practice delivery skills in a fun and laid-back way that connects to social media. This activity can be used in-person or online and is intended for public speaking, oral/interpersonal communication, and introductory theatre classes. Based on content creator Madeleine Chalk's "These lyrics but it's the opening of a TED Talk" videos, students will deliver song lyrics as if they were giving a TED talk. In doing so, they will practice delivery skills such as eye contact, vocal variety, and body language. After the activity, students will debrief on the mechanics of delivery, audience engagement, and real-life applications.

Previous Presentation – 2024 Central States Communication Association Conference

Intended Courses: This activity is intended for public speaking, oral/interpersonal, and introductory theatre classes.

Approximate time required: 60 minutes

Learning Outcomes: After completing this activity, students will be able to incorporate effective public speaking delivery and analyze the impact of delivery on audience engagement.

Introduction

Effective delivery skills are crucial to public speaking. Nonverbal communication, including body language and voice, can significantly impact how well an audience understands and connects with a topic. Yet, many speakers struggle with this. In part, this may be due to public speaking anxiety, including fear of judgment and physical symptoms (Grieve et al., 2021). To lessen these fears, the "These lyrics but it's the opening of a TED talk" activity provides a low-pressure and humorous opportunity for students to practice delivery skills in front of an audience.

Rationale

Many U.S. colleges and universities require a basic communication course as part of their general education curriculum. As part of these courses, at least one speech is typically required. However, this often leads to public speaking fear among students: at least 63% of college students report feeling anxious about public speaking (Marinho et al., 2017). Some of these fears include being judged and being the center of attention (LeFebvre, LeFebvre, and Allen, 2018). Fear of judgment may hinder a student's delivery skills and prevent them from fully demonstrating their knowledge and intellectual abilities in their presentation (Grieve et al., 2021). Thus, to mitigate these fears, it is helpful for instructors to incorporate activities that allow students to practice speech skills in a low-stakes and welcoming environment.

This specific activity provides a humorous, engaging way for students to practice speech delivery. Research by Garner (2006) found that humor in the classroom creates a more relaxed and welcoming environment for students to learn. By incorporating humor to practice public speaking delivery skills, the goal of this activity is to provide a lighthearted environment where some of the pressure is eliminated.

Pre-Activity

Prior to the activity, the instructor should provide an overview of nonverbal communication. Spend approximately twenty minutes on this section. Begin by discussing body language, including movement, hand gestures, and eye contact. It may be helpful to pause and demonstrate sharing a message with and without body language (for example, saying "go over there" with and without pointing to the spot). Then, discuss voice, including volume, rate, pitch, articulation, verbal fillers, pauses, and pronunciation. Again, it may be helpful to juxtapose a

message delivered with expressive voice to a message delivered in a monotone and inarticulate voice.

Because this activity is based on the format of a TED talk, the class should be familiar with the structure of these talks. Watching popular TED talks or discussions about what makes an effective TED talk (for example, "You are Contagious," by Vanessa Van Edward) will help students visualize what a TED talk looks and sounds like. As a class, it may be helpful to discuss things they noticed in the talks. For instance, were there similarities in speaking styles? Body language? Content? Which TED talks did they like or dislike?

After covering these materials, show students examples of content creator Madeleine Chalk's "These lyrics but it's the opening of a TED Talk" videos. This is what the activity is based on, and it will also bring humor and pop culture to the room. Chalk's videos can be found on TikTok or YouTube.

For an example of one of Madeleine Chalk's videos, click here.

Face to Face Instructions

After discussing the introductory materials, students should be split into pairs. Although this activity may be completed individually, students tend to feel more comfortable working with a partner. This also allows students to build rapport with their classmates before presenting in front of them, easing some of the pressure of public speaking.

Students should then select a song with their partner. It may be beneficial to provide guidelines for song choice, such as no offensive messaging or expletive language. Alternatively, the instructor may provide a list of songs to choose from or have students blindly choose a song title from a designated container.

Instruct the students to select eight lines from their song to present as a TED talk. To ensure that all students practice public speaking, each partner should present four lines. Advise the students to exaggerate the elements of delivery, reflecting back on hand gestures, eye contact, vocal variety, etc. Give students around ten minutes to select a song and practice their delivery.

After giving them time to practice, regroup as a class. Students will then come to the front of the classroom and present their TED talk. This gives students the opportunity to practice standing in front of their classmates. After presentations, the following questions can be used to guide discussion:

1. What was challenging about this activity?
2. Did it feel natural to exaggerate the delivery in such a theatrical way?
3. As an audience, were you engaged? Why or why not?
4. How can we use these skills in real-life public speaking situations?
5. Will the emphasis on delivery vary based on your audience and speaking situation?

Depending on class size, expect to spend around thirty to forty-five minutes on presentations and discussion.

Online Adaptation

If completing this activity in a synchronous online class, follow the same instructions as an in-person section. Split students into pairs using breakout rooms, then regroup for presentations and discussion. If completing this in an asynchronous class, students may individually record and share their videos on a discussion board. To facilitate discussion, require students to respond to at least two other students' videos and answer the following questions:

1. As a viewer, were you engaged in this video? Why or why not?

2. What elements of delivery were particularly effective (hand gestures, pitch, eye contact, etc.) in holding your attention?

Additionally, the instructor may require a separate discussion board or journal entry from students that incorporates the discussion prompts from the in-person instructions.

If student recordings are not feasible in an asynchronous section, the instructor may adapt the activity by asking for an analysis of one of Madeleine Chalk's videos. To do this, the instructor would post one of Chalk's videos on a discussion board then ask students to answer the same questions from above.

Appraisal

This activity is a relaxed and humorous way for students to practice delivery skills and become comfortable standing in front of their classmates. Students have voiced that this is one of their favorite in-class activities. Not only is it fun, but it breaks the wall of fear that some students have leading up to presentations. By the end of this activity and discussion, students feel more confident and connected to their peers.

Although students initially report feeling uncomfortable, this activity helps them understand the pivotal role delivery skills play in public speaking. It gives students the opportunity to develop stage presence and foster audience engagement in a low-pressure environment. Because students do not have to write a speech, it also eliminates anxiety related to the actual speech content and organization. Students can direct their full attention to delivery.

Finally, as audience members, students often comment on how much more exciting it is to watch a speech with exaggerated delivery than a speech with dull delivery. Students often underestimate the extent to which delivery has on audience engagement. This activity provides a concrete demonstration of the impact delivery skills can have on a message.

Challenges

One of the most obvious challenges with this activity is student comfort level. Although this is a light-hearted activity, some students may be reluctant to present in front of their classmates. Working with a partner helps eliminate some of this discomfort. It may also be helpful to conduct this activity after discussing methods of coping with speech anxiety.

Another challenge that often surfaces is song selection. Students tend to agonize over picking the "perfect" song. Here, it may be beneficial to assign students a song, especially if the class is short on time.

Finally, this activity is best suited for face-to-face classes. Although it can be adapted to an online format, the same level of camaraderie is not always achieved. It can also be intimidating for students to record themselves. However, this may be valuable practice for a class that requires recording and uploading speeches.

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