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Media Rhetoric Interpersonal

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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the 43rd edition of *Comm-Entary*! We are proud to present you with this year's edition of the Communication Department's research journal at the University of New Hampshire. The annual publication of *Comm-Entary* is a time-honored tradition here in the Communication Department. Over the past 43 years, *Comm-Entary* has enabled young scholars to share their insights on media, rhetoric, and interpersonal studies. We have reached audiences in six continents and in dozens of countries around the world. We are so excited to share it with you.

This year, I had the privilege of witnessing and being part of the incredible achievements of our journal. Our team recruited innovative new talent this year that helped shape our goals and bring our objectives to life. Furthermore, in pursuit of last year's goal of expanding our reach, we are proud to announce that our social media strategy has expanded to a new platform: Tik Tok. For the second year in a row now, we have also fostered collaborations with UNH's chapter of Lambda Pi Eta (LPE), the Communication Department's Honors Society. Some of the research in this publication, in fact, stems from the bright minds of LPE students. We are also proud to have highlighted two panels of authors at the annual Undergraduate Research Conference for the second year in a row. The nine young scholars that presented their research at the conference speak to the academic excellence of the students of the Communication Department.

Our Editorial Board and student editors made the publication of the 43rd edition a success by their true commitment and hard work. And, of course, none of it would have been possible without the guidance and leadership of our incredible faculty advisor, Professor R. Michael Jackson. The dedication and passion for academia that our members demonstrate can be clearly seen in the pages that follow. Thank you, team!

Comm-Entary is a true example of scholarship and young minds coming together to contribute something meaningful to the communication field of study. From the *Comm-Entary* team to you, we hope you enjoy and find meaning within the following pages!

Sincerely,

Ashley White

Editor-in-Chief

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God's Favorite: Hollywood Archivists and Peddlers

Daniela Farfan

In his exhibition, *'Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?'*, photographer David LaChapelle features well-known figures of contemporary culture that are revered as God's favorite. The selected idols include Elton John, David Bowie, Dolly Parton, Amy Winehouse, Courtney Love, and Hillary Clinton. The mirage of Hollywood is glamorous and made to be beautiful.

Hollywood is a place of dreams congruent with limitless imagination and youth. Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain. LaChapelle's work is largely recognized for its absurdities and social capital. He makes images about people needing to sacrifice themselves in pursuit of greatness. The portrait's dual nature offers us insight into the relationship between fantasy and truth.

LaChapelle's critique of Hollywood tropes is self-aware. The colors are oversaturated, the lighting is overdone, and the celebrities are cast as clichés. LaChapelle captures musicians, actors, politicians, and models in a sea of excess. The fluorescent pinks, greens, and blues mimic the intensity of a fever dream. Instead of trying to explain what it all means, I will assess the role of celebrity and its value in society. As it turns out, the seemingly obvious is what I need to be skeptical about. LaChapelle combines elements of surrealism and pop culture to capture the lure of success and stardom. Like Hollywood, it's theatrical and dense. The photographer is fixated on the Hollywood dream and to a large extent so are the public. The celebrity is essentially fantasmic; whether they are constructed from the fantasies of the photographer or fantasies for the audience.

Teenagers in their bedrooms are archivists of tradition. The bedroom is an observatory for identity, desire, and dreams. As young children, we organized our shrines to our liking; lining our walls with celebrity posters and deliberately rejecting anything uncool. It is not directly autobiographical but in a way we imagine ourselves as the faces on our walls. The celebrity embodies something greater than us. The celebrity represents an aspirational lifestyle. One that is easy and appealing for people who have to work hard. Celebrities are inescapable as they are celebrated by the media, businesses, and culture. In a society motivated by fame and success; celebrity culture influences people's goals and how they achieve them. For example, teen girls compare themselves to images of celebrities. Celebrity images may make them feel dissatisfied with the way they look. Specifically, celebrity influence on body image is often linked to eating disorders and low self-esteem. When young teens are exposed to such unrealistic images of the 'ideal body', they become a commodity. Celebrities document their eating habits, excessive workout routines, and their physical bodies that associate being thin with self-worth. The desire to emulate these celebrities can be life-threatening for those who suffer from eating disorders.

The photograph titled *'Pamela Anderson: He Aimed the Arrows of Love that Puncture My Aching Heart'* (Fig. 1) portrays a woman famous for the exploitation of her body. The tone of the image is erotic yet sterile. Here lies Pamela Anderson, on an operating table, prodded and punctured by needles. The anatomical mannequins at her bedside are meticulously marked for augmentation. The pre-op marking session alludes to a cosmetic procedure. Unlike surgery done out of medical necessity, cosmetic procedures are related to vanity and suggest the body requires correction. The linguistic message in the title helps the audience understand exactly what is being viewed. Pamela has fallen on her own sword. Pictured holding the arrow that punctures her own

heart. The idea of preservation is evident in this message. To preserve the body is to protect the body against age. A celebrity is nothing without beauty. Also pictured is the mannequin looking at his reflection through a mirror. It is no coincidence that the mirror is pointed at us, the audience, suggesting we too have been vain. Upon first glance, the suggestive qualities of this photograph ooze sex and promiscuity. However, behind the camera is an intentional message void of eroticism and lust. The image is painful to look at. A lapse of judgment will define the celebrity for a lifetime. For this, the celebrity is tortured and put to death by the public.

How far will the celebrity go to please the public? In the photograph titled *'David Bowie: Self Preservation'*, (Fig. 2) Bowie is photographed in a medical setting. Once again, we are faced with contortion of the body. Bowie's loss of identity is immortalized in this image. Dressed in all white and wearing a cross on his neck evokes a sense of purity, innocence, or lack thereof. Bowie is seen going through an identity crisis. The tone of the image is similar to a horror film, one of which the character is dealing with multiple versions of himself. Perhaps, he holds an older version of himself on his lap. Perhaps, the meaning questions his sanity. Regardless, the image is one of regret. A part of Bowie is deeply regretful of sacrificing himself for fame. This interpretation is at the intersection of the entire series. Being faced with regret in losing yourself to the world.

The litmus test for success is determined by those who are recognized for their genius. Celebrity success is canonized and enduring unlike the obvious, most important realities. The most important realities are often banal and not talked about. The celebrity will challenge our ethics and ability to think critically. The photograph does a fantastic job at describing aesthetics using

iconic figures that elicit a strong emotional response. For instance, when you see a photo of Courtney Love (Fig. 3), a cultural moment such as the suicide of Kurt Cobain, is resonant enough to incite public discourse. Here, the model is figuratively bound to an old accusation. The image takes you back to exactly where you were when you learned Kurt Cobain was dead. These images encapsulate feelings and moments in a lifetime. LaChapelle tells a story that is sensory based. It's meant to stimulate conversation and rhetoric in real life. Hearing one person's opinion is fascinating, but hearing multiple opinions is learning. Photography isn't meant to be uploaded and forgotten about. Photography stimulates awareness and entertainment that people should discuss. It helps to aid social conversation and fulfilling interaction.

The photos make for a compelling argument, analyzed through two totally different experiences. The first part of the argument is that the experience of fame for the celebrity is sacrificial. In this particular sense, celebrities give us their lives, so we can live ours. The celebrity is perceived as a pawn. The celebrity is an ethereal body for the public to project their own desires onto. Often, resulting in a total loss of agency. The dangerous impact of fame is observed, however, passively acknowledged. This response is a key part of the celebrity ethos.

The reason is that fame is only interesting to the public if it retains its illusionary properties. Fame is about creating illusions to be experienced, not puzzles to be solved.

Celebrities occupy the fantasies offered to us in the world of fiction. We give meaning and purpose to our day to day lives by understanding them as a narrative. The same experience is given a completely different meaning for those who observe. Common people worship celebrity culture without really knowing why. LaChapelle challenges the viewer to think critically. It hurts

a lot less to look at it and to be ashamed that it was our culture who did it. Despite the obvious pop-culture exaltation there is something deeply hollow when considered all together. In the photo titled *'Faye Dunaway: Day of Locust'* (Fig. 4), we are drawn to the center of the image, actress Faye Dunaway is draped over a limousine. The limousine is a mode of transportation for the elites, or a separation of people. Hundreds of fans desperate to have their photos signed, roses received, and questions answered. LaChapelle asks the audience "is the celebrity a God?" It is a critique of the Hollywood system and the way actresses are discarded by it. The critique is synchronous with the audience. Faye's body reminds me of the image of Jesus Christ. The photographer asks the celebrity to pose herself as someone better than the others; as a Hollywood martyr. With her arms outstretched, Faye longs for something more than celebrated excess; searching for something human. Depicted in the same way, Christians worship Jesus, deserving of all praise and glory. It makes me think about why people worship celebrities in the same way they worship God. I think it's because it makes us feel good. We worship celebrities because it's traditional. Some may see it as an act of love and others may see it as an act of destruction.

The bright lights and chaos of the portrait becomes incongruous with catholic iconography. In reflecting Barthes' aesthetic signifiers, the objects and poses of religious sacrifice overpowers the rest of the image. The crowd reminds me of going to a church service; raising hands while praying. It's ironic to compare this photograph to praying. While outstretched arms in a church are meant to symbolize a desire to reach out and touch God, or invite his presence into our lives, the celebrity is burdened. The media wants to determine whether the celebrity survives or has to be thrown to the wolves. The message contradicts itself because the thing is, we may look to the celebrity as an icon or a God but they are not. The celebrity cannot survive the hooks of religion

or the imposition of becoming someone holier than thou. Celebrity culture is inherently anti-religious. Celebrities are expected to occupy a higher moral ground. How should the world interpret those who are famous? The attitude of the photograph asks the viewer how they define their virtues and values. How do these objects and affection of religious significance and desire affect our emotions and impulses? The lore of Hollywood is a fable as old as time. But its existence does not repel nor does it repulse the common man to benefit from its endorsement. LaChapelle projects his view of life as an art project. Suggesting that if a celebrity is a commodity or product of religion then they will be loved by all. The celebrity will become as irresistible as they are untouchable. It is not so much the talent of the individual that is emphasized here, but the philosophy of the celebrity itself. People tend to worship, live, and feed off of celebrity culture. The photograph is constructed to view the honorable celebrity as a vessel for our own desire. As haunted and fictionalized as the Hollywood starlet, celebrity culture will continue to influence a generation of dreamers seeking to be godly. As a society, we chose to honor the same factors that control us. The message of this photograph demonstrates a worldview much deeper than the lifestyle of the rich and the famous.

The choice is intentional. (2022)

The effects of mass media are not contingent on age or “knowing” the difference between fantasy and reality. As an adult, the word “fantasy” may allude to fiction. The word “fiction” can mean created by imagination or not presented as fact. The reality of a fictional story is not based on fantasy rather; whether it's believable and attractive. Buying into a fictional narrative is a common experience that allows us to imagine “what if”- to feel as though it could be true. It is persuasive and devoid of critical analysis. The transportation theory (Cooley, 1894) describes

why people are mentally drawn into the reality described in a narrative. As a result, we become less critical and gain a sense that the story is real. We are persuaded to accept a point of view when we engage with a story, and this is possible because we suspend our disbelief.

I chose LaChapelle's '*Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?*' because of my own curiosities regarding fame and perception. I discovered some patterns in relation to what the images argue. First, the function of celebrity is to shape and influence our everyday lives and how we attach meaning to ourselves. Celebrities reflect various ideas about social structure, self-reflection, and political beliefs. The culture around celebrities promotes gossip and products. Celebrities provide a household name for strangers to discuss, connect, and debate. In a way, the celebrity is a unifier of people. To put limitations on the celebrity is to go against everything we believe about them and their greatness. We associate the celebrity with purpose, purpose is what makes us feel good and suddenly connected to a stranger. The celebrity is uniquely idolized for bringing the public comfort that reality is not capable of. It is clear that the celebrity works through our lives with purpose. Even though each photograph pushes the boundaries of comfort zones on some level, the participants are clearly not saints. LaChapelle's camera embraces humanity and vulnerability but the distance between the viewer's reality and the fictional celebrity creates enough space in which the viewer believes the dream.

David LaChapelle successfully uses rhetoric to convince his audience to look at the value of the ordinary. In the face of two evils, which is the better of two evils? Which undesirable action or choice will minimize our suffering or pain and the injustice it brings? LaChapelle persuades his audience to reflect inwards, to understand the nature of their own virtues, and explains the contradictory nature of the human condition. The audience may choose compassion and in spite

of our better judgment to live unconsciously. The celebrity and the public are face to face forced to view similarities in each other. Both regretful and lost, whether through excess or longing, *'Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?'* narrates the great search of finding out who we really are and the ways in which we betray ourselves in the process.

Pamela Anderson: He Aimed the Arrows of Love that Puncture My Aching Heart, 2010



David Bowie: Self Preservation, 1995



Courtney Love: Silent Screaming, 2007



Faye Dunaway: Day of Locust, 1996



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Short Analysis: Emma Watson “HeForShe UN Campaign” Speech

Emma Derocha

Feminism is defined as “the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes,” (Brittanica). A topic as simple as it is, feminism has always had negative energy surrounding it. Many believe that feminism advocates for women to have the most rights, when in fact; we simply want the same as men. People also view feminists as crazy, outspoken women who simply hate men. This could not be further from the truth of feminism.

Girls still grow up in a society where they are expected to be polite and not to speak their opinion or they could be viewed as bossy, or even a b**ch. Women are still not paid the same as their male counterparts in the workforce today. Although we have made progress, women are still not even looked at or treated the same as men. Actress Emma Watson presented a speech at the HeForShe UN Campaign in 2014 in which she shared her beliefs and thoughts surrounding feminism. Emma Watson argued that in order to achieve gender equality, masculinity stereotypes and expectations of boys must also be changed. This is a deliberative speech because it attempts to persuade the audience to change their perspective on various ideas.

Watson started the speech by saying she had been appointed 6 months prior to speak at this event. She pondered ways to get her thoughts and opinions across to people, and she realized that many people correlate feminism with a hatred for men. She used short sentences at the opening to capture the audience's attention. Watson's speech works by sharing the definition of feminism, the main topic of her speech; then proceeding to provide examples of ways she has been affected by the unfair treatment of being a woman in society. She goes on to express that to further women in society, we must make changes in the ways we view men.

Emma Watson's argument in her "HeForShe" campaign speech works by using examples of the sexism she has experienced since a young age. Alluding to the sexism she has experienced, Watson said "I started questioning gender-based assumptions when at 8 I was confused at being called "bossy," because I wanted to direct the plays we would put on for our parents- but the boys were not," (UN Women).

When a girl takes control and has a plan, she is viewed as being bossy; however, a boy is only called a team leader. Many women would agree that they have felt silenced in the classroom or in the workforce; afraid to speak up because they could be viewed as bossy or even a b**ch. There is a double standard for women of all ages, no matter what they are doing.

Watson also mentioned that many of her friends dropped out of their high school sports teams in fear they would get too much muscle on their arms. Many young women in high school have made similar statements or heard their own classmates say this. Women are expected to be dainty, petite, quiet and not too athletic, because that could possibly intimidate their boy peers. From the male gaze, girls are not expected to be tougher or have bigger muscles than their boy classmates. Young girls are trained to think that it is not "lady-like" to run faster than the boys at recess. Using real life examples was an effective way of relating to the audience.

Watson acknowledged that she was privileged to grow up in a family where she was not viewed as less because she is a woman. Discussing the strong women in her life who represented gender equality ambassadors, she said that they shaped her into who she is today; without even realizing they embodied a feminist. She furthers the speech by saying that if those in the audience believe in equality, they are an inadvertent feminist.

In the middle of her speech, Watson says; "How can we affect change in this world when only half of it is invited or feel welcome to participate in the conversation?" This is a direct reference to Hilary Clinton's

1994 speech in Beijing which pushed for women's rights; and 30% of the audience were males. Watson said that most of the topics Clinton hoped would be changed are still the same today... so how are we supposed to believe that there will ever be change if the people we need to get behind the change most won't listen when we speak?

The argument in this speech asks the audience to stop viewing feminism as something that means we must despise all men. Watson also wants the audience to stop placing gender stereotypes on males, saying; "Men- I would like to take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation. Gender equality is your issue too." Emma Watson speaks about times in her childhood when her father's role in her life was viewed as less to her mother's; even though she needed her dad just as much as her mom. She goes on to say that many men who struggle with mental illness are afraid to reach out for help; because men have always been expected to be tough and not feel emotions. In recent years, the term "simp" has been used to describe a man who shows emotions towards his partner. This term is often used in a degrading tone. This is damaging to not only men's mental health, but to feminism; why is it normalized in society to tell a man he is weak show affection to someone he loves? Using pathos, Emma Watson finishes the speech by using emotion and stressing that if we do not actively make changes in society, it could take another 75 years until women are paid the same as men. She quotes a statistic that states at the current rate, it won't be until 2086 until young girls in rural Africa will be able to receive a secondary education. Emma Watson will be 96 years old in 2086. This is so sad to think that in 2021, so many young girls are still not given the opportunity to receive an education.

In the final sentence of her speech, Watson asked the audience: "I am inviting you to step forward, to be seen and to speak up, to be the "he" for "she". And to ask yourself if not me, who? If not now, when?" This closing was so simple yet so powerful. She asked the audience to realize the power they hold to change the world and the way that women in the future will be viewed; only if they actively make these changes.

This speech was an effective attempt of speaking towards the goal of destroying stereotypical male stereotypes that keep us from achieving feminism. Watson's UN speech conceptualizes the good life as a place where all men and women are equal; and gender stereotypes are destroyed. The way that Watson touched upon the fact that achieving feminism means we must fix the way that men are viewed in society is unlike most feminism speeches. This speech made great statements and arguments, although I do not think it was enduring. 6 and ½ years later, and many of the struggles Watson touched upon are still faced today. However, Watson's use of reaching out to men; the opposing side of the feminism argument was powerful as it is not usually done. I believe that when discussing feminism, it is important to stress the fact that many issues discussed also impact men. This will convince men to get behind the movement.

Popstar and outspoken women's rights advocate Taylor Swift applauded Emma Watson's 2014 UN speech, saying that if she had a role model like Watson when she was younger; she would have declared herself a feminist much earlier in her life. "I wish when I was 12 years old, I had been able to watch a video of my favorite actress explaining in such an intellectual, beautiful, poignant way the definition of feminism, because I would have understood it. And then earlier on in my life I would have proudly claimed I was a feminist because I would have understood what the word means," (Time). I believe many people are afraid to label themselves as a feminist because of the negative energy surrounding the term. Having a bold, female lead who is not afraid to voice her opinion like Emma Watson is very influential for not only young women, but men of all ages. Seeing your favorite actress advocate for something may make fans more likely to listen and learn.

Watson spoke from her experience as a woman in society. Emma Watson also draws attention to the fact that many people will likely comment and ask why an actor from the Harry Potter series is speaking upon the feminism movement; and whether she is qualified. However, no matter your age, occupation, or place in society, the topics of feminism impact every single woman on this planet.

As a woman and feminist, I believe that Watson's speech was incredibly moving and will be used as an example year from now for feminism advocacy. It was relatable, and the route she took to turn the conversation on men was empowering. Achieving fair, equal opportunities for everyone in society; regardless of their age, weight, skin color, gender, or sexuality is so important. We need feminism because girls are still called a b**ch when they speak up for themselves. Because girls in so many countries are still not able to receive an education. Because each time a girl is assaulted, people ask what she was wearing as if clothing determines consent.

Because only 7.4% of those holding CEO positions in Fortune 500 companies are women.

Because people call men weak if they struggle with mental illness. We need feminism.

The world is a much better place when everyone can perform and live the same way that their neighbor does. Once we all come to terms and agree on the idea that someone's gender does not determine their worth or ability in society, the world will be a much better place for everyone living in it. Until then, we must work together to destroy gender stereotypes on both sides!

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Interorganizational Communication: Case Study

Emma Derocha

Case Overview

The case presented in this study examines coercive power. An eighteen-year-old freshman attending college in a new state found himself longing for a community on campus which led him to decide to join a fraternity. Regrettably, this student did not find this community or brotherhood in this fraternity. As part of the pledging initiation, he was put in an extremely dangerous situation that was overseen by the authority figures of the fraternity. When he tried to drop out of the pledge process, he was coerced by older members to continue it and made to believe that this was something that everyone had to do. The situation left him paralyzed, lacking vision and all motor abilities, and requiring 24/7 care.

Learning Objective

This case examines coercive and authoritarian power in hierarchical structures, and how individual responsibility is challenged as a result of these power dynamics.

Case Narrative

Dr. Phil: Every year, freshmen head off to college, many hoping to go from the safety of their parent's house to the freedom of a frat house. Fraternities are built on the idea of lifelong bonds and brotherhood, but there can also be a culture of silence hidden behind fraternal traditions. Today I am joined by the parents of a hazing victim who never want another family to endure what they have gone through. Their son Danny made it out alive but is now trapped in a body that is no longer his own.

Tom Santulli: Thank you for having us, Dr. Phil. Unfortunately, my son Danny learned the dark secrets of fraternity culture the hard way. Danny was a freshman at the University of Missouri and decided to pledge to the fraternity Phi Gamma Delta.

Dr. Phil: Can you explain what your son endured during his time pledging the fraternity? How was he treated by the older members and authorities?

Tom Santulli: On October 19th, 2021, on what was called “Pledge Dad Reveal Night,” the fraternity pledges were blindfolded and expected to drink a whole liter of liquor by themselves while the older members observed. Throughout the evening, Daniel repeatedly put the bottle of vodka down, but his pledge dad would hand it right back to him. Daniel kept saying, “No more, no more, I’m done,” to which an older member of the fraternity answered, “There are no p***ies in the house tonight.” Daniel could no longer hold himself up and proceeded to fall to the ground during the evening.

Dr. Phil: Do you know if any members of the fraternity tried to help your son while this happened?

Tom Santulli: No, Dr. Phil; they did not. As seen on video cameras, members in charge of the fraternity picked him up and threw him onto a living room couch. For over an hour, Daniel was left by himself; causing him to fall off the couch and hit his head.

Mary Pat Santulli: At that time, his lips were blue. Then they picked him up and dragged him down the hall, dropped him headfirst, and put him in a car to go to the hospital.

Tom Santulli: When Daniel arrived at the hospital, he had stopped breathing and his BAC was 0.486, which is six times the legal limit of 0.08 in the state of Missouri. The doctors basically said this was caused by alcohol poisoning. This incident was avoidable.

Mary Pat Santulli: The accident left him wheelchair-bound with no motor skills or vision. I had to resign from my job in April to provide 24/7 care for Daniel. **Key Case Concepts**

Coercive Power: An ability that allows someone in a leadership position to influence individuals to follow an instruction or order through force and threats.

Authoritative Power: The ability of a group or individual to exercise control over others; often when there is a disparity of voice between the parties involved.

Hierarchy: A system of organizing a group of people into different levels of ranks or importance.

Individual Responsibility: The belief that people have control over their actions and decisions.

Theoretical Briefing

Social psychologists John French and Bertram Raven conducted a study of power; leading them to focus on different types of leadership tools; including **coercive power**. French and Raven define coercive power as an individual's expectations that he/she will be punished by the authoritative individual if they do not conform to that person's influence attempt (Richmond et al, 1980). Psychologist Park Burgess (1973) implied that a coercer's main goal is to induce the experience of the victims being forced to comply with their rule. (p.72). Louis Tornatsky and P. James Geiwitz also gathered that coercive power can be recognized as an inappropriate mode of influence between individuals in an organization (1968).

One of the main goals of coercive power is to convince the victim that influence should be accepted without retaliation (M. Roloff et al, 1998). In addition, French and Raven (1968) maintain that the strength of coercive power is contingent on the subordinates understanding there is punishment if they choose to not comply. (Richmond et al, 1980). According to Psychotherapist Parke Burgess (1973) "The key tactic of coercive strategy is to preclude verbal and nonverbal alternatives to the demanded act. And the key to that tactic, in turn, is ultimate appeal to violence against the victim," (p. 67). Burgess further explained in *Crisis Rhetoric: Coercion v. Force* that when an individual is coerced, the victim is so constrained to act individually that they can hardly be blamed for going so "beyond reason." (Burgess, 1973).

In the journal *Power: How it is Used and Sometimes Abused*, essayist Su Axten (2003) claims "Hierarchical structures or complex interrelationships between peers, whether power is conceived or perceived, are binding factors in any group and become an innate characteristic of that group," (p. 683).

Axten (2003) continues to express that so much of what human beings think and do is done unconsciously, and what people do may not always be intended to gain control, but rather maintain a strong sense of self. Therefore, the means of achieving power or control of a group of individuals or situation is not always done through a conscious desire but the hope of achieving a status quo within oneself. (Axten, 2003).

Authoritative Power

Authority is “more properly understood as a mutual relationship between two or more peoples; it is dynamic more than static,” (Reid, 1967, p. 7). Hierarchy has been considered an essential foundation of **authoritative power**, which may determine how authoritarian leadership weaves its influence on employees. (Farh & Cheng, 2000). Authoritative power is desired by individuals as it offers a sense of validation and status quo which gives humans a sense of security (Axten, 2003, p. 684). Su Axten (2003) concludes that security is beneficial to those in authority positions as “Feeling secure means being in control and placing ourselves in positions where we can control others increases our sense of security. (p. 681).

In the journal *Abusive Supervision Through the Lens of Employee State Paranoia*, Professor M.L.E Chan (2014) suggests that authoritarian leaders shape subordinates by setting rules and demands and threatening punishment as a result of disobedience. The authoritarian leaders instill authority and control over the subordinate, requiring their unquestioning agreement, represented in the often-said phrase, “Do what I say,” (Cheng et al, 2004). In return, “the subordinates are expected to comply with their leaders' ideas and requests without dissent,” (Chen & Zhang, 2019, p.934). Furthermore, authoritative figures' coercion often goes unnoticed, and their victims are unlikely to report abuse, therefore the abuse is likely to prolong. (Weiss, 2002, p.31). The victims feel threatened but also desiring to feel a part of this whole,

therefore they conform sufficiently to be accepted by the hierarchy; often through the participation in initiation ceremonies; symbolizing the acceptance of the identity of the group. (Axten, 2003, p. 683).

Hierarchy

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, **hierarchies** are a system in which people or things are ranked based off their importance. In an explanation of power and hierarchy in the work environment, author Carolyn Dipalma (2004) describes the traditional pyramid of hierarchical power as: “a series of horizontal levels of authority that are broader at the base and narrow toward the peak,” (p. 298).

In the journal report “The Origins of Status Hierarchies: A Formal Theory and Empirical Test,” Yale University Professor Roger Gould (2002) contests: “In sociological studies of science, it is commonly observed that prominent individuals benefit (from hierarchies)- and marginalized individuals suffer,” (p.1148). These status rankings are stable, not necessarily because of proven success but because of the self-validation it provides for the prominent individuals, or the ones at the top of the hierarchy. (Gould, 2002). While discussing those in the lower rankings of hierarchical structures, highly regarded lecturer Marisalva Favero et al (2015) stated: “Thus, those who rank below them, by the established social design, submit to their rules, perpetuating a power that is nonexistent,” (p.1834).

Researchers Dr. Sheila Feiger and Madeline Schmitt found that even when organizations make a group effort to dismantle hierarchical power structures, the effort dissolves and the power structure eventually reappears (Feiger & Schmitt, 1979). This can prove true and challenging to organizations, but “by allowing multiple voices to exist and to be confronted through dialogue, social barriers such as (professional) hierarchies are transcended, and genuine learning is made possible,” (Teig, 2020, pg.4).

Individual Responsibility

Andrea Sangiovanni, Professor of moral and legal philosophy at King's College in London published a book on his findings regarding the relationship between principles, social factors, and **individual**

responsibility. *Humanity Without Dignity: Moral Equality, Respect, and*

Humans Rights contends: "Of course, any person's particular situation and particular relation to the social structures they aid in reproducing—where it is known—will change the character of our overall assessment of their degree of wrongdoing as well as their degree of culpability and liability,"

(Sangiovanni, 478). Additionally, Robert F. Card, Professor of Philosophy concluded that actions of individuals within hierarchical organizations should be understood differently than their actions would look outside of this structure (Card, 2005). He defended this claim by stating the role hierarchal structures play shapes the availability of alternatives for the subordinate outside the organization. (Card, 2005).

In the text, Robert Card (2005) explained how many actions that individuals take in daily life are without awareness prompted by authority, saying: "this suggests that we do not just abdicate our agency on rare occasions; given the difficulty of locating precisely what constitutes 'our action' within a hierarchical context, this leads to the continual erosion of agency itself within organizations and hence to the erosion of personal responsibility," (p. 400).

Psychologist David C. Hodgins also contributed research regarding individual responsibility in his article titled "Personal Choice is a Nuanced Concept – lessons learned from the gambling field." Hodgins (2020) describes individual responsibility in comparison to individuals wearing seatbelts; stating "The claim that ultimate responsibility rests with the individual is overly simplistic and does not recognize the reality of how people make decisions about their behavior. Each driver decides whether to buckle their seatbelt while driving an automobile. However, such a decision is dependent on seatbelts being available, which is a regulated obligation of the manufacturer. We can drive our cars without using the seatbelt, but

we are strongly nudged toward buckling up by those persistent reminder buzzers. It would be unpleasant to drive ... without buckling the seatbelt,” (p. 2).

In the context of inflicting individual blame on people, Professor Dana Cloud said, “This can also be applied to other issues in which personal responsibility is used as a scapegoat to ignore larger systemic and institutional inequalities,” (1998, p. 389). Michael J. Perez and Phia Salter also defended this theory by stating that individual responsibility is utilized asymmetrically to cover the wrongdoings of dominant groups. (Perez & Salter, 2019).

Questions:

- 1) Where does the victim presented in the case overview fall within the organization's **hierarchical** structure? Do they possess an equitable amount of power as their counterparts?
- 2) When considering the practices or traditions presented in the case, is it assumed that those in positions of **authoritative power** consciously knew what they were doing?
- 3) If the hazing victim tried to use their **individual responsibility** and choose to leave the situation, could the hierarchical structure of the organization prevent that from occurring?
- 4) What individuals are inflicting **coercive power** in the presented hierarchical structure?

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Performing Relationships During Special Occasion Openings

Ashley White

In honor of my uncle Alan.

Pseudonymized as “Alfred” in the “Performing Relationships During Special Occasion Openings”, the pursuit of this research would not have been possible without your collaboration and eager support of my academic curiosity. Special occasion interactions will, from now on, forever be a little less special without you there to welcome us.

Greatly Loved, Deeply Missed.

The goal of this research is to explore the role of opening practices during special/celebratory occasions. Although openings are present in virtually all interactions, they take on different and at times larger forms during special/ uncommon interactional events. How these openings are performed conveys much about the social relationships between the interactants. As such, this research investigates several critical components of openings in relation to relationship displays. To achieve this, two recordings are transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted.

Ethnographic Context

The first video takes place on Thanksgiving. The video (six minutes in duration) comprises examples #1 and #2 and was recorded in Mary’s home. The camera was positioned in her living room, providing a clear shot of both the living room, the kitchen, and the entrance through

which participants will be arriving. People arrive from the glass door on the left, which leads to the sunroom which ultimately is where the front door is. There is a total of 11 people in this interaction. By the time the camera started recording, over half of the participants (6 people total) had already arrived and settled in. The video, therefore, captures the arrival and settling in of only 5 participants. Almost immediately, people break into smaller groups to speak with one another, making the hearing of distinct conversations sometimes challenging. With that being said, this video is rich with data on openings and it is possible to isolate individual conversations to gain a deeper understanding of people's relationship displays. Each of the participants in this video is in some way socially and relationally connected to one another.

The second video (approximately seven and a half minutes in duration) comprises examples #3 and #4. It displays a series of openings that occurred on the same day and in the same location. On September 18th (a Sunday) around noon, the family came together to put together a surprise birthday party to celebrate Mark's 65th birthday. The surprise takes place at Juliette's house. During the recording, Anna and Brennon, had just arrived and were sitting in the dining room/kitchen area with Juliette and Mark (the celebrated individual). While the camera was getting setting, the family secretly (unbeknownst to Mark) started setting up birthday decorations in the garage. Anna, Brennon, and Juliette were aware of this, so their 'unofficial' task was to distract Mark. During the course of the recording, different family members begin arriving. Overall, the video captures three arrivals (Dean, Ralph, and Alfred) and the "official" arrival of Sue ("official" because Anna, Brennon, and Juliette were already aware of her presence, but Mark was not). In this paper, however, only the arrival of Ralph and Dean is analyzed.

Analyzing Examples #1 and #2

The following two examples comprise an introduction sequence between Carly with Juliette and Mark. These examples are showcased because 1) introductions are somewhat rare in these types of interactional contexts given that most participants are typically already acquainted with and close with one another; 2) two introductions happen back-to-back, each with their own peculiarities and interactional design; 3) this is a peculiar instance of introductions because the participants had already met on a previous occasion. However, Juliette and Mark have seemingly forgotten about this. The interactional implications of this unfold in the sequence as follows:

Example #1

01 JOS: So have you guys met, (.)
 02 JOS: ((Points toward Juliette and Mark))
 03 JOS: Well you ha[ve
 04 SAM: [I think I've met everybody.=
 05 JOS: =Juliette and Mark. Have you met Juliette and Mark?
 06 CAR: I think so.
 07 JOS: You have? Okay.
 08 ((All three turn left where other conversation is
 09 occurring))

At line 01, Josie initiates a pre-introduction sequence and directs it toward arriving parties Samuel and Carly. While delivering this line, Josie points toward Juliette and Mark (as indicated in line 02). Pre-introduction sequences are “devoted to checking to see if an introduction is appropriate before one is launched” (Pillet-Shore, 2011, p. 88). Interestingly, Josie attempts to take on the role of mediator in the possible introduction sequence she is setting up. According to

Firth, “the role of the third party... is twofold: he (or she) is both the social bridge, the mediator who facilitates the social contact of the two parties, and he may be also an ostensible guarantor of their social identity” (1972, p.6). Josie is not the host of this event but given her relationship with the arriving parties (her son Samuel and her son’s girlfriend Carly) and with the host (her mother Sheila), it appears that she is uniquely well suited to initiate a mediated introduction. By attempting to initiate a mediator-introduction, Josie complies with the preference for mediated introductions over self-introductions (Pillet-Shore, p. 80). “Preferred”, in this instance, is used to refer to the conversation analytic (CA) concept of preference organization. Preference organization in CA refers to the idea that typically, in interaction, there is the possibility of alternative relevant actions that may do affiliative face-affirming actions that promote social solidarity or disaffiliative face-threatening actions that destroy social solidarity. These two alternatives, in turn, are not equally valenced and how one chooses to perform them comes with a different set of interaction features (Pillet-Shore, 2017, p. 3-4).

Josie, however, never actually completes the pre-introduction utterance started at line 01 because she self-interrupts (as indicated by the beat of silence “(.)”) and then does a self-repair utterance at line 03. Repair refers to the set of practices participants engage in to address and resolve troubles in speaking. (Pillet-Shore, 2017, p. 18). Repair may be either self-initiated and/or completed or other-initiated and/or completed (p. 18). In this example, the repair sequence at lines 01-03 by Josie is self-initiated and self-completed. Thus, this is an example of self-correction. The onset of the self-interruption and consequential self-repair, furthermore, coincide with Josie’s ongoing visible/embodied behavior. In fact, it is only after she gazes at

Samuel, her son, that she realizes/remembers that he has already been acquainted with Juliette and Mark. As such, her pre-introduction sequence is deemed unnecessary and aborted before reaching completion. In self-repairing, Josie avoids her utterance being met with a “blocking” response, one that discourages the action the pre-sequence is setting up for (p. 8). Furthermore, it prevents Samuel from having to do the dispreferred action of other-correction.

This instance of self-repair also entails facework. Face refers to “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). Facework, therefore, refers to the work participants do to ensure that the positive social value of themselves and others remains positive. Participants in interaction may engage in different forms of facework, including avoidance and corrective processes. The avoidance process refers to the actions participants engage in to prevent face-threatening situations, and the corrective process, on the other hand, refers to the work participants do to save face after a face threat has occurred (pp. 15-19). In this example, it is clear that Josie’s aborted utterance does face threat avoidance. By aborting her utterance in line 01, she avoids Samuel’s potential blocking response. Following this, Samuel is instead able to do alignment with Josie’s renowned self-corrected utterance in line 03. Alignment refers to those responses that “cooperate by facilitating the proposed activity or sequence; accepting the presuppositions and terms of the proposed action or activity; and matching the formal design preference of the turn” (Chapelle, 2020, p. 248). This, in fact, occurs in line 04 when Samuel aligns with Josie’s self-repair utterance by providing an affirmative response (“I think I’ve met everybody”). This, in turn, promotes affiliation. Affiliation refers to responses that “are

maximally pro-social when they match the prior speaker's evaluative stance, display empathy, and/or cooperate with the preference of the prior action" (p. 249).

Although Samuel's response could have brought the sequence to an end (a sequence-closing third such as "Okay" may have been interactionally relevant here), Josie then turns to Carly at line 05 and relaunches her pre-introduction sequence. This time, the focus is specifically on Carly, as indicated by Josie's embodied action of putting her hand on Carly's shoulder and directing her gaze at her. Carly, who up until this point had remained silent, also provides an aligning and affiliative affirmative response (I think so) that indicates that an introduction sequence is not required. Lexically, her response may indicate some kind of uncertainty (she utters "I think so" as opposed to a stronger affirmative response such as "yes"). However, she delivers this line in preferred design. Preferred design features include the production of utterances "simply and straightforwardly –without delay, qualification/mitigation, or account" (Pillet-Shore, 2017, p. 4). Conversely, dispreferred design includes elements such as delay, qualifications/mitigations, and accounts (p. 4). As can be observed in line 06, Carly's deliverance occurs straightforwardly, without hesitation, gaps of silence or delay, and with no accounts. Given this, the other participants in the interaction, Samuel and Josie, accept her response at face value and do not see it fit to engage in sequence expansion (which may have indicated some kind of trouble/unresolved issue). Rather, in line 07, Josie emphasizes Carly's response (You have?) before doing a sequence-closing third ("Okay"). As such, they indicate that there is nothing left to add to that specific interactional sequence and, in this case, indicate that all issues have been adequately addressed and resolved. Another way that the participants indicate that all issues have been resolved can be observed in lines 08-09. At this point, Josie, Samuel, and Carly

physically reorient themselves from their own interactional bubble to join the ongoing conversation to their left. Thus, they move to be included in the shared transactional space that the participants to their left have already established, otherwise understood as the F-formation. Formations refer to people's "spatial-orientational organization differing according to how the participants' attentional involvements are organized" (Kendon, 2010, p. 5). The participants in the adjunct conversation to the left move to expand their pre-existing o-space to include newcomers Josie, Samuel, and Carly. The o-space refers to the inner space formed in conversational circles that participants "actively operate to sustain [and] is the space reserved for the main activity of the occasion" (p. 5). In doing so, they subtly promote inclusivity and do a positive relationship display.

The attempted pre-introduction sequence, then, comes to an end and no longer appears to be interactionally relevant. Josie has, seemingly, established that the arriving parties are all acquainted with one another. However, merely a minute later, an issue arises. Juliette, who has been slowly greeting the pre-present parties in the interaction, finally sets her gaze on Carly. The following interaction takes place:

Example #2

01 JUL: #I don't think I- (.) I haven't met- (2.0)
 02 DEA: This is uh:: Samuel' girlfriend Carly.
 03 JOS: Have you not [met ↑Carly?
 04 JUL: [CAR:ly?=
 05 CAR: =>Carly yes nice too meet you.<=
 06 JUL: =Hi::, nice to meet you:..
 07 JUL: ((Initiates hug with Carly))
 08 CAR: ((Returns hug))

09 ((Overlapping talk/ Unintelligible))
 10 JOS: °Yeah I thought you guys met°.
 10 JUL: I- I probably forge-
 11 CAR: >hihihihih<
 12 DEA: ((gestures toward Mark)) And this is my brother
 Mark?=
 14 JUL: =[I just told-
 15 CAR: [°Hi.°
 16 MAR: Hi, ((waves))
 17 DEA: ((turns toward Carly)) Carly,
 18 JUL: I was just saying I forget everything anyway [so just
 19 get £u(h)sed to it.
 20 CAR: [hih hih
 hih hih
 21 JUL: †heh heh heh heh heh

At line 01, Juliette initiates an utterance that indicates that she is unfamiliar with Carly, whom she is gazing toward. The interactional design of this utterance is worth paying close attention to. As previously established, “parties treat mediator-initiated introductions as ‘preferred’ over self-initiated introductions” (Pillet-Shore, 2011, p. 80). At line 01, it appears that Juliette is either gearing toward a self-initiated introduction or an explicit request for a mediated-introduction (#I don’t think I- (.) I haven’t met-). It is important to note that both of these actions fall within the category of dispreferred actions. The dispreferred nature of her action can be observed in how she designs her turn. It includes many of the dispreferred features mentioned above, including hesitancy, cutoffs, and beats of silence. It is worth noting, however, that such disfluencies may also be attributable to her speech impediment.

At line 02, Dean notices Juliette's utterance and is able to quickly assess that Juliette must be unfamiliar with Carly. Similar to Josie, although Dean is not the host to this event, he also finds himself in a uniquely well-suited position to act as third-party mediator to the unfolding introduction sequence. Dean is both Juliette's son and stepfather to Carly's boyfriend. Therefore, he is in an optimal epistemic position to introduce the two unacquainted parties. According to Pillet-Shore, mediators solve the interactional problem of recipient design, which refers to "a multitude of respects in which the talk by a party in a conversation is constructed or designed in ways which display an orientation and sensitivity to the particular other(s) who are the coparticipants" (2011, p. 83). As such, "mediators have an epistemic advantage (over the unacquainted persons) in their ability to recipient design their formulations of introducible persons" (p. 83). Participants in interaction, overall, possess varying levels of epistemic knowledge. Those who know more than other participants are said to be in a K+ position, while those who know less are in a K- position. These positions oscillate during interaction and can be brought into equilibrium to help participants achieve "common ground" (Heritage, 2013, p. 376). Dean, therefore, is in a K+ epistemic position compared to Juliette, who is unfamiliar with Carly and thus finds herself in a K- position. By promoting a third-party mediated introduction at line 02, however, Dean helps her transition from the K- position to a K+ one.

To achieve mediated introductions and establish common ground, introducers typically do person reference formulations. Person reference formulations formulate who someone is using names and/or category terms/descriptors" (Pillet-Shore, 2011, p. 78). These formulations answer questions concerning connection and ownership, social category identity/categorical relationship, and account for presence (p. 84). Dean accomplishes this at line 02 (*This is uh::*

Samuel' girlfriend Carly), sometimes in subtle ways. Connection and ownership are established via "Samuel", who is the known-in-common person between Juliette and Carly. Social category identity is then achieved through the identity marker "girlfriend", as it indicates who Carly is categorically to the known-in-common person Samuel. Finally, the account for presence is implicitly addressed, as Carly's relationship to Samuel accounts for her presence at a family special event (Thanksgiving). This identification works to reduce "social uncertainty", which Firth describes as "the formal symbol of a social relationship established... of the reduction of an unknown to a (putatively) known social position" (p. 4-5). The fact that Dean addresses her as "Carly" (as opposed to limiting his introduction to "Samuel' girlfriend") is also significant. By stating her name, he allows Juliette to be able to then engage in the introduction (at lines 04-06).

At line 03, Josie jumps in with a polar question (one that requires a "yes" or "no" response). As the video displays, Josie is engaged in another ongoing conversation when she overhears Juliette's line 01 prompting the third-party mediated introduction accomplished by Dean at line 02. Initially, Josie has her back turned toward the camera as she engages in conversation with her sister Betsy (as displayed in Image 1). As she overhears the beginning of the introduction, however, she reorients the upper part of her body toward Juliette and Carly so that she is in body torque. Body torque refers to the "divergent orientations of the body sectors above and below the neck and waist, respectively" (Schegloff, 1998, p. 536). By entering into body torque, she abandons her home position. The home position is "the position from which some limb or physical movement departed, and the return to which marks a possible ending to a spate or unit of activity" (p. 542). Body torque, therefore, may be resolved by doing a return to home position

or by doing a full body reorientation. In this example, as Josie realizes that Juliette and Carly are seemingly unacquainted, she does a full body reorientation so that her renowned home position is the orientation toward the unacquainted parties. She also reaches her left arm out toward Carly.

In addition to this, Josie establishes eye gaze with Juliette. This is partly obscured in the video, as Dean partially stands in front of her. As Josie overhears the conversation, therefore, she seemingly abandons her previous activity and becomes locked into the ongoing mediated introduction to her left. Josie's behavior may be accounted for considering her previous attempted mediated introduction explored in Example #1. Given that she had asked Carly whether she had met Juliette and Mark (Example #1, Line 5), she is now under the impression that everyone in the room is acquainted with one another.

At lines 04-08, the introduction sequence finally takes place. At line 04, Juliette does a person reference formulation repeat (*Car:ly?*) with rising tone intonation. Person reference formulation repeats do work to “commit that name to memory” (Pillet-Shore, 2011, p. 78). Therefore, Juliette displays an orientation to being accountable for remembering Carly's name from now on. At line 05, Carly confirms her name (*Carly yes*) and does an introduction-specific assessment (*nice too meet you*). Introduction-specific assessments may act to assess how it is to meet the addressed recipient (p. 78). This assessment, in turn, is returned by Juliette at line 06 (*nice to meet you:*). Juliette also does a greeting at line 06 (*Hi::*). By doing this, she ratifies “the relevance of an incipient/in-progress introduction” (p. 78). Finally, at line 07,

Juliette initiates touch/body contact (p. 78) which is consequently returned by Carly at line 08. By engaging in touch/body contact, participants “display a positive affective stance” that promotes affiliation or rapport.

Another characteristic that is commonly observed in introductions that can also be found in this example is the presence of overlap. According to Pillet-Shore, “introducible persons observably work to achieve overlap with one another when producing introduction sequence actions” (2011, p. 78). At lines 03-04, the end of Josie’s turn and the beginning of Juliette’s occur in clear overlap. In addition to this, participants often rush-through “transition-relevance places to secure additional turn-constructual units” (p.78-79). Such rush-throughs, indicated by the “=” symbol in the transcript, can be observed at lines 04-06. Another common element in introductions is sound-stretching utterances to achieve overlap. This can be observed at lines 03-04, specifically at line 04 when Juliette stretches the utterance “Car:ly”. Overall, more sound-stretching (without overlap) also occurs at line 06 “Hi::” and “you:”.

Another common element in introductions is a claim of preexisting knowledge about the introducible person. Such utterances essentially claim that at least one of the introducible persons already knows about the other (Pillet-Shore, 2011, p. 78). This concept is relevant in this introduction sequence when considered in conjunction with Example 1. As is established by Josie’s query, Carly should be already acquainted with Juliette and Mark. She confirms so by stating the affirmative “I think so”, which brings the Example 1 sequence to an end. However, when the subsequent introduction initiated by Juliette takes place, Carly takes no

corrective action to remind Juliette about their previous encounter. By choosing not to do other-correction, Carly does protective facework. Juliette, an elderly woman, is prone to having memory issues. This is especially true when it comes to remembering people she infrequently sees, such as Carly. Instead of pointing out their prior acquaintance, which would put a spotlight on Juliette's remembering problem, Carly chooses to act as if they have never met. This, in itself, promotes affiliation.

At line 10, Josie points out that, to her knowledge (established in Example 1), Juliette and Carly have already been introduced (°Yeah I thought you guys met°). Her choice to bring this fact to the surface while the other participants (namely Carly) have done work to conceal it is worth nothing. While Carly does affiliative work, Josie seemingly does the opposite with this utterance. One way of accounting for this is by considering what Josie was attempting to do in Example 1. As established, Josie's role as daughter of the hostess and mother of Carly's boyfriend puts her in a uniquely well-suited position to act as the third-party introducer between known-in-common Carly and Juliette. In an attempt to fulfill this role, she does a pre-introduction sequence in Example 1, which is met with a blocking response that, therefore, ends the sequence. Now, however, she discovers that Juliette is not acquainted (to her knowledge) with Carly. Josie's utterance at line 10, therefore, may be a subtle way of doing defensive facework. It communicates the idea that, to her knowledge, Carly and Juliette had already met and absolves her from not going ahead with a mediated introduction. In other words, Josie does a subtle account for her previous behavior.

Josie's utterance is picked up on by Juliette, who quickly attempts to do accounting work of her own. At line 11, Juliette initiates an utterance that, for her part, seems to be the beginning of an account for why she didn't recognize Carly (I- I probably forge-). However, she is cut off by a second mediated introduction initiated by Dean between Carly and Mark (lines 13-14 and 16-17). Juliette attempts her account a second time at line 15 (I just told-), but is again cut off. Finally, Juliette delivers a successful account at line 19 in which she explains that "I forget everything anyway". This utterance does protective facework. Juliette protects her face by accounting for why she did not remember Carly, attributing her forgetfulness and successfully absolving herself from the face-threatening situation she found herself in.

Juliette's mention of her forgetfulness can be considered a delicate subject. In conversation, there are instances in which a topic may arise that "breaches conversational standards" and may be perceived as a "delicate" subject (Lerner, 2013, p. 95). Given this, the involved participants in this example may be hesitant and unsure of how to respond. Should this utterance be taken as a serious/ somber statement assessing Juliette's health? Or is it possible to perceive it in a lighthearted and even humorous manner? Juliette's subsequent TCU at lines 19-20 clarifies this. Her utterance "so just get fu(h)sed to it", delivered with a laughing voice (indicated by the "£" symbol), communicates to the other participants that it is okay, and perhaps it is encouraged, to laugh about her forgetfulness. Laughter, in this context, encourages subsequent affiliation by Carly and Josie at lines 21-23.

Analyzing Examples #3

Example #3 takes place during the setting up of a surprise party. The camera angle only truly shows Brennon (to the left) and Juliette (to the right). Off-screen, to the right, sit Mark (whose birthday party the participants are preparing for) and Anna. The example starts at the .53-second marker and captures the off-screen arrival of Ralph (Mark’s brother). This arrival was selected and is analyzed in detail because of the presence of many opening characteristics, including but not limited to: becoming copresent, identification, greetings, lapses, and previous activity formulations. In addition to this, this arrival contains a special greeting utterance type, a feature frequently observed in special occasion openings such as the ones explored in this paper.

Example #3

10 [((Door Opens))
 11 JUL: ↑Hi::?
 12 RAL: Hello::?
 13 JUL: [Oh:] the:re’s Ralph:?

At lines 10-11, becoming socially copresent occurs. Becoming copresent occurs at the earliest possible moment in openings, as it represents the moment “participants physically make their way into social interaction” (Pillet-Shore, 2018a, p. 4). The arriving party may move to gain admission in different ways, and how one chooses to become socially copresent has interactional implications. In this example, Ralph self-admits by letting himself into Juliette’s house without any accompanying warning summons actions (such as knocking on the door or ringing the doorbell). According to Pillet-Shore, “the choices parties make about how they become physically and then socially copresent reflect and propose the state and character of their social relationships” (2018a, p. 5). By letting himself into Juliette’s house in this way, he displays less territorial deference and, consequently, a stronger bond with Juliette. Given the

ethnographic context of this interaction, we know that Ralph is Juliette's son. As such, he has visited her home on countless occasions and knows that their relationship does not warrant a summons/answer sequence.

At lines 11-13, an identification sequence occurs. As Ralph self-admits at line 10, Juliette appears initially confused as to who is at her door at line 11 (as indicated by the rising turn-final intonation represented by the “?” symbol). This, in turn, marks the beginning of an identification sequence. Identification refers to the sensitivity to establishing the identity of others at the very outset of interaction (Schegloff, 1986, p. 118). It is particularly found in interactions where visual inspection of the other is not possible, such as telephone conversations. However, it applies to this example as well as Juliette is unable to see Ralph at the time of the identification sequence. Juliette's utterance at line 11, in this context, also does “presence validation and threat denial” (Pillet-Shore, 2012, p. 375). Juliette is unaware of who is entering her home and is potentially facing the threat of having a stranger let themselves in. Requesting an identification, therefore, acts as a way of reducing potential threats and, in an even more subtle way, accounts for the arriving party's presence in that interactional context. Ralph, for his part, answers her request at line 12 by saying “Hello::?”. In his response, he does not explicitly self-identify (for example, he does not say “Hello, it's Ralph”). In doing so, Ralph communicates the idea that Juliette should have the tools (the sound of his voice and the contextual setting) required to complete the identification sequence. This interactional choice is yet another way Ralph displays intimacy and the strength of his relationship with Juliette. At line 13, Ralph's assumption turns out to be true as Juliette accurately identifies him (there's Ralph:). Such a response does not promote sequence expansion, thereby displaying that no other identifying

utterances are required. In this sense, the preference for brevity in identification can be observed. According to Schegloff, if possible “the minimum resources... should be needed by the current interlocutor in view of the current state of the relationship” to achieve recognition (1986, p. 127). Line 13, then, establishes that recognition has been successful and promotes the closure of the identification sequence.

Example #3 Continued

14 BRE: [°Hi°]
 15 ANN: [Hi? °Heh heh°]
 16 RAL: [Hey hey?]
 17 JUL: Hi:,
 18 RAL: ↑Hello: Mark.
 19 MAR: Uh (.) Hello::.
 20 ANN: °huh huh°

At lines 14-19, the participants engage in a series of greetings. Greetings refer to the “discrete audible and visibly (vocal, verbal/lexical, and embodied) actions that participants deploy to publicly mark the moment when they ratify another’s social copresence” (Pillet-Shore, 2018a, p. 5). It is the recognition that an encounter with another is deemed “socially acceptable (Firth, 1972, p. 1). According to Pillet-Shore, participants to incipient encounters typically withhold greetings until having a clear idea of “who’s there”. By doing this, they display “their orientation to identification/recognition via visual inspection as prerequisite to producing a copresent greeting” (2012, p. 377). This occurs in this example, as the greeting sequence only takes place after Juliette has been able to identify Ralph as the arriver. The video, furthermore, shows that this inspection is both verbal (her request for identification at line 11) and visual (she physically reorients her body so that she is in direct eye line of the door). In addition to this, not

all greetings are the same. Participants “design their greetings for particular addressed-recipients, tailoring them to (display) their own understanding/appraisal of “who we are to one another right now” (p. 377). In this example, the way participants prosodically construct their relationship does interactional work to display the participants’ relationships with one another. The participants use “large” greetings, those which sound “big, substantial, effusive” (p. 383). Ways of doing large greetings include lengthening utterances, using a louder tone of voice than the previous in-progress talk, visibly/audibly smiling, and using high onest pitch with gradual fall-to-mid (p. 384). Such greetings are also typically done in a chorus of overlapping talk (p. 383). In this example, it is possible to observe instances of overlap (lines 14-16), sound stretching (lines 17 and 19), and a louder tone of voice (line 19). Large greetings display multiple things in interaction. First, it displays successful recognition (p. 388). It is no coincidence, then, that this type of greeting takes place immediately after the previously examined identification sequence. Furthermore, large greetings treat the current encounter as special. Specifically ““large’ clusters of prosodic features indexes speakers’ orientation to the amount of time elapsed since last contact as significant” (p. 388). This idea is also supported by Firth, who claims that during greetings participants manifest “regret for past severance” (1972, p. 8). Said “regret”, furthermore, tends to manifest in a manner that is proportional to the time elapsed between the last encounter and the one currently taking place. In other words, the longer two parties have been separated, the grander their greeting is likely to be as a way of making up for not keeping in touch. It is a way of reasserting the strength of their social relationship and establishing that, despite the elapsed time, the relationship is just as strong as the last time they were in each other’s presence. This is particularly relevant in special occasion interactions, as the greeting participants typically have not seen each other for a prolonged period of time.

Another aspect of this greeting sequence worth noting is that, while Ralph greets all the other participants without specifically referring to them, he greets Mark with a specific personal formulation at line 18 (“↑Hello: Mark”). By explicitly addressing Mark by his name during the greeting sequence, it is possible that Ralph is doing some kind of pre-sequence. Such work is relevant in this interactional context as this is a multi-party interaction. That is, there are more than two participants engaging in conversation. Ralph’s utterance calls out for Mark’s attention, specifically making sure that he, out of all participants, is directly engaged with him. One way of accounting for this is that, shortly thereafter, Ralph is going to wish Mark a happy birthday. Therefore, this greeting utterance may be doing work to prepare Mark to be the recipient of birthday wishes.

Example #3 Continued

21 RAL: Happy birthday.
 22 MAR: uh (.) uh thank >you< Ra:ndy.
 23 RAL: You’re welcome.

At line 21, Ralph does the special greeting utterance type “Happy birthday”. This utterance takes place early in the interaction (perhaps as early as interactionally and contextually possible). Furthermore, the wishes are also delivered in preferred design (including characteristics such as smooth delivery, no hesitancy/lapses, and delivered straightforwardly). Doing birthday wishes is a face-affirming action. By doing so, Ralph affirms that Mark’s birthday is a mentionable worth bringing up in the earliest moments in conversation. This is another way Ralph displays a positive relationship during the opening sequence of a special

occasion interaction. It is worth noting, in fact, that the lack of such wishes could have been perceived as a noticeably missing action. This, in turn, could have put the relationship in jeopardy and stalled the conversation upon further corrective action. Following this, Mark does a relevant SPP that accepts Ralph's special greeting utterance, which in turn promotes sequence closure at line 23. Mark, however, seemingly treats the sequence as incomplete, as he then moves to expand it:

Example #3 Continued

26 MAR: (my my) is it a big one.
 27 RAL: Okay?
 28 (2.0)
 29 JUL: .hh we're not ready to go yet, [°honey°.
 30 MAR: [↓No no no no no

At line 26, Mark does an assessment. To assess is to evaluate, judge, or state one's personal appraisal of the value of some referent. With assessments, participants claim knowledge of that which they are assessing (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 57). Mark does a positively valenced assessment toward his birthday. His birthday, in turn, can be considered an owned referent. Owned referents are those for which participants are regarded as responsible for (Pillet-Shore, 2021, p. 18). In a broader sense, however, it refers to those referents that participants regard as "mine". By positively assessing his birthday, a second assessment becomes relevant here. Second assessments "are assessments produced by recipients of prior assessments in which the referents in the seconds are the same as those in the priors" (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 59). Ralph, however, does not produce one. Rather, he does a minimal neutral SPP at line 27 that neither positively nor negatively assesses the assessable. Again, his utterance is one that promotes sequence

closure. This type of action may be considered a subtle example of disalignment, as Ralph is not doing the action (second assessment) that Mark attempts to set him up for at line 26.

Following this, at line 28 there is a 2-second lapse in conversation. Lapses, according to Hoey, refer to “periods of nontalk that develop when all interactants forgo the opportunity to self-select in a place where speaking was possible” (2018, p. 1). The position of this lapse is relevant. It occurs just at the end of the overall opening sequence (including summoning, identification, greeting, and special greeting). Furthermore, the lapse occurs after Ralph’s move to terminate the assessment sequence initiated by Mark. Lapses, typically, engender one of three interactional consequences: they may end the interaction, continue with prior talk, or start something new (Hoey, 2018). In this case, at line 29 a new topic is formulated and the participants resume their talk.

Example #3 Continued

31 JUL: He’s still, we’re- we’re- (.) doing something in the
 32 gara:ge you can se~e. ((cough)) (°that’s°) °that’s why
 33 he’s here°.
 34 RAL: Ahh::.

As the participants reengage in conversation after the lapse, a previous activity formulation takes place at lines 31-33. Previous activity formulations typically occur when a newcomer arrives at a previously ongoing conversation. Such sequences “include arriving newcomers into previously-in-progress and ongoing interactions” (Pillet-Shore, 2010, p. 154). Specifically, they “make sense for the newcomer, preparing her/him epistemically by naming and summarizing the

activities that have transpired prior to his/her arrival and/or deciphering indexical aspects of the previously-in-progress interaction” (p. 155-156). In this example, Juliette catches Ralph up as to what has been going on so far. She briefly (and somewhat discreetly) informs him about what is going on in the garage (Sue and Sonie, two family members, are putting together the birthday surprise decorations for Mark). This serves to make sense of the previously-in-progress interaction for newcomer Ralph. Juliette then moves to inform him of what the pre-present participants (herself, Brennon, Anna, and Mark) are doing in the living room. How previous activity formations take place in conversation is socially relevant. Such sequences may either be proffered or requested. To proffer a previous activity formulation is preferred, while having to explicitly request one is dispreferred (Pillet-Shore, 2010, p. 160). Furthermore, proffering a previous activity formulation promotes inclusivity, while requests do not. In this example, Ralph does not have to explicitly request a previous activity formulation. Rather, one is proffered relatively early in the interaction. This, therefore, promotes inclusivity toward Ralph and is another way participants display their social relationships.

Analyzing Example #4

Example #4 also takes place during the setting up of Mark’s surprise birthday party. The example starts at the 6:16 second marker and captures the off-screen arrival of Dean (Mark’s youngest brother). This arrival contains regular opening elements such as becoming copresent and greetings. Furthermore, this clip also includes examples of registering, teasing, and noticing. Ultimately, however, it was selected because it represents a deviant case in preference organization in arrival sequences.

Example #4

05 ANN: °just do it.°
 06 BRE: heh.
 07 ANN: Why: no: [t.
 08 DEA: [He:y.
 09 BRE: ((turns around)) [↑Hey!
 10 DEA: [°Hi Mark,°
 11 ANN: [°°↑Hey:°°=

In Example #4, becoming copresent starts at line 08. This line, furthermore, also initiates the greeting sequence that unfolds from lines 08-11 and then continues later on in the transcript. The somewhat prolonged production of Dean's utterance (as represented by the “:” symbol), seems to indicate that he is treating this greeting as a special occasion and using “large” features. Overall, his utterance appears to be doing the action of announcing his arrival and does not do much to promote or do relationship displays. Following Dean's utterance, the pre-present participants turn to meet his gaze and respond to the initiated greeting sequence. Brennon, in

particular, engages in multiple instances of body torque starting at the 6:26 time marker in the video recording.

One interesting thing to note about Brennon's embodied behavior is that although he enters into body torque, it is not continuous. In fact, over the span of 26 seconds (up until time marker 6:50, when he finally does a permanent return to home position), he torques-untorques his body six times. It is worth noting, furthermore, that while some instances of his body torque are greater (the first three times, for example, there is intense torquing of the chest, shoulders, neck and



head), in other occasions his torquing behavior is barely perceptible (such as in the last three

instances, when he primarily cranes his neck). Furthermore, despite the arrival of a new person, Brennon never does a full body reorientation. As the images display, he does upper body torque but his dominant orientation remains the table. This, therefore, is in contrast with Josie's example of body torque Example #2. While Josie abandons her previous home position to

instead pursue the ongoing conversation to her left, Brennon's home position never changes. This behavior, however subtle it may seem throughout the overall interaction, does work to display (or rather, in this case, not display) social relationships. By never doing a full body reorientation, Brennon is displaying that arriving party Dean is only tangentially and temporarily receiving his attention. This, in turn, may act to block Dean from attempting to engage in further conversation with him. One way of accounting for this behavior may be understood by considering the relationships between these two participants. Dean is Brennon's father. Furthermore, Brennon was already aware that, at some point, Dean would be arriving at the party since they live together and left the house to go to the party at roughly the same time. Seeing Dean's arrival, therefore, is neither surprising nor eventful for Brennon. Therefore, after Brennon fulfills the interactional and social duty of acknowledging Dean the newcomer and exchanging greetings with him (at line 09), there is not much left to be said or done. In a very subtle way, essentially, Brennon's lack of further or grander acknowledgement toward Dean may actually be doing interactional work to display the strength of their relationship.

Further relationship displays between Dean and Brennon can be observed in the interaction as follows:

Example #4 Continued

08 DEA: [He:y.
 09 BRE: ((turns around)) [↑Hey!
 10 DEA: [°Hi Mark,°
 11 ANN: [°°↑Hey:°°=
 12 BRE: =You're [late.
 13 JUL: [°Hi:.°
 14 MAR: [Hi: Dean,

15 ANN: Hey lo:ok at you slacker you got here after everyone
 16 else and by everyone else I mean Ralph.
 17 DEA: °heh heh heh.°
 18 BRE: °You're° la:te,

After delivering a greeting utterance at line 09, Brennon's next interactional move points out Dean's supposed tardiness at line 12 (*You're [late]*). This is, at an initial glance, a face-threatening action. It does the action of registering, which can be understood as doing the action of calling attention of a publicly perceivable referent (Pillet-Shore, 2021, p. 13). Registering, typically, follows the rules of preference organization. As such, positive instances of registering are typically delivered in preferred design while negative instances of registering are typically delivered in dispreferred design. In this example, however, Brennon negatively registers Dean's tardiness with preferred design. Such an action represents a deviant case in preference organization. In this case, preferred design can be observed in the fact that Brennon's line is delivered at the earliest moment in conversation (just after he has exchanged greetings with Dean) and his utterance is delivered with preferred features such as straightforward production of the utterance. This utterance, furthermore, can be considered an example of teasing. Teasing is conceptualized in two ways. First, it is "a provocative cutting down of a target that is construed as (ostensibly) non-serious" and second, it is a "provocative setting up of a target that is construed as (ostensibly) non-serious" (Haugh, 2017, p. 4). In this case, it appears that the first conceptualization applies to the line of teasing pursued by Brennon. Following the initial tease at line 12, two more instances of teasing occur at lines 15-16 (delivered by Anna) and then again at line 18. Anna's lines 15-16 latch on to Brennon's initial teasing utterance at line 12, in a way expanding it. This expansion may be attributed to the fact that Dean, in not responding to

and affiliating to the initial attempt at teasing, prompts the participants (Anna and Brennon) to attempt to get him to “play along”. In fact, while Dean does not respond to the initial tease, he does offer a light chuckle in response to Anna’s lines 15-16. To understand why the teasing takes place during this particular interactional moment, however, it is again necessary to consider the context of the conversation. Anna and Brennon are Dean’s children. They live with him and see him on a daily basis. When departing to go to Juliette’s house, they all left the same home at approximately the same time to meet there. Therefore, by the time Anna and Brennon see Dean again, it has likely been just about an hour since their last face-to-face encounter. Given this, the greeting sequence is cut short to instead engage in playful teasing. The fact that this teasing, overall, occurs at one of the earliest possible moments in interaction suggests a strong relationship between Dean, Anna, and Brennon.

Example #4 Continued

18 BRE: °You’re° la:te,
 19 ANN: Oh:, but you brought food so: I guess you [have an
 20 excuse
 21 DEA: [Well

After the teasing sequence, noticing occurs at lines 19-20. Anna produces an utterance that notices that Dean is carrying several bags full of groceries for the party (off-screen). Noticing may be accomplishing several things in this context. First, noticing serves to account and mitigate for the previous teasing and negative registering that took place. Furthermore, noticing may also be doing face-preserving work. Throughout the previously analyzed teasing sequence, Dean only audibly affiliates with the teasing he is on the receiving end of once (at line 17).

Although the teasing is lighthearted in nature, it is possible that it could be perceived as a face-

threat. As a result, noticing that Dean “brought food” and claiming that “you [have an excuse” (account) does work to recover face.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has explored the role of opening practices during special/celebratory occasions in examples #1-3. Emphasis is put on different aspects of openings. Examples #1-2 focus mainly on the interactional feature of introductions and third-party introductions. Such sequences showcase the initiation of social relationships and also showcase the work interactants do to make sure others are acquainted with (and, therefore, comfortable) with one another). Example #3 focuses on unexpected arrivals during celebratory occasions. Emphasis is put on territorial deference, affiliation, face, and previous activity formulations as a means of promoting inclusivity and displaying relationship. Overall, relationship displays manifest themselves differently depending on factors such as intimacy, setting, time elapsed since previous encounter, and reason for encounter.

Research Project: Final Paper Appendix

Thanksgiving Introductions

Juliette= JUL

Dean= DEA

Josie= JOS

Carly= CAR

Mark= MAR

Samuel= SAM

Example #1

(3:34-3:43)

01 JOS: So have you guys met, (.)
 02 JOS: ((Points toward Juliette and Mark))
 03 JOS: Well you ha[ve
 04 SAM: [I think I've met everybody.=
 05 JOS: =Juliette and Mark. Have you met Juliette and Mark?
 06 CAR: I think so.
 07 JOS: You have? Okay.
 08 ((All three turn left where other conversation is
 09 occurring))

Example #2

(Skip to 5:00)

01 JUL: #I don't think I- (.) I haven't met- (2.0)
 02 DEA: This is uh:: Samuel' girlfriend Carly.
 03 JOS: Have you not [met ↑Carly?
 04 JUL: [Chey:enne?=
 05 CAR: =>Carly yes nice too meet you.<=

06 JUL: =Hi::, nice to meet you:.

07 JUL: ((Initiates hug with Carly))

08 CAR: ((Returns hug))

09 ((Overlapping talk/ Unintelligible))

10 JOS: °Yeah I thought you guys met°.

11 JUL: I- I probably forge-

12 CAR: >hihihihih<

13 DEA: ((gestures toward Mark)) And this is my brother

14 Mark?=
 15 JUL: =[I just told-

16 CAR: [°Hi.°

17 MAR: Hi, ((waves))

18 DEA: ((turns toward Carly)) Carly,

19 JUL: I was just saying I forget everything anyway [so just

20 get fu(h)sed to it.

21 CAR: [hih hih

22 hih hih

23 JUL: ↑heh heh heh heh heh

Birthday Surprise Arrivals

Juliette= JUL

Brennon= BRE

Anna= ANN

Ralph= RAL

Mark= MAR

Dean= DEA

Example #3

(00:53-01:49)

01 JUL: A:nd, (.) uhm (.) Alfred and Kate are coming and I'm
02 ho:pi:ng (.) uhm (.) Zeke °can come°.

03 ANN: Mhm=

04 BRE: =°Hm°=

05 JUL: =And I don't know ~oehh~ (.) That's- that's her
06 graduation (.) picture.

07 ANN: Cara?

08 JUL: °Eh° that's Ca:ra. ~Yeahh~ see?

09 ANN: [Ni:ce.
10 [((Door Opens))

11 JUL: ↑Hi::?

12 RAL: Hello::?

13 JUL: [Oh:] the:re's Ralph:?

14 BRE: [°Hi°]

15 ANN: [Hi? °Heh heh°]

16 RAL: [Hey hey?

17 JUL: Hi:,

18 RAL: ↑Hello: Mark.

19 MAR: Uh (.) Hello::.

20 ANN: °huh huh°

21 RAL: Happy birthday.

22 MAR: uh (.) uh thank >you< Ra:ndy.

23 RAL: You're welcome.

24 JUL: [((coughs))

25 ANN: [°huh huh huh huh°

26 MAR: (my my) is it a big one.

27 RAL: Okay?

28 (2.0)

29 JUL: .hh we're not ready to go yet, [°honey°.

30 MAR: [↓No no no no no

31 JUL: He's still, we're- we're- (.) doing something in the
32 gara:ge you can se~e. ((cough)) (°that's°) °that's why

33 he's here°.

34 RAL: Ahh::.

Example #4

(6:16- 6:41)

01 ANN: My idea was,
 02 ((pots clacking in the kitchen))
 03 ANN: We >should just< buy the camp.
 04 BRE: ((raises eyebrows))
 05 ANN: °just do it.°
 06 BRE: heh.
 07 ANN: Why: no: [t.
 08 DEA: [He:y.
 09 BRE: ((turns around)) [↑Hey!
 10 DEA: [°Hi Mark,°
 11 ANN: [°°↑Hey:°°=
 12 BRE: =You're [late.
 13 JUL: [°Hi:..°
 14 MAR: [Hi: Dean,
 15 ANN: Hey lo:ok at you slacker you got here after everyone
 16 else and by everyone else I mean Ralph.
 17 DEA: °heh heh heh.°
 18 BRE: °You're° la:te,
 19 ANN: Oh:, but you brought food so: I guess you [have an
 20 excuse
 21 DEA: [Well

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The Role of Epistemics in Storytelling

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The purpose of this research is to explore the role of epistemics in storytelling sequences in everyday interaction. Epistemic status and stance are present, although not always deliberate, in almost all aspects of our regular interactions. This is especially true in storytelling. As such, this paper aims to investigate several critical components of storytelling in relation to epistemics. These include story initiations, repair sequences within stories, assessments, and references within storytelling interaction. To achieve this, a six-minute interaction rich with storytelling sequences is transcribed and analyzed. There are three participants in this interaction: Anna (ANN), Jeff (JEF), and Troy (TRO). Names have been pseudonymized to maintain anonymity. Anna has known Jeff and Troy for the past two years, while Jeff and Troy have known each other since they were in high school. Jeff and Troy are also roommates, while Anna lived in the same building as them at the time of recording. All three of the participants grew up in the same area of New Hampshire before attending the same college (University of New Hampshire). That being said, Anna only resided in this area intermittently. The interaction takes place in Jeff and Troy's dorm room on a Spring evening in 2021.

Epistemics in Story Initiation

Epistemics play an important role in story initiating sequences. In fact, laying the necessary epistemic groundwork before engaging in a storytelling sequence oftentimes increase the chance of a positive story reception. . Epistemic status refers to the idea that people recognize each

other as more (K+) or less (K-) knowledgeable concerning certain domains of knowledge (Heritage, 2012, p. 32). The following examples display this.

Example #1

208 ANN: ⇒ When corona starte:d we got like (.) an emai- because
 209 like- (0.4) we got an email from like the- (0.3) my
 210 parents are living in a like a community type of thing
 211 right?
 212 (0.4)
 213 JEF: ((**nodding**))

In this first instance, Anna launches a new storytelling sequence at line 208. Storytelling sequences are those that require more than one turn constructional unit (TCU) to reach completion (Sidnell, 2010, p. 174). While initially considered interactional problems because of their requirement for prolonged turns, they are now understood as a solution. In fact, they may afford participants in interaction, unique opportunities for delivering what it is [one] has to say” (p. 174). Storytelling sequences can be observed and understood via the use of “story prefaces”, which serve to prepare the other participant(s) in the interaction that a storytelling sequence is about to take place. A story sequence, allows recipients to see that points of possible turn completion which fall within the scope of story-telling are not transition-relevant and do not constitute opportunities for another speaker to take a turn” (p. 176). Thus, for stories to be successful they must be recognizable as stories for transition relevance to be suspended. Story prefaces achieve this by providing “clues” that a story is about to take place. They may provide an indication of the setting of the events, employ the term “we” to set up the characters involved in the story, indicate a time marker of when the events took place, or state that there is a problem that could be possibly resolved by the end of the storytelling sequence (p. 179-184). This can be

observed in example #1. At line 208, Anna provides the time when the story occurs (*when corona starte:d*), a protagonist (*we / my parents*), and a location (*living in a like a community type of thing*). During this story initiating sequence Anna also engages in a series of repair sequences. Repair refers to “an organized set of practices through which participants in conversation are able to address and potentially resolve... problems of speaking, hearing or understanding” (Sidnell, 2010, p. 110). Repair sequences are composed of two parts: initiation and completion. Initiation typically marks “a possible disjunction with the immediately preceding talk”, while completion results in a “solution or abandonment of the problem” (p. 110). Repair can be initiated by the speaker of the trouble source itself, in which case it is designated as “self-initiated”. Similarly, repair can be initiated by the recipient, in which case it will be designated “other-initiated”. The repair sequence, furthermore, may also be completed either by the original speaker or by the recipient, in which cases they will be designated (respectively) self-repair and other-repair. Overall, repair can be designated as self-initiated self-repair, other-initiated other-repair, self-initiated other-repair, or other-initiated self-repair (p. 110). When repair is initiated by the speaker of the repairable item, the sequence often involves “perturbations, hitches, and cut-offs” and is done within the same turn or in the TRP (transition relevance place) of the repairable (p. 111). In example #1, repair is self-initiated at line 208 when the speaker does a cut off (*an emai-*), a restart followed by another cutoff (*because like-*), a pause ((0.4)), followed by yet another reformulation and cutoff (*we got an email from like the-*), and pause ((0.3)). The repairable, in this instance, appears to be a difficulty in setting up the necessary contextual information for the story to be understood. Anna, the storyteller, realizes that she possesses epistemic knowledge that her recipients do not. As someone present for the events she is about to recount, she is “entitled” to the saying of this

particular storytelling sequence. This entitlement is observable in the teller's display of the epistemic grounds and explains why, storytellers often situate themselves within the events of the story as witnesses or participants" (p. 184). The success of her storytelling sequence, however, hinges on the ability to tell the story in such a way that is readily available to all participants. As Sidnell reminds us, "equally important in shaping the story-telling sequence is the knowledge of the other co-participants" (p. 175). Different audiences may possess different levels of knowledge about the narrated events than others, which makes it important to consider everyone's starting epistemic position. Epistemics, in conversation analysis, can be defined as, the conveying of news to otherwise unknowing recipient(s)" (Heritage, 2012, p. 30). This causes a "change of state", whereby recipients may begin in an unknowing epistemic position (K-) and transition to a knowing epistemic position (K+) during interaction (p. 31). In example #1, Anna realizes that there is an information imbalance between recipients that may prevent the successful telling of the story sequence. This imbalance, according to Heritage, warrants "a sequence of interaction that will be closed when the imbalance is acknowledged as equalized for all practical purposes" (p. 32). In this case the storyteller, Anna, finds herself in a K+ epistemic position while her recipients are in a K- position. Although this is true for most storytelling sequences, the fact that repair is present in this example indicates that Anna is treating her participants' K- position as problematic. In this sense, the repairable in example #1 is the information imbalance. Thus, this is an issue of epistemic comprehension.

Even though the story preface and the repair sequence are both still in progress at this point, they must be halted to permit the equalizing of epistemic positions. Given this, a pre-expansion sequence with rising final intonation is produced at lines 209-211 (*my parents are living*

in a like a community type of thing right?). Pre-expansions are preliminary sequences (thus “pre”) to a base sequence (or base adjacency pair) with its projected base first pair part (FPP; Schegloff, 2007, p. 28-29). They may accomplish two things: first, “project the possibility that a base FPP ... will be production”, and second “make relevant next the production of a second pair part”, namely the response to the pre-expansion sequence (p. 29). In this instance, the pre-expansion seeks to ensure that the participants understand where the storyteller’s parents live. This, in turn, ensures that they have the necessary epistemic position to understand the following story. The pre-expansion FPP, furthermore, is produced in such a way as to prompt a preferred “go-ahead” response which allows for the continuation of the story. Go-ahead responses promote the “progress of the sequence by encouraging its recipient to go ahead with the base FPP which the ‘pre’ was projecting” (p. 30). In this sense, it employs “recipient design”, which, in storytelling, refers to the general principle that one should avoid telling others that which they already know (Sidnell, 2010, p. 177). In this example, Anna frames the pre-sequence question in such a way that assumes her recipients know the answer. This is despite the previous indication (the repair sequence) that she does not believe her recipients to possess this information. Thus, the construction of the pre-expansion question in example #1 explicitly guides the recipient towards the preferred answer (consider the use of the word “right?” at the end). As expected, this prompts one of the participants, Jeff, to produce a non-verbal “go-ahead” response at line 213 in the form of nodding. Nodding, when employed in the middle of storytelling sequences, can be an affiliative action. Affiliative actions are those which display support of and endorse the teller’s conveyed stance” (Stivers, 2008, p. 36-37). Nodding, by association, indicates that “story recipients... have achieved some measure of access to the events being reported and that they understand and endorse the teller’s stance toward these

events” (Stivers, 2008, p. 36-37). Thus, this initial sequence in example #1 allows for two interconnected outcomes. First, by asking the pre-sequence question in lines 209-211, the imbalance between Anna’s K+ position and Jeff and Troy’s K- positions is equalized. Thus, Anna can now proceed with the recounting of her story. Furthermore, if Anna had not equalized all the participant’s epistemic positions, her story may have been up for misinterpretation which, in turn, may have required further elaboration.

An example of such misinterpretation is displayed as follows.

Example #2

144 JEF: [I mean (0.2) I know in Newport what you can do
145 is you can::

(Lines 146-153 omitted)

154 JEF: [No >wha- what we do< when we have to top our po:ol off.
155 uhm (0.3) Not only do we all take showers because of
156 this excellent thing. (.) But uh. (0.2) Hhhh (.) Uhhh
157 (0.4) So we just say hey, we- we’re filling up our
158 po:ol. We- (0.3) we call our town water (0.4) and
159 they’re like (.) awright, Cool. What’s- what’s your uh:
160 your water meter at, or whatever. >°I don’t remember
161 what it is.°< Or How many gallons are you putting in,
162 (0.7) and so they’ll say oh yep ‘x’ amount. And they say
163 co:ol and take it off your bill. I mean that’s a:ll.
164 (0.9)

165 JEF: °That’s how my parents did it.°=

166 ANN: =Really?

167 (1.6)

168 TRO: ⇒ Wait. I dont†- I didn not understand what you were
169 sa(h)ying=

In this example, Jeff launches a storytelling sequence at line 144. This is an example of a second story, as directly before it is Troy's story about a beaver. It has long been observed in conversation analysis that stories are sequential and often occur in series (Sidnell, 2010, p. 185). A first story may be followed by a second one, a third one, and so on. Second stories often bear resemblance to the immediately preceding one. They may be linked thematically, have similar characters, or engage in similar topics (p. 186-187). In this example, the second story is linked to the first one in that they both discuss filling up pools and the accompanying water expenses. By linking the story to the previous talk, the storyteller also displays the relevancy of their story. As Jefferson reminds us, stories are "locally occasioned" and "sequentially implicative" (1978, p. 220). In this example, the story is triggered by the previous story and "topically coherent" with the current conversation (p. 220). Thus, it displays relevancy. The bulk of the story occurs between lines 154-163. The story officially comes to a conclusion at line 165 ("That's how my parents did it."), when Jeff uses an exit device that does a "return home" (Jefferson, 1978, p. 231). The responses to his story display differences in epistemic positions. The first recipient, Anna, responds with an assessment that, despite displaying her K- position, still indicates her understanding of the story (=Really?). The second recipient, Troy, on the other hand, produces a disaffiliative remark. This occurs at lines 168-169 (Wait. I dont↑- I didn not understand what you were sa(h)ying). In this case, disaffiliation does not stem from an unwillingness to affiliate with Jeff. Rather, Troy lacks the epistemic grounds to understand the story, thus displaying his K- epistemic position.

The two examples can therefore be compared. The main difference between the outcomes of these stories lies in how they are set up. In the first example, Anna launches a storytelling sequence but quickly interrupts it to check for epistemic status. This arises only once this has been verified and epistemic positions have been equalized does she fully continue her story. Jeff, on the other hand, fully dives into the storytelling sequence without checking for prior knowledge. Although conversation analysis does not presume to understand the inner psychology of individuals, it can be posited that he made the assumption that everyone was knowledgeable enough to understand what he was referring to. In this, Jeff may be displaying the preference for minimization. This refers to the idea that “on occasions when reference is to be done, it should preferably be done with a single reference form” (Sacks and Schegloff, 1979, p. 16). Although this preference is generally understood to be concerned with references to people, it may also apply beyond that. In example #2, the reference is towards an object or thing (water meter). He refers to this once during his extended turn and does not expand upon its definition. Thus, he displays a preference for minimization. Nonetheless, this is proven to be problematic as Troy displays his K- position at lines 168-169 (wait. I dont↑- I didn not understand what you were sa(h)ying) in the immediate after telling of the story.

This imbalance in epistemic positions causes Jeff to reformulate his story in lines 170-187, prompting yet another confused reaction from Troy.

Example #3

Lines 170-187 (Jeff's reformulation) redacted for brevity

189 TRO ((*Troy tilts head*))

190 JEF: >I don't know if<- (.) if you can do that in Claremont

191 but that's-

192 TRO: ⇒ Ugh (0.5) .hh I don't understand. I have well water so I
 193 don't know [how that works]
 194 JEF: [OHhh:::.] yeah [I forgot you do

After Jeff's reformulation, Troy provides a nonverbal response at line 189 ((*Troy tilts head*))). Jeff interprets this physical gesture as a token of disaffiliation indicating renewed comprehension troubles. Thus, Jeff attempts to dig for the underlying issue at line 190 (>I don't know if<- (.) if you can do that in Claremont). His utterance can be seen as an attempt at accounting. In this instance, however, it is the speaker that is trying to account for the recipient's lack of understanding (and lack of epistemic grounds). He does so by positing whether what he has told in his story is possible in the town Troy grew up in (Claremont). His turn is cut off by Troy in lines 192-193 when Troy provides an account of his own as to why he is responding to the story with such confusion (I have well water so I don't know [how that works]). In an interesting turn of events, the epistemic positions are reversed. Troy now finding himself in the K+ position while Jeff is revealed to have been in a K- position all along. Jeff, as it turns out, is unaware of the fact that Troy uses well water. Such an assumption can be made based on his response to Troy's utterance. He produces a loud change of state token (OHhh:::.) and explicitly mentions he had forgotten this detail (I forgot you do) at line 194. According to Heritage, "oh' indexes an epistemic shift concerning the K- position previously adopted by the questioner" (2012, p. 34). Given this, Troy was never in an epistemic position to understand this story.

Epistemics in the Production of Stories with Repair

Epistemic knowledge plays an interesting role in repair sequences observed in the production of storytelling. As explored above, the success of a storytelling sequence may hinge on the narrator's ability to convey their epistemic knowledge. This is not possible (for example, when the storyteller forgets a detail about their story), repair may become involved.

Example #4

085 TRO: Well it's not like the turds are in it it's just (1.2)I
 086 don't know what's the word we- we wer
 087 JEF: Yeah no [it just (.) defuses
 088 ANN: [Would it be hard to filter out or something
 089 or?=
 090 TRO: =It's like some kind of wo:rd, >uh li- li-< they Ca:ll
 091 it
 092 JEF: [(Disintegrates?)
 093 TRO: ⇒ [Beaver Fever (.) like (0.3) some type of-
 094 JEF: Oh: Shit. Like there was an actual thing that happened?=
 095 TRO: =Yeah: it's a- like- it's a legitimate Bad thing that
 096 you: cannot [use] for your water=
 097 ANN: [Hm!] =Huh

In this instance, Troy struggles to relay his story, prompting him to initiate repair. This is observable in Troy's initial pause at line 085, followed by him explicitly stating "I don't know what's the word" and the use of cut-offs at line 086 (we- we wer). This, then, is an instance of a "word search" repair. At lines 087-089, other-completion of repair is attempted first by Jeff and then by Anna. These two participants attempt to offer candidate solutions to Troy's word search. These attempts, however, prove unsuccessful as Troy's word search continues at line 090

(=It's like some kind of wo:rd,) followed by further hesitation and cutoffs (>uh li- li-<). After one last attempt at other-repair by Jeff at line 092 ((Disintegrates?)), Troy finally completed the repair sequence at line 093 (Beaver Fever).

Notably this instance of repair seems to occur because of a noticeable issue in epistemic management. Repair is initiated because Troy lacks the specific terminology to produce the term he is attempting at lines 085-086. The disease to which he refers, presumably Giardiasis, would be considered a **specialized reference** and a specialized topic. According to Enfield, reference is a matter of selection (2013, p. 1). In certain cases, however, specific references are necessary (so is the case in this example). When the specialized term, is missing, an alternative becomes acceptable. It can be argued, therefore, that this example of self-initiated repair and ultimate self-completion in the form of “Beaver Fever” is an alternate or substitute term he employs in place of the specialized term “Giardiasis”. Given that this is a specialized topic, Troy is likely the only participant who possesses the epistemic status to recognize what he is referring to. In other words, the specialized term and its substitute “Beaver Fever” are likely to lie solely within his epistemic domain, putting him in a K+ position. A further look at the transcript provides evidence for this. For example, after completing the repair at line 093, Troy does not end his turn. Rather, he initiates a new TCU (like (0.3) some type of-) that, if not cut off by Jeff at line 094, appears to be an attempt at explaining the term “Beaver Fever”. This explanation continues again at line 095, when Troy qualifies the term as “a legitimate Bad thing that you: cannot [use] for your water=”. The difference in epistemic positions, furthermore, is rendered explicit by Jeff's reaction to the production of the repair at line 094. Jeff initiates his turn with the production of a change of status token “Oh:”. Following this, he produces a TCU

with rising tone intonation, indicative of a question. The production of this question solidifies Jeff in a K- position, as it displays his lack of epistemic status regarding this specialized topic. It also serves to show that Jeff understands Troy to be the participant with the most information about the topic, solidifying the latter in a K+ position. In this light, it becomes possible to view Jeff and Anna's attempts at other-completion of repair as futile. Both of these participants, being in a K- position, simply lack the necessary (and specialized) epistemic knowledge to complete this instance of repair. This example, therefore, displays the role of epistemics in the production of storytelling involving specialized topics.

Example #5

039 ANN: (0.7) And like >they couldn't really do anything
 040 about it< either. Like- Because we ca:llled like (0.2)
 041 ⇒ **Wildlife**. ((*mimicking phone call*))
 042 JEF: ⇒ I mean yeh, y'ca:ll uh: (.) **Fish n Games** >and they're
 043 like< (0.9) .hh ok:~ Where is it? (0.2) I mean it's just
 044 walking around right? Is it (1.2) °okay.° Uhuh=

In Example #5, another instance of repair can be observed. At line 041, Anna exhibits initial difficulty producing the term “Wildlife”. In fact, immediately preceding this utterance is the prolongation of the word “called” (ca:llled), the use of the word “like”, and a brief beat of silence ((0.2)) which may serve to delay the production of the term. Following this, Jeff engages in embedded correction. This can be defined as a procedure or device that incorporates correction in the ongoing talk (Jefferson, 1987, p. 97). The embedded correction can be observed in Jeff's use of the word “Fish n Game” instead of the initially proposed “Wildlife”. In this act of subtle correction, Jeff is displaying a K+ knowing position compared to Anna's K-

position. Therefore the correction, aided by epistemic management, allows for the continuation of the interaction in progress.

Epistemics, Storytelling, and Delicates

During storytelling, epistemics can play a role in the production of **delicate terms**. The following example illustrates this.

Example #6

059 TRO: ⇒ (0.5) The thing is, (0.2) The Tu:rds (.) that the beaver
 060 gi- uh- ((*Looks towards camera* ^gesturing^)) (1.4)
 061 Excretes, or whatever n whatever word that ((*gesturing
 062 talking*))
 063 (0.8)
 064 JEF: heh heh heh [HEh heh heh heh]
 065 ANN: [Huh huh]Huh huh=
 066 JEF: =You bro:ke the fourth wa:ll
 067 TRO: Huh
 068 ANN: [°hah hah hah hah hah°
 069 TRO: ⇒ [Cra:ps, (0.9) arright?
 070 ANN: I (hh)heh heh heh
 071 (0.7)
 072 ANN: [°huh huh huh°

In this instance, Troy is attempting to produce a term that he is treating as delicate. According to Lerner, speakers and their recipients pay particular attention to the limits of propriety and impropriety. Impropriety refers to the breach of the conventional rules of propriety, including

the voicing of potentially offensive terms (vulgarity), indelicate topics (sex, death), and derogatory references to people (2013, p. 95). Delicate matters can be attended to in a variety of modes, including the use of euphemistic formulations. This refers to a “recognizably alternative formulation for a less guarded one that shows this formulation is being delivered as a delicate” (p. 97). In other words, a less offending expression is offered up as an alternative to the delicate. This can be observed during Troy’s formulation at line 063, where he uses the ‘proper’ term “excretes” as an alternative for the crasser term “craps” which appears at line 069. In addition to this, the production of delicates involves some form of delay and hesitation (p. 98). Troy’s turn starts with a pause ((0.5)), thus initially delaying the formulation of the delicate. Then, he produces an initial TCU which, once again, is briefly interrupted by a pause before the production of a first delicate (The Tu:rds). Following this, Troy continues his turn before cutting off his speech (gi- uh-) and pausing again ((1.4)), this time for over one second. During this time, he appears distressed. He makes eye contact with the other participants and then again with the camera as he does the motion of gesturing. Then, he produces the word delicate as the alternative “excretes”. Implicit in the hesitancy, gaps of silence, and cutoffs is a repair sequence. In this instance, Troy self-initiates and self-completes repair. The repairable itself is not initially produced. Rather, Troy is treating the potential utterance of a delicate as a repairable which he stops himself from producing. Instead, he does a word search for a term that he deems more appropriate within the context of the conversation. The production of this turn, overall, follows dispreferred design. Dispreferred first pair parts are those which are enacted through delay and other constructional constraints (Schegloff, 2007, p. 82). Thus, by initiating this subtle sequence of repair in dispreferred form, Troy gives the other two participants space to jump in with other-completion of the delicate. As Heritage explains, participants who are in the

process of producing a delicate may delay their turn in an attempt to elicit co-production of the delicate from the other participant(s) in a given interaction. Such hesitancy and delays, therefore, “furnish for the (technical) possibility of other-completion – and thereby for the social possibility of the collaborative realization of delicate formulations.” (p. 106). This, however, never occurs. Rather, Troy is forced to produce an alternative term “excretes”. Even then, he still treats the term as somewhat problematic, as he continues his turn by saying “or whatever n whatever word”. What does occur, however, is that the other two participants, Jeff and Anna, respond to his turn with affiliative laughter. The introduction of improper talk in a conversation in which no prior improper talk has taken place (such as frankness, rudeness, crudeness, profanity, obscenity etc.) can be understood as a move towards intimate interaction (Jefferson et al., 1987, p. 160). So is the case in this example, where Troy’s delicate formulation is the first such impropriety that can be observed in the transcript. Furthermore, when a speaker engages in improper talk, they may be offering an invitation to their co-participants to “produce talk together whereby they can see themselves as intimate” (p. 160). In this sense, recipients may perceive the move into impropriety as something they must either accept or reject, with laughter being one way in which acceptance can be accomplished. Thus, the recipients’ laughter in example #6 grants Troy a “go ahead” response that accepts impropriety and moves into intimacy. During these bursts of laughter, Jeff also engages in teasing at line 066 (=You bro:ke the fourth wa:ll). Teasing, according to Haugh, can be considered a broad area of scientific inquiry. It is not only a social action accomplished in a non-serious way, it is also open to evaluation by participants and their recipients (2017, p. 4). In response to this positive engagement with the prior improper talk, Troy upgrades his initial delicate from “excrete” at line 061 to “craps” at line 069. In doing so, he no longer treats the term as a delicate. This can be

observed by comparing his initial turn from lines 059-062 with his turn at line 069. While his first turn is characterized by dispreferred FPP design (hesitancy, cut offs, gaps of silence), the second one is built with preferred design. It is produced immediately, and the upgraded term is placed at the beginning of the utterance.

In this instance, epistemics play a subtle role. Troy finds himself in a somewhat difficult position. He is in the process of producing a term he initially deems a delicate. This position is made even more difficult considering the context during which the utterance is pronounced. Before this moment, no one else has produced an impropriety. This moment, therefore, sets the precedent of whether delicates (such as swearing) is to be deemed acceptable during the course of this interaction or whether it is to be rejected. Furthermore, the only reason Troy treats the term as a delicate may be that he is aware of the camera recording him for an assignment. This is shown at line 060 (**Looks towards camera**), when he struggles to complete his turn and glances directly at the camera while anxiously gesturing. Thus, Troy feigns epistemic ignorance. He willingly puts himself in a K- position even though the original term (which he goes on to produce at line 069 in the form of “craps”) is clearly one that he possesses in his epistemic domain. This is, therefore, an example of epistemic incongruence. Epistemic congruence refers to instances during which epistemic status (what one knows) and epistemic stance (how one presents oneself) align (Heritage, 2012, p. 33). Incongruence, which is typically rarer, refers to when epistemic status and stance do not align. It is used “to appear more, or less, knowledgeable than they really are” (p. 33). In this instance, Troy feigns an inferior epistemic stance even though he possesses the epistemic status to complete the repair sequence. Therefore, this

example illustrates how epistemic domains can be used to escape uncomfortable situations during the act of storytelling.

Epistemics in Story Assessment

Assessments are a vital element of storytelling sequences. Overall, assessments “are produced as products of participation... a speaker claims knowledge of that which he or she is assessing” (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 57). When an assessment is not offered, therefore, participants may be claiming a lack of access to, or insufficient knowledge of the assessable (p. 57). Given this, story assessments are also intimately tied with epistemics. Several examples are displayed below.

Example #7

105 ANN: Ah (0.5) You know that meme? From like-
 106 TRO: Tuh hhuh↑ schh.
 107 ANN: Avengers Endgame with like old Steve where's like (0.4)
 108 °No, I don't think I will?°
 109 TRO: N(h)o(h) I don't think I wi(h)ll? Heh↑=
 110 ANN: =But yeah, that.
 111 TRO: [↑Heh (.) heh
 112 ANN: ⇒ [That's what they're like. (0.7) Just a:ll the time
 113 though.

In example #7, Anna provides an assessment of an organization (Fish n Games) mentioned in Troy's previous story about a beaver. The assessment is produced via the production of a reference. In this case, the reference refers to a thing, or “meme”. References can be recognitional or nonrecognitional. Recognitionals are “reference forms as invite and allow a

recipient to find... who... is being referred to” (Sacks and Schegloff, 1979, p. 17). Non-recognitional, instead, are those that are unrecognizable to the recipient (p. 17). The reference “meme” in this example, is non-recognitional. It is only after I specify which meme I refer to (Avengers Endgame with like old Steve) at line 107 that the reference becomes recognitional. The successful production of this assessment, overall, hinges on the recipients’ being in a K+ position. If they were to be unaware of the meme Anna refers to, the assessment would fall short, void of any social interactional meaning. Given this, the assessment itself (the base FPP at lines 112-113) is preceded by the production of a pre-expansion sequence from lines 105-108. The pre-expansion takes the shape of a question that serves to verify that the recipients are in a K+ epistemic position. Once such a position has been verified by Troy’s affiliative remark at line 109 in the form of repetition (N(h)o(h) I don’t think I wi(h)ll? Heh↑=), the green light “go-ahead” response has been granted to proceed with the assessment. Thus, the assessment finally occurs at lines 112-113 ([That’s what they’re like. (0.7) Just a:ll the time though.])

Example #8

131 TRO: =Like the surfa:ce? (0.4) That’s cool. (0.7) He::- (0.5)
 132 He: make it be dammed it up so all the water doesn’t go
 133 ⇒ to our lawn (.) so I’m grateful for the beaver.
 134 ANN: (0.4) Aw↑Aw:: Okay?
 135 JEF: [Yeah why not.]
 136 ANN: ⇒ [So it’s a] little love and hate kinda thing.=
 137 TRO: =Yeah (0.2) Now I gotta spend two hundred dollars to
 138 Fill my pool every year.
 139 ANN: (0.2) hm heh
 140 JEF: Ooph.
 141 (0.5)

142 ANN: uhuh Ye(h)ah that i:s an ooph.

In example #8, Troy's story about a beaver is coming to an end. At this point in the conversation, he is providing conclusive evaluative remarks about the story, including an initial assessment at line 133 (so I'm grateful for the beaver). This assessment serves to wrap up the story and may serve as an invitation for the other participants to provide their own feedback. If the other participants choose to do so, they will be displaying interest in the story and that it is relevant. This display of relevancy indeed takes place in the following turns. In this example, they are produced by Anna (Aw↑Aw::) at line 134 and Jeff at line 135 (Yeah why not). I then provide an ulterior assessment at line 136 ([So it's a] little love and hate kinda thing.=), which marks an upgrade from the previous assessments. Interestingly enough this assessment is met with subtle rejection. Troy's turn at lines 137-138 is an example of a dispreferred response constructed in preferred format. This turn begins with an initial agreement (Yeah), which is a preferred response. However, Troy then pauses ((0.2)) and goes on to further elaborate his turn. The elaboration itself, beyond the action being done through it, indicates some sort of trouble as it likely would not have been necessary if this were simply a preferred response. The second part of this turn, as it turns out, can be construed as a complaint (Now I gotta spend two hundred dollars to fill my pool every year.). Complaints, according to Pillet-Shore, can "interactionally [display] a negative affective stance toward someone or something" (2015, p. 1). In this case, the negative affective stance is displayed by Troy towards his previous assessment of the beaver at line 133 (I'm grateful for the beaver). Prior to this statement, the participants are unaware of the expenses Troy must incur as a result of the beaver. As such, our initially positive assessments are downgraded at lines 140

(Ooph.) and 142 (Ye(h)ah that i:s an ooph) to ones that display affiliation with Troy's changed stance. This change in assessment is contingent on the participants' change in status, as they go from a K- epistemic position before Troy's utterance at lines 137-138 to a K+ epistemic position afterwards. Example #8, therefore, is another instance in which assessment can be closely interrelated with epistemic display.

Epistemics, Relationships, and Reference

One way that relationships can be displayed is through reference. So is the case in the example offered below.

Example #9

144 JEF: [I mean (0.2) I know in **Newport** what you can do
(Lines omitted)
190 JEF: >I don't know if<- (.) if you can do that in **Claremont**

In this instance, Jeff refers to two locations in two separate moments in the interaction. The first instance occurs at line 144, while the second one in line 190. In each scenario, the reference to place is a recognitional. It is direct and immediately understood by all three of the participants. This can be observed in the fact that no one questions where these locations are and in the absence of conversational tools used in the case of reference misunderstanding (such as try-markers). This immediate understanding by the participants can be attributed to two interconnected things. Firstly, as explained in the introduction section, all three participants used to live in the same area (Sullivan County). Jeff and Troy grew up in that area, while Anna lived

there on an intermittent basis. As such, all of the participants are likely to be familiar with any references to places made in interaction. Second, all of the participants are aware that the others grew up in the same area. Thus, they can make the assumption that everyone is in a K+ epistemic position. In doing so, in this instance, Jeff displays the preference for minimization. The role of epistemics in displaying relationships within a storytelling sequence, therefore, cannot be understated.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has explored the role that epistemic knowledge plays in the construction of storytelling sequences as displayed in examples 1-9. From the very initiation of storytelling sequences, laying the necessary epistemic groundwork can make the difference between the positive reception of stories (such as in example #1) and the negative (or at least confused) reception as displayed in example #2. This negative reception, as discussed in example #3, is partially attributable to epistemic imbalances which, in one way or another, ought to be restored if participants seek an affiliative response from their recipients. Epistemic knowledge spans throughout story production. So is the case for repair sequences, which in some cases, such as examples #4 and #5, may only be completed by the participants who find themselves in a K+ epistemic position. Alternatively, epistemic ignorance may also be feigned in cases in which the speaker may wish to elicit the co-production of a delicate (such as in example #6). Furthermore, epistemic knowledge may play an important role in the production and understanding of story assessment. In example #7, for instance, epistemic knowledge is checked a priori to ensure an accurate understanding of the assessment that is about to be produced. In example #8, instead, affiliative assessments become possible only after the

recipients of the story have received additional information. This, in turn, transitions them from a K- epistemic position to a K+ one. Finally, epistemic knowledge also appears in the unexpanded use of references in storytelling sequences.

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Rhetorical Analysis of Surviving R. Kelly

Grace Righini

INTRODUCTION

The Lifetime documentary titled *Surviving R. Kelly* details allegations of sexual abuse against American musician Robert "R" Kelly. This documentary was created to provide young black women a platform to speak out against artist R. Kelly. Kelly had been accused of sexual misconduct. The stories dated back to the beginning of his career in the 1990s, and many of them focused on the predatory teen girls. He was sentenced to 30 years in prison in 2022 after a New York court found him guilty on eight counts of sex trafficking and one count of racketeering. To explain to the audience why R. Kelly was an abuser, victims come forward and go into depth about recent claims of his physical, mental, and sexual abuse. It was made in response to Kelly and other people who do not believe the victims because Kelly has denied all claims of sexual and physical abuse. The audience is intended for those who want to learn about what R. Kelly did to deserve jail time and what he did to the underage girls and women he abused. As the Me-Too movement gained global awareness in 2017, there have been more instances of women feeling that the time is right for them to tell their story and have it been not only received - but also accepted. However, the docuseries reveals how the court systems can work against victims and make it difficult for justice to be served to the alleged perpetrators involved, especially when a celebrity is involved. The primary audience for the documentary was the general public, as it was broadcast on a popular cable television channel and was widely promoted and discussed in the media. The documentary appealed to people interested in issues related to sexual abuse and harassment, as well as to fans of R. Kelly's music or those with a

general interest in popular culture. It may also have been of interest to people who are concerned about the broader social and cultural contexts in which the allegations against Kelly were made. It is worth noting that the "Surviving R. Kelly" documentary may have had a more limited audience than some other popular television programs, as it aired on a cable network rather than a major broadcast network. It is also possible that some people may have chosen not to watch the documentary due to the controversial and disturbing nature of the subject matter.

ANALYSIS

The volume of survivors, family members, former business partners, and close Kelly associates who share intimate details about his years of addiction, deception, and alleged abuse of women and girls in "Surviving R. Kelly" is a crucial piece of reporting, and it will be eye opening for those who haven't followed the details of Kelly coverage over the past 20 years. To ensure that these women receive justice, those who assisted R. Kelly in abusing these women and girls are also held accountable. This is showing how higher ups, especially in the music industry, use their power and those beneath them to abuse women. Interviewees talk about how Robert was one of the biggest stars at the time of this tape, how he got away with it, and how toxic the music industry is to save these criminals. (Episode 4,-37:00) R. Kelly's fame had skyrocketed, and he was a superstar. He attracted women using his wealth and influence. At the 2002 Olympics, Kelly performed in the midst of the sex tape scandal. This demonstrated his enormous popularity. People continued to support him despite the crimes he committed. Even during the trials, Kelly retained many fans, allowing him to continue his crimes. Sadly, because he gave them high ratings and made them a lot of money, businesses and record labels also ignored those crimes. Dakota Sandras tells how the docuseries worked as a tool to empower the

women. She says, “Launching from the groundwork of #MeToo and expanding the efforts to #BelieveWomen, I contend that Surviving R. Kelly exemplifies the power of localizing theory to the individual as it frames lives as truthful on its terms and validates testimony as an argument, thus opposing the hermeneutic of disbelief that has plagued rape culture discourse.” (Sandras, 2). Many women express how considerate and good natured Robert used to be around them, but as soon as he achieved what he wanted, those same women altered their tone to describe how Robert changed. The #MeToo movement's creator Tarana Burke talks about how Kelly knew what he was doing and that he was guilty since he was paying the girls and their families to remain silent. Azriel Clary and Dominique Gardner, who had to flee Kelly's abuse to survive, provide us with firsthand evidence of this. Dominique Gardner had to run out of the hotel and leave with her mother to escape from Kelly. The documentary was able to successfully create meaning within the audience and use emotion to persuade them. They were able to invoke sympathy, vulnerability, and heartbreak when: Andrea, his ex-wife, who addresses talking Robert directly in the interview says, “Robert, you know what you did. You know the turmoil you brought into my kids’ life. You destroyed Christmases, birthdays, and graduations. It's because of you Robert that my kids were told they can't sit at the lunch table because your daddy rapes little girls. And for that, you can go to hell”. (Episode 4, 37:50) Visuals were used such as photos and short clips to get the message across. Touré, a journalist, talks about interviewing Kelly on BET after the trial, Shows a clip of Touré asking Kelly the question “Do you like underage girls?” and Kelly responds, “How young are we talkin’?” (Episode 4, 17:35) This clip is used specifically to show how open he was with the public and these suspicions were seen in interviews he did. Finally, the docuseries was able to successfully invoke change: Dr. Khadija Monk, a professor of criminology says, “The number of times a domestic survivor

leave is between seven and ten times before they permanently leave” and it is because of the power and control the abuser has. (Episode 5, 21:10) Interviewees talk about the history of abuse toward black girls and sexual abuse in our society. They talk about the community that bashes the black women that speaks out about abuse. Angelo Clary, Azriel Clary’s father, says that if these girls were young white women, then we would not be going through this. (Episode 6, 31:59) We can see in the docuseries how the victims were overlooked. Seeing the impact on the victims sparks change within the audience to not only speak out themselves, but to watch within their communities for abuse and be able to criticize other celebrities and hold them accountable if they recognize an injustice.

RECEPTION

Public opinions about the "Surviving R.Kelly" documentary were varied, as people have different perspectives and experiences that shape their views on the subject. Some may view the documentary as a powerful and important exposé that brings much needed attention to the issue of sexual abuse and misconduct in the music industry. Others may view it as one-sided or sensationalized and may believe that it does not fully present the complexities of the situation or the full range of evidence and perspectives. It is important to note that at the time of its release, R. Kelly had not been convicted for the alleged crimes reported in the series. Furthermore, the documentary presents only a limited number of perspectives and may not present a complete or balanced view of the situation. In response to the series, there was conflicting feedback from the public regarding its validity. Rotten Tomatoes, who gave the documentary a 95% said, “This documentary series reveals young women emerging from the shadows and uniting their voices against singer R. Kelly. Celebrated as one of the greatest R&B singers of all time, R. Kelly's

career has been plagued with rumors of abuse, pedophilia, and predatory behavior toward women. Now, survivors are stepping forward to detail new allegations about his physical, mental, and sexual abuse. After the documentary came out, conflicting reviews came out from the everyday audience who viewed the docuseries. One watcher, said, “#MuteRKelly I should’ve known long ago that R. Kelly was guilty of child pedophilia. He was living a double life as a satanic child predator, and we all allowed him to continue sexually abusing more women. Thank you, Lifetime who had the courage, to produce this documentary.” Other viewers were not as supportive of the victims and their allegations from the series. Another watcher said, “I have mixed views about the allegations. As a woman who was molested as a child, I know a lot of things about sexual abuse personally. For me, the most disturbing part of this documentary is that many of the so-called victims were over 18. These were grown women of consenting age. As someone who is grown, if your relationship is toxic, common sense tells you to leave. In my opinion, these older women are after his money.” However, on the opposite end, someone said “This was an eye-opening documentary that shows what happens when we choose to make any human being an "idol". All too soon we discover they have feet of clay. Instead of being an example of everything that can be achieved through hard work and raw talent, he let the African American community down. But it's not just the plight of this one Black man, it's the plight of men of all colors who use fame, money, and power to marginalize, victimize and abuse women because they can--some celebrities are just better at hiding it.”

The Guardian also wrote an article criticizing the docuseries, *Surviving R Kelly* review disturbing but deeply flawed. They allude to the “Cosby scales” where they say “And so to the last set of scales. Let’s call them “the Cosby scales”. You put the alleged abuser’s fame and

wealth on one side and keep adding—keep adding, keep adding female testimony to the other and hope that one day the latter will outweigh the former and that proper investigation will ensue. If you can add high-profile reporting to the women’s words, your odds improve. This is how we live now.” It is difficult to quantify the exact impact of the "Surviving R. Kelly" documentary on public opinion, as people's views and opinions are likely to be shaped by a variety of factors. However, it is clear that the documentary sparked conversation about the broader issue of sexual abuse and harrassment in the music industry. The documentary also led to a renewed focus on the issue and sparked widespread discussions and debates about the allegations against Kelly and the broader cultural and social contexts in which they were made.

IMPACTS

It's critical to examine how the documentary has specifically impacted women of color. On feminism, Crenshaw states “Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often do not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender. These problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytical structure.” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). The documentary had an impact on the victims' perceptions of themselves and the women in their community. The #MeToo movement and the mainstream media underwent a substantial and swift change from the standpoint of intersectionality as a result of their comprehensive analysis of the R. Kelly crisis documentary. The documentary fights to bring justice to its victims. Dakota Sandras, who discusses the documentary as evidence says, “Though justice has not yet entirely come socially or legally for the women who shared their testimonies, the documentary gave their experiences recognition and value that has

been withheld from female assault victims, particularly those of color.” (Sandras, 2). Due to social media and public discourse on the intersectionality of the R. Kelly issue, victims of R. Kelly were first persuaded to consider withholding information about their sexual assault in public out of fear of punishment from their community.

CONCLUSIONS

The "Surviving R. Kelly" documentary had a number of significant outcomes. In the wake of the documentary, Kelly was dropped by his record label, and he faced a number of criminal charges related to sexual abuse. The documentary also had an impact on the broader cultural conversation about sexual abuse and harassment, with many people calling for increased awareness and action on the issue. The National Sexual Assault Hotline in the United States, operated by the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), experienced a 27% increase in calls during the airing of the documentary. RCA Records, Kelly's record company, fired him immediately after the documentary aired. As of today, R. Kelly has denied all claims of sexual assault, domestic violence/ abuse, and sexual misconduct with minors. The docuseries showed that abusers can be hiding in plain sight. R. Kelly's abuse of young, impressionable black girls followed a pattern that society should have picked up on and it paved the way for other women to speak out about their abuse against other abusers and it pushed the #MeToo movement forward in a way in which victims are not able to share their experiences with a mass audience. Overall, the series was empowering to not only the women who spoke up but inspiring other women to come forward as well.

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***Death with Interruptions* Short Analysis**

Lydia Osmer

What if one day, death ceased to exist? No one died. Not even the sick or old. That is the exact question José Saramago explores in their novel *Death with Interruptions*. The novel follows the impact life and death have on our political, religious, and social institutions while exploring what it means to be human.

At first, readers might find themselves frustrated with the structure of writing in José Saramago's *Death with Interruptions*. The book, translated from Portuguese, is written with a stream of consciousness style. The stream of consciousness writing style in *Death with Interruptions*, absent of quotation marks for dialogue, improper capitalization, and long run-on sentences, are reflective of the way human minds are complex and nonlinear during life. It is also reflective of our fragmented understandings and fear surrounding death. Further into the book, one can even argue that it is written from the perspective of the character Death as her writing style is similar to that of the book.

When Death's letter is received by the public, her writing style is criticized by a grammarian. The grammarian describes her writing as "chaotic syntax" with "the absence of full stops, the complete lack of very necessary parentheses, the obsessive elimination of paragraphs, the random use of commas and, most unforgivable sin of all, the intentional...abolition of the capital letter...even omitted from [her signature]" (122). At this moment, the reader realizes that the book is commenting on its writing style in a meta-fashion. The "chaotic syntax" demonstrates

the chaos that is life, the chaos that ensues when humans stop dying, and the way death tries to reestablish order by coming up with a death-letter delivery system. The "absence of full stops" is reflective of life doesn't stop for anyone—it is always moving. Death is usually the only full and complete stop a human will experience, and the absence of death in the beginning of the book shows how death is a necessary stop people must eventually come to. The lack of capitalization is arguably a statement on the imminent nature of death and death's perspective that people are insignificant in the scales of life and death despite their names. Death takes all, even if you have a notable name in the world.

An interesting thing Death does decide to lend proper capitalization to in her original letter is the month "December" (109). While the book and Death herself do not capitalize the names of musicians or their musical pieces, or care to name the public figures, it does capitalize a month. The inevitability of death for all humans is again illustrated through lack of respect for the human proper noun, but it would seem as though the book and death respect time. Time is essential to death's workings. Every person's death date is neatly organized in a catalog fashion and must occur on that date and time. Her respect for time is also represented through her new approach of delivering letters to those who are about to die giving them a one-week warning. Stream of consciousness writing also reflects the respect for time as human thoughts are constantly flowing and time alive is limited. It upholds our fears of death and feeling like time is running out as we go through life approaching death closer with every second that passes.

There is someone who surprises Death and disregards the time assigned for his death. The cellist. His death letter kept getting returned. Death sought him out and fell in love with him. By

the end of the book she has become closer to human as she "went back to bed, put her arms around the man and, without understanding what was happening to her, she who never slept felt sleep gently closing her eyelids. The following day, no one died" (238). As death approaches being more human-like, the sentences get shorter with more proper punctuation being included. This is representative of how death's turn to love helps slow down her stream of consciousness, her eternal "life" force (or death force for that matter). This is universal for people as love helps life feel less chaotic along the way. Love can help us slow down and live in the moment, stop battling with time, and appreciate life more. The reader is left wondering what is to happen now that death has succumbed to love. Will the scythe continue it's duty? Will some other entity take up her place? Will death never return? And there is that stream of consciousness now coming out of this writer as the fear of death and never-ending thoughts of the human brain flow out onto the page in an attempt to make sense of life and death.

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Case Study Report: The Five Stages of Death in *WandaVision*

Lydia Osmer

Grief is an experience every human being will go through at some point in their lifetimes. Dealing with death is an inescapable and inevitable part of life. Everyone experiences grief differently depending on a variety of factors such as the expectancy of the death, the bereaved individual's relationship with the deceased, and the cause of death. To better contextualize how grief works and understand how people deal with life after loss, many anthropologists, psychologists, philosophers, and communication scholars alike have composed multiple approaches in order to define grief as a phenomenon. One of these approaches is pretty familiar to those of western culture: Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief. The Five Stages of Grief have become a popular contemporary approach to understanding how people live through their grief. In fact, the approach is applicable to many depictions of the grieving process in popular culture, especially in that of the 2021 mini-series *WandaVision*. *WandaVision*'s depiction of the bereaved character of Wanda Maximoff demonstrates Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's approach of the Five Stages of Grief by using Wanda's magical abilities to reflect her grieving process in each of these stages.

In order to demonstrate how *WandaVision* displays the Five Stages of Grief, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the series' plot. The mini-series aired on the Disney+ streaming platform in 2021 following the events of the Marvel Cinematic Universe's blockbuster *Avengers: Endgame*. The show follows Wanda Maximoff as she grieves the loss of her partner Vision who died gruesomely in *Endgame*. In *WandaVision*, Wanda has created a false reality,

which will also be referred to as the “hex,” in the town of Westview, New Jersey. Within Wanda’s hex, she has materialized an alive version of Vision using her magical powers and are married to each other. Further down the line within the plot of the show, Wanda is also able to magically conceive and give birth to two children that only exist within her hexed reality. The hex is delivered in the style of classic television sitcoms transforming through the decades referencing shows from the 1950s to the 2000s such as *I Love Lucy*, *Bewitched*, *The Brady Bunch*, *Full House*, *Malcolm in the Middle*, and *Modern Family*. By referencing the styles present in each of these decade-defining sitcoms, the hex becomes a clear site of exposing Wanda’s deep-rooted denial.

Denial is an important aspect of grief to examine within this context as it is the first stage Kubler-Ross designates to her Five Stages of Grief approach. It is important to note that Kubler-Ross originally designed the approach to be utilized with terminally ill patients whose care had come to the point where it was no longer possible to mitigate their illness. In layman's terms, the Five Stages of Grief were designed to prepare those who were about to face death and help them come to terms with it. Even though this was Kubler-Ross’s original intent with the approach, it has been adopted by grief counselors and psychologists to instead help the bereaved process grief over their deceased. This application to the bereaved is essential in understanding how the showrunners depict Wanda’s grieving process. The Five Stages of Grief as designed by Kubler-Ross and as demonstrated in *WandaVision* are as follows: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. It is also important to note that while all of these stages might be experienced by an individual, the weight at which each stage is experienced can greatly vary and come in waves. Wanda is depicted as experiencing each stage, but as this case study will point out, there

are more obvious examples of some stages over others and some overlap demonstrating the interconnectedness of the stages.

The first stage of grief, denial, is immediately apparent in the first episode of *WandaVision*. Denial is a result of the bereaved not wanting to believe or having difficulty coming to terms with the fact that the deceased is actually gone. Viewers are introduced to the show in black and white where Wanda and Vision have a classic 1950s home together. Those familiar with the context that Vision died in *Endgame* would be confused as to how Vision is on their television screens, but this is then revealed as a result of Wanda's hexed reality. Her denial leads to her creating this reality as a defense mechanism against the immense pain and grief she feels after having lost Vision. Denial is evident in her creation of the hex and her creation of a version of Vision in the hex as she can be in full control of the events happening around them. This allows her to keep the one she loves safe and far from the grasp of death. Another factor that reveals Wanda's denial is that not only does she essentially resurrect Vision, but in her hex she and Vision are married and live a stable, normal life. Denial also runs throughout the show as Wanda will rewind things or cut things out like she is editing the show if something seems amiss or does not align with her reality built out of denial.

Denial, in turn, leads to the next stage of grief—anger. Anger comes about when something or someone threatens to break through the bereaved individual's state of denial. Wanda's anger especially comes out when Monica Rambeau, an individual agent from outside the hex, manages to bring up Wanda's history of dealing with loss in her life. For example, when Monica and Wanda sit down to have a conversation, Monica references how Wanda's twin brother,

Pietro, died tragically in the real world. Immediately, Wanda realizes that Monica has not been put under her spell and becomes angry. Wanda retaliates and expresses her anger by using her powers to physically blast and cast out Monica from her hex. This instance of anger in Wanda demonstrates how anger in the Five Stages of Grief is often a result of the attempt to dismantle the bereaved individual's denial.

From anger comes bargaining—the third stage. Bargaining as a stage in the bereaved occurs when the individual going through the grieving process is starting to realize they don't have control over the situation and are battling between their denial and their acceptance. In *WandaVision*, bargaining happens in two very distinct moments. One particular moment the audience witnesses an instance of Wanda's bargaining is when she steps outside of her hex to confront the agents from the Sentient World Observation and Response Department (S.W.O.R.D.). These agents have been attempting to infiltrate and take down her hexed reality, and as a result, Wanda's anger with them leads to her bargaining with them. In episode 5 of *WandaVision*, she confronts the S.W.O.R.D. operation and tells them, "This will be your only warning. Stay out of my home. You don't bother me, I don't bother you" (2021). While this statement of Wanda's has threatening undertones (demonstrating how anger often leads to bargaining), it is clear that she is struggling to retain her control over the hex, and therefore over her state of denial. Wanda's bargaining again reveals itself when she gets into an argument with Vision over her hex. Vision has come to realize that people are trapped inside of Wanda's reality and that he isn't "really" Vision. While Vision is threatening her state of denial, Wanda loves Vision so she struggles with how to confront this. She insists she doesn't really understand how everything is happening (which is somewhat true since she does not have a full grasp on her

magical abilities). She is also persistent that it is out of love for their family they have in the hex. Her argument with Vision demonstrates the conflict of losing control while also wanting to keep control in her denial-built reality.

The fatigue of trying to maintain a sense of control within denial leads to the fourth stage of depression. Depression in Wanda comes to the surface in Episode 7 where the audience sees Wanda visibly disheveled. She showcases typical signs of depression such as not wanting to get out of bed, struggling to eat, and becoming distant in giving attention to her kids. The episode also features a “commercial” as a part of the hex sitcom that advertises an antidepressant:

Feeling depressed? Like the world goes on without you? Do you just want to be left alone? Ask your doctor about Nexus: a unique antidepressant that works to anchor you back to your reality, or the reality of your choice! Side effects include feeling your feelings, confronting your truth, seizing your destiny, and possibly more depression. You should not take Nexus unless your doctor has cleared you to move on with your life. (*WandaVision*, 2021, ep. 7)

This commercial alone is an excellent example of depression as a stage of Wanda’s journey through the Five Stages of Grief. It clearly references how Wanda has been feeling like “the world goes on without” her as she is very alone in her grief. The reference to being “anchored” back to reality alludes to how depression in the Five Stages of Grief is, like all of the in-between stages, tied back to the struggle of maintaining denial. “Side effects” such as “confronting your truth” illustrates this further as it is all rooted in Wanda’s denial. Wanda’s depression is a result

of the tiring nature of trying to maintain a state of denial while also struggling to magically maintain a reality built from that denial.

Finally, at the end of *WandaVision*, Wanda reaches the final stage of acceptance. Acceptance happens in the bereaved individual when they come to accept the reality of their loss and are no longer in denial. A major player in her reaching acceptance is when Agatha Harkness, another witch in Wanda's hex, forces Wanda to relive the moments of her life when she had to face loss and how she grew in her power each time. Within this flashback-travel sequence is a scene where Vision comforts Wanda after the loss of her brother. Vision delivers the iconic quote, "What is grief, if not love persevering?" (*WandaVision*, 2021, ep. 8). By having to face her reality head on and how she has been able to persevere through each hardship in her life, Wanda is able to reach acceptance and take down her hex. With her acceptance, Wanda has to say goodbye to her created version of Vision and her children. Reaching acceptance is the catalyst that allows Wanda to then start really exploring her powers as the Scarlet Witch and discover what she is capable of while controlling and understanding her abilities better. Acceptance in the bereaved, as depicted by Wanda, signifies the release of denial.

WandaVision artfully displays Kubler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief throughout the series.

Wanda's grief is extremely complicated and leads to an intense experience of denial which triggers the Kubler-Ross cycle. Even though the Five Stages of Grief were originally designed to work with terminally ill patients, the use of this cycle to understand how bereaved individuals process grief, as depicted in *WandaVision*, can help other bereaved people and their support systems better understand what they are feeling and why they are behaving in certain ways

while grieving. While *WandaVision* closes with Wanda reaching acceptance, her process of grieving can continue to be explored in the more recent title *Doctor Strange: Multiverse of Madness* as she searches for her children in other universes. By continuing her story in this way, the writers of her character demonstrate how the Five Stages of Grief are cyclical and reaching acceptance is a gradual journey.

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Content for Change

Kaley Lambert

Former environmental activist Paul Kingsnorth, and author of *Anthropocene Unconscious: Climate Catastrophe Culture* Mark Bould, both hold the perspective that humanity is in some way trapped by the climate crisis. Bould's work implies a more optimistic take: while we (humans) have limited options for handling the crisis, we do still have a chance to do so.

Kingsnorth, on the other hand, is more pessimistic. He ultimately believes there is no longer **any** chance of stopping the climate crisis. Both Bould and Kingsnorth appear to agree that if there **is** any possibility for human intervention and action regarding this global issue having a significant impact, the ultimate solution(s) do not lay with the development and application of new technology but rather in a shift of mentality and ideology. A stance combining these philosophical perspectives of both Kingsnorth and Bould is not only reasonable-it is **essential** for any substantial progress to be made in mitigating the climate crisis. In that storytelling is one of the primary ways mentalities are formed and changed, such philosophy **must** be adopted into media narratives.

Paul Kingsnorth takes a powerfully critical, and justified, stance on *Transhumanism*.

Transhumanism may be understood as a movement that advocates for and works toward human advancements using technology. Such advancements may include the voluntary use of technologically advanced prosthetics, genetic modification, the implanting of a computer chip(s) into one's brain for improved cognitive capabilities, and the transfer of one's consciousness into a digital medium with the intention of digital immortality. Kingsnorth takes particular issue with

the transhumanist endeavor of seeking digital immortality; he holds that using technological means to become immortal and “escape” the consequences of climate change and other current woes being experienced on Earth, is rooted in the exact mentality that has led to the climate crisis in the first place.

To contextualize the problematic nature of seeking digital immortality to escape climate change, one may compare it to pursuits for Earth-like planets as “backups.” Present ideas of terraforming mars or finding an Earth 2.0 are innately riddled with colonialism, anthropocentrism, elitism, and a capitalistic mindset. In reference to the star-bound pursuits of Billionaires Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, Professor Ted McCormick in *The billionaire space race reflects a colonial mindset that fails to imagine a different world and* argues “They offer colonialism as a panacea for complex social, political and economic ills, rather than attempting to work towards a better world within the constraints of our environment. And rather than facing the palpably devastating consequences of an ideology of limitless growth on our planet, they seek to export it, unaltered, into space. They imagine themselves capable of creating liveable environments where none exist. But for all their futuristic imagery, they have failed to imagine a different world. And they have ignored the history of colonialism on this one.” (McCormick)

Looking to other planets for escapism ignores the issues of inequity across gender, race, sexuality, and economic class. Such issues are already prevalent on Earth and escaping to another planet in no way guarantees leaving behind social inequity. It **does** guarantee possibly leaving behind those who are already disenfranchised. The idea of a planet solely populated and run by the wealthy does not sound like the utopian opportunity that Musk and Bezos may think

of it: it sounds like an outright nightmare. Ironically, in being populated by the wealthy, these pursuits would leave out the very populations that could make a more positive social environment than that of Earth: the non-wealthy. In a study published by the American Psychological Association, “Across 4 studies, lower class individuals proved to be more generous (Study 1), charitable (Study 2), trusting (Study 3), and helpful (Study 4) compared with their upper-class counterparts. Mediator and moderator data showed that lower class individuals acted in a more prosocial fashion because of a greater commitment to egalitarian values and feelings of compassion.” (Piff et al.)

One may compare pursuits of digital existence with those of extraterrestrial colonization, as they both entail seeking out a “new world”. Similarly, the same issues of economic inequality present with extraterrestrial colonization would be at play with digital colonization. In that tickets for star-bound ships would likely be astronomically expensive, so would be access to technology that permits digital-reality residence.

The aforementioned issue of inequity is only one of many social factors at play in the problems with extraterrestrial colonization and the development of digital worlds. Built into both of these pursuits are ideas of entitlement and expansion. Both of which are already at play on Earth. Both of which inherently justify wasteful habits. Both of which have directly contributed to the climate crisis at hand. Anthropocentric and colonial perspectives have long been used to justify human use, and abuse, of natural resources. As such, these kinds of pursuits and mentalities should **not** be encouraged or lauded as solutions for the climate crisis.

It would be unfair to apply this argument to all technology-based pursuits regarding the climate crisis. There are justified critiques of tactics focused on swapping out “bad” technology for “better” technology. For example, swapping out fossil-fuel-based energy for wind turbine energy is problematic for multiple reasons, especially in that the construction of wind turbines in natural spaces foundationally contains the same anthropocentric and expansion-rooted ideals previously mentioned. However, harm-reducing tactics and technology are still worthwhile in hindering the climate crisis. Their role cannot and should not be thought of as a final fix but rather as a stalling mechanism to delay the crisis long enough for more substantial changes to be made.

There is numerical evidence to support the idea that **media content** can incite direct, real-life change. Following the release of *Blackfish*, a documentary about the suffering of a captive orca at U.S. marine park SeaWorld, “One year after the release of *Blackfish*, SeaWorld’s stock market price fell by 33%.” (“How the Documentary Blackfish Negatively Impacted the Marine Park Seaworld”) Popular Youtuber Jimmy Donaldson, known by his screenname *Mr. Beast*, has amassed roughly 53 billion subscribers to his channel. (Leskin et al.) While much of his content does encourage wealth accumulation, Donaldson is known for donating grandiose sums of money to strangers. Donaldson also spearheaded the *#Teamtrees* digital campaign, in which he and fellow creator Mark Rober embarked to raise funding to plant twenty million trees by the end of 2022 with the intention of offsetting the harms of deforestation done unto global populations and the environment. According to Business Wire, “-the campaign set an audacious fundraising target of crowdfunding \$20,000,000 by January 1, 2020. *#TeamTrees* defied the

odds and met its \$20M funding goal in just 56 days, powered by more than 800,000 donors from 200+ countries and territories. While the campaign drew support from notable tech founders like Elon Musk (Tesla), Jack Dorsey (Twitter), Tobi Lutke (Shopify) and Marc Benioff (Salesforce), the vast majority of funds came from small-dollar donors. The most common donation amount was \$5.” (Eusebio)

Shifting public mentalities away from expansion, anthropocentrism, and entitlement may very well be the substantial change necessary for humanity to have a proper chance at preventing progression of the climate crisis. The most efficient and effective way to shift mentalities on a wide enough scale to make significant impact may be through the use and application of storytelling in media. If media content were, on a wide scale, to deliberately shift narratives to encourage compassion, action, and concern for the environment, to discourage wastefulness and mentalities of expansion and colonialism, it may be possible to halt progression of the climate crisis. Such a mentality shift would need to be accompanied by foundational, institutional, and structural changes to be sustainable, but creating content that helps that shift begin holds the power to push humanity in the right, and necessary, direction.

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Media Responsibility for Environmental Influence

Kaley Lambert

The United States media functions as a key resource that many citizens may use to form and/or strengthen their opinions on a variety of subjects. Media can shape public ideas of accomplishment, desires, morality, and even overall views of the state of the world, which in turn hold the power to shape public behavior and habits. Two concepts that media has a direct influence on, in multiple capacities, are those of *the growth machine* and *sacrificial landscapes*. Media can document these harmful phenomena and the organizations, institutions, and practices that feed into them to address and reform the issues they cause. Media is also, however, able to contribute to the attitudes and behaviors of society that worsen the conditions that lead to sacrificial landscapes developing, and which fuel growth-driven mindsets, which are capable of deeply harming the global environment. The media not only shapes public opinions on (and interactions with) these concepts, but also actively influences social and cultural factors that contribute to their **existence**. In that media holds this kind of power, creators must take responsibility to be conscious of and deliberately consider these issues when producing content for public consumption.

The idea of *the growth machine* was popularized by Harvey Molotch in his paper “The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place.” In essence, one can understand the growth machine as the harmful structure within which everyday citizens economically function, wherein they are manipulated by and for the benefit of the economic elite. The growth machine is a harmful structure to social, economic, and environmental life. As explained eloquently in

“Prologue: The first days of Katrina” the growth machine is “-a set of dynamics that tends to shape the daily economic life of most American communities. As generally understood, the term refers to a process that is built and set in motion by persons who focus on profit and ‘progress,’ but one that has no internal brakes and no sensors to take note of the damage it is doing as it churns along. Significantly, the people who work hardest to energize the Growth Machine are usually seen not as villains, but as community leaders.” (Freudenburg et al. 10)

The growth machine plays a villainous role socially, as well as environmentally. As reported in *How Buying Stuff Drives Climate Change*, “-our consumer habits are actually driving climate change. A 2015 study found that the production and use of household goods and services was responsible for 60 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Not surprisingly, wealthy countries have the most per capita impact. A new U.N. report found that the richest one percent of the global population emit more than twice the amount than the poorest 50 percent; moreover, the wealthier people become, the more energy they use.” (Cho) The growth machine inherently rewards and encourages wealth, selfishness, and consumption. With these habits and attitudes, far more waste may be generated which in turn pollutes the environment. One may argue that the glorification of affluence and consumption being present within much of U.S. media is a substantial factor in perpetuating ideas and structures that uphold the growth machine-thus harming the environment. It is also, however, possible for the media to play a role in calling out the flaws and consequences of these attitudes and structures.

The classic fairytale *Cinderella* is one such example of a piece of media that fuels the fire of the growth machine. In the Walt Disney Productions film adaptation, the main character Cinderella

is the stepdaughter of a cruel woman who is implied to be of moderate wealth. Cinderella is excluded from reaping any benefits of her stepmother's (or birth father's) wealth and lives a personal life akin to being non-wealthy. Cinderella's happy ending in the story occurs only when she marries an affluent prince and moves into his overwhelmingly wealthy family's palace. She gets her fairytale happy ending only upon **gaining affluence**. (Luske) This narrative correlation is quite problematic. By presenting wealth as a goal for viewers to strive for, *Cinderella* and many pieces of media like it encourage viewers to do **whatever they can** to be wealthy, as money is implied to be a resource that wholly erases stress and adds happiness. This attitude is foundational for fueling the growth machine, and for contributing to the immense degrees of overconsumption and waste-production present in the United States, as well as within wider global circumstances.

In contrast to Cinderella's encouraging attitudes that fuel the growth machine, the thriller-horror film *American Psycho* actively calls out and draws attention to the flaws of U.S. materialism. The story of *American Psycho* follows the fictional character Patrick Bateman, a high-profile banking executive in New York City who is fixated on achieving superiority, power, and affluence to the point where he tortures and murders multiple victims, mainly to enhance his status or satiate his aggression and frustration. By including unsettling music, uncomfortable dialogue, and other such horror genre components, the film makes it clear to viewers that they are meant to **fear** Bateman, and in turn fear the structures and behaviors he seeks out and condones. Such behaviors include ruthlessness, striving for perfection and financial power, and a lack of empathy. (Harron)

To many, the underlying message to steer away from such attitudes and practices may seem overwhelmingly clear in *American Psycho*, but as is expressed by Christian Bale (the actor who played the character of Patrick Bateman) in an interview with GQ: this narrative warning is not necessarily obvious for all viewers. Bale told a story of him chatting with a group of men who had worked on a Wallstreet trading floor, and how they expressed an unironic **love** for the character of Bateman. Bale states in this interview that it was worrisome to hear such sentiments when in his view the film is “-clearly a satire on capitalism in the 80s.” (GQVideos) One may argue that if the creators of *American Psycho* were less meticulous and deliberate in their spinning of Patrick Bateman as a negative and scary figure in the narrative, even more viewers may make the (albeit misguided) assessment that he is someone to idolize, instead of a personified warning **against** feeding the growth machine.

As previously mentioned, the growth machine is not the only concept/phenomenon that is impacted by the media. Another such example is *sacrificial landscapes*, which the media both positively and negatively influences. Sacrificial landscapes can be understood as physical areas which have in some way been afflicted with a negative influence- often for the sake of benefiting another region, or as a result of being neglected so as to divert resources to another region. One may argue that the existence of sacrificial landscapes is a symptom of the growth machine’s harm. When foundationally colonial mentalities of **expansion** are dominant, resources that could otherwise be used to strengthen and support existing, struggling communities are often diverted to growing and developing new structures. In that way, for the same reasons the media may contribute to the growth machine, it may also contribute to the existence and development of sacrificial landscapes. Further similar, though, the media is able to

play a role in pointing out the tragedy of sacrificial landscapes and warn against behaviors that contribute to their development.

The film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* is one piece of media that almost entirely centers around the suffering and hardships of people living within a sacrificial landscape. The film is a fantasy drama that follows a father-daughter duo living in the “Bathtub.” The Bathtub is a small, internally sustained community on an island in the Louisiana bayou. The Bathtub lies beyond the boundaries of the Louisiana levee systems, and as such is an area with minimal protection from flooding that could be mitigated by said levees. Residents of the Bathtub live almost entirely off-grid and are predominantly people of color. An intense storm floods nearly all of the Bathtub, killing many residents, and displacing almost all from their former homes. Deliberate shots of chunks of ice breaking away from glaciers, melting, and traveling within the film imply that the severity of the flood was enhanced by climate change. (Zeitlin)

The hardships faced by the characters in *Beasts of the Southern Wild* are wholly possible for **real, living people**. As reported by Scientific American, “When Hurricane Katrina hit southeast Louisiana in 2005, the damage was the most extensive in the region’s African American neighborhoods. Of the seven ZIP codes that suffered the costliest flood damage from Katrina, four of them had populations that were at least 75% Black, government records show.”(Frank) By highlighting these possible circumstances and the conditions that may lead to them, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* has the potential to sway public perspectives of climate change and the climate crisis, particularly those regarding the role of inequity in the damage done unto marginalized communities, and possibly inspire preventative action.

The media is able to present content for public consumption that may alter the ideas and opinions of audiences. Such stances in turn can influence the behaviors of those who hold them. The growth machine, sacrificial landscapes, and other harmful phenomena and structures would likely not exist without the contributions of public perspectives and behavior. Content creators, then, should deliberately engage with and consider such issues when developing their content and narratives, lest they themselves contribute to these cycles of perspective-holding and action-making that are harmful to social and environmental life.

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The Almost-Feminism of *Midsommar*

Kaley Lambert

The 2019 film *Midsommar*, directed by Ari Aster, is a piece of media that contrasts the rampant sexism found within the horror genre. *Midsommar* entails a matriarchal society that encourages sharing one's emotions, punishes toxic masculinity, contains complex and unique female characters, and which permits feminine sexual autonomy. However, *Midsommar* is not without its faults in its feminism. There is a blatant lack of intersectionality, issues of consent within the presented sexual autonomy, and an overall issue of linking positive feminist concepts with a demented and murderous cult. *Midsommar* is able to achieve almost-feminism, which, although imperfect, is still ultimately a worthwhile counterweight in a sea of actively sexist horror films.

Midsommar is a horror-drama combination film starring Florence Pugh and Jack Reynor.

Midsommar was directed by Ari Aster, who also directed the critically acclaimed horror film *Hereditary*. This film follows Pugh's character, Dani, as she endures a near-endless stream of traumatic events. It starts with Dani's sister committing murder-homicide via carbon monoxide poisoning, resulting in the death of herself as well as their mother and father. While Dani attempts to seek comfort from her boyfriend, Christian, as played by Reynor, she is none the wiser that prior to her family tragedy, he had intended to end their relationship. Throughout their on-screen relationship, Christian is constantly neglectful, dismissive, and at times outright abusive toward her. The heavyweight contributions to Dani's trauma occur when she joins Christian and his friends on a trip to a once-in-a-lifetime midsummer festival within an isolated Swedish commune called the Hårga.

The Hårga commune is a matriarchal society, with an older woman as the main authority figure, and within which expressing one's emotions is encouraged. These three facets of this society are positive feminist concepts that are absent from much of western culture and western media-let alone within the horror genre. In much of western culture, older women are treated poorly. They are often cast aside for being beyond their fertile years and not necessarily matching societal beauty standards. As stated in *The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf regarding beauty standards excluding older women, "Ten years ago, too, as a result of the cosmetic companies' ad pressure, women's magazines rarely featured the faces of women older than twenty-five, and you seldom saw the least hint of a wrinkle." (Wolf, P. 7) The older female leader of the commune, in contrast, is treated with respect, admiration, and reverence for her wisdom and compassion. Compassion, kindness, and other such emotions that are traditionally treated as feminine are regarded highly within Hårga culture—something that is also uncommon in much of western society.

A common image within the film is a collective cry or collective scream as a reaction to troublesome scenarios. One ritual for the midsummer festival is one in which any member over the age of ninety commits suicide by jumping off a cliff. This tradition occurs on an as-needed basis and happens to coincide with the rest of this festival's events. At the time of the *Midsommar*, two members of the Hårga community were over the age of ninety. When this ritual is completed, everyone in the audience joins in a collective scream or cry, and anyone who does not participate is looked at as odd. This ritual and custom directly contrast how in western culture, young women, in particular, are often belittled and demeaned for being emotional-

usually to strip them of any sort of power or authority, as being emotional is equated with being irrational. For the Hårga, *not* being emotional is strange. Women in western culture tend to face ridicule for being too young and emotional to be intelligent and hold authority, or for being too old to be attractive.

Not only does *Midsommar* include the Hårga presenting emotions as something to be shared and something reasonable to experience, but it also presents emotions as something powerful. For the Hårga, emotions are powerful tools to be used by anyone of any gender-not something that expresses any sort of weakness. The inclusion of an emotionally open and matriarchal society within this film is sadly not a net-feminist element, as the Hårga is a murderous *cult* that uses emotional vulnerability and dependence as tactics to ensnare new members (in this case, Dani).

The matriarch of the Hårga is a complex, unique, and well-developed female character, as are many of the women in this film. This female complexity is a feminist element. In western media, especially horror movies, female characters are often reduced to romantic or sexual interests for a main male character, or merely gore fodder for villains to kill and brutalize. This is (mostly) not the case in *Midsommar*. *Midsommar* presents a mentally ill woman with some sort of violent psychosis, Dani's sister, and refrains from demonizing her. While her sister causes Dani a lot of heartbreak, she is not anywhere near the main antagonist in the story. Considering that women with mental illnesses are rarely portrayed in western horror, let alone without being an antagonist, this is an actively feminist detail. Dani herself is portrayed as a complex, intelligent, sensitive, powerful, grieving, and sometimes impulsive woman. These characteristics are frequently portrayed as incompatible with one another in women. One cannot

be both sensitive *and* powerful, or impulsive *and* intelligent. The film treats Maja, a young woman from the commune who pursues a mutually romantic relationship with Christian, with the same depth and care. Maja could have easily been thrust into the role of an antagonistic *other woman*, as is done in many horror films. Instead, Christian is (brutally) punished for being disloyal to Dani, but Maja is in no way punished for pursuing a relationship with a man she is interested in, which is strangely uncommon in western media. Maja is shown to be driven, passionate, friendly, and dedicated, which is a level of detail and depth rarely granted to non-protagonists in a love triangle.

The climactic event in the relationship between Maja and Christian, while presented as a divine feminine occurrence, is far from a feminist scene. Christian and Maja have a deeply sexual encounter with an audience of at least a dozen naked Hårga women. Christian is not only drugged with hallucinogenic tea, which already pushed this encounter into being an instance of rape, but is also physically pushed by one of the older women in the audience to continue his encounter with Maja when he started to show hesitation and doubt. Rape and sexual assault can happen to anyone. Christian's character is presented as unlikable and does initially reciprocate Maja's advances, but those details in **no** way excuse the film from forcing him to endure sexual assault.

Within the Hårga commune, women hold all sexual autonomy for initiating relationships. There is an established ritual necessary for male-female relationships to occur, which must be initiated by the woman involved. This feminine sexual autonomy and power could have been a feminist detail if not for the inclusion of this scene. Christian's rape is the only detailed application of

this aspect of the Hårga community, which may influence some viewers into associating feminine sexual autonomy as something only present within this type of brutal and unnerving scenario. The inclusion of female sexual autonomy is feminist but presenting it as something that comes at a cost is not.

In alignment with Christian being (unreasonably) punished for his mistreatment of Dani, the men in this film are punished for displays of toxic masculinity and rewarded for being in tune with traditionally feminine traits (which is in a way a feminist element). Pele, a Hårga resident, is presented as a substitute for Christian as Dani's romantic interest. Christian and Dani have been in a relationship for four years. Pele has known Dani for less than a year. Dani's birthday takes place during the midsummer festival. Pele gifts Dani a detailed portrait of herself that he drew, whereas Christian completely forgets about her birthday until he is reminded of it by Pele. Pele is soft-spoken, compassionate, and gentle man, and is rewarded for acting as such with an implied future romantic relationship with Dani.

Christian's friend Mark is severely punished for acting with toxic masculinity. During his stay at the commune, Mark continuously ogles the Hårga women. He expresses early in the film that his only intention in going on the trip is to have casual affairs with attractive and, as he believes, promiscuous Swedish women. Mark, as compared to the rest of his travel party, takes little interest in learning about Hårga traditions and customs. As such, he is mostly unaware of the Hårga's spiritual connection to nature. Following the events of the ceremonial suicide ritual, the deceased individuals are cremated. Their cremated remains are then in some way infused into/spread on an ancestral tree, which Mark publicly urinates on. This is incredibly

disrespectful to Hårga culture, and as such, Mark is skinned and murdered by a Hårga man who witnessed his actions. Sexualization of women and being self-centered to the point of disrespecting others are two significant elements of toxic masculinity-and a lack of tolerance for them is a reasonably feminist concept.

Perpetuating the idea of men being hyper-sexual is one example of this film reiterating stereotypes. Others include slotting our protagonist Dani into the "crazy girlfriend" role, and the only woman of color in the film, Connie, into the "angry black woman." *Midsommar* slightly redeems itself for including stereotypes by making them justified behavior that happens to be performed by someone in the given role. Dani is "crazy" because of immense trauma and being subjected to hallucinogenic drugs. Connie is angry because of the sudden and suspicious disappearance of her boyfriend (who viewers later discover was murdered by the Hårga) as well as witnessing the brutal deaths of two people. The sensibility of these reactions does help them to have more depth than merely fitting their corresponding stereotypes, but that does not absolve the film from perpetuating these potentially harmful and sexist ideas.

Another issue of stereotype-inclusion within *Midsommar* exists in the character Ruben. He is the Hårga community's prophet. Ruben has developmental disabilities as a result of being born from an incestuous relationship. Ruben has physical features that are regarded as abnormal within typical western beauty standards, and presents minimal communication skills. His role as the community prophet is to create abstract paintings that Hårga spiritual leaders translate and convert into spiritual tomes. The Hårga usually bring in outsiders (such as Christian's friend group) for the purpose of adding variety to their bloodlines but perform intentional incest so as

to bear new prophets with such disabilities. They view those with developmental and mental disabilities as less attached to or restrained by worldly matters, allowing them to be more spiritually attuned. While the film expresses the use of someone with disabilities as a prophet or a mystical figure as something to criticize it nonetheless includes and re-perpetuates this outdated and harmful trope.

In alignment with perpetuating stereotypes, this film also participates in the othering of an entire culture. It is common in western horror to have the setting for horrific events be somewhere outside of the United States, to make them feel more unnerving, as *foreign* is often equated with *strange*. As stated in the chapter "Role models and stereotypes: An introduction to the 'Other'" within *What media classes really want to discuss: A student guide* by Greg Smith, "Media Othering is not so powerful that it overrides your real-life experience. If you have spent considerable time in Native American culture, your images of actual Indians will outweigh a more generalized notion of the 'noble savage.' But Othering does shape your experiences and your interpretation of them. Othered images have a kind of magnetism. If we see a real-life instance that confirms our image of the Other, we tend to give that example special attention. " (Smith, P. 96) It is made clear in this film that the Hårga is an isolated and outlier culture that happens to be in Sweden, but it acts as viewers' only representation of Swedish culture within the confines of the film, and as such has the power to shape one's perception of the country. While not necessarily sexist concepts, othering and stereotyping involve the same prejudiced mindsets that feminism aims to combat.

Another such mindset that feminism strives *for* is intersectionality. As stated in the chapter "Intersectionality" within the *Encyclopedia of gender in media* by Mary Kosut, "Advocates of intersectionality reject the notion that women share a single experience, contend that identity politics frequently conflate or ignore intragroup differences, and highlight the limits of "woman" as a single point of convergence." (Kosut, P. 177) Ideally, feminism is conscious of social issues and prejudices beyond sexism and takes them into account. The feminism of *Midsommar* largely fails to accomplish this. In terms of racism and lacking representation, for example, *Midsommar* only has three characters of color with speaking roles throughout the entire film, with each of them having minimal screen time compared to their white role-equivalent counterparts. While Sweden does have a predominantly white population, the ratio of white characters to characters of color is thoroughly disproportionate, especially considering that the story takes place in a fictional culture in which it is possible to manipulate demographics. Other issues of intersectionality within *Midsommar* include a lack of body diversity and class awareness among the main characters. The main cast are all seemingly able-bodied, young, and conventionally attractive characters, and are widely presented as coming from middle-class or actively affluent backgrounds.

The most troublesome aspect of *Midsommar*'s almost-feminism is that the majority of the positive feminist concepts within the story are exclusively present within the murderous and morally skewed Hårga cult. Feminine sexual autonomy is a good thing. Emotional depth, maturity, and sharing one's emotions are good things. Shunning toxic masculinity as compared to being in tune with one's femininity is a good thing. It is troublesome, though, to link these elements to the Hårga society. For any viewer who may otherwise have minimal/no previous

exposure to these ideas, they could very well associate them as something only present or possible within cults-and then perceive otherwise positive concepts negatively.

As far as feminist concepts are concerned, *Midsommar* is vastly superior to many other horror movies and a lot of western media in general. It includes a matriarchal society, respects older women, punishes toxic masculinity, rewards emotional vulnerability, has complex and unique female characters, and has a strong female protagonist. It is, however, deeply flawed in its feminism. There is an overt lack of intersectionality, as *Midsommar* exhibits a lack of consideration for class, ableism, racism, or body diversity. It also participates in reiterating harmful tropes and stereotypes, and the othering of an entire country. It's only applied instance of feminine sexual autonomy leads to rape. Most notably, almost all of its positive feminist elements are directly or indirectly linked to a morally dark society. Nevertheless, *Midsommar* is still an important piece of media in that it is a detailed, engaging, and interesting film that sets a precedent for the horror genre to begin drifting away from sexism and toward feminism.

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Environment Influence on Interaction Outcomes

Kaley Lambert

Case Study

This research compares environmental differences between spaces from two different reality television program environments which are specified as having the same interaction-goal, observes how the spaces may influence the types of interpersonal interactions they are built for, and compares data regarding the outcomes of said interactions within these spaces so as to provide support for the argument that environments may influence interpersonal interaction outcomes.

Foundation

In tandem with other interactional elements, the body plays a substantial role in communicative interactions with companions **and** oneself. Such influential embodied elements include haptic and sensory-rich experiences, which can add depth and intimacy to interactions, as detailed in a report on haptic rituals research by Katila et al. (2020:418-423) This depth may enhance both interactions with others, as detailed in *Danielle Pillet-Shore's* research on registering in face-to-face interaction (2021:10-11) as well as enhancing healthier interactions with oneself, such as within embodied yogic meditative practices like those examined in in the research of *Froeliger et al.* (Froeliger et al., 2012).

Other embodied elements such as body torque and positioning may convey a participant's attention and engagement in an encounter. (Schegloff, 1998:535-538) This attention and

engagement, when observed, may influence co-participant actions to regain attention (Goodwin, 1980:293-294) which may consequently influence companions' perceptions of, and interactions with, themselves. A hypothetical example: If a companion X pauses when telling a story to gain companion Y's attention, which leads to Y feeling guilty for not being visibly attentive- this may affect Y's idea of themselves as an attentive/respectful/good companion, and their self-perception may cyclically influence their proceeding actions.

Embodied elements contribute to both positive **and negative** interactions with oneself and others. This may be observed in encounters where an interaction-participant has traits or qualities that may be noted by co-participants (particularly in a visual manner) that denote "otherness." *When the World isn't designed for our Bodies* details experiences wherein perception of traits denoting otherness influence the ideas and actions of situational companions. (Waldman, 2020) Similarly, *Being Black in America is Exhausting* details the experiences and perspectives of an individual whose ideas of himself, as well as his interactions with himself and situational companions, are altered as a result of him being labeled and treated as an "other." (Capehart, 2021)

The role of situational **environment/setting** has the ability to influence embodied, and other, interactional elements. The space within which an interaction takes place physically influences participants' bodies and the ways in which they may use said bodies to interact with one another and themselves, as supported in LeBaron and Streek's research about built-spaces. (LeBaron and Streek, 1997:1-24) Social interaction outcomes, both positive and negative, may impact

interpersonal relationships. (Li and Fung, 2013) In that environment/setting may influence interactional elements, one may argue that environment/setting have the potential to influence the “success” or outcome of an interaction, which may in turn influence the development of interpersonal relationships. To examine and support the argument that environments influence interactional outcomes, I will compare differences within spaces that are explicitly built to encourage specific interactions and are intended to be conducive for interpersonal relationships.

Method

The data used in this paper primarily consists of images showcasing deliberately constructed environments from two reality television programs: the first season of *Love Island UK* (Brunton & Cowles, 2015) and the first season of *Love is Blind*. (Coelan et al., 2020) Both programs designate themselves as aiming to encourage and produce romantic interactions and romantic relationships. This image data is paired with numerical data reporting the “outcomes” of the television programs, and observations of environmental differences between the programs.

Findings



Love Island Set Images (above) from left to right: images 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3. (Babbage, 2015)



Love is Blind Set Images (above) from left to right: images 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3. (Walsh & Romero, 2022)

When observing the setting of *Love is Blind* (and *Love Island UK*) there are a considerable number of environmental elements to note. In the setting for *Love is Blind* participants, romantic interactions exclusively take place within one of twenty identical indoor spaces, pictured in images 1.1 and 1.2. These pods are considerably small, soundproofed, dimly lit, and contain furniture and decor with notably luxurious fabric types such as velvet. Romantic interactions solely occur in one-on-one encounters, with each partner in solitude within their own pod (pictured in image 1.1) and separated from their companion by a completely opaque wall shown in image 1.3. The only real-time sensory input partners are able to directly receive from one another is auditory in nature, by conversing via audio speakers (Walsh & Romero, 2022).

These romantic interactions are explicitly private in nature beyond them being recorded for the television program, as no other participants are able to observe the actions taken or discussions held between two partners. One may argue that the program creator Chris Coelen holds, or at least implies, agreement with the argument that environments influence interactions, as he claims there were deliberate intentions when designing the spaces for this program. He states

that the design choices made were out of desire for the environment to be “-comfortable and conducive to conversation — a place where they could get cozy with each other” (Walsh & Romero, 2022).

The setting for *Love Island UK* varies drastically from that of *Love is Blind*. For *Love Island UK* participants, romantic interactions take place within a combination of indoor and outdoor spaces spanning a large, vibrantly colored and decorated villa in Mallorca, Spain. The villa contains multiple smaller, dedicated spaces for interactions including, but not limited to, a communal bedroom (image 2.1), outdoor beds and balconies (image 2.2), an outdoor bar (image 2.3), and an outdoor pool (image 2.1.). These spaces allow participants to have a wide array of interactions with a spectrum of shared sensory input. The villa does not guarantee much privacy for participant interactions. Participants engage with and witness one another in one-on-one interactions (which may remain isolated or be observed and/or interrupted by others) as well as group interactions. All participants are meant to share a communal bedroom (image 2.1) which contains a deliberately limited number beds, all of which are designed to suit two people. (Babbage, 2015) Despite the environments for both *Love Island UK* and *Love is Blind* being explicitly structured to encourage romantic interactions, the settings and design choices vary drastically.

Along with the settings of these two programs varying, the outcomes of the programs differ as well. For *Love Island UK* there were twenty-three participants total over the course of the first season. (Brunton & Cowles, 2015) Of those twenty-three, six romantic couples that formed

within the program were ongoing at the time of the season finale, (Prendergast, 2022) meaning 52% of contestants were in a relationship by the end of the season, which is presented as the ideal outcome for participants. In comparison, for *Love is Blind* there were thirty participants total during season one (Coelan et al., 2020). Of the thirty contestants, eight couples got engaged within the program, and two of those eight went on to formally wed within the program (Kinane, 2020) meaning 13% of contestants got married to a co-program-participant within the duration of the program, which is presented as the ideal participant-outcome. In that the environments and success-outcomes of these programs differ despite both programs being structured for the same goal, there may be a connection *between* the environmental and outcome differences.

If one accepts that the goal of these programs and their environments are to provide spaces conducive for romantic interactions and the consequential development of romantic relationships, it may also be accepted that the *Love Island UK* program was most successful at accomplishing this goal by the end of its season for a higher proportion of participants. It may, then, be fair to argue that the environmental elements at play in the *Love Island UK* program are better suited for developing romantic interactions and romantic relationships within a given timeframe than those in the *Love is Blind* program.

For the sake of data consistency and applicability, this research does not touch on the **longevity** of any of the relationships formed within the conclusion of these programs, nor does it touch on relationships formed among co-participants **after** the season finales of each program. While

some individuals may consider longevity to be indicative of romantic relationship or romantic interaction success, that is not a universal sentiment, and was not explicitly stated as a goal of these programs. The **stated goals** of these programs are what this research is applying as a measure of outcome-success, so longevity is not factored. It is also important to acknowledge that environment/setting are not the only factors that may have been influential toward the outcomes of these programs. Other factors that may be worth noting that have not been analyzed, include financial incentives, participant chemistry and preferences, cultural and social influences, program familiarity, identity dynamics, audience influence, and competitive versus non-competitive framing.

Conclusion

Despite both *Love Island UK* and *Love is Blind* pursuing the same goal of producing romantic interactions and romantic relationships, the environments of both programs vary drastically-as does success in accomplishing their shared goal. These differences support the argument that environmental elements may influence interpersonal relationships and interpersonal interaction outcomes, particularly those of an embodied kind. Further studies, such as research into the impact and influence of specific environmental elements, may allow individuals to make better informed setting choices or design choices for their desired goals. This research may be useful to guide and/or enhance design choices or setting choices for different interactions with oneself or with others based on specific outcome goals.

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Pandemic Through the Lens: An Examination of Repeat Photography During Lockdown

Lauren Cole

Introduction

The year 2020 was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic that affected the world in ways that had never been seen before. As the virus spread globally, governments placed stay-at-home-orders, preventing people from leaving their houses. The pandemic not only affected the way society and governments viewed health regulations and procedures but it also had sweeping effects on environments across the globe. At the peak of the pandemic, “4.4 billion people, or 57% of the planet, were under some sort of movement restriction” (Anthes, 2022). Many studies have begun to indicate that short-term movement restrictions “significantly improves air quality... reduces GHGs emission, lessens water pollution and noise, and reduces the pressure on the tourist destinations” (Rume & Islam, 2020). Despite the ongoing climate debate in many countries, the COVID-19 pandemic offered the environment a period of respite and challenged how humans view their impact on the world.

Over the course of the pandemic, photography and social media became tools to highlight and amplify the changes that were occurring while the rest of the world was home. Specifically, repeat photography “has emerged as an important and popular method for recording and understanding environmental change” (von Hellerman, 2020). This genre of photography works as a side-by-side image, representing the same location at different times. During the pandemic, this clearly displayed the direct improvements stay-at-home orders had on the environment. The photographs that emerged during the pandemic illustrated a possible future if changes were to be

made regarding the environment. Examples of repeat photography highlight the idea that visual imagery has the power to “turn an abstract concept into something tangible and accessible” (Wang et al, 2018). The unique opportunity of the pandemic allowed this genre of photography to work in contrast to previous examples of climate imagery, which can be used to promote climate action to the public. For the first time, humans’ impact on climate change was unavoidable, photography allowed these changes to become “real.” Using social and news media, these photos create a deeper understanding of the climate crisis and offer the public a hopeful example of environmental action.

Overview:

Examples of repeat photography that highlighted the environmental changes due to the pandemic could be seen across all social media platforms and were the focus of a series of news media. Despite the popularity of these images across social media and news sites (Kinver, 2021; Hoeller, 2020; Picheta, 2020), there is a lack of scholarly research into how these photos worked to engage the public's response to climate change. This paper works to understand how they might have that effect by looking at studies on climate imagery, repeat photography, and social media (Braasch, 2013; Rachmen et al, 2019; Seelig, 2015; von Hellerman, 2020; Wang et al, 2018). One study reviews the use of climate imagery within digital media and works to understand how images are being used and understood by the public (Wang et al, 2018). In researching this topic, the authors found that there is an absence of human stories within climate imagery which can be problematic in building public engagement. They argue that climate change communication needs to focus on people rather than science and politics (Wang et al, 2018). Another article written by Gary Braasch furthers this idea as he claims that “climate

change seems distant and abstract” (2013). He goes on to include that people need to heed the warnings about the “helplessness-inducing effects of negative images” and introduce more pictures of solutions and adaptations (2013). Both of these studies, while critiquing climate imagery and its lack of human connection, highlight that these issues can be solved through changes in how we represent climate photos in digital media. Introducing more positive photographs that represent solutions as accessible and attainable will help to entice people to enact change. This paper attempts to argue that the climate imagery during the pandemic serves this purpose.

In looking for ways to increase human engagement in climate action, social media emerged as a tool that can be used to help increase human connection with climate imagery. A study done by the Pew Research Center in 2012 found that 61% of Millennials use Facebook to receive political news and 32% use the platform to share information and opinions. Importantly, the study found 25% of respondents become more engaged in political issues after seeing content about them on social media (Rachman et al, 2019). As Susan Wang and her colleagues write in their study, social media is “becoming a key source of information” due to platforms being more viewed and accessed in general (Wang et al, 2018). In researching this topic, many news articles were found to reference photographs people had posted to Twitter and other platforms, showing their first-hand experience with the changing environment (Kinver, 2021; Hoeller, 2020; Picheta, 2020). Due to the stay-at-home orders, there was an increased reliance on social media to create the human connection that was lacking. This aided in creating a larger social media presence that could see and respond to the climate change visuals. Online platforms create a

space where personal experience can spark a conversation about climate change and therefore entice people to take action.

In addition to discussing previous studies, this paper also seeks to situate the COVID-19 repeat photography within the context of Daniel Palmer's concept of the “sublime image of disaster” (2013). Palmer argues that the popular images used in relation to climate change can suggest that the effects of it “occur ‘out there’, in an abstract ‘nature’ – distanced from people’s everyday experience” (2013). He furthers that there is a fascination with “the aesthetics of disaster”, which leads to those documenting crises to be as shocking as possible so that viewers want to act on the issue presented. The photography that emerged during the pandemic lockdowns works against this idea, as these images represent an entirely unique situation where the “aesthetics of disaster” are reversed. The imagery from this time does not show the end of the world or a disaster waiting to happen, but rather a hopeful future that people can aspire to. This is a phenomenon that repeat photography has previously never depicted. Palmer argued against traditional repeat photography, saying that those photos “arguably do little to enable the viewer to do anything about the loss presented” (2013). In the pandemic photos, there is no loss being presented. Therefore, the COVID-19 photographs again work successfully against the status quo to highlight the distinctive environmental recovery during this time. This reversal of traditional repeat photography offers viewers a glimpse of hope in the fight for climate action as these photos prove to the public that the environment can recover, which encourages people to act.

Analysis:

Photography as a form of influential media for environmental change has a long history of support and critiques similar to the absence of human stories detailed above. However, many environmental photographers also use their medium to communicate that the threats to the environment are real and work to bring out certain emotions in order to motivate people to action (Seelig, 2015). Repeat photography is one method that helps photographers achieve this goal because, as anthropologist Dr. Pauline von Hellermann says that “It helps to visualize environmental changes for general audiences” (2020). In most cases, these photos are published side-by-side to amplify the differences between them. This works to “elicit responses, views and stories which may not have emerged without the photos” (von Hellerman, 2020). Below are four examples of repeat photography taken during the pandemic lockdowns. All of these were pulled from news articles that focused on environmental recovery and how the photos detailed those changes. The analysis of these images will highlight critiques of climate imagery and explain how these photographs work to challenge those ideas.

Figure 1: Comparison images at the India Gate in Delhi (Kinver, 2021)





Figure 2: Milan, Italy on January 8, 2020, vs. April 17, 2020 (Hoeller, 2020)



Figure 3: Los Angeles, California (after photo taken on April 14, 2020) (Hoeller, 2020)



Figure 4: Punjab, India Comparison photos pulled from a local Twitter user, posted on April 3, 2020, with the caption: “For the first time in almost 30 years could clearly see the Himalayas due to India’s lockdown clearing pollution. Just amazing!”

(Picheta, 2020)

Through the examples above, it is clear that the changes during the lockdown were drastic and extremely visible to the naked eye. Additionally, with the presence and popularity of social and news media, people from areas across the world that may not see this environmental recovery first-hand are able to experience it as well. While the widespread circulation of these photos works to bring awareness to climate change, there are some limitations to presenting repeat photography as the only measure of these changes. Some scholars argue that this genre of photography suggests to viewers a possible linearity or connection between the photos that may not exist (von Hellermann, 2020). This idea is reinforced in the news article where Figure 3 was pulled from, which reads: “whether this is lockdown related or due to factors such as recent storms is unclear” (Hoeller, 2020). Despite this critique of repeat photography, it can be argued that the visuals alone are enough to inspire change in someone. Whether the photograph itself represents the truth of this change or not is less important than the message itself. If the goal is to mobilize audiences around climate action, the use of “emotive and spectacular imagery” (Campbell, 2014) has been proven to do so. Since the pandemic, scientists have found that there was a decrease in NO₂ emission up to 20-30% in some areas (Bhat et al, 2020). Whether or not the stay-at-home orders were the sole cause of this change, the photos are able to convey the idea that human activity has a considerable effect on the environment.

Another critique of climate imagery is that there is a lack of human stories and representation in photography which “can act to distance viewers, both psychologically and geographically” (Wang et al, 2018). Additional studies have shown that photos carry more shock value when they depict vulnerable people (Braasch, 2013). The photos taken during lockdown work in an entirely different and distinct way: these pictures function so well *because* there was a complete lack of human involvement. The pandemic created a collective, worldly experience that allowed for these photos to work in ways that normal repeat photographs could not. This collective understanding replaced the need for inclusion of a human story because the representation of the lockdowns became the story. It can also be argued that this amplified the emotional response to these photos because it showed how the environment would respond if there was almost a complete removal of humans.

Another aspect of these photos that has aided their shock value is the reversal of historical framing that typically is represented by repeat photography and climate imagery.

Daniel Palmer describes this phenomenon, saying that photography “is limited by its temporality of what is or ‘has been’, rather than what *may be*” (2013). In contrast to these supposed limitations, the examples of repeat photography shown above actually represent what may be: instead of representing the environment as something that is rapidly declining, it shows a snapshot of what could happen if we were to truly implement change. This reverses the usual helpless feeling that comes from negative images (Braasch, 2013). As a result, the photos can elicit a hopeful feeling in those who are viewing them, further inspiring them to act.

In addition to the repeat photography that became so popular over the past three years, BBC released a nature documentary in 2021 titled *The Year Earth Changed* which documented how the environment changed during the pandemic. In a review of the documentary, Ezra Harper Glenn explained how these changes enacted the same hopeful feeling that the repeat photographs represent. Glenn describes how most environmental documentaries only focus on the distressing problems that have been caused by human actions, and adds that a result of this trend is that people begin “to regard nature as a fragile, sensitive flower, trampled underfoot in our rush to progress” (2022). This claim also explains how traditional climate imagery has been interpreted. Glenn also writes that, *The Year Earth Changed* “demonstrates the planet’s remarkable powers of resilience as it responded to the shutdown-induced calm and snapped into recovery mode in a few short months” (2022). This example goes hand-in-hand with how repeat photography functions as an inspirational piece of climate imagery across social media as both forms of media give viewers an environmental goal to work towards.

While the documentary may have a larger audience and therefore a better ability to highlight the animals that were impacted during this time, repeat photographs also work in the same manner to elicit change through the use of social media. Figure 4 is an example of repeat photography that was used in a CNN article. The side-by-side images were pulled from a Twitter user's feed on April 3rd, 2020 which has since received over 1,000 likes and 358 retweets since it was posted. The woman who posted the image included the caption: “This was the view from our rooftop at home in Punjab India. For the first time in almost 30 years I could clearly see the Himalayas due to India’s lockdown clearing air pollution. Just amazing!” (Picheta, 2020). While the photos themselves speak to the intense clearing of air pollution, this example also highlight

how the human story can also be incredibly effective in making a difference. The inclusion of this woman's experience from her own rooftop highlights how significant it is to be able to see the mountain range for the first time in 30 years, and this idea that individuals on social media “could generate peaks of attention comparable to that of organizations or governments” (Wang et al, 2018) is essential to effecting change. It allows people to start conversations, share their experiences with others, and increase the availability of stories that may not be seen otherwise. In this example, the photos impacted many people who shared their views in the comments. One person wrote: “If mother nature can repair so quickly imagine what a difference it would make if we all promised to make a few lifestyle changes...” (Bains, 2020). Overall, social media platforms like Twitter allow people to share personal anecdotes and open the stage for people to have conversations about new topics. This helps to bring awareness to the photography as well as the messaging behind the photographs which may lead to other forms of engagement like the sharing of advocacy messages or motivations to change behavior (Wang et al, 2018).

Conclusion:

While the COVID-19 pandemic was a human health tragedy, it gave scientists the opportunity to study how the environment reacts to human interference. Studies have since emerged that detail what lessons can be learned from our experiences during lockdown and the ways in which we can implement those lessons to live more sustainably (Rume & Islam, 2020). Things like investing in sustainable industrialization, using green transportation, developing renewable energy, and focusing on ecological restoration and ecotourism are all changes that Rume and Islam argue will help maintain the short-term effects of COVID-19. One of the most important strategies to come from the pandemic is a focus on international cooperation (Rume & Islam,

2020). While many countries used different methods to combat COVID-19, there was also a sense of cooperation that needed to occur in order to curb the spread of the virus. This kind of global partnership is something that is desperately needed in the field of climate justice.

Photography and social media are just some ways in which we can accomplish that. As ocean conservation scientist Dr. Amanda Bates claims: “No one can say anymore that we can’t change the whole world in a year, because we can...we did” (Anthes, 2022).

In addition to the lessons we have learned during the pandemic, the repeat photography that emerged to show the environmental recovery affected the way people think about climate imagery. While the photos depicted a unique event, they showed that it is possible to create positive images to help enact change instead of the usual attempts to shock people with depressing imagery. Environmental photojournalist Gary Braasch reinforces this idea saying that “picturing a healthier and safer future can be empowering” (2013). These repeat photographs give viewers the opportunity to picture what is possible if they begin to work on their environmental footprint while also highlighting how quickly the environment will start to recover from it—the question is where do we go from here? The photos are the catalyst for people wanting to enact change and better the environment but they do not show how this can be done. In many instances, this is where that helpless feeling begins to creep back in. The solution to this problem can be found in the nature documentary, *The Year Earth Changed*.

Despite the amazing changes that happened because of the lockdowns, the film does not support the call for another one. Instead, it suggests small adjustments, “like tweaking the ways we light parking lots, or closing beaches a couple days each month” (Glenn, 2022). Many of these small

adjustments are already taking place in post-pandemic life (Honey, 2021), but more can be done. There is hope that in researching these photographs, more attention will be paid to how photography can make climate change visual and therefore aid in the process of climate justice. Through the use of hopeful photographs like the examples above and the wide circulation they receive on social media, repeat photography can become an even more powerful tool in helping climate change information become more accessible and understandable for the public.

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Art in Climate Argumentation

Matt Morely

We live in an era that is in itself truly fascinating, but is at the same time completely and utterly terrifying. We are in the midst of an unprecedented environmental crisis that is perhaps one the greatest threats to human life that has ever existed. But despite the overwhelming evidence that tells us just how much danger we are in, people don't feel compelled to act. In fact, many don't even believe that we are actually in a crisis despite the shocking corroborations of the changing world around us. This emergency has transcended the constant regurgitation of scientific facts and statistics. One no longer has any need for science in order to recognize that our world is in fact changing. Extreme temperatures force residents to remain in their homes, forest fires wreak havoc all over the world, severe storms and hurricanes devastate our towns and cities, and yet many still refuse to believe that our human activities have anything to do with these catastrophes. The evidence before us is incontrovertible. Our world is changing, and whether we choose to believe it or not, our human activities are responsible for many of these changes. And so the question has to be asked: How did we get here, and what, if anything, is going to get people to understand that this is a real emergency? I believe that the answers to these questions lie within the arts. Art has always been the medium through which we make sense of the world around us. It has the ability to compel beyond what science and facts are capable of by invoking powerful emotions within its audience. I believe that if we are to prevail during these uncertain times, then we need more artists who are willing to take creative risks in service of conveying their message. As writer and environmentalist Paul Kingsnorth emphasizes in *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto*, "Artists are needed... We believe that art must look over the edge, face the world that is coming with a steady eye, and rise to the challenge of ecocide with a

challenge of its own: an artistic response to the crumbling of the empires of the mind.” (Kingsnorth & Hine 2019). In this essay, I am going to discuss why I believe that art needs to become a fundamental piece of the environmental crisis, but first, we need to look at environmentalism from a sociological perspective.

Much of the current environmental crisis pertains to sociology, as the concept of the “environment” is itself a social construction. The very fabric of the environment and the way that we perceive it is rooted in what we call framing. This is a term that is used to describe the ways that we perceive different entities as well as the relationships between those entities. A frame is an unconscious system of interconnected words and ideas that can be triggered even if only one of them is explicitly referenced. For example, the frame for the word “school” might include words such as “teacher,” “student,” “classroom,” and so on. When a frame is activated, it can trigger certain emotional responses within a person or group of people. We see this utilized particularly in politics and media, but it can also be applied to environmental rhetoric. An example of this concept at play can be seen in the terminological shift from “global warming” to “climate change.” Beginning in the mid 1970s, “global warming” was the term most commonly used to describe the fluctuating temperature and weather patterns that were being recorded around the world. However, around the early 2000s, there was a push from politicians and communication consultants to use “climate change” as an alternative, believing that it sounded more positive and less scary than its predecessor. “The idea was that ‘climate’ had a nice connotation—more swaying palm trees and less flooded out coastal cities. ‘Change’ left out any human cause of the change. Climate just changed. No one to blame.” (Lakoff 2010). This lexical shift highlights one of the biggest flaws with regards to current environmental

framing. Our society seems to think of nature and the environment as abstract ideas that exist outside of human civilization. This is due to the historical framing of nature as a place where people are not present. “The very fact that we have a word for ‘nature’ is evidence that we do not regard ourselves as part of it.” (Kingsnorth & Hine 2019). The danger of this perception is that it allows us to believe that many of these environmental disasters occur in places that most people will never see. “The effects of climate change occur ‘out there’, in abstract ‘nature’—distanced from people’s everyday experience.” (Palmer 2013). We don’t necessarily need to hold ourselves accountable for the environmental damage that we may be causing when we fall into this mindset, as it leads to a distancing effect between people and the environment. We hear about the effects of climate change every day, but we have become so detached from nature that we aren’t necessarily forced to confront these issues.

The other fundamental problem with environmental rhetoric is that it fails to properly carry the message to its intended audience. Much of environmental science seems to have become the simple reporting of facts and statistics, but as we are seeing, this is not always an effective method of communication. There is rarely any sort of emotional response to facts and statistics because they don’t always carry any significant meaning to non-scientists. However, when you can take these facts and turn them into a story with a compelling narrative, people tend to be much more receptive. This idea is highlighted by Randy Olson in his book, *Houston, We Have a Narrative*, wherein he emphasizes the need for science to incorporate narrative and storytelling into its arguments. “Scientists must realize that science is a narrative process, that narrative is story, therefore science needs story.” (Olson 2015). Over the past several years, one thing has become abundantly clear about environmental activism: People will never be motivated by facts

alone, we need something more. It's not about conveying different information, it's about conveying the same information, but in a different way. Environmental scientists very much understand the seriousness of the situation that we are in, but if they cannot find a way to effectively communicate that situation to the general public, then we will continue to make no progress. We need to figure out a way to get everybody on the same page, both scientists and non-scientists alike, and this is where the arts come into play. In order to see true change, we need artists who are willing to challenge the current narrative of environmentalism, and what better place to start than within the world of music.

In order to compare some of the different stylistic approaches to environmentalism in the arts, I look no further than Australian prog-psych rockers King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard. Despite their ridiculous sounding name, King Gizzard have proven themselves to be one of the most versatile and musically proficient rock acts of the past ten years. Since 2012, the band has released 23 studio albums, covering everything from smooth indie jazz to hair raising thrash metal. They have also been very outspoken about environmental issues, and much of their discography is heavily tied into issues such as climate change, resource exhaustion, and the exploitation of animal food sources. In 2019, the band released two separate studio albums that were both rooted in environmentalism, *Fishing for Fishies* and *Infest the Rats' Nest*. While both of these albums were produced with the goal of tackling various different environmental issues, each one saw the band take an extremely different stylistic approach. The first album, *Fishing for Fishies*, was a fun, light-hearted endeavor into the world of boogie rock. Boogie rock is a musical subgenre that developed out of the blues rock movement in the late 1960s. It is typically characterized by swung, laid back grooves and blues undertones. King Gizzard employs these

stylistic techniques on the album's title track, "Fishing for Fishies." The song starts off with a swinging, almost New Orleans jazz style drum beat, which is moments later joined by a finger-picked guitar melody, a walking bassline, and soft calls of the harmonica. The song feels very intentionally cheesy and overly jovial, but it still carries a serious message. On the hook of the song, Stu Mackenzie sings "Fishing for fishies don't make them feel happy or me neither, I feel so sorry for fishies." Here the band calls into question the morality of fishing for recreational or competitive purposes. Mackenzie's lyrics suggest that fishing for any purpose other than feeding one's self is cruel and wrong. This is further implied by lyrics such as "It seems like cruelty to me, you ain't hungry, leave them be." This song isn't just about overfishing and the damage that it brings to the world's oceans, but it's also more broadly about humanity's treatment towards animals. The band is highlighting how human beings seem to perceive themselves as superior to nature and all creatures living within it, while also calling out the hypocrisy of this viewpoint. The song "Plastic Boogie" also contains heavy environmental themes, specifically regarding the overuse of plastic and the damage that it can bring to all kinds of wildlife. Unlike the mellow grooves of "Fishing for Fishies," this song is a bit heavier and more upbeat, which suggests the dire nature of the situation. This is also accentuated by lyrics such as "Oh, the way we wrap it is wrong... it's like a vendetta against our mother nature." Despite the somewhat dark and gloomy undertones of this track, it still feels like a fun and driving experience, which is true of most songs on this album.

Reception to *Fishing for Fishies* was mostly positive, but the album did receive a notorious 4.8 out of 10 from the popular music website *Pitchfork*. Music critic Sophie Kemp published a somewhat unforgiving review of the album, calling it "soulless" and "downright boring." She

went on to say that the album was “vaguely about the environment, but mostly about goofing off with expensive equipment in service to the concept of ‘boogie oogie oogie.’” (Kemp 2019).

It’s true that a lot of the environmental themes on *Fishing for Fishies* can be easily overlooked by unobservant listeners, but the band would fix this problem with their next project. Not four months after the release of *Fishing for Fishies*, *Infest the Rats’ Nest* was released, which saw the band trying their hand at thrash metal. Thrash metal is a subgenre of metal music that is characterized by driving tempo, complex instrumentals and an overall aggressive sound. *Infest the Rats’ Nest*, aside from being the band’s first endeavor into thrash metal, also contains a heavy environmental and sociopolitical narrative. The story follows a post-apocalyptic version of the Earth in which all resources have been depleted, causing the rich and powerful to flee the planet and colonize Mars. We see glimpses of this world on the album's opening track, “Planet B,” where Mackenzie sings of browning fields, rusting tractors, and a harsh nuclear winter. On the hook of the song, Mackenzie sings “there is no planet B, open your eyes and see.” With this song, the band is essentially saying that if we ruin the planet Earth, we don’t have anywhere else to go. Many people believe that humanity might one day possess the knowledge and technology in order to terraform and colonize the planet Mars, but the band pokes holes in this philosophy on the song “Mars for the Rich,” on which they suggest that even if the colonization of Mars was a possibility at some point in the future, it would most likely only be an option for the wealthy and powerful due to the costs and risks associated with space travel. The band gives commentary on the horrors of factory farming and genetic engineering on the song “Organ Farmer,” which features some of the most manic instrumentals on the entire album. The song “Superbug” is about the rise of diseases and illnesses due to antibiotic resistance. Unlike most of the other songs on the album, “Superbug” is very slow and sludgy, almost resembling the

soundtrack for a zombie-apocalypse thriller. The lyrics portray a world that's being ravaged by the "superbug," an unstoppable plague that is extremely transmissible and has the potential to wipe out all of humanity. The main theme of this song is emphasized by the lyric "unnecessary anti-Bs likely killed humanity." This line alludes to the overuse of antibiotics, which has led to a drastic rise in many modern diseases. After this song, the second half of the album takes much more of a cli-fi turn which sees the survivors of the plague attempting to colonize Venus, but their attempt fails as Venus's atmosphere is toxic, making it an uninhabitable planet. This could be a metaphor for the ongoing toxification of the Earth's atmosphere due to greenhouse gas and chemical emissions.

The release of *Infest the Rats' Nest* was also accompanied by 3 bizarre music videos for the songs "Planet B," "Organ Farmer," and "Self-Immolate," each one packed with symbolism and easter eggs. The first video, "Planet B," showcases the band frolicking around a field in orange jumpsuits before a woman with a gun shows up and starts killing them one by one. As she picks each band member off, the others continue to frolic around, not even really attempting to get away. One runs straight into the gun, one starts jumping up and down in place, one even simply lays down on the ground and waits to be killed. I believe that this video is a metaphor for humanity's response (or lack of a response) to the environmental catastrophes that we are seeing. We are in the midst of one of the most significant threats to human life that has ever existed, and yet the majority of people aren't doing anything about it. It's as if somebody is holding a gun to our heads, and instead of doing anything, we're just simply waiting for them to pull the trigger. It's also worth noting that the band members are wearing orange jumpsuits that appear to resemble prison uniforms, which may represent humanity's inability to escape from

planet Earth. From here, the videos only become more and more unhinged. In the “Organ Farmer” video we see the band demolish a car inside of what appears to be a human factory farm. At the end of the video, the masses of people inside of the building are sprayed with some kind of gas, which could represent the use of chemicals in the food of factory-farmed animals. The “Self-Immolate” video, which is quite possibly the most disturbing video of the bunch, sees the band members drinking gasoline and setting themselves on fire while running around the field from the “Planet B” video. When asked about the album and the music videos that accompanied its release, Mackenzie said “thinking about things that are going on on planet Earth right now is really scary, and it’s way scarier to me than any horror movie... the interesting thing about humans is that we are kind’ve going down laughing at the moment, and we’re having a good time as we go down, and I think that was the main general theme of all of the videos.” (Mackenzie 2019).

Reception to *Infest the Rats’ Nest* was much more consistent than that of *Fishing for Fishies*. It quickly became a fan favorite, and most critics agreed that while the album wasn’t perfect, it was still an adventure that was worth having. Stuart Berman of *Pitchfork* referred to this album as “a raging response to a world where even the most despairing UN climate reports barely make a blip.” (Berman 2019). Unlike *Fishing for Fishies*, the environmental themes on this album were indisputable, and even casual listeners were able to pick up on the largely environmentalist inspired messages. It’s worth reiterating the fact that this is the album that marks the band’s first crack at the metal genre. Metal is an inherently belligerent musical genre, and it was a conscious decision on behalf of the band to make music that sounded like this. The band is painting the hellscape of what the Earth will look like if we fail to act, and the frenzied

thrash metal sound compliments this sentiment very nicely. There is also a very noticeable level of anger and rage that can be heard on this album. The band is clearly frustrated with the lack of a response to the climate crisis from global leaders and politicians, and that frustration carries all throughout the tracklist. Berman puts it particularly well in his review of the record, saying that it “embraces the contentious stance that metal isn’t necessarily a way of life, but a passing mood we all feel from time to time.” (Berman 2019). Metal is by no means the most popular genre of music, nor is it the most accessible. The band could’ve easily made something that would’ve resonated with a larger audience, but instead they chose to make something that is an honest portrayal of the situation as they see it.

I bring up this band specifically because I truly believe that this is the kind of content that we need to see more of if we want to see more results. Environmental science fails to spark interest because it doesn’t know how to portray scientific information to a non-scientist audience. This leads to scientists communicating only with other scientists rather than non-scientists.

“Academics find themselves talking to even smaller and narrower academic audiences, using a language that educated readers do not understand, publishing in journals they don’t read, and asking questions they don’t care about.” (Hoffman 2015). In other words, the environmental catastrophe that we are seeing is the result of a disconnect between the scientific community and the non-scientific community. It all comes down to a simple matter of communication. We need scientists to research and investigate what is going on around our planet, but the vast majority of human beings are not scientists, and at the end of the day, it’s the non-scientists who need to be convinced that a change is necessary. There needs to be a middle-man between these two groups, someone who is not necessarily a scientist, but can still act as a translator and a mediator

between the scientists and the non-scientists. We need someone who can take the information that the scientists are bringing to the table and break it down to the general public in a way that is digestible and easy to interpret. This, I believe, is why art must become a fundamental part of environmentalism. When considering some of the most influential people of the past ten years, the names of accomplished climate-scientists are not the ones who come to mind, rather it's people such as Taylor Swift, Kendrick Lamar, and Beyoncé. These are the people who are truly influential: The artists, the trend-setters, the people who, through their art, can influence people to change their habits and can truly drive people towards a more eco-friendly lifestyle. These are the people who can inspire others to speak out against corrupt companies and politicians who continue to exploit the environment for their own gain. These people are the last piece of the puzzle that's missing within the environmental crisis. We need artists, we need influencers, we need to make it fashionable to care about the environment. We need to stumble upon some kind of middle ground between science and the arts. As stated by author Ellen Dissanayake in her 1988 book, *What is Art For?*, "There seems to be something about art—it's indefinability, its multiformity, its intimations of transcendence—that makes the scientist feel that his methods and tools are inadequate for understanding it, just as there is something about science—its rigor, its tendency to mechanical reductionism—that makes the artist or lover of the arts suspicious of its pronouncements concerning anything in the realm of the 'spirit.'" (Dissanayake 1988). If we want to see a true change, then we must appeal to the "spirit" that Dissanayake speaks of here. King Gizzard, while they may not be the most popular music group, are doing something incredibly important with their music, and I firmly believe that more artists need to take influence from what they are doing with works such as *Infest the Rats' Nest* and its accompanying music videos. With these projects, King Gizzard forces their audience to react to

the degradation of the environment. When you watch each of these 3 music videos, you have to have some kind of a reaction, even if that reaction is simply “what the hell is going on in this video.” It’s important to note that all art is subjective, and that a song or painting or movie isn’t necessarily going to resonate with everybody who comes across it. At the end of the day, not everybody is going to like or appreciate what the band is doing on this record, but I believe that we need more artists who are willing to produce content like this. We need artists who are willing to call the situation like it is, without worrying about who they might offend along the way. We need art that will make us stop and consider how our own individual actions affect the environment that nurtures us. We need art that is unapologetic, and blatant, and in-your-face, because nothing else seems to be working at this point. This isn’t to say that every artist needs to light themselves on fire just to send a message, but in the end, I believe that art like this is what it’s going to take to motivate true environmental change.

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Analysis of “My Sister’s Keeper” and Parents of Terminally Ill Children

Brie Surawski

“My Sister’s Keeper” (Cassavetes, 2009) is a film about a 13-year-old girl named Anna who is suing her parents for medical emancipation after they tell her she needs to donate one of her kidneys to her older sister Kate, who has been battling leukemia her entire life. Anna is genetically conceived for the sole purpose to be a donor for Kate, after her parents find out she has cancer and that no one else in the family is a DNA match. Anna begins donating blood as a newborn and eventually bone marrow to Kate as she grows older. As Kate’s donor, Anna has undergone many surgeries and medical procedures, and is unable to live the normal life of a healthy child. At the end of the movie, the audience finds out that Kate actually wanted Anna to sue her parents so that she did not have to go forward with the kidney transplant. Here we learn that Kate is tired of fighting and is at peace with her coming death, despite her parent’s desire for her to keep battling the illness. Her parents’ unorthodox decision to conceive Anna to be harvested is just one example of how parents can make choices without thinking about the long-term outcomes on the family unit when they are faced with the potential mortality of their child.

After a cross analysis with Davis and Crane’s (2020) stories working in a pediatric palliative care unit (PPCT), it is evident that there are many similarities between these parents and the parents in “My Sister’s Keeper.” Through their ethnographic study, the authors were able to draw many conclusions regarding parents in this unique and horrific situation. In this case study, I aim to apply their findings to this film to show how truly difficult this situation can be for parents so that others can better understand why these choices may be made. In the movie “My Sister’s Keeper”, it is evident that parents often make extreme decisions when faced with an ill child, such as restricting overall quality of life and free will and neglecting autonomy with little thought of how the decisions will affect the child and the family unit as a whole.

Before she began to get sick, Kate was a normal child. After many tests and visits to the doctor, Kate is diagnosed with acute leukemia, leaving her parents Sara and Brian heartbroken and frantic. As stated by Davis and Crane (2020), “there is a quick transition from the comfort of childhood to the word of medical treatment (life sustaining) and for many a hard death” (p. 14). Kate quickly goes from her normal life to a life in and out of the hospital. Sara and Brian are willing to do anything to save Kate’s life, and with the off-the-record advice of her doctor, they make the decision to genetically conceive Anna in vitro as a donor child. Although this is not their first choice, Sara, Brian and Kate’s older brother Jesse are not DNA matches for the blood and marrow Kate will desperately need to prolong her life. After finding out their child may die, parents are forced to make extremely complex and important decisions with very little time to think (Davis & Crane, 2020, p. 17). With Kate’s illness progressing rapidly, her parents are left with little time to make a decision. Finding a DNA match through traditional methods will take too long, forcing her parents to think outside the box. Although their decision can be seen as immoral, they were desperate to keep their daughter alive as many parents in this situation are. When making this decision, they are not thinking about their unborn child’s future life, but instead only of Kate. After the delivery of news that their child may die, parents might focus on the sick child at the expense of the healthy family members.

Immediately after she was born, Anna’s life was restricted by her parents in order to keep her healthy for Kate’s donations. She was unable to participate in sports or spend much time with friends, as she navigated in and out of the hospital for procedures. Although Anna is healthy and Kate is not, they are living a similar lifestyle hindered by medical treatments. In the article, Davis and Crane quote Dr. Mary Forsyth as she states, “When we focus so intensely on symptoms individually, we fragment the illness, and often overlook some of the long-term decisions we are making” (Davis & Crane, 2020, p. 16). This is exactly what Sara and Brian do when they find out Kate is going into renal failure at the age of 15. Sara and Brian are so focused on Kate’s worsening condition now spreading to her kidneys, that they cannot understand why Anna would not want to help her sister. Throughout the film, Anna is almost

manipulated by her mother, as she repeatedly tells her to “keep helping her sister.” No matter how much pain and suffering being a donor causes Anna, she continues to do as she’s told up until this point. Even though we find out that Kate has asked Anna to sue for medical emancipation, it is still important to note that her parents were disregarding Anna’s future by asking her to donate her kidney to Kate. By donating a kidney at such a young age, Anna’s life would be changed forever. She would be unable to participate in many of life’s enjoyments, such as drinking alcohol and competing on a team. None of this is important to her parents at the time, as Kate’s illness clouds their decision-making processes.

Similar to the way that their parents restrict Anna’s free will, they also neglect Kate’s autonomy. As Kate’s illness progresses, Sara grows an obsession with keeping her daughter alive at all costs, even at the expense of the ill person’s free will and self-determination. This is what is known as protective autonomy, where the life of the ill is protected at all costs. Kate longs for respectful autonomy, where the wishes of the one who is ill are respected. At no point is Kate asked by her parents what she wants in terms of medical interventions, but instead she is told that she has to keep fighting and go on with the procedures, despite how tired she is. Parents of terminally ill children are stripped of agency as they are unable to make a difference in how life will play out for their child (Davis & Crane, 2020, p. 27). Sara is in denial that she is no longer the one in charge of Kate’s life and that the cancer is going to take over. We can compare this situation to that of Jenn in Davis and Crane’s stories in the PPCT unit. Jenn is the mother of Hunter, a 14-year-old boy with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. Although Hunter may survive, his life will be completely different. He will require to be hooked up to all sorts of equipment to live, changing the routine of the whole family. He is not getting worse or better, and it is unclear how the illness will shape his future. Parents often take extreme measures without considering the quality of life for the child (Davis & Crane, 2020, p. 16). Like Hunter, Kate is alive but with little quality of life. She is clearly too sick to go through a kidney transplant and wishes to be put to rest and stop suffering. Her parents, and more so her mother Sara, neglect Kate’s deteriorating quality of life as she fights leukemia.

Even with a kidney transplant, her health will continue to decline, but Sara is only thinking about whether Kate is alive or dead rather than how she is feeling being alive.

As seen in the film, when a child in the family is faced with a terminal illness, it can affect the family unit as whole. Kate's brother Jesse often felt neglected, as all the focus was on Kate's survival. Kate was tired of the spotlight being on her and yearned for a normal childhood. For example, at one point Jesse is not thinking and tackles Kate playing football. Sara is very angry at him, but Kate actually is happy that Jesse forgot about her illness for a second. Sara and Brian's relationship also suffers, as they begin to fight a lot. The only thing holding their marriage together is trying to keep Kate alive. For example, in the last few days of her life Kate desperately wants to go to the beach. At this point, Brian is coming to terms with Kate's approaching death, so he agrees to take the family to the beach. Sara becomes extremely angry and even asks for a divorce when she finds out Kate is out of the hospital. This shows how parents can start to have different decisions at the end of their child's life. Brian has shifted his focus onto making Kate happy and comfortable during the end stages of her life, while Sara is still fighting for the survival of her daughter. The effect on Kate's family shows that when we can't make sense of the illness, it causes chaos that takes over the lives of the entire family (Davis & Crane, 2020, p. 22). The family does not understand why this had to happen to Kate, nor does any family with an ill child. Similarly, one of Davis and Crane's stories is about Karen, the mother of Bonnie, a 15 year old with Rett Syndrome. Bonnie has been in and out of the hospital her entire life, which has been extremely difficult on the family. Her condition consumes their lives, resulting in a divorce between Karen and her husband. Both of these examples show the immense impacts that illness can have on a family, especially the family unit's wholeness, unity, and structural integrity.

Through a cross analysis of "My Sister's Keeper" and Davis and Crane's stories working in a PPCT unit, it is clear that the terminal illness of a child can be difficult to prepare for. This film is just an example of the hard reality that these families are dealing with as their assumptive worlds are shattered. Parents

assume that they will be able to raise their child and watch them grow up, but this is taken away by the illness. Although proper grieving is necessary, parents who lose a child must work toward post-traumatic growth in order to keep the rest of their family intact. Through watching movies or reading stories like the ones discussed, parents in these situations can gain a sense of comfort that they are not alone, no matter how much it may feel that way. The findings of this case study can allow us to understand some of the decisions parents make, no matter how irrational they may seem to the outside perspective. We cannot understand the thought processes of these parents unless we are in the same situation, but we can use others' situations to aid and comfort parents who are faced with losing their child to illness.

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Empathy Meditation to Soothe Division

Kaley Lambert

Introduction

In modern society, particularly in the United States, there is a sense of harsh, **polarized** division which is largely counterproductive for any sort of societal harmony. In *Speaking of Psychology: The decline of empathy and the rise of narcissism* social psychologist Sara Konrath details scientific findings that document empathy decline in the United States up to 2009. Konrath implies a suspicion that this decline has likely continued. She also expresses a considerably strong belief that while empathy within an individual is influenced by natural/genetic factors, it is **also** influenced by cultural factors and restraints. (Luna & Konrath, 2019) Empathy may be understood as some sort of acknowledgment, understanding, and concern for the experiences, especially those which are negative, of others. Many United States citizens, and much of humanity as a whole, have increasingly been facing monumental levels of stress and hardships in recent history. Professors Judith Hall and Mark Leary hold that the **felt** absence of empathy “- makes the medical, economic, political and societal assaults on our fundamental trust in the world even harder to handle.” (Hall & Leary, 2020) One may argue that societal absence and/or decline of empathy may be a contributing factor to the strong presence of harsh division in the United States. There may exist practices and endeavors that would allow individual citizens and communities to engage with and increase empathy **and** decrease stress. Such practices may in turn possibly function as means for citizens to better engage with pursuits that may ultimately make societal harmony more attainable.

One possible empathy-encouraging and stress-reducing practice is meditation. *Resting-State Functional Connectivity Link Mindfulness Meditation With Reduced Interleukin-6: A Randomized Controlled Trial* suggests that participating in meditation practices may decrease stress levels in an individual. (Creswell et al., 2016:53-60) The Buddhist *Metta Bhavana* meditation, also known as the loving-kindness meditation, is one such practice that is specifically conducted to build compassion for oneself and others (empathy) as well as for developing general inner peace and mindfulness (stress relief). This practice involves the practitioner reciting phrases of good-natured intentions and kindness toward themselves, a loved one, a neutral figure in their life, and a negative figure in their life, while deliberately thinking of something that brings them positive/peaceful feelings. One may argue that a program/activity that provides a designated opportunity to engage with this practice could contribute to an increase in empathy and a decrease in stress for participants. For this paper, I took part in an activity centered around the practice of Metta Bhavana meditation, which I will detail and reference in support of this argument.

Case Study

The aforementioned activity involved the following elements/steps:

- Practicing the Metta Bhavana meditation for multiple days.
- Writing down the positive/peaceful thought that arose while conducting the Metta Bhavana meditation on an index card.
- Exchanging said card with a partnered classmate, who also conducted the aforementioned steps. Both proceeding to in some way attach their partner's index card to their cellphone.
- Over a week, sending photos to one's partner based on the thought(s) written on the index card

provided by their partner. {The activity intended for these photos to be sent over time, but my partner and I took them over time and sent them all at once.}

- Deliberately considering and paying heed to mindfulness of one's environment and self and extending the Metta Bhavana intentions to one's partner while taking pictures in one's environment.

In my experience with this activity, I feel I developed a stronger sense of connection to and empathy for my assigned partner. On a daily basis I was reminded of, and aware of, a peaceful and positive memory in her life, as well as the factors within said memory that I presumed contributed to its positivity. Her memory involved sitting in her backyard with her family and listening to music. From this alone, I learned that family, the outdoors, and music are peaceful and positive thoughts/concepts for her.

I myself wrote down the quote my partner provided me regarding her memory onto an index card, which I trimmed and kept facing outward within my clear phone case. This resulted in me considering my partner **and** her positive memory often, as they would come to mind most times I picked up/ looked at my phone. In turn, I'd often lift my phone and take note of my surroundings to determine if I thought there was any relevant content for me to photograph and send to my partner. This summative chain reaction overall led to, I believe, me engaging more critically and mindfully with my environment, as well as with thoughts of my partner.

Before this activity, I solely knew my partner as a classmate/peer on a superficial level, and as such, I never considered/thought of her in any way outside of the classroom. Within this activity, though, I dedicated both **physical space** (within my phone case/ attached to my phone entirely) and **time** in my life toward considering and thinking of this individual to whom I previously held minimal attachment, while also wholly aware that she was doing the same thing concerning

me. The thought of this mutual commitment brought me ample joy. It is a peaceful thought to be reminded that someone else in the world cares about/ may be thinking about you, even if it may just be for the sake of finishing an assignment. Being reminded that you have a purpose/ that you function as a positive entity in someone else's life can help soothe feelings of self-doubt and stress that arise when one feels insignificant or unimportant.

As an unexpected positive consequence of this activity, I found myself sending similar messages to my loved ones and friends, as well as being more present in and conscious of my environment and phone use. I often pick up my phone when in situations where I feel awkward or bored. By engaging with this activity, I feel I had a task that I could actively engage with when picking up my phone instead of aimlessly scrolling social media, which often leaves me feeling insecure or dissatisfied. In comparison, whenever I took a photo intended for my partner (or a friend) I was reminded of the Metta Bhavana guiding statements and was left with positive feelings.

Solutions

In that this activity and experience allowed me to consider and care about my partner's happiness, as well as to feel considered and cared about by her, all while being more mindful of my environment-I hold the idea that this activity and others like it may encourage and increase empathy. As such, I propose the following program as another possible endeavor to accomplish this same positive outcome:

- A small, meditative summer program/course offered for credit for college students, wherein participating students would meet twice weekly to practice Metta Bhavana meditation and affiliated activities.

- For the first session of the course, the entire timeslot would be dedicated to doing introductions, low-pressure and low-commitment bonding exercises, and allowing students an opportunity to get to know one another.
- Proceeding sessions would alternate with one day each week dedicated to further bonding activities and discussion time, and the other day each week dedicated to group sessions of Metta Bhavana meditation.
- At the start of the course, students would provide one another with documents that include:
 - Their name
 - Happy memories of theirs/things they enjoy
 - And an image of their choosing
- Throughout the course, students are required to compile some sort of individualized, physical scrapbook-esque-documents with an array of writing, images, newspaper clippings, playlists, doodles, scent swatches, lyrics, audio links, etc. that they feel remind them of their classmates or in some way relate to their feelings about their classmates, which they would add to and work on throughout the course. The creators of these compositions would be anonymous to the receivers of them to promote sincerity and vulnerability in creating them but would be kept track of by the course instructor.
- All students would be required to compose at minimum one scrapbook page **for** and have at least one scrapbook page composed for them **by** all of their classmates.
- All students would have a “mailbox” in the classroom, within which the scrapbook documents meant **for** them would be collected during the second-to-last week of the course.
- The final assignment for the course would entail each student writing/recording responses to each of the compositions, which would then be distributed to the composition constructors by

the course instructor.

The intention behind this proposed program is for the participating students to develop bonds, empathy, compassion, and relationships with one another. The thinking behind the students physically sharing space while conducting the Metta Bhavana meditations and bonding-classes is rooted in the idea that experiences of *intercorporeal co-presence* (shared presence in physical spaces) make way for stronger relationships and connections. (Katila et al., 2020: 422-426)

Katila et. al also discuss the importance of shared experiences being *multi-sensorial*. That is, the use and engagement of multiple senses in a given interaction often make for an encounter having more depth and significance to participants. (2020: 423-426) This idea is applied in this program through the shared-space experiences that may be possible within the class sessions, and in the composition assignments being physical, likely tactile creations which can at minimum be touched by all parties, but also likely seen, and maybe even smelt/heard-which may lead to them functioning as sensory conductors for interactions with more depth.

The compositions-creating assignment is intended to have the same effect as the previously mentioned index card and pictures, in that the assignment would encourage students to think of and be conscious of one another and their surroundings while moving through the world. Lorne M. Buchman touches on the deeply personal and powerful nature of **making** something, which is a largely inspirational factor behind the idea of the composition assignment. (2021: 184) In that the students would be not only making things but also thinking of each other while doing so, it may be that they would in some way associate their personal, intimate feelings of power-through-creation with thoughts of their classmates, which could, in turn, strengthen the connections they would (ideally) be building.

Conclusion

In that widespread lack of empathy and the presence of excess stress may be contributing factors toward harsh social division in the United States, programs to increase empathy and decrease stress may help to soothe these issues. Meditation functions as an activity that can decrease stress and, particularly in the case of Metta Bhavana practices, may encourage empathy and compassion for others. Multi-sensorial experiences and intercorporeal encounters make for richer connection-building. As such, a program centered around Metta Bhavana meditations with particular consideration toward intercorporeality and multi-sensorial richness may strengthen the connections and empathy of participants, who in turn might then hold better skills to address social division in pursuits for societal harmony. The proposed program detailed in this paper applies each of these concepts and may function to accomplish this goal.

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Remembering the AIDS Crisis & ACT UP: The Failures of the American Public, Government, and Cultural Institutions

Céilí Flot

To some Americans, the 1980s are remembered fondly. Warped with nostalgia and unwavering in their romanticization of these years, they see this as a time where pop culture flourished, where the supposed quest for American greatness was on track again, and where the interests of American citizens were supposedly protected by their charismatic president who led with a strong hand. To other Americans, this decade is remembered by the moral failures of their government in protecting the people they serve while their fellow citizens watched complacently. They remember how their friends, who were seemingly young and able bodied, had fallen inexplicably ill and had quickly deteriorated to a growing disease. They remember the hysteria that ensued when this disease was named and traced— where their fellow citizens spouted alarmism and cried for isolationist tactics of the community it had predominantly affected. Treated like lepers, these Americans remember the 1980s as a time where they had to take matters into their own hands and fight for their life. The AIDS crisis officially started in America in 1981 and was coined as AIDS, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, in the summer of 1982 (CDC). From the very beginning of its onslaught, epidemiologists had traced its disproportionate impact on metropolitan gay communities and had reported on these findings. As this new and unprecedented disease was swiftly killing those who were infected, the country responded in hysteria rather than advocating for research and treatment. Paired with their fear and ignorance, many citizens believed AIDS to be a disease that only affected gay people, who should thus be separated from infecting heterosexual Americans. Some took this homophobic rhetoric to the extreme— deeming the rise of AIDS to be a plague sent from God

himself in punishing the promiscuity of gay men who live their lives in sacrilege. Others saw the outbreak as a taboo not to be mentioned, an unfortunate outcome caused by promiscuity and carelessness. These values were mirrored by the American government who refused to address the outbreak of AIDS as a serious problem in the realm of public health. After much criticism, it wasn't until 1985 in which President Ronald Reagan briefly mentioned AIDS and the administration's funding efforts towards research during a press briefing. By then, there were 13,309 known AIDS related deaths in the United States— a death toll that inevitably rose to over 20,000 by 1987 (Criswell).

Formed in March of 1987, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, stylized as ACT UP, was formed during a meeting at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center in New York City. It was here when American playwright and activist Larry Kramer, often noted as the catalyst for this movement, delivered a fiery speech regarding the inefficient handling of the AIDS crisis, stating "If my speech tonight doesn't scare the shit out of you, we're in real trouble. If what you're hearing doesn't rouse you to anger, fury, rage, and action, gay men will have no future here on earth. How long does it take before you get angry and fight back?" (Mass 1997).

Inspired by these remarks, fueled by their rage, and motivated to make themselves be heard by their government and the citizens who ignored their suffering, a group of three hundred individuals promised to fight back. From that important meeting, ACT UP continued to grow in size in New York and in cities across the nation. Determined to force action, they began to engage in theatrical protests that worked to grab the attention of the general public who had avoided the suffering of AIDS victims out of fear and ignorance. These engaging protests were well documented by activists within the organization and by journalists who covered their

actions through photographing each protest event and spreading it to be seen nationwide. ACT UP humanized those suffering from AIDS in a world where they were relentlessly stigmatized and ignored by the public— forcing their audience to perceive them as real, embodied people whose government sat still and remained actionless while they died. They worked to repeatedly reveal the negligence of the government and our institutions in failing to protect the health and safety of American citizens during their protests. Through doing so, they argued that citizens and our institutions had committed a lapse of morality in contributing to the spread of a preventable illness.

“WE DIE, THEY DO NOTHING” : Capturing Attention & Inspiring Sympathy



Taken by Jim Estrin/The New York Times in 1991

ACT UP faced a major challenge in making their voices heard, as the public was unwilling to listen to their plight out of ignorance or pure callousness. The media had also contributed to the lack of AIDS awareness in the early days of its spread: “Though more than half of

those stricken were residents of New York City, *The New York Times* wrote only three stories about AIDS in 1981 and three more in 1982—all of which went on the inside pages” (Tumulty 2021). While activists involved in AIDS demonstrations centered their attention to addressing this crisis, the media and public were complicit in this attention disparity and far too

busy conducting their normal operations and way of life to care for those being affected by AIDS. Noting this disconnect, ACT UP orchestrated visually commanding protests that gave the public a view into their world and demanded their attention. During the 1991 protest at Grand Central Square Station, photographed by Jim Estrin, members of ACT UP had covered the train arrival times with a banner reading “ONE AIDS DEATH EVERY 8 MINUTES”. Purposely doing this during rush hour, this protest served as a nuisance and a disrupter of the normal proceedings within this space as the viewers aimlessly attempted to find their boarding times to no avail. Unlike the reports tracking the number of AIDS casualties that they might otherwise have skipped on the television news cycle; the viewer cannot press a button on their remote to change this image and ultimately has no choice but to look on (Flot 2022). This was a major tactic that shaped the way the group would conduct their protest— They refused to be silenced and made it incredibly difficult for those passing by to sweep these deaths under the rug. While ACT UP conducted these elaborate protests to catch the attention of the public, there was another difficulty— sustaining that attention and inspiring sympathy from those removed from the plight of AIDS. With homophobia alive and well during this time, the nation was generally unsympathetic to those predominantly affected by the AIDS crisis and were instead worried for their own lives. This lack of sympathy didn't necessarily stem from a genuine hatred of homosexuality, but rather the ignorance that was typical of the time. Much of the country struggled in understanding homosexuality and had their perceptions of it shaped through the stereotypes perpetuated by the media, the church, and overwhelming



Taken by Frank Fournier in 1987.

cultural values that suppressed anything that differed from the nuclear family model. With that in mind, ACT UP conducted these protests to stretch the minds of the people who were so accustomed to seeing them as outsiders to instead see them as people whose lives mattered, regardless of sexuality and illness. Fournier's photograph taken of the GMHC, a partnered group of ACT UP, during the Gay Pride Parade in 1987 demonstrates the dedication to breaking down those barriers and fostering sympathy for their plight. The center of the photograph is focused on an empty wheelchair being pushed by two men. Without knowing the context of this photo, the empty wheelchair serves as an iconic code of loss that applies to everyone regardless of our experiences. The viewer is provoked into thinking about the missing presence within that chair, the life that was lived and the life that was lost. In turn, it forces us to reflect upon our own missing loved ones— family members, our friends, and our lovers who we have lost throughout the years. Through drawing upon an iconic and universal experience, ACT UP effectively knocked down barriers separating their lives from the public. They effectively compelled these outsiders to understand that while they may differ in sexuality, politics, and beliefs, everyone can understand the pain that comes with the loss of life and the grief that follows.

When entering public spaces, ACT UP strategically planned their protests to address the silence of the public as they remained careless and unfeeling while their fellow citizens died.

Furthermore, they made their protests noteworthy in order to attract the attention of the media who had previously slighted the AIDS crisis for more acceptable and less controversial stories.

Through these protests, they argued that the inattention of the public and media is shameful when the lives of AIDS patients are needlessly lost while the public carried on in their own lives

unaffected and unangry. As activists who were affected by the AIDS crisis or had AIDS themselves, they conveyed that the public and media were complicit with the inefficient handling of the AIDS crisis and were too far entrenched in their own systemic beliefs to realize that they had turned their backs on those who suffer. Regardless of the categorical barriers that worked to separate them, ACT UP forced the unfeeling public to recognize their moral lapse as they stood still— ignoring the plight of citizens whose society was shunning and failing them.

“SILENCE = DEATH”: Confronting Our Institutions

Ensuring that their voices be heard and that their suffering didn't go unnoticed, ACT UP relentlessly confronted the government, its departments, and valued American cultural institutions through persistent protest. Similar to how they approached other public demonstrations, they conducted their protests to make the loss of life be seen and unable to ignore. However, these demonstrations targeted towards the government centered around framing this needless loss of life as a direct failure of the government who promised to protect them. These protests point to the main perpetrators in the mishandling of the crisis and directly cement their guilt. During the first few years of the outbreak, the Reagan administration had refused to address the AIDS crisis as a consequential matter. Driven by their dedication to true conservatism and warped by conclusions that AIDS was a moral and religious challenge rather than a public health issue, the executive branch remained silent in responding to the AIDS crisis and had instead worked towards removing funding dedicated to matters of public health— something that would inadvertently affect AIDS patients as they sought care for their



Taken by Catherine McGann in 1988.

deteriorating immune system. In a photograph taken by Catherine McGann in 1988, we see ACT UP demonstrators holding large cardboard signs featuring the faces of political figures—some who have direct ties to the Reagan Administration and others who have spouted conservatism to the masses. The protesters paired these faces with linguistic messages, as the cutouts feature the last names of the political figures emboldened with the words “GUILTY” written on their foreheads. In the background, the face of Hitler looms over the faces of President Reagan and Vice President Bush. Paired with a banner reading their mantra “SILENCE = DEATH”, the members of ACT UP conveyed that these leaders are not only guilty and responsible for the death of thousands of Americans, but that they have desecrated the once esteemed American democratic values with their complacency— as they chose to subscribe to their own conservative agenda rather than working to save the lives of American citizens.

ACT UP went on to further address the inefficiency of governmental institutions outside of the Executive Branch, choosing to target the U.S. Food and Drug Administration over ethical concerns regarding treatment of AIDS patients and the clinical trial process. During the late

1980s, there had been a push to conduct more research in finding a cure to AIDS. While this push was significant from previous governmental inaction, the FDA was slow moving in its work and dragged down by bureaucratic order that prevented the widespread access of treatment for



Taken by Peter Asnin in 1988.

AIDS patients. After noting this process, conducting research on clinical trials, and learning of the unethical practice of double-blind placebo testing, ACT UP spearheaded a “die in” protest at the FDA headquarters in Maryland. The photograph taken by Asnin demonstrates the protesters plopping themselves down in front of one of the uppermost institutions tasked to handle matters of public safety and playing dead as the arrangement of their still bodies mimic a set of graves. In their hands, they hold pieces of cardboard modeled to serve as tombstones. ACT UP forced the FDA workers and the greater audience to perceive the deaths caused by their inefficiency. While their bodies also serve as a protest, the linguistic messages spread throughout the photograph are essential in conveying their message. The protestors challenge the moral ethics of the FDA in the process of drug testing and assume their guilt— “I DIED FOR THE SINS OF THE FDA”, “KILLED BY THE SYSTEM”, and “I GOT THE PLACEBO”. This particular protest would be illegible without the strong linguistic messages— viewers would be perplexed in trying to comprehend the meaning of the arrangement of their bodies, the purpose, and its significance had the cardboard gravestones been blank (Flot 2022). Through directly confronting the inefficiency of the FDA in not meeting the increasing loss of American life due to a disease which they are tasked with treating, ACT UP argues that the FDA had conducted

their research without moral compass and that their arbitrary bureaucratic processes have contributed to a loss of life.

In addition to addressing the silence and complacency of the government, ACT UP worked to confront the religious institutions whose belief systems had instilled and perpetuated ignorant rhetoric that had shaped public and governing perceptions of homosexual Americans—particularly those with AIDS. Furthermore, they conveyed that the traditional values of the church worked actively against the prevention of the spread of AIDS. While the Catholic Church had consistently preached views of harboring the sick and disadvantaged including those with AIDS, they congruently preached on the sanctity of marriage between man and woman, the sin of homosexuality, and the mortal sin of any form of contraception including condoms which had been scientifically proven to be the most effective measure in preventing the spread of AIDS.

This was of particular interest to ACT UP who had shaped their goals to not only advocate for direct action from the government in AIDS research but for the normalization of safe sex practice and discussion. After the Archbishop of New York had argued against HIV/AIDS prevention education and the distribution of condoms within public schools, ACT UP had staged a demonstration at St. Patrick's Cathedral located in New York, crowding the outside entrance and eventually attending the regularly scheduled Sunday mass. In the photo taken by Meryl Levin during this protest, there are 3 central figures in focus— 2 young female protesters embracing and clutching an AIDS awareness pamphlet while an older nun sits to the right of them. The young women stare ahead past the lens of the camera, presumably looking to the



Taken by Meryl Levin in 1990

altar, while the nun stares deeply into the camera with an unreadable expression. The contrast between this differing set of figures is palpable. Despite these three figures sharing similar characteristics in being women sitting in the same place of worship and in the same pews, they are separated not only by the physical space in

between them, but also by their manner of dress, their age, and the values they hold. The photo ultimately represents the disconnect between these two groups of people— the AIDS activists pushing for necessary change and the Christian believers who advocate against that change. It works to depict the Catholic Church and its constituents' refusal to abandon their traditional religious dogmas during a crisis in which thousands of lives are being lost to a relentless disease. Through this protest and the photo documentation it prompted, ACT UP argued that a cultural institution once prevailed as a pinnacle of morality and human reason had contributed to the plight of AIDS by acting out of self-interest, directly advocating against preventative measures that could save lives.

Ultimately, ACT UP had conducted their protest to face up to both the government and the religious institutions who worked to shape our culture. In Sotomayor's photograph taken outside a Manhattan church, we see a culmination of this effort as the protesters of ACT UP are surrounded by codes that reference the social institutions



Taken by John Sotomayor in 1987

who have passively or directly led to the progression of the AIDS epidemic. As they stand at the stairwell of a church whose ideology actively worked against AIDS prevention, clutching their signs filled with President Reagan's face and linguistic messages condemning his silence, the iconic code of the American flag billows in the wind above them. What was once seen as a prevailing message of freedom, protection, and justice, is dull in comparison to the chaos below. Under their own national flag, these members of ACT UP fight for their life to be protected by the institutions that were once revered and driven by their flag's message.

“ACT UP! FIGHT BACK! FIGHT AIDS!”: Conclusions

In closing, ACT UP had played a massive role in altering the course in the handling of the AIDS crisis— they relentlessly waged demonstrations determined to compel the public and our institutions to properly address the epidemic as a serious matter of public health. Some may say that they had succeeded as they had effectively tackled the manner in which clinical drug trials are conducted. Following their mantra of “drugs into bodies”, they had ushered forth a new practice of patient advocacy in which AIDS patients could actively be taking experimental drugs

to address their illness rather than waiting for a definitive cure which could have taken years to create and research. This model went on to affect the FDA's previous order of operations in the medical process. In a *New York Times* interview, Dr. Anthony Fauci notably stated "Did Act-Up play a significant role in the whole idea of expanded access to experimental drugs? The answer is yes" (DeParle 1990). Eventually, these experimental drugs made way for the creation of effective treatments to come. Today, as a generation removed from the hysteria and suffering of the AIDS crisis, we live comfortably. Because of the advancements made, a person with AIDS can live a long life through receiving proper treatment. While some argue that this chapter of suffering is over and that the long battle was won, ACT UP does not celebrate nor rejoice in these developments: "ACT UP since 1987— we're not celebrating. While ACT UP has an incredible history, HIV/AIDS is not history. HIV/AIDS is very much with us. And we call on you to join our fight to end AIDS" (ACT UP 2022). Determined to continue the fight for the end of AIDS, they meet every Monday to this day. Furthermore, they continue to acknowledge the past handling of the AIDS crisis, dedicating a whole page of their website to document their efforts made in the 1980s and 1990s. Despite general understanding of the culture in the 1980s, these photographs serve as a stain in American history. While time has passed and the world is not where it was then, their arguments are the same and are as relevant as ever. Serving as a harsh reminder of the moral failures of our nation in stigmatizing those suffering from an unforgiving and cruel virus, ACT UP continues to argue that the American public, our government, and our institutions have blood on our hands in remaining silent while citizens. Through doing so, they ask us to abandon the stigmatization of disease and suffering and to instead recognize the preventable deaths of Americans. They ask us to question how the cultural institutions we hold close to us could allow this epidemic to spread rampantly and kill thousands

before significant action was taken. Through their story, they ask us to act up and fight back when these institutions, plagued by corruption and self-interest, fail to protect us.

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Kill "Objectivity," Save the Planet? (Or at least have a better chance to)

Kaley Lambert

Objectivity as an ethical goal for journalistic standards hinders efforts to address the global climate crisis. Supposedly-objective media sources disadvantage the voices of marginalized communities, which are primarily the hardest-hit victims of climate crisis threats and damage, while simultaneously privileging climate crisis/climate change opinions held by a minority of scientists. These sources also privilege stances from corporations, governments, and individuals in positions of high power, which further disadvantages marginalized voices. This standard, as well as feigned objectivity and misrepresented subjectivity practices, may be detrimental to community and audience trust in environmental media sources. Civic engagement and community collaboration are heavily influenced by the absence or presence of community trust and are necessary for efforts to combat the climate crisis. As such, one may argue that environmental media standards should shift toward an alternative ethical framework so as to mitigate the ever-increasing threat of global climate catastrophe.

Arguments against and Issues with Objectivity

Objectivity may be understood as the idea of working with freedom from bias. Researcher Richard Kaplan attests that objectivity has been pushed as an ethical goal for journalistic standards in the United States for over one hundred years, gaining particular popularity between 1865 and 1920, as noted in *Theory Review the Ideal and the Myth of Objectivity* (Poerksen). While there may be merit to the ethical ideas that lead an individual to seek or value objectivity, substantial critiques have been raised that highlight deeply concerning issues with this standard

as well as the content-creation habits and mentalities it inspires. These arguments outweigh those in favor of objectivity. Such issues regarding environmental media may include but are not limited to: privileging unsupported stances and disadvantaging marginalized voices.

Regarding the matter of supposedly-objective journalism advantaging climate change/climate crisis opinions held by a minority of scientists, in the summary for *Objectivity, False Balance, and Advocacy in News Coverage of Climate Change*, Declan Fahy states:

Journalists have struggled historically to apply the notion of balance to the reporting of climate change science, because even though the overwhelming majority of the world's experts agree that human-driven climate change is real and will have major future impacts, a minority of scientists dispute this consensus. Reporters aimed to be fair by giving both viewpoints equal attention, a practice scholars have labeled false balance. (Fahy)

This practice advantages opinions with less scientific backing and, as such, possibly contributes to the concerning climate change/climate crisis denial perspectives held by an estimated 14% of United States Citizens in 2021 (*Yale Climate Opinion Maps 2021*).

In contrast to objective journalism offering an advantage to opinions held by a scientific minority, this standard **disadvantages** the voices of marginalized communities and individuals. Journalists from these backgrounds face disproportionate professional challenges such as racial profiling in the workplace, unfair disciplinary treatments, expectations of extra un-compensated labor, tokenization, mental health stigma and lack of resources, economic disadvantages, and other troublesome influences (Ingram). In a system that buys into objectivity as a goal for journalists, said journalists are held to an overwhelmingly unreasonable expectation to **present**

themselves and their content as impartial, balanced, and devoid of emotional influence as possible. In this structure, journalists from marginalized backgrounds are effectively forced to ignore or underplay events, forces, and systems of injustice in their reporting and their own lives- lest they risk unemployment or professional backlash. In conjunction with the lofty expectations brought on by objective journalism standards, the burden of these forced disadvantages is undoubtedly heavy and likely makes for dissatisfying and uncomfortable workplace environments.

Opinion piece *Objective Journalism Doesn't Exist* for the *Harvard Crimson* touches upon the issue of objectivity playing into harmful structures of power and states that supposedly-objective journalism encourages harmful perspectives which privilege "-powerful entities like the state and large corporations, entities that have enough power to influence and produce narratives, to inform and shape truth to match their agenda. In doing so, it normalizes the very real tools that systems of power can use to delegitimize and threaten the marginalized" (Singh). There is a significant historical precedent of financially and socially powerful individuals directly influencing media outlets. *How the Ultrarich Use Media Ownership as a Political Investment* is a study on the influence of the incredibly wealthy via media outlet control, which includes a highlighted example of such influence wherein a right-wing billionaire created a right-wing newspaper source that actively affected the outcome of Israel elections and national politics in his favor (Grossman et al.).

Unfathomably wealthy corporations and individuals in the United States exert similar influence upon government policies, including ones pertaining to environmental pursuits. For instance, as reported by *The Washington post*:

Walmart has set targets of reaching net-zero emissions across its global operations by 2040 and reducing supply chain emissions by 1 billion metric tons by 2030. But the retail company gave \$180,325 to RAGA in the 2016 election cycle, \$182,750 in the 2018 cycle and \$270,100 in the 2020 cycle. Walmart also donated \$12,500 in the 2020 cycle to the campaign of Utah Attorney General Sean Reyes (R), who joined a lawsuit to stop President Biden from revoking a key permit for the Keystone XL pipeline. (Joselow and Montalbano)

These corporations and individuals may also influence environmental media content and pursuits by applying their financial and social influence to push for publications, ideas, and policies that benefit themselves and possibly hinder climate crisis mitigation and action policies. Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, the two wealthiest individuals in the world, each own at least one media-content company. (*Forbes Billionaires 2022: The RICHEST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD*) Bezos owns *The Washington Post*, and Musk recently took ownership of *Twitter*, a globally influential social media site.

If one holds Singh's claim to be accurate, this issue with objectivity may be especially concerning with regard to environmental media. The climate crisis disproportionately affects marginalized communities, as supported by the *2021 United States Environmental Protection Agency Report*, which:

-shows that the most severe harms from climate change fall disproportionately upon underserved communities who are least able to prepare for, and recover from, heat waves, poor air quality, flooding, and other impacts. EPA's analysis indicates that racial and ethnic minority communities are particularly vulnerable to the greatest impacts of climate change. (*EPA Report*

Disproportionate Impacts of Climate Change on Socially Vulnerable Populations in the United States)

If content aiming for objectivity disadvantages voices from marginalized communities, it is likely that such supposedly-objective media would not accurately represent the effects of the climate crisis in these communities. This is pointedly dangerous in that marginalized communities have the highest need for support and aid in combatting the harmful effects of the climate crisis and would be less likely to receive such aid if this need is unrepresented.

Possibility of Objectivity and Feigned Objectivity

In addition to issues with objectivity as a journalistic standard, many arguments have been raised claiming that objectivity is outright not possible/ is a myth. *Constructivist* perspectives, for example, largely hold that "- absolute knowledge of truth is impossible, i.e. that we as human beings are inescapably biased" (Poersken 295). This is a compelling argument as individual backgrounds and differing racial, economic, gender, sexuality, ability/ability, and other personal identity statuses may profoundly influence one's stances and perceptions of the world. Whether or not objectivity exists, ample pieces of environmental media content that incorrectly **present** themselves as objective may be observed in United States media. Two pieces of such content are *Climate Activists in Berlin Glue Themselves to Airport Runway, Disrupting Air Travel*(Nerozzi) and *Trump's Questionnaire to Govt. Climate Scientists Just Leaked, and It's Terrifying* (Colagiovanni).

Climate Activists in Berlin Glue Themselves to Airport Runway, Disrupting Air Travel is an article by Timothy Nerozzi for *Fox News*, a right-leaning source according to the *Ad Fontes*

Media Bias Chart. (Interactive Media Bias Chart) This article has multiple features, which *All Sides*, a company aiming to address and provide resources to recognize media bias, claims signifies a biased and opinion-centered piece. *(How to Spot 16 Types of Media Bias) Trump's Questionnaire to Govt. Climate Scientists Just Leaked, and It's Terrifying* is an article by Lou Colagiovanni for *Occupy Democrats*, a source labeled as left-leaning by *Ad Fontes*, similarly contains elements signaled by *All Sides* as indicative of biased or opinionated content. Neither article is labeled as an opinion piece despite both host websites containing designated categories for opinionated content. This disparity implies that the sources are either feigning objectivity (that is, deliberately hiding that they are subjective) or are, at minimum, misrepresenting their biases and subjective nature.

Trust and Engagement

Some defenders of objective journalism point to gaining and holding media trust as a motivation to strive for objectivity. *Objectivity wars, and the future of media trust* documents a panel discussion among journalists and journalism scholars Kyle Pope, David Greenberg, Lewis Raven Wallace, Wesley Lowery, Andie Tucher, and Masha Gessen. As documented in *Objectivity wars, and the future of media trust*, there are journalism scholars who hold and reiterate the sentiment that objectivity breeds audience trust, such as David Greenberg, who fears that "A loss of objectivity within traditional news organizations(...)could result in a loss in confidence in the press"(Russell). Greenberg does not push that all journalism must be objective but that a combined dynamic of advocacy journalism and traditional journalism should be upheld as it makes for a more robust United States journalism system (Ibid.).

Greenberg's proposition is more flexible and plausible than other such views which call for objectivity across the **entire** United States mediascape. This view, however, is unstable as it is founded on the flawed reasoning that more objective journalism equates to more media trust from audiences. *Gallup* has conducted polls to garner an idea of the trust held for major U.S. institutions since 1972. Gallup's records highlight that, from 1972 to 2021, media trust levels were lowest in 2016 and were at their **second-lowest as of 2021** (Brenan). To reiterate Richard Kaplan's research: objectivity has been held as a standard in United States journalism from 1920 to 2022 (Poersken), during which media trust has continuously **decreased**. This data may suggest that supposedly-objective journalism could correlate to a decrease in media trust as opposed to an increase and, as such, may negate media trust as a defense of objectivity.

One way objectivity may decrease media trust is through audiences noting the flaws of objectivity and engaging with arguments that question whether it exists at all. In turn, they may grow weary of sources that align with this standard. Further, resources that falsely **claim** or imply themselves to be objective (such as *Climate Activists in Berlin Glue Themselves to Airport Runway, Disrupting Air Travel* and *Trump's Questionnaire to Govt. Climate Scientists Just Leaked, and It's Terrifying*) may inspire viewer distrust in the validity of their content. In *The Trust Gap: How and Why News on Digital Platforms Is Viewed More Sceptically versus News in General*, a report published by the *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*, 33% of people surveyed in the United States report that they actively do not trust news media, 17% report neither trust nor distrust, and 49% report active trust (Mont'Alverne et al.). Trust is a critical factor in audience attention to and engagement with pieces of media, as supported by *Trust or Bust?: Questioning the Relationship Between Media Trust and News Attention*, which

states, "-media trust and news attention patterns may factor into aspects of community building and civic involvement, which ultimately play a vital role in sustaining the health of a participatory, democratic society" (Williams 116). One may reasonably extend this claim to environmental media.

Audience attention and engagement with environmental media are imperative to climate action, as supported in *What Is Climate Change Communication?* by the *Yale Program on Climate Change Communication* which states, "Individuals, communities, and societies come to understand, care, and act on climate change through their communication with other people" (*What Is Climate Change Communication?*). Further, pursuing action to combat the climate crisis largely depends on collaborative work and civic involvement. In *Tackling Climate Change Requires University, Government and Industry Collaboration*, Anna Skarbek, CEO of the *Climateworks Center* at the *Monash University Sustainable Development institute*, states, "Collaboration is essential to address climate change. Siloing is inevitable in and between organisations that run portfolios, departments or faculties. But climate change cuts across silos. No single entity can achieve a net zero future alone" (Skarbek). As such, if community members grow distrustful of environmental media sources (as a result of said sources feigning objectivity or misrepresenting biases) and, consequentially, lose passion for civic involvement-it may largely hinder environmental media pursuits from combating the climate crisis, which continues to grow increasingly dire.

A digital *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC) newsroom post designed to help contextualize and summarize info from the 2022 IPCC report states:

Increased heatwaves, droughts and floods are already exceeding plants' and animals' tolerance thresholds, driving mass mortalities in species such as trees and corals. These weather extremes are occurring simultaneously, causing cascading impacts that are increasingly difficult to manage. They have exposed millions of people to acute food and water insecurity, especially in Africa, Asia, Central and South America, on Small Islands and in the Arctic. To avoid mounting loss of life, biodiversity and infrastructure, ambitious, accelerated action is required to adapt to climate change, at the same time as making rapid, deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. So far, progress on adaptation is uneven and there are increasing gaps between action taken and what is needed to deal with the increasing risks, the new report finds. (*Climate Change: A Threat to Human Wellbeing*)

The *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* is a leading global entity in assessing and analyzing data regarding climate change and the climate crisis. As such, this report's warning carries significant weight in conceptualizing the state of this significant environmental concern.

Transparent Subjectivity as an Alternative

As the climate crisis is an ever-increasing threat and in that there are palpable issues with the standard of objectivity and with feigned and misrepresented subjectivity, one might argue that a shift in environmental media standards may be necessary. A shift away from objectivity so as to mitigate hindrance to climate action, and a transition toward a standard that garners a higher probability of audience trust and engagement, may be more conducive to climate action. A possible alternative standard is *transparent subjectivity*, which may be understood as a deliberate and honest acknowledgment of biases within one's content and perspectives.

This stance can be observed as already accepted and applied in the opinion piece *Media bias is OK – if it's honest*, which states:

It should be obvious that there can't be such a thing as a neutral journalist. We all have moral instincts and points of view. Those points of view will color our interpretations of the facts. The best course of action is to acknowledge where we're coming from. If we show an awareness of our own political leanings, it actually makes us more trustworthy than if we're in denial about them. (Robinson)

This may serve as a device to soothe concern for whether transparent subjectivity would be received with acceptance or vitriol as a standard within mainstream media and journalism.

This standard is further assessed and supported in an exploratory study comparing transparency, subjectivity, and objectivity in academic texts, by Roger Nunn, Caroline Brandt, and Tanju Deveci, who "propose transparency in displaying and thereby acknowledging assumptions, agency and inevitable subjectivity as an integral part of reporting knowledge creation as a more tenable position [than objectivity] (Nunn et al.). These ideas may extend beyond academic writing and possibly apply to a broader array of content-creation: including environmental media. Adopting such a standard may allow for more audience trust in, care for, and engagement with environmental media—a chain reaction which may actively benefit efforts to combat the global climate crisis.

Conclusion

Objectivity is a long-standing, flawed journalistic standard that is detrimental to pursuits of climate crisis action. Objectivity encourages practices that reiterate structures of injustice, such

as privileging wealthy and power-holding voices. Objectivity-driven content also disadvantages voices from marginalized communities, individuals, and journalists, while simultaneously advantaging stances with minimal scientific backing or support. These harmful practices may compound with media distrust generated through feigned objectivity and lead to reduced community engagement with environmental media. Such disengagement, in turn, halts meaningful collaborative pursuits that are crucial for the success of efforts to mitigate and combat the climate crisis. In pursuit of reducing or eliminating this environmentally burdensome practice, environmental media may need to divert away from objectivity as a journalistic standard. Whether environmental media ought to transition toward transparent subjectivity or some other standard, it is clear that the time for change is long overdue. Given the dire nature of the global climate crisis at hand, bold disciplinary transitions such as this continue to grow increasingly necessary and urgent. For the sake of our planet, it is imperative that these changes in environmental media pursuits start **now**.

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The Death Penalty does not Deter Murder

Sam Maynard

The debate on whether the death penalty is a just form of punishment for heinous crimes, most notably murder, has been a major discussion for decades. At the very center of this debate is the question – does the death penalty deter murder? This question is one of the primary factors for Americans on whether capital punishment is worth maintaining. This discussion is of vital importance, as the topic at hand is dealing with the loss and protection of human life, something that should not be taken lightly in any context. Many credible researchers support the conclusion that the killing of convicted murderers through capital punishment does not deter criminals from committing future murders. Put plainly, there is no statistical benefit to the death penalty.

First, the importance of public opinion on this question must be emphasized. Many of those who are in favor of the existence and continued usage of the death penalty credit their support to the idea of deterrence. According to a study by Hans Zeisel and Alec M. Gallup, the belief that capital punishment is a deterrent is one of the top reasons given by Americans who favor the death penalty, topped only by “a life for a life” (Zeisel and Gallup 289). In the same study, the question “Is the Death Penalty a Deterrent” is asked. Sixty-two percent of respondents answered “Yes”, while seven percent were unsure (Zeisel and Gallup 289). This number changes drastically when those who are likely better educated on the matter are surveyed. A 2021 paper by Timothy Griffin references a more recent study which polled sixty-seven past presidents of the American Society of Criminology (ASC), the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, and the Law and Society Association. Respondents overwhelmingly (87.5%) believed that there is no

existing deterrent effect (Griffin, paragraph 12). It is logical for people to attempt to find rational justifications for their desire for revenge, but the evidence simply does not support these feelings. Dartmouth professor of mathematics emeritus John Lamperti puts this concept into words well, writing “Many of those who defend the deterrent value of the death penalty rely on strong intuitive feelings that capital punishment *should* be uniquely effective. When the available evidence doesn't support that conclusion, they argue that the evidence is imperfect” (Lamperti, paragraph 38). Indeed, it makes sense that families or friends of loved ones feel strongly about convicted murderers and want to act on raw emotion, but it is vital that lawmakers proceed with statistical evidence in mind, not grasp for excuses to fulfill personal retribution.

While it is difficult to truly find concrete results in a discussion as complex as the theoretical prevention of death, most credible evidence supports the idea that the death penalty produces no deterrent effect. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find credible arguments that provide research to support deterrence. In some cases, older studies have been disproven. “The death penalty has no deterrent effect. Former claims that each execution deters a certain number of murders have been thoroughly discredited by social science research” (ACLU 2). Researchers like John Lamperti compare homicide rates to determine their effectiveness. “...in 2008 the average murder rate in states with capital punishment was 5.2 (per 100,000 people) while in non-death penalty states it was 3.3” (Lamperti, paragraph 12). Simple statistics like this serve to challenge the concept of proven deterrence, and they do so successfully. The link does not exist. It is true that this type of analysis is difficult, and findings are not always concrete, but evidence is increasingly convincing. Research on this topic is a complicated and often messy process, as

shown in incredible depth in a 2006 paper by John J. Donohue III and Justin Wolfers. While they agree that evidence is imperfect, they do rest on one finding. “The only clear conclusion is that execution policy drives little of the year-to-year variation in homicide rates. As to whether executions raise or lower the homicide rate, we remain profoundly uncertain” (Donohue III and Wolfers 45). This supports the idea that is being pushed by those mentioned throughout this paper. There is a clear lack of data for deterrence caused by the death penalty. “Critics say the larger factors are impossible to disentangle from whatever effects executions may have” (Liptak, paragraph 26). This is what this side of the deterrent argument is trying to prove. The link is not conceivably present.

Nearly all credible sources have concluded that data very strongly suggests a lack of deterrent capability. In fact, there is some evidence to support the idea that the death penalty even encourages murder. “If, however, severe punishment can deter crime, then long term imprisonment is severe enough to cause any rational person not to commit violent crimes. The vast preponderance of the evidence shows that the death penalty is no more effective than imprisonment in deterring murder and that it may even be an incitement to criminal violence in certain cases” (Bedau, paragraph 16). This suggestion has surfaced across several studies on the effect the death penalty has on murder. Those with self-destructive tendencies may use the promise of death as an incentive to commit acts of extreme violence. John Lamperti cites a medical paper by Dr. Louis West describing one of these scenarios. “Recently an Oklahoma truck driver had parked to have lunch in a Texas roadside cafe. A total stranger—a farmer from nearby—walked through the door and blew him in half with a shotgun. When the police finally disarmed the man and asked why he had done it, he replied, ‘I was just tired of living.’”

(Lamperti, paragraph 27). While this reasoning is not entirely conclusive, it is certainly something to consider when discussing the deterrent argument.

Those opposed to these studies attempt to reason with the idea that capital punishment should deter murder, and quote studies that falsely claim solid results. Likely the most well-known and most cited work by deterrent supporters is Isaac Ehrlich's paper claiming that murders are prevented by the death penalty. He states that "In light of these observations one cannot reject the hypothesis that punishment in general, and execution in particular, exert a unique deterrent effect on potential murderers" (Ehrlich 413-414). Since this paper was published, Ehrlich's methods have been largely disputed and discredited by many, including John Lamperti.

Lamperti states that besides writing in an intentionally misleading and unmeritedly confident manner, Ehrlich's methods are not entirely reliable, and his conclusions are not well-supported.

"My own conclusion is that regression on nationally aggregated data can never yield reliable evidence on deterrence, pro or con. The signal, if any, is hopelessly buried in the noise"

(Lamperti, paragraph 21). Ehrlich's data is unreliable, and he makes assumptions he treats as irrefutable. They are far from irrefutable. This type of weak data, and Ehrlich's paper itself, are what the opposing side of this argument is based in. They admit that data is not concrete, then claim that their often myopic findings prove that deterrence exists.

Until the unlikely case where evidence is observed, this argument should be relatively straightforward. There is little to no indication that any homicide deterrent factor exists via the death penalty. As John Lamperti wrote, "...if there were a substantial net deterrent effect from capital punishment under modern U.S. conditions, the studies we have surveyed should clearly

reveal it. They do not” (Lamperti, paragraph 38). Various studies from diverse and reliable sources have found no indication of murders being prevented. As stated, this is an ongoing and admittedly difficult subject to observe, but the simple fact is that there has not been a reliable study that confidently produces anything of substance. Until then, the deterrent-on-murder argument should not be used as a basis for the death penalty to continue to be used. Americans must reflect on their values and determine if capital punishment is a just and effective way to stop homicide. There is no basis that the death penalty prevents any loss of life.

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