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In this Issue

Editor's Note

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Dear Reader, welcome to 46.1 of *Women & Language*! Once again, countless many thank yous to The Best Editorial Assistant of All Time, Elyssa Smith. Leland Spencer's love and support continues to humble me. I also want to thank Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender (OSCLG) Past President Karla Scott and President Cerise Glenn for their support and guidance.

I want to thank those scholars and activists who contributed to our forum that discusses the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*. Please see my introduction to the forum for more information.

The generosity of our reviewers, who write the most beautifully encouraging evaluations, continues to move me. Thank you to our editorial board! I also want to thank our ad hoc reviewers:

Janell Bauer
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Jasmine Wang
Celeste Wells
Stephanie Young

I need to recognize the passings of two of our editorial board members. We deeply mourn these losses with their families, colleagues, and friends. In July of 2022, we lost Dr.

Brianne Waychoff. Dr. Waychoff was an Associate Professor of Communication and Co-coordinator of Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies at the Borough of Manhattan Community College of The City University of New York. Brianne wrote some of the most beautiful and encouraging reviews that I ever had the blessing to read.

We also lost Dr. Martha James "M.J." Hardman in January 2023. Dr. Hardman was a pioneer in the field of linguistics. She retired (supposedly!) from the University of Florida in 2010. She also served OSCLG as one of its beloved Oracles. M.J.'s OSCLG presentation about The Crone, The Mother, and The Maiden still resonates with me. I also appreciate the love and support she showed me when I took on this position.

We know we will see you again. Rest in Purple.

Readers, please keep seeking *Women & Language* as an outlet for your work and your learning. Blessings to you.

Maternal Resilience After Hurricane Maria: The Foregrounding of Productive Action and Use of Alternative Logics in the Development of Proactive Maternal Agency

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Abstract: In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria that hit Puerto Rico in 2017, mothers were not merely vulnerable subjects but critical agents of post-disaster recovery for families, communities, and social systems. This narrative analysis highlights two processes of Buzzanell's (2010) Communication Theory of Resilience through stories collected from two site visits in 2019 and 2020. In an expansion to Buzzanell's (2010) theory, the stories of Lourdes and Mariana acknowledge the proactive agency of maternal resilience as enacted through communication, contextual, and relational elements of life in the aftermath. Through Lourdes and Mariana's feminist mothering practices, they rewrote the scripts for good mothering, discursively and materially reconstructing the mandates that shape motherhood within our culture. As they came to take on multiple intersectional maternal agencies, they leveraged their anger and activist orientations for collaborative empowerment that enacted mechanisms for restorative justice across the island.

SHORTLY BEFORE SUNRISE ON SEPTEMBER 20, 2017, Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico as a category four hurricane. As the storm hit the island's southeast coast, Maria drove a diagonal path right through the heart of the island. With sustained winds of 155 mph and a ground speed of 10 mph, the slow onslaught of terror and destruction spared no one. Extending over half of the 100-mile-long island, Maria decimated the natural landscape and destroyed the livelihoods and homes of tens of thousands. As Morales (2019) detailed, "Entire communities that had previously been invisible, cocooned in foliage, now emerged, ghostlike" (p. 208). For example, Callé Lõiza, a barrio outside of Old San Juan, lost 90% of its homes. At a hospital outside of Luquillo, those suffering from scabies, conjunctivitis, and gastritis tripled every day. Worse yet, people were so desperate for water that they turned to superfund sites, creeks, city runoff, and bleached the water before finding the means to boil it to avoid sepsis and giardia (Clemente, 2017).

Despite his acknowledgment that "Puerto Rico was absolutely obliterated" the day after Maria made landfall, President Trump left the White House to spend the next few days at his golf club, where he tweeted about NFL protests, his Muslim ban, and leveraged attacks on Obamacare, North Korea, and the news media (Andrés & Wolffe, 2019, p. 9). It took five days before anyone in the White House contacted the Puerto Rican leadership. An investigative report by *Politico* revealed the inequity in this response:

> While the U.S. deployed seventy-three Northern Command helicopters over Houston within six days, it took three weeks for the same to happen in Puerto Rico. FEMA sent three times as many meals to Houston and 40 percent more liters of water, and four times as many blue tarps for temporary roofing despite the hurricane damaging 50 percent more homes in Puerto Rico than in Houston. (Morales, 2019, p. 214)

Even more striking is that it took "43 days for the administration to approve permanent disaster work in Puerto Rico, as compared to seven days for Houston" (p. 214). Although the population density and the extent of the destruction were clear, Puerto Ricans found themselves stranded with no way out and no help coming.

The feuds between politicians and the exculpation of responsibility were mixed with screaming pleas from those stranded on rooftops and women crying as they tried to get food for their starving families and communities. As the issues with power, water, and food continued, the death toll expanded with each passing day. In a plea for help, Andrés and Wolffe (2019) wrote, "the sea of desperation and the need was best summarized by the mayor of San Juan's outcry, 'we are dying here'" (p. x). Waiting for help was not an option. Alone, Puerto Ricans reclaimed the island and their homes despite the overwhelming situation. They mobilized and relied on the strength of their relationships with neighbors, friends, and family to reconstruct their lives.

As the storm's second anniversary passed, communities and families continued to struggle under the weight of the inadequate emergency response after and since Maria. With the watermarks on the walls outside a now open restaurant still visible, mothers

lined up outside a Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) office, standing in the heat for hours to get their assistance. As the electricity would go on and off, sometimes for a week, nearly 60% of residents found their FEMA claims denied, losing any hope of securing their homes for the next storm (Johnson, 2022). For the residents of Vieques, their hospital would remain shuttered, forcing residents to go by ferry to another. In a searing account of the U.S.'s betrayal of Puerto Rico after the hurricane, Morales (2019) charged, "With cell service and internet out, island residents like my mother were caught up in a pervasive wave of disconnection and chaos, one that exposed the inadequate response by the federal government as well as [Puerto Rican Governor] Rossello's reeling government bureaucracy" (p. 204). The former administration had only released 30% of the federal disaster relief aid promised, even as the island neared the fourth anniversary of Maria (Acevedo, 2021). Despite decades of historical mistreatment and endemic, large-scale failures of social support, a bricolage of community innovation emerged as islanders found new ways to hold home and family together. People leveraged relationships to intercede in the social unevenness the storm made visible to restructure both governmental and material forms of power.

As a case site, Puerto Rico presents an ideal vantage point to work through, critique, and advance a definition of resilience that more aptly captures what emerges in post-disaster life for women, mothers, families, and communities. Using the narratives of two mothers who experienced Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico in 2017, this article examines the multidimensional aspects of maternal resilience and explores further the complex cultural and contextual factors, including pre-storm humanitarian crisis conditions that influenced the overall recovery of the mothers. Although their stories parallel the processes of resilience as outlined by Buzzanell (2010; 2021b), their stories also expand her framework to include elements of belongingness, creative entrepreneurship, collaborative empowerment, and intersectionalities that are interlinked within histories and material exigencies. Further, by centering the maternal subject position, we can critique the shortcomings identified within popular conceptions of resilience, as scholars have often imbued these models with a view of social desirability

that omits classist, racial, gendered, and politicized elements. The two stories presented in this article paint a different picture of mothers' experience of post-disaster life, revealing places where mothers cultivated multiple kinds of agencies, rewired networks for restorative justice, and pushed back against the myths that shape the maternal experience. In an expansion to Buzzanell's earlier framework, resilience here is situated in a culturally diverse and contextually complex environment that draws in the pre-storm humanitarian crisis conditions that are entangled in mothers' overall recovery.

Literature Review

Models of Resilience

Current research models on resilience after disasters often ignore the contextual, historical, and cultural elements that run as undercurrents in disaster environments. Instead, frameworks for resilience often generalize relief responses that advance normative, factor-focused models attempting to restore communities to pre-disaster status. One pernicious theme that permeates resilience literature and discussions is that resilience is a community's ability to recover or "bounce back" to a pre-upheaval state. Here, presumptively, people, families, and communities can return to "normalcy." Kelman et al. (2016) rightly ask why a society that "bounces back" should return to the same "normal" state that disadvantaged some groups pre-disaster, noting:

> If the aim is to return to that "normal" of the vulnerability process, then when the next disaster is created—it would look similar to the disaster which just happened. States of normalcy are an insufficient goal if pre-disaster conditions involved women's oppression, racial segregation, and endemic poverty, which increases peoples [sic] level of disaster risk before impacts. (p. 137)

Encouraging people to live with or avoid hazards instead of removing the systems that tie them to those hazards in the first place further institutionalizes and enables systems of inequity and inequality to persist, leaving those recovering from a disaster in perpetual struggle.

A second assumption in the literature is that resilience is specific to a trait or disposition and/or enacted through a particular policy. These approaches to resilience propose that resilience results from character traits instead of interactive, changing, and lived relationships. As Houston and Buzzanell (2018) note, a pitfall of this approach is that "resources necessary for individual and system coping may not be prioritized or provided because resilience is understood to be an innate trait of people and systems, rather than a capacity that is ultimately the product of support, opportunity, and assets" (p. 26). In this sense, this assumption further burdens those at risk because they either do or do not possess the capacity for resilience.

Neoliberal arguments about recovery hold that rebounding from a crisis is a personal responsibility; assistance towards long-term recovery should not be the responsibility of the state or aid organizations, but rather the individuals and communities facing the threats. Entangled in this approach is the belief that accepting risk is a part of resilience and that the impact from storms is innately natural and not man-made, thereby exculpating much of the responsibility for recovery onto the local communities themselves. In a critical reading of resilience recovery models, Houston and Buzzanell (2018) warned that a neoliberal conception of recovery could blame the lack of progress on the very people who need assistance. The neoliberal perspective placed blame on the general populace, the island's culture, and its administrators for what was actually the failure of the Trump administration's recovery efforts in Puerto Rico. Despite the apparent inadequacies in federal relief assistance, this view of recovery attributes the lack of adaptation in people and systems following a crisis to their own shortcomings. As Bonilla (2020) argued, the slow and absent aid response in Puerto Rico is testament to the "dominance of neoliberal forms of governmentality seen through the cuts in social safety nets, that call upon individuals to take up entrepreneurial modes of self-care" (p. 2). Although I certainly do not contest the necessity of stabilizing the conditions of post-disaster life quickly and efficiently, I question the assumptions that seem to underwrite such a priority. In sum, these notions of recovery and models of resilience tell us that rebounding from a crisis is our responsibility alone.

In order to understand what recovery should look like, Buckle (2006) added that a definition of resilience must account for the interplay of the different characteristics of disasters, such as types of damage, duration of event, and intensity of event, and the physical, social, economic, political, historical, and cultural elements that make different places affected by disasters differently. As Bottrell (2009) identifies, a useful corrective is that recovery models should account for "the reciprocal interplay of individuals in relationships and environments- families and neighborhoods" (p. 323). I embrace the conceptualization of Jones (2020) that describes resilience as a "movement toward mutually empowering, growth-fostering connections in the face of adverse conditions, traumatic experiences, and alienating social-cultural pressures. It is the ability to connect, reconnect, and resist disconnection" (p. 78). When juxtaposed against the events leading up to and after Maria, it becomes apparent that new models of resilience are needed. Given this, it is important for future models of resilience to acknowledge the cultural and social context of Puerto Rico as an area affected by disasters. By emphasizing the interactive and discursive dimensions of resilience, which have a significant impact on those who are most affected, these models can be better suited to address the unique challenges faced by disaster-affected communities in Puerto Rico.

Further, although there is a small but growing literature documenting women's and mothers' agency in such situations, additional voices can add texture and nuance to our understandings of resilience. Accordingly, this work turns to a neglected figure of resilience in post-disaster research and intervention: the mother. As the maternal element is a critical locus of agency and meaning in post-disaster narratives, the accumulating evidence that gender matters in post-disaster recovery informs a focus on mothers and mothering.

Women and Disasters

In *Gender: The Missing Component of the Response to Climate Change, Lambrou and Piana* (2006) demonstrate that gender is a significant factor for survival of those impacted most severely by disasters fueled by climate change, arguing that climate

change affects men and women differently. One reason for this difference, as Hilhorst et al. (2008) address, is that "social processes generate unequal exposure to risk by making some people more prone to disaster than others, and these inequalities are largely a function of the power relations operative in every society" (p. 2). Aguilar (2014) adds, "Before, during, and in the aftermath of disasters, human beings perpetuate social patterns of discrimination, and these entrenched patterns cause certain groups of people to suffer more than others" (p. 73). Enarson (2012) points to patriarchal social structures within society as a major contributing factor in women's risk before, during, and after disasters.

The disparity between men and women in disaster-prone environments is largely driven by their economic and familial situations. Enarson's (2012) research found that in the United States, these disparities are further exacerbated by racial differences. For instance, prior to Hurricane Katrina, women of color in New Orleans were more likely to live in poverty, earn less, and lack access to preventive healthcare compared to Caucasian women. Likewise, similar conditions were also present in Puerto Rico before Hurricane Maria, where women, particularly women of color, had lower rates of homeownership, employment, and access to healthcare services compared not only to men but also to women of color on the mainland United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). As an additional example, Enarson (2012) found that gender, cultural, and economic/ class positions constrained the trek for aid. Recovery resources and relief efforts are often male-controlled, which causes a restriction of access for women on the margins, such as single mothers, divorced women, lesbians, women of color, and other intersectionalities that disadvantage women. To adequately realize sustainable recovery for families and communities, it is critical to start with the recognition that much of the mundane survival work that keeps families and communities going post-disaster falls to women.

Mothering in Disasters

Beyond the gendered and racialized tensions women experience, women who are mothers face additional, multiple

oppressions that intersect and reinforce one another as mothers are differently impacted when their families and communities call on them in post-disaster settings. In *Displacement, Gender, and the Challenges of Parenting after Hurricane Katrina*, Peek and Fothergill (2008) found that women's domestic labor changed because of the disaster, increasing their burden as they not only have to attend to the regular duties of the home but they must do so in challenging environments that might not have access to electricity, running water, transportation, employment, childcare, and/or safe housing. Specifically, because of a lack of schooling and childcare mothers are often pulled back into the home while the demands for money and repairs to the home push men back into the provider roles (p. 72). Mothers are additionally more susceptible to hazards of place because they are the primary users and managers of the household essentials. As food preparers and childcare providers, mothers stay behind, stay put, or return to unsafe places where they encounter mudslides, gas explosions, and isolation (Cutter et al., 2008). Research following Hurricane Katrina confirms these findings as David and Enarson (2012) witnessed firsthand the impact of the disaster on families, finding connections between disaster vulnerability, gendered impacts, and recovery resilience. As one of the researchers remarked, "Greeting me early in the morning were women [already in line for resources]: tearfully exhausted, impatient African American and Latina women with babies, children, teens, and grandmothers in tow" (p. ix). Given that gender is a primary organizer of domestic life and carries with it certain expectations and role negotiations regarding work inside and outside the home, when a disaster strikes, mothers are immediately involved in meeting survival needs and stabilizing home life. The challenge here is that the responsibilities that fall on mothers in the aftermath of a storm are critical to family survival. No matter what happens in or to a family, the mother navigates the needs of the families' emotional and physical well-being as mothers are the "shock absorbers of the adjustment efforts" after a disaster (Enarson, 2012, p. 3).

There is an eerie correspondence between the idealized maternal subject and the traits of the resilient subject. The discourse of intensive mothering positions the maternal subject as selfless, self-sacrificing, always prioritizing the care

of her children, responsible for making the private sphere of the family a haven for its members, and indefatigable about domestic chores. As O'Reilly (2016) describes, related to the social, economic, political, and cultural problems mothers face is the patriarchal institution of motherhood, which entrenches certain hegemonic ideologies that inform the identity of the mother and work of mothering. Popular models of resilience that presuppose personality or character traits as the basis for a positive adaptation map readily onto the cultural ideal of the mother. Furthermore, society imposes unrealistic expectations on mothers to be the "ideal mother" and engage in intensive, selfless care work, even in difficult circumstances. This can lead to models of resilience that perpetuate myths about motherhood, as I observed during my visits to Puerto Rico.

The similarities between models of resilience and neoliberal discourses of intensive mothering are not surprising. In western discourses mothers are typically expected to be the primary caregivers for their children and families. They are also expected to maintain a sense of normalcy and provide unwavering care, even in challenging situations. These expectations are often deeply ingrained in societal norms, and can place a significant burden on mothers in times of crisis. Additionally, these societal expectations can create the impression that mothers must possess certain traits in order to be considered resilient, placing a significant burden on them to "mobilize the discursive, interactive, structural, and material resources at any given moment" (Houston & Buzzanell, 2018, p. 3). These models reinforce the notion that mothers must take on the work of recovery for their families and communities alike. Both the trait model of resilience and cultural ideals of mothers and mothering promote individualistic conceptions of resilience that lend themselves to neoliberal responsibilization and deficit assessments.

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

Matricentric Feminism

To flesh out an alternative to dominant approaches of resilience and disaster recovery models that accounts for gender

as a missing component within disaster research, O'Reilly's (2016) matricentric feminist theoretical approach, in places like Puerto Rico, can more inclusively address the labor—emotional, social, physical—and identities of those at the heart of affected families and communities. Importantly, as O'Reilly (2016) notes, when researchers regard "mothering as a site of power, wherein mothers can create social change through child rearing and activism, they enable mothers to enact an empowered model of mothering" (p. 19). Using matricentric feminism as a theoretical framework can work to "contest, challenge, and counter the oppressive patriarchal institution and narratives of intensive mothering with the goal of imagining and implementing a maternal identity and practice that is empowering to women" (p. 7). As briefly detailed, such considerations are important for mothering in disaster contexts as unmasking the patriarchal discourses that frame maternal subjectivity works to correct to the power relations operative in disaster environments. As Tierney (2014) advocates when writing about the social roots of risk and resilience, "confronting risks means confronting power" (p. 9). Because the meaning of disaster emerges from the confluence of personal and local stories about events and conditions, understanding how these stories are re-contextualized, silenced, or celebrated must involve examining mothers' work, the risks they assume, and how they enact processes of communicative resilience. This lens can expand our understanding of resilience to consider other contexts that help to avoid preoccupations with solutions or traits, identifying ways the demands of post-disaster situations can reproduce restrictive, gendered, institutionalized practices and discourses of mothering. In sum, this matricentric feminist theoretical approach offers a critical perspective for rethinking the resilience of mothers in post-disaster scenarios.

Communication Theory of Resilience

To understand mothers' experiences, Buzzanell (2010) offers us a helpful analytical framework for broadening conceptions of resilience through a more critical and contextual perspective. Buzzanell's (2010; 2021b) Communication Theory of Resilience (CTR) avoids the preoccupations with solutions and traits, offering an alternative understanding that limits

neither resilience nor mothering to normative models but re-situates the dynamics of the complexly articulated material and discursive tensions that frame mothers' lives. CTR focuses on how society constructs and enacts communication processes of adaptation and transformation, reactivity and proactivity, disruption and reintegration, and stability and change. In addition, CTR emphasizes the contexts in which material resources, policies, and ideological structures constrain and enable these processes within families. Importantly, this framework approaches resilience as emergent and constantly regenerated or revised, rather than a static state that is achieved or not. Hallmarked by five communication processes, Buzzanell's (2010) model includes:

1. *Families craft new definitions and conditions of normalcy.* In developing the "new normal," Buzzanell and Turner (2003) looked at how families negotiated job loss. Despite job losses causing turmoil in their family systems, the families in the study continued to practice family rituals, such as going out to eat. These rituals provided a sense of stability during uncertain times.

2. *Individuals within the family work to affirm identity by reframing self-other relationships.* Buzzanell and Turner (2003) identified how the individuals wanted to maintain or enhance a particular identity and performed in ways that reinforced pivotal identities for individuals and their families. These identity anchors enacted in a time of difficulty are those that the individual or the collective find the most meaningful.

3. *Individuals within the family may foreground productive action while backgrounding negative feelings.* Buzzanell (2010) describes this part of the resilience process as acknowledging the "right to feel anger or loss in certain ways" or "backgrounding" negative feelings so that those feelings are not counterproductive but channeled those feelings into productive action (p. 9). During her experience navigating the premature birth of her twins, Buzzanell (2010) notes she focused on the positive and worked to create feelings that reframed the situation into one of hope instead of hopelessness.

4. *Families put alternative logics to work, designing new ways of handling the problems created by their changing circumstances.*

Buzzanell (2010) describes this piece of her framework as attending to the "seemingly contradictory ways of doing organizational work through development of alternative logics or through reframing the entire situation" (p. 6).

5. *Families build and maintain communication networks.* Buzzanell (2010) advocates for utilizing social capital as essential to resilience, emphasizing the role of external support mechanisms in helping people respond to stressful situations. She draws on work by Doerfel, Lai, Kolling, Keeler, and Barbu (2008) that found that "resources embedded in organization-to-organization social relations, helped local organizations survive" (p. 6).

In her keynote address, Buzzanell (2021a) referred to her latest application of CTR, stating that her theory of resilience broadens the application of these processes to consider the politicized nature of resilience as it has become embedded in policies and solutions that have "simplistic kinds of outcomes." She advised scholars to look at the "multiple intersecting deeply embedded inequities" that families experience, demonstrating how resilience can provide them with mechanisms for adaptation and transformation. Noticeably, in extending the application of a matricentric lens, Buzzanell (2021b) adds that these communicative and relational processes take place within hierarchies, which is of value when considering the elements of privilege and oppression those living in Puerto Rico experienced both before and after Hurricane Maria.

Although Buzzanell (2010) has been widely cited for her development of a communication theory of resilience, the use of her five processes has not been used exclusively to study the impact of disasters on mothers. To show the variation in mechanisms for recovery and resilience and draw on specific types of "structural and infrastructural aspects as well as communicative processes" that impact mothers' lives, this paper will highlight two specific processes, "backgrounding negative emotions to foreground productive action" and "the use of alternative logics" (p.10). As Buzzanell (2010) notes, these processes are "the stuff of community rebuilding after widespread flooding and fires, and of a nation's ability to turn devastating events into potential growth and reputational opportunities" (p.10). Focusing on these two processes in conjunction with the

narratives mothers share can reveal context-specific strategies women and mothers used in the aftermath of a disaster. This can inform policy, organizational, and community infrastructure elements to promote more effective post-disaster relief and further highlight the role of human agency. Importantly, these processes can elucidate the need for narratives that can shift conceptions of mothering to envision recovery practices that encourage efforts for empowerment, transformation, and culturally sensitive, justice-based systems of recovery. Future work could attend to additional processes as the experiences of mothers living through the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico can offer a unique vantage point to understand how disaster contexts can bring about conditions for crafting new definitions of normal, anchor family life, community, and cultural discourses, and build and maintain communication networks. As such, I conducted this project with the following research question: "How do mothers' stories illustrate the processes of CTR in the post-disaster environment following Hurricane Maria?

Method

I conducted two site visits to Puerto Rico between 2019 and 2020. While there, I interviewed 10 women and conducted a focus group with a Midwifery organization, as well as several other informal interviews with community members, university professors, and business owners. To understand the lived experiences of mothers living in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, I collected stories as a primary data source through these interviews, alongside some ethnographic observations collected as a secondary method. I encouraged the mothers to tell me the story of what happened during Hurricane Maria and in the two years since.

Given the possibility that my participants would not speak English and my desire to meet my participants in their home locations, it was important to bring a translator with me as I collected my data. The first member of my team was Kristen Erdmann, who has a background in international studies, is a certified community health worker, is multilingual, and has lived in Spanish-speaking environments. My second translator was

Laurel Paputa, who has a background in communication and health, is fluent in Spanish, and has lived abroad.

After transcribing the interviews, I used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space approach to analyze and engage with the stories. As well as other ethnographic elements gathered and transcribed from the two site visits. Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) approach has three aspects: interaction, continuity, and situation. *Interaction*, which involves both the personal and the social, asks the researcher to analyze a transcript or text for the personal experiences of the storyteller and for the interaction of the individual with other people. To do this, I worked with the stories to understand the women's relationships with one another and how those relationships ebbed and flowed in relation to changing circumstances, families, and communities. *Continuity* asks that the researcher analyze the transcript or text for information that considers the past, present, and future. As I engaged in re-storying my interviews, I organized the mothers' experiences chronologically, first situating their narratives in the everyday aftermath, then exploring how mothers moved through the in-between phases as they waited for aid to arrive and electricity to return, to finally exploring the work mothers were doing to improve the conditions of their lives as long-term transformational strategies for their future. *Situation* asks researchers to look for specific situations in the storyteller's landscape. To do this, I analyzed the interactions within the context of the social, historical, and cultural factors that shape the understanding of the experiences depicted in the interview data. The process of analysis was an iterative one. I returned again and again to my field notes, transcriptions, and even photos, "creatively reimagining how these elements might be put together, and then creating an assemblage that one hopes has significance, salience, and meaning for those who experience [or in my case, read] it" (Ellingson & Sotirin, 2020, p.7).

In mapping Buzzanell's communication processes, I followed storylines that related to her framework of resilience, re-envisioning resilience as contextually, culturally, and relationally orientated. From this iterative process I chose two particular stories, the accounts of Lourdes (given name) and Mariana (pseudonym), as concentrating on two stories makes it possible to share the level of detail necessary to gain insight into

the two particular processes of Buzzanell's (2010) model I have highlighted.

Analysis

Backgrounding Negative Emotions to Foreground Productive Action: Lourdes

Green (2004) argues that there are still missing elements to motherhood studies, urging that we need to continue to examine how women are using opportunities within motherhood "to explore and cultivate their own agency, and to foster social change" (p. 16). As the crisis in Puerto Rico persisted for months and years, so did mothers' mounting anxieties and uncertainty over what the future would look like for their families. Many mothers lamented feeling lost or discouraged as resources continued to be scarce. The work they did in reframing the situation to find the positive and pursue goals that moved them forward towards recovery allowed them to determine actions that were productive for activating change and feeling some sense of control and agency over their lives. Buzzanell's (2010) framework for resilience advances communication processes that are evident in the agentive interventions that Puerto Rican mothers enacted post-disaster as they attempted to change the conditions in which they were mothering.

For some mothers, the difficult circumstances they faced during and after the disaster resulted in feelings of frustration and anger towards the injustices they experienced and witnessed. However, they found it challenging to express their anger publicly. This is in part because there are expectations for how women are supposed to behave under stress. For mothers, in particular, the romanticized discourses of the all-loving maternal figure assume that "emotions such as anger, hostility, and frustration are not only deemed insignificant but almost entirely ignored" (Duquaine-Watson, 2004, p. 125). Further:

> at its best, American cultural understandings of motherhood contribute to the shaming and admonishment of mothers who articulate negative emotions. At its worst, it renders certain maternal feelings

virtually unspeakable and, thus, an important aspect of women's experiences invisible. (p. 125)

Thus, framing an issue as feminist or honing in on the sense of injustice that particular exigencies create can help to legitimize anger for women.

Additionally, the framework Buzzanell (2010) proposed is useful as it acknowledges negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, frustration, and hopelessness, but it does not encourage denial or coping mechanisms like avoidance or defensiveness. Instead, it recognizes that individuals, families, and organizations may legitimately express negative feelings, but in ways that are productive for recovery, such as seeking social support and reframing the situation. Anger can also be seen as a productive emotion, as feminist scholars have identified how women, particularly those in minority or intersectionally oppressed groups, use anger to re-articulate the conditions of their oppression (Ahmed, 2010). Through legitimizing negative feelings, mothers in particular can affirm their positions and encourage different courses of action. To sum up, while mothers push some feelings like discouragement or fear into the background, they channel other feelings, like anger, and bring them to the forefront to use as internal motivation for mobilizing towards change, despite societal expectations.

Living in a gated community 30 minutes to the west of San Juan, Lourdes described herself as "poor" and was nervous to show us inside her quaint one-story blue home. As a single mother of two children, 9 and 11 during Hurricane Maria, an activist, lactation consultant, and a researcher, she spoke about having trouble keeping up with the mess and finding time to do the repairs to her home that were still visible today. Although her ex-husband helped with the kids from time to time, Lourdes still bore the sole responsibility for preparing for the storms and in managing the aftermath. Being trained in infant and youth feeding in emergencies, she understood the precarity children were in regarding water and electricity. She filled every water container they owned and charged all of their devices. "I was the given Drs. Ruth Lawrence and Audrey Naylor Legacy Scholarship by the states Breastfeeding Committee. I had worked as a La Leche Leader for nearly 10 years. You know, I knew what

needed to be done." Yet, despite all of her training, nothing could prepare her for the aftermath of Maria.

Lourdes had just finished her training as an International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) and had drafted emergency response protocols to assist new mothers when Hurricane Maria made landfall. In the immediate aftermath of Maria, Lourdes called the midwives from Centro de Mam to open a clinic in San Juan, conducting lactation support and free IBCLC consultations:

> I realized there were a lot of moms who had to dump their milk stashes down the drain because they had no way to store them or keep them cold. There was a police officer and his wife was breastfeeding. He was able to get a freezer that one of the gas stations had donated to the police station, and that's where he stored his wife's milk. There was a woman whose baby was born in the hospital, but she was in the room right next to the generator, and it was so hot that she's like, "Take my baby to the nursery," so she didn't breastfeed. We would go do a home visit, and somebody whose baby wasn't latched on, you were supposed to keep stimulating yourself. And I'd be like, "Well, are you pumping?" They're like, "Yeah, at night when I turn the generator on." But that's 12 hours without pumping! So, I learned hand expression, and we started teaching hand expression.

Because relief organizations failed to address material conditions, these situational needs and creative responses were happening all across the island. Mothers called attention to how the food supplies kept them alive but were not healthy, were unequally distributed, and were hard to find, or limited, given their family size and need. With infant feeding protocols, similar issues emerged. One stark issue was the delivery of much-needed baby formula post-hurricane. Lourdes recalled her frustration that aid for mothers included powdered baby formula rather than the safer liquid formula:

> Okay, so I know that liquid ready-to-feed formula is the cleanest and the safest, but what we're getting here is powder, and we will continue to get powder here because nobody's thinking. Powder is cheaper; powder is lighter because you could fit it on a flight... And I think that

there were places in the mountains where literally they were airdropping [powered] formula. They made these formula mothers feel like villains because they wouldn't give them the help they really needed. And I'm like, how were they supposed to make bottles without water? How were they supposed to disinfect them? I don't think that anybody who's donating formula is saying, "How can we send powdered death to babies in Puerto Rico?"

This failure to recognize the needs of the mothers in Puerto Rico had deeply troubled Lourdes. The powdered formula issue draws out the tensions of a resource-based solution-focused conception of post-disaster resilience as it presupposes access to resources and generalizes the needs of vulnerable people and women's experiences. Thankfully, her experience working with SafelyFed, a non-profit organization out of Canada that works to ensure families can get the support, information, and supplies to feed and care for their babies in the aftermath of emergencies, gave her the knowledge to use the opening created by the storm as an opportunity to repair and rewire the networks of support and resource distribution for nursing mothers and their infants. As a result, she started her own LLC, Alimentación Segura Infantil (ASI), a service organization dedicated to helping mothers in Puerto Rico.

Lourdes discovered that the issues on the island were far more complex and deep-rooted than just the type of formula government and aid organizations provided. Part of what encouraged her in the aftermath was her distrust in support systems. Long-standing infrastructure decline and inequitable political policies left mothers struggling before the storm. Issues included increasing poverty rates, the local memory of historical programs to sterilize Puerto Rican women, superfund waste sites that contaminated their water, and the disparity of social programs such as WIC and health care resources. In the aftermath, mothers relied on bottled water to make their babies' formula and needed electricity to sterilize and warm bottles. However, neither of these critical resources were reliably available. Lourdes lamented that the responsibility to come up with solutions always seemed to fall on the mothers themselves.

One of the motivating forces for Lourdes was that she was a mother herself. Each night after she had spent the entire day

driving all over the island to help mothers whose babies were on the verge of dying or who themselves were on the verge of dying, Lourdes got in her bed and cried herself to sleep. "No one came to help them. I decided we had to do something." Her visit to the Tao Baja temporary shelter was catalyzing. Although women were given "a bucket, a brush, and soap," without a kitchen or hot water, they could not sanitize baby bottles. A properly cleaned bottle, as Lourdes instructed, is an essential step in ensuring that the formula prepared for the infants does not contain harmful bacteria that could make them sick. So, Lourdes learned a method of cold-water sanitation. She and her team also became experts in making formula:

> We learned that one tablespoon of unconcentrated regular unscented bleach to one gallon of water. You soak clean infant feeding bottles or pump equipment for two minutes; you take it out; you let it evaporate, has the same sanitation effect as boiling for five minutes or steaming for seven minutes.

She also noted that mothers were using flooded reservoir areas or possibly contaminated water from superfund sites. As such, they also had to teach people how to ensure their water was potable. This included the water they were using to sterilize their bottles. She recalled, "We teach people how to collect that, how to sieve [water], that even if you use like a T-shirt, and then how to use Clorox or how to boil to make that water potable." Without doing all of this, Lourdes feared infants would get sick and the government would blame mothers for not properly feeding their children when the responsibility to ensure that these protocols for clean water and sterilized bottles should have been on the organizations providing that aid initially.

It also frustrated her that the formula cans FEMA and the Red Cross were sending had instructions and labels written only in English, pointing out that these resources were not sensitive to the language of the population they were trying to help. These organizations' actions in the aftermath made little sense to Lourdes, which increased her overwhelming sense of injustice:

> They're like, "Read the can." And our cans are in English, so there's that problem. And they don't follow the World Health Organization recommendations, which is to boil to kill the pathogens, because they don't, they can't read

them. Who are we to them? If they really wanted to help us, they would see what they were giving us. People couldn't even read the cans.

Lourdes recalled how she telephoned one of the relief organizations to explain what mothers needed but had difficulty reaching anyone because the service on the island was so spotty. When she did finally get through, the woman on the other end was about to hang up, and Lourdes recalled shouting into the phone, "You're not doing me a favor; you're doing your job. So, my question to you is, are you going to do your job or what? We're dying here."

Although creative problem-solving gave some mothers a sense of empowerment, Lourdes argued that the responsibility to change should not have fallen on the mothers, but on the support structures and resources providing the aid. "Why weren't they doing their job?" she questioned. She firmly believed that community organizations such as Centro de Mam should not be solely responsible for addressing the challenges faced by mothers and their families. However, if they were to bear this burden, they must ensure that positive changes were made. Lourdes used the anger and frustration she felt to center mothers' experiences and develop goals and an activist commitment to justice-based recovery. "It looked like a nuclear bomb had dropped, and feel like I was talking to God and saying, 'Okay, I understand what I need to do.' I'm the idea girl, and I'm the organizer. So, I started grabbing my friends, and we began to tackle these bottle-fed babies."

Lourdes shared that the failures in infant and young child feeding during emergencies were not limited to bottle-feeding mothers, but also impacted breastfeeding mothers. In emergency situations, the SafelyFed model, promoted by the World Health Agency, encouraged breastfeeding initiatives in disaster-prone environments by promoting the "breast is best" motto. However, this presented another challenge for Lourdes as breastfeeding requires clean, safe, and accessible water, to which many women did not have access. Lourdes acknowledged that she was not supposed to ask for formula, but felt conflicted as formula donations were necessary in emergency situations. She said, "I'm not really supposed to ask for formula. But how can you say don't send formula donations to the islands? The moment of

the crisis is not the moment to give that message." Lourdes was frustrated because, regardless of the feeding method, mothers were still facing difficulties and feeling as if they were doing something wrong. She added, "So, basically, no matter what mothers did, it was wrong, or [U.S. relief organizations] were making it hard for them."

To provide more context to Lourdes's concerns over the "breast is best" motto and related issues of inequity in Puerto Rico, she noted that Centers for Disease Control (CDC) was excluding data from U.S. territories in the most recent national breastfeeding estimates. The lack of data was alarming because, without understanding the demographics of infant feeding, Lourdes noted, "that in emergencies, it would be hard to know how much formula to bring or how much water would be needed to support those breastfeeding." It begged the question, "Why was and is Puerto Rico excluded from the data the U.S. gathers on infant feeding and on the needs of nursing women when we are U.S. citizens?" Lourdes noted that nearly 74% of Puerto Rican babies are being partially or fully formula-fed, identifying that this statistic becomes problematic when considering the conditions mothers faced in the aftermath. Given Puerto Ricans had limited access to formula and clean water, some babies required much more intervention. Lourdes noted that occasionally, they would have to insert a nasogastric tube, a tube that would go through the nose into the infant's stomach, and feed nutrition through a syringe. Lourdes recognized that without access to formula, ASI would need to help mothers with re-lactation. "We realized that the breastfeed, breastfeed, breastfeed, breastfeed message is turning off 74% or 80% of people. So, we realized we had to have a little bit more of a generic message about how we relayed information for feeding their babies after."

ASI's strategy to help women re-lactate after days or weeks might seem illogical given that it required ample access to fresh water, foods such as lean meats, proteins, and oatmeal, as well as supplemental pumping and a stress-free environment. As Lourdes's interview attested, difficult situations required creative approaches, and when looking at the intricacies of Puerto Rican mothers' lives, a one-size-fits-all solution did not account for these tensions. In this context, various techniques

for feeding infants and caring for mothers became necessary, including "breast is best" messages, back-to-bottle methods, re-lactation practices, and combination feeding techniques.

Lourdes also acknowledged the impact of intensive parenting and the overwhelming feelings mothers experienced, especially when faced with mothering and feeding their families in these conditions. Importantly, as Lourdes noted, the "breast is best" motto in this context-imposed rules and expectations on mothers that inadvertently labeled them as "good" or "bad" if they chose not to or could not breastfeed and thus contributed to increasing mothers' anxieties. She also noted that although a stress-free environment aids breastfeeding, the lack of resources and support was not reducing mothers' stress but exacerbating it. As Lourdes lamented, without the mechanisms for support and culturally relevant resources, Puerto Rican mothers continued to be "left to fend for themselves. We really have to know how to help mothers who are feeding their babies to support them with the breast or to provide them help with formula if they need it."

The communicative process of productive foregrounding while backgrounding negative feelings in Buzzanell's (2010) resilience framework is evident as Lourdes backgrounded some concerns she and others had and foregrounded action to move her community in a direction that reduced their vulnerability and helped mothers and families across the island long-term. When the complexity of the conditions after Hurricane Maria and the historical context of Puerto Rico are layered together, a more intimate portrait of infant feeding dilemmas on the island emerges, demonstrating that for this context and for mothers, in particular, different approaches to relief and recovery efforts are necessary. Lourdes did not remain passive while mothers were ignored and neglected by aid organizations in post-disaster interventions. This is where the model that Lourdes created through ASI became an integral piece in helping mothers on the island to move forward.

Lourdes wanted mothers to know that they could trust ASI to help provide them with safe options, no matter how they fed their baby. Emerging out of the necessities of post-disaster relief and epitomizing the features of resilience as proactive communal agency, the resilience of mothers inspired Alimentación Segura Infantil: in Spanish, *seguro/a* means safe. As Lourdes noted,

"The concept was that it would provide free or low-cost services to the community in lactation at the same time as it would create learning and training opportunities for people who either just wanted to become more hands-on lactation specialists or who wanted to become an IBCLC." Within just a few weeks of Maria, leveraging other relationships, like the one she had already forged with Centro de Mam, Lourdes conducted her first free infant youth and child feeding in emergency training. Her goal was to reach:

> anybody interested in receiving information about how to increase breastfeeding rates while still treating with love and dignity families who are formula feeding or combination feeding, [is] invited to this training. It's free of charge, as long as you promise to use the information to help other people.

To do this work, she built a large-scale social network of mothers and additional collaborations with organizational networks of women to diffuse knowledge, mobilize on the ground support, train women to provide infant feeding and lactation support and develop longer-term solutions that the local and state governments could not, seeing their social connections and community as critical for their recovery. In 2018, a year after the storm, Lourdes's groundbreaking work won her the Miriam H. Labbok Award for Excellence. As Agustina Vidal noted at the Breastfeeding and Feminism International Conference (2018),

> When the emergency has passed, we will have a roadmap on what knowledge and skills communities need to keep babies safe, a solid roadmap on how they can organize themselves, and put themselves at the service of families and babies.

Within two years, ASI had changed the local lexicon and culture around infant feeding and became the largest infant and young child feeding organization in Puerto Rico. Further, the model of training local women that Lourdes developed gained recognition from the U.S. Department of Health, the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine, and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

Rooted in Lourdes's concern and resistance is the acknowledgment that continuing to live with pre-storm conditions or accepting the continued risks they, as Puerto

Ricans, continue to face, such as lack of clean water and unreliable electricity, is "unacceptable." In her work with ASI, Lourdes saw a hierarchical system rooted in the "large-scale mistreatment of women and mothers for decades," one that she noted was only getting worse as disaster aid trickled in and "the failures to care for Puerto Rican women and mothers became more and more obvious." She reminded me, "They show us hours after this or that on the television, but here, in reality, it was weeks before the helicopters came. Babies starved, and it was weeks before formula came. And when it did, it was powder."

Despite the AAP modifying policies to support mothers in the aftermath of disasters better, Lourdes argued that their work still has room for growth because "those policies need to reflect different emergencies" and the needs and resources of different locales and exigencies. For example, snowstorms in the Upper Peninsula could create electricity blackouts "for days or weeks," or forest fires in California could force people to "live out of their cars." Such scenarios could generate conditions where boiling water for formula would become an impossible necessity.

In the aftermath of Maria, access to basic needs such as clean water came head-to-head with the precarity that existed before the storm, such as school closings, large-scale poverty, and food scarcity. Lourdes felt the frustration over the consistent mistreatment of Puerto Ricans as indicative of the contradictions embedded in their lives. Using her work with ASI, she hoped to shed light on their immediate needs after the storm and the conditions of the island long-term. As Lourdes exclaimed, "It's not okay for [the U.S. government] to treat us this way. It shouldn't be something we just have to suffer with and deal with. Or you know, just part of living here and being Puerto Rican. If you come here, it's all about tourism, but we're dying." She hoped that through the change enacted by ASI, she could empower other mothers and women across the island to resist living with the persistent struggles they faced. In summary, she acknowledged her deep anger:

> I was really, really angry that they would do this to [mothers and infants]. How could they? It was a calling for me to do something to build something better, more equitable for all women and mothers, not just on our island, but all over.

Lourdes's story draws awareness of the emergence of entrepreneurial activities by women and mothers after disasters, as they not only absorbed the shock for their families but also empowered their communities by creating new response mechanisms. One major impediment to building back is that "the bureaucratic gap between funding agencies and policies de-emphasizes collective action and the importance of inclusion and equity in the resources and funding allocation process" (Borges-Méndez & Caron, 2019, p. 11). Inadequacies in post-disaster infant feeding mechanisms exposed the problems with gender-blind relief efforts and one-size-fits-all recovery processes. As a result, women such as Lourdes had to mobilize resources themselves, "creating new organizations and businesses, and harnessing autonomously the knowledge required to participate in reconstruction" (p. 14).

Such gender-blind problems show a need to document women's specific experiences and further mothers' voices in these environments, as "motherhood is an important category of analysis for understanding women's oppression" (Bueskens, 2016, p. xiv). Lourdes's story about the issues with infant feeding after Maria demonstrates the invisible but interwoven conditions that continued to intensify the historical oppressions that these women faced. Her work challenged the ideological assumptions about motherhood and the expectations and presumptions around infant feeding. Importantly, through documenting their stories, the intersectionalities that oppress mothers became visible. Lourdes's anger became transformative, giving her a renewed sense of purpose. Through her work with ASI, she shifted the dynamics of power, determining new conditions for mothering and providing more options and support, which allowed mothers to feel hopeful and connected. Drawing on her anger and acknowledging it as legitimate, Lourdes enacted entrepreneurial creativity illustrative of feminist resilience, situating her as one figure of maternal agency.

Using Alternative Logics: Mariana

Buzzanell (2021a) notes that sometimes what turns out to be productive action can be seen as contradictory to the work needed for recovery, as those in crisis determine what they find

to be productive. In Puerto Rico, where long-term historical conditions created a humanitarian crisis even before Maria, post-disaster conditions, as one mother described, "turn[ed] our world upside down." Actions mothers took before the storm no longer seemed possible or made much sense. Behaviors that once seemed unsafe or worrisome became sensible. For example, one mother remarked that she let her kids play with trash on the side of the road to create some novelty in the aftermath, or as another mother noted, "We swam in the water. It was dirty, but we were hot, and he (her son) hadn't had a bath in days." In addition, this communication process might entail resistance to comply with rules and regulations or behaving in a way that may at the time seem irrational. Coutu (2002) argues that "resilience offers an alternative when rational thought and action may be ineffective" (p. 49). This is in part because conditions and contexts may require creative workarounds for exigencies that create barriers to, as one mother aptly put, a "just recovery" and, as such, demand change. Mariana, another figure of maternal agency, had a difficult time reconciling her frustrations and instead employed what might have appeared to be non-rational resistance towards recovery resources as a means of advocating for change in the systems she viewed as unjust and inequitable.

Mariana, a single mother of two children, ages three and five during Hurricane Maria, she prepared for the storm similar to Lourdes. "I filled up all the water containers and made sure to shut everything up." Given that Mariana was just shy of eight months pregnant and her daughter was still "small enough that she needed to be carried sometimes," she questioned how she would manage if something went devastatingly wrong during the storm. "I couldn't do things the way I would have normally, you know." This meant that she had to be open and honest with her other children about the dangers and encourage them to be more responsible, despite how young they were. She described, "[My kids] had backpacks packed. They'd cry, but because it's just me, I needed them to understand how we would have to do things to survive. I wanted to be prepared." Despite her best efforts, her small bungalow style home could not withstand the damage caused after both a tree and a utility pole fell on the roof. "The water poured in and everything was damaged. It wasn't safe, so we left. I didn't have another choice.

I just couldn't go to those camps." As a result, Mariana moved her family back in with their father. "He was very abusive, you know. But only to me. I knew I could manage. It was to keep them safe." Within a few weeks' time, the relationship slid back into its abusive patterns and Mariana once again had to move her children:

> It's very complicated because you can learn about how trauma works in the body and mind, but experiencing it is different. I've been working with the community and women that have been abused by their husbands, and I've been doing sexual education, and when that happened to me after the hurricane, I couldn't react because you could not believe it's happening, and I was processing so much at the same time.

In the aftermath of Maria, Mariana began working within her community as a first responder, doula, and community volunteer. Her work took her to the temporary camps established by FEMA and the Red Cross to help aid those who had lost their homes in the storm. While triaging various needs, she struggled with seeing the large disparity in aid response, finding that there were exclusionary practices happening at the intersection of race, class, and gender:

> It was hard to see children that were living in these camps by the street, and all I could think about was how vulnerable they were and what would happen to them. These pregnant women, they were not eating. They were taking care of their babies and not themselves. I told [the women from FEMA] these camps are full of sexual aggressors, and then they found out that these people in the camps were taking advantage of women and children. Then you go to these houses that have particular needs, elders, people just in their beds and their caretakers are in trauma and they are very tired, the pregnant ladies and babies and they are getting nothing either: Trump said that 93 billion was coming to Puerto Rico. Well, we didn't get that money because it stopped after 1 million.

The shortcomings in post-disaster relief, coupled with the Trump administration's lack of accountability and inadequate response, led to the dissemination of harmful messages, such

as emphasizing personal responsibility, perpetuating myths of intensive parenting, and reinforcing stereotypes about women of color and Puerto Ricans. As Mariana observed, these messages enabled the U.S. government to continue the historical mistreatment of Puerto Ricans. "They took schools away, and they're taking our help away. There are already more deaths than births in Puerto Rico. They want a Puerto Rico without Puerto Ricans," she said.

Furthermore, the societal expectation that mothers are responsible for absorbing the impact of disasters for their families, inadvertently blames the mothers themselves for the neglect and trauma they experienced. Mariana felt the weight of the challenges she and other mothers faced profoundly and recognized that this was not just the distress of the moment but a culmination of historical mistreatment and deprivation that, without resistance and change, would continue to oppress Puerto Ricans and their families:

> I thought, you have this privilege. I have water, and I could find a new place to rent. Then I'd hear about these kids who were found on the roof of their house, and their parents died because they gave all the food to the kids. I had to stop listening. At the same time, I'm here having this struggle, but I'm adding to that because I can't help them. At the same time, it doesn't take away my ability to be accountable to where I live. To be responsible to what my role here can be. What kind of world do I want for my kids?

Mariana found that her role as a mother conflicted with her community role and the expectations placed on her to enact certain maternal instincts. Instead, Mariana channeled her anger and frustration into what she considered productive action in an attempt not only to fight her marginalization, but the marginalization she was witnessing around her. To drive home her rationale for the choices she made in the aftermath, she told me about a study done by Refugees International that illustrated the failures of emergency shelters on the island. Quoting this study:

> Domestic violence shelters were not included in the island's emergency plans. When help came, it was haphazard and misinformed. According to one shelter

director, one day, FEMA simply dropped off some boxes of menstrual hygiene materials, which were not a priority need. In another case, they gifted a shelter with expired baby formula and pampers. (Vigaud-Walsh, 2018, p. 4)

Mariana's feminist awareness and her maternal identity impelled her to weigh in on the cost-benefits of her participation in inequitable, failed systems. She recognized that the blame placed on Puerto Ricans for the conditions prior to the storm and the expectations for them to recover independently required a shift in her mothering practices, an added dimension to her resilience. She described the moment that she did something that seemed irrational at the time, but for her, devoting herself to care work for survival would not solve any problems. The only way to make change was to enact it herself. She stated, "So, I decided not to take assistance from the government. Everyone asked, why would you do that? They judged me for not providing for my kids. But I saw it as providing for them even more so. I could work, and we could live." Through such contrary choices, Mariana refashioned herself into what O'Reilly (2019) calls a "mother outlaw": "Mothering could be experienced as a site of empowerment and a location for social change if the mother lives her life, and practices mothering, from a position of agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy" (p.11). For Mariana, the storm brought a desire to resist the systems of power, the oppressive structures, and defeating discourses that make mothers' lives harder.

In addition, she rejected assistance to call direct attention to the losses and contradictions she saw in the recovery efforts. Although her loss was material, her experience helping others in the aftermath unmasked for her some of the historical amnesias about the colonial treatment of Puerto Ricans, the subjugation of women, and the oppression of marginalized groups. Though many Puerto Ricans often subscribe to the harmful practices against people of different sexual and racial identities, Mariana witnessed contradictions in solidarity when working as a community first responder. For example, although a church organization came to the aid of their local community, providing food and emergency supplies they had received as donations, they refused to give those resources to community members that were part of the LGBTQ community. The church acted as

a shelter, a community center for aid relief, and a larger social resource for some families, whereas for others it acted as a barrier to survival and recovery. For Mariana, the church's role called into question the identity of solidarity among many islanders and as well as the frayed relationship between the island and the United States. Further, as a Black Caribbean woman, Mariana's experiences of identity oppression and discrimination align with the systemic subordination and disconnection experienced both before and after the storm aftermath. As Beatson (2013) observed about the otherness of Puerto Rican women:

> Black Caribbean women interact with the patriarchal state differently because their citizenship status and racial location are consequently different from the perceived Western population. This otherness limits their feeling of belonging and isolates Black Caribbean diasporic women because they may not feel supported by their community and the nation at large. (p. 76)

These intersectional forces and frustrations became apparent for Mariana in the aftermath, as she stated, the humanitarian crisis on the island had many feeling as though they were "second-class citizens" or "undeserving of aid because we aren't really from the U.S."

Although the conditions of her life exacerbated her internal struggle prior to and after the storm, Mariana repositioned herself in light of social, familial, and cultural identities and her role as a first responder to cultivate more maternal agency. She shifted how she was going to care for her family and the work she was going to do in her community, hoping that through this effort, she could reduce some of the amplified anxieties they were experiencing and reconcile their struggles.

Because of her deep introspective work, Mariana reframed her situation. She refused government help and assistance from churches as activism against what she described as a failed system that continued to limit the possibilities for families and replicated resource insecurities affecting women, children, the aging, the infirm, and those that "have identities others might not understand":

> I feel the frustration over our government deeply. It never really helped. I don't want to say they're helping me because they never did. So, I didn't take their

assistance. I could see my privilege. I didn't want to be a part of letting this happen to us. There's too many hurts articulated together.

Given the large-scale failures and the prejudices that excluded members of her community from elements of the recovery process, including one of her children, who had come out as non-binary, Marianna channeled her anxiety, anger, and frustration to realign her mothering practices as a site of resistance against the larger cultural narratives that situate Puerto Rican mothers.

Mariana understood that not taking the assistance offered through FEMA's informal housing in the shelters or aid provided by the Red Cross was risky. But the risk of moving into the shelter, where she and others attested to the violence and harassment women and children experienced, and the likelihood of predators being allowed to live there unchecked, seemed more problematic. She contended that the help that came was not helping at all, so the recovery efforts were illogical to her. "If they wanted to help, where was the help? Who was in charge? Why would they leave us so vulnerable like that?" Her choice to live with an abusive partner short-term was, for Mariana, a situation she had more control over than the uncertainty of the camps, which "lacked any organization or security" for those staying there. As Buzzanell (2010) observed, individuals in crises often respond to oppressive logics with "ongoing and concerted efforts to alter the organizing system itself" (p. 6). Although her resistance made things more challenging, she felt more in control: "They didn't get to decide how I lived anymore. I would take charge of that. I would decide how we lived." By embracing situations that might seem contradictory to their immediate well-being, Mariana tried to help her children "feel safe again." She matched the contradictions in recovery efforts with her contradictory behavior, reframing her risky choices in relation to the risks they faced taking the help. Mariana linked her losses, choices, and the action and inaction of others with her maternal identity to subvert the issues of gender inequality that affected women's post-disaster mothering experiences and shifted from "being the victim" to embracing her form of self and family preservation.

In sum, even as she was mothering in the harsh conditions of post-Maria, which included an abusive relationship, homelessness,

and financial difficulty, Mariana mothered in a way that not only empowered herself but actively resisted and called out some of the social injustices that her family confronted in the aftermath. Mariana's feminist child rearing exemplifies what O'Reilly (2004) describes as the work of mother outlaws: this is care work that "challenges the traditional practices of gender socialization for both mothers and sons and, as Rich argues, depends upon motherhood itself being changed" (p. 328). Mariana also used her anger about the deprivation she experienced after the storm as a driving force for change to develop more maternal agency for herself and her family. Despite embracing alternative logics and enacting behaviors that seemed at odds with safety, Mariana became another figure of agency. By opposing both the practices and demands of patriarchal mothering and entrenched patterns of discrimination, Mariana positioned herself outside of the institution of motherhood, which contributed to her ability to adapt and transform. In doing so, she showed how resilience is not only dynamic and full of contradictions, but transformative. In the end, Mariana hoped that by mothering this way, "my son will know just how much I fought to ensure that they have a right to live and that my daughter recognizes that I fought so that she gets the right to make a choice about how to live."

Conclusions

Through Lourdes's and Mariana's narratives, we can see how mothers negotiated material, interpersonal, and discursive tensions in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. As they navigated demands, contradictions, and exigencies, they constructed a variety of responses to the disaster aftermath that led to maternal identities and mothering practices that empowered them. Although Buzzanell (2010) identifies communicative and interactional elements through her development of CTR, my work expands on two specific components of her framework to suggest additional considerations. By adding a unique context site, a matricentric lens, and a narrative emphasis, a model of maternal resilience emerges. This model expands on her original processes to include:

1. Anger, often attributed as a negative emotion, became a productive force for the mothers' feminist activism and

creative entrepreneurship that worked towards restorative justice and equity. The familial and community work of mothers in the hurricane's aftermath attests to the value of women's participation in recovery efforts and further legitimizes the feelings of women.

2. Although governmental organizations enacted recovery mechanisms, many mothers saw this work as merely temporary and illogical and took issue with the gendered inequities they were experiencing. As a result, they resisted rationalizing risk in favor of strategies that challenged and opposed dominant recovery models. Their resistance was part of their dynamic adaptation and transformation.

As part of Buzzanell's (2010) theory, she notes that resilience involves the deliberate process of working to move forward instead of letting negative feelings create stagnation. In her description of the communication process, "foregrounding productive action while backgrounding negative feelings," Buzzanell (2010) addressed how individuals focus on the positive in crises, reframing the situation and their feelings to find hope and meaning in the experience. The work Lourdes and ASI did to ensure resources and information for post-disaster infant feeding illustrates the communicative processes of foregrounding productive action and backgrounding negative feelings. In response to the lack of action and inappropriate protocols for infant feeding practices that were insensitive to mothers' and infants' regions, situations, language, race, economic conditions, and cultural traditions, Lourdes developed goals and an activist commitment to righting those wrongs. The relationships forged between Centro de Mam and ASI advocated emancipatory, equity-based design and historically situated relational and transformational practices: attending to language, establishing contextually situated infant feeding practices, and addressing the current challenges of medical care across the island. Using her frustration over the deep-seated inequities and the consistent mistreatment of Puerto Ricans, Lourdes developed a business model that improved the methods and protocols for infant feeding, alongside access to improved resources, educational services, and medical care for other mothers and their infants across the island.

In an extension to Buzzanell's (2010) framework, the maternal perspective allows us to examine how women use the opportunities within motherhood to become agents of change within families and communities at large. Although women and mothers are expected to deny feelings of anger or frustration, Lourdes focused her energy instead "against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being" (Lorde, 1997, p. 280) to harness the knowledge of her community, activating relational networks to mobilize resources in new ways. Taken together, the emotional labor of Lourdes and Mariana helped to confront challenges and constraints linked with gendered ideologies. Instead of silencing these "negative emotions," they pushed them to the forefront, intervening in both the personal and institutional constraints they faced. Their anger became a productive force for their feminist activism and creative entrepreneurship that worked towards restorative justice and equity. An understanding of the maternal experience brings the emotional labor of women/mothers to the forefront, attesting to how mothers used often silenced feelings to enact productive behaviors that interceded in the disparities and develop solutions that benefited them long term.

In the second process of Buzzanell's (2010) framework, individuals and organizations might enact workarounds that are contradictory to the work necessary for their survival or adaptation when faced with complex conditions. Sometimes in crisis, actions and behaviors enacted prior are no longer possible or seem rational. As a result, new conditions and situations will shift the way people behave, the groups to which they belong, and their expectations. For example, aid organizations were sending in powered formula despite mothers' limited access to clean water and sterile equipment necessary for feeding, leading to global policy modifications that improve access to the liquid ready-to-feed formula in disaster environments. Buzzanell (2010) describes how behaviors that might seem counter-productive can open up opportunities that were not available before a crisis as, "putting alternative logics to work, designs new ways of handling the problems created by changing circumstances." Contradictions and tensions mothers faced in their new normal tasked them with meeting expectations that rationalized risk. For Mariana, Maria exposed the gendered

hazards and inconsistencies embedded in recovery mechanisms and advocated for collective resistance to barriers they, as a community of mothers, had always experienced in Puerto Rico.

Although Buzzanell's (2010) framework accounts for the ways people reframe situations, enacting workarounds to maneuver failing systems and adapt, the stories here expand this part of the model to include the work of resistance in transformation. Mariana had to rework her relationship with her family and work to gain more control and agency in her life, which meant a drastic departure from what disaster relief workers and analysts might expect of individuals in disaster environments. For example, when their homes are damaged, aid organizations expect them to join shelters, and when they are without food, aid organizations expect them to join the church lines and take the military packets offered. Without jobs and income, relief workers might expect disaster survivors will take the checks the government provides. Mariana instead rejected government aid and live temporarily with her abusive ex-partner. Her seemingly impossible choices drew attention to the increased danger temporary shelters meant for women and children, revealing the problems of recovery efforts. From her perspective, she could protect her children and herself from a singular and familiar threat, but could not protect them from the unknown probability of child predators in the camps. For Mariana, embedded in the money FEMA offered were constraints that would further entrench Puerto Ricans in a cycle of poverty and scarcity, calling her to reject their offer of aid. From her perspective, taking their money or help further allowed the United States to see her as a victim and continued to treat her as such.

In sum, as Lourdes's and Mariana's narratives reveal, the aftermath of Maria exposed the paternalist and incongruent recovery processes that were not only one-size-fits-all, but continued to replicate inequities all across Puerto Rico. Through their feminist anger, activist orientations, communal coalitions, and mothering practices, they reframed their situation to enact behaviors that were productive for the recovery of their island and allowed them to feel more control and agency in their lives. Facing additional tensions of notions of gender, race, work, and self within the cultural landscape, they renegotiated

relationships and identities to create new resource avenues to survive and thrive and live well. As they came to take on multiple intersectional maternal agencies, they found collaborative empowerment and pushed back against accepting "what was" to rework their lives for "what could be." In doing so, they became powerful agents of transformation and restorative justice across the island.

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"What Are They Going to Call You . . . Elderette?": Stories Women Tell of Conflicting Gendered Discourses in the Evangelical Church

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Abstract: Research reveals that traditional gender roles in evangelical churches shape how women engage with others and to what extent they take on leadership roles. Communication research on dialectical resistance frames organizational life as tension-filled and complex. Through interviews with 25 women who previously attended or currently attend evangelical churches, this study explores ways women perceive and respond to church-enforced gender roles. We adopt a theoretical lens rooted in Mumby's dialectical approach to control and resistance and discover how women understand their faith and roles in the church. Women's stories reveal their negotiation and production of meaning around three dialectics emanating from the church's power and members' responses: (a) the dialectic between rational and emotional expression, (b) the dialectic between understanding faith and practicing faith, and (c) the dialectic between respecting evangelical authority and challenging its patriarchal dimensions. Participants demonstrated that women reify patriarchal power and engage in resistance through a reckoning of tensions that collectively serve as evidence of shifting gender roles and power dynamics in the evangelical Church.

Keywords: evangelicalism, identity, dialectics, resistance, gender roles

#CHURCHTOO WAS ONE OF SEVERAL HASHTAGS born out of the #MeToo social media movement. Emily Joy, the first to use #ChurchToo online, is an abuse survivor and former evangelical (Moslener, 2018). The hashtag exposed the far-reaching abuses of power in the form of sexual harassment and abuse within religious contexts. In addition, the movement led to internal leadership changes in some churches, while other organizations chose to protect abusers and preserve their leadership roles (Allison, 2021; Bartkowski & Read, 2003; Dawson, 2016). #ChurchToo affected women attending evangelical churches as they had to reconcile with

these accusations. This movement represents one of the many considerations that influence women in their examination and enactment of their personal and religious identities. Women often struggle with their identities when they face clashes between their roles as wives, mothers, and church members (Jule, 2018; Palczewski et al., 2019).

This study aims to amplify the voices of women who negotiate their identities amidst critiques of evangelicalism; these voices often are not included in public narratives or within churches with which women may align. Tensions complicate evangelical women's responses, pulling them in opposing directions. A church's interpretation of purity, marriage, sexuality, the workplace, and theological beliefs help shape the way women navigate their religious beliefs and behaviors. Unfortunately, these messages often contradict each other, as church culture and language may not support the opportunities, even if leadership figures outwardly offered them to women. For instance, a church elder often implies a male leader. Gender is so inscribed in the role of elder that participants within this study struggled to imagine what a woman elder might be called; as one participant questioned, "what are they going to call you . . . elderette?" While discussing their shared identity as evangelical women, the participants reveal a complex set of tensions that impacted the way they negotiated their roles in the church.

Our analysis presents a glimpse of the competing expectations placed on women in evangelical Christianity today and how women grapple with those expectations. We argue that women resist male-dominated religious spaces by reimagining and recalibrating their approach to tensions they experience in the church. From interviews with women who are current or former members of evangelical churches, we learn that there is just as much, if not more, interrogation within traditional evangelical women's conversations around their faith as there is in many other social movements. Such interrogation is not legible within current resistance frameworks, but may serve to loosen and shift gendered norms. Thus, this study contradicts findings that organizational tensions typically indicate lower identification with the organization or profession (Mahon & Nicotera, 2011), instead finding that it is through the dialectical

negotiation of tensions that women construct enduring faith-based identities.

We begin with a review of related literature, focusing on Mumby's (2005) dialectical framework as a basis for our analysis. Mumby's (2005) discursive approach furnishes an analysis of how women both reify and challenge church discourse that attempts to control and fix meaning about the roles and identities of women members of evangelical churches. Next, the research frames the competing messages as imbricated within power structures (Putnam et al., 2016), examining how women navigate conflicting gendered discourses. We then discuss methodology, followed by the results, and close with conclusions and implications for theory.

Review of Literature

Our literature review offers a conceptualization of evangelicalism, a review of relevant studies on the evangelical church, and a discussion of women's navigation of gender roles in religious spaces. We then present research on tensions, contradictions, and dialectical approaches to organizing. Finally, we close with a discussion of how communication and religious studies theorize resistance.

Evangelicalism, Gender, Identity

Religious organizations have functioned as gatekeepers to eternal salvation for centuries. The combination of a church membership's claim to eternal consequences and the totalistic nature of religious values and norms means that religious identities play a primary role in people's lives inside and outside the church (Barker, 1994; Cheney & Cloud, 2006; Hinderaker, 2015). Evangelicalism is among the denominations of Christianity that offer appealing, simple, and straightforward answers to questions of the afterlife, the purpose of life, and identity. Ward (2018) describes how members are commonly allotted to a specific role by their gender and are expected to demonstrate the fruit of their faith according to that role. However, even as a religious movement with a common history and shared beliefs, it is composed of a "coalition of

submovements, which are sometimes strikingly diverse and do not always get along" (Marsden, 1991, p. 2).

Although evangelicalism is far from a monolithic experience, valuable similarities bind evangelicalism in the United States in fragmented, competing ways. For instance, evangelical families negotiate a multitude of conflicting discourses about gender and sexuality, gendered roles, and power, but they are bound to the church by shared cultural discourses and a belief in the Bible as the Word of God (Bartkowski, 2001). Many different beliefs about gender roles exist in evangelical churches in the United States. Some believe gender differences are biological and unchangeable, while others believe in gender differences with overlapping qualities, such as a nurturing father figure, but still expect him to be the "bread-winner." A smaller subset of biblical feminists favors gender equality in role opportunity (Bartkowski, 2001; Gallagher, 2004). Contemporary evangelicalism, with its origins in the eighteenth century, describes a collection of discourses bonded by four shared assumptions, which echo Bebbington's (1989) analysis of the belief system: (a) the Bible is the infallible Word of God, (b) people need to undergo a process of conversion to evangelicalism, (c) Jesus atoned for humanity's sins by being crucified on the cross, and (d) believers should express their faith through good deeds. The four defining features of evangelicalism unite members of this influential denomination.

There is an essential distinction between evangelicalism and fundamentalism, however. Marsden (1991) states succinctly that "an American fundamentalist is an evangelical who is militant in opposition to liberal theology in the churches or changes in cultural values or mores" (p. 1). In other words, fundamentalism describes the conservative impulse to reject change in favor of tradition (e.g., traditional gender roles). In contrast, evangelicalism more broadly describes the four core beliefs above, according to Bebbington (1989). Other defining characteristics of evangelical churches include proselytization and strict adherence to biblical texts, though there can be a high degree of variability among church members (Ward, 2019). We treat these ideas as exemplars of the dominant tradition of evangelicalism, encapsulated in smaller religious subsets, including Southern Baptists, Lutherans,

Presbyterians, and many non- denominational churches, to name a few (Smith & Masci, 2018).

Scholars have documented fundamentalist strains of evangelicalism's history, supporting heteronormativity in various ways within the family, the workplace, and daily life. Ward's (2019) three-year ethnography listening to a new male pastor's sermons at an evangelical church demonstrate how clergy attempt to construct a communally appropriate view of gender roles through their Sunday morning services. The order and structure believed to be God's creation extend to how men and women interact (Wilkins & Thorsen, 2010, p. 178). Purity pledges and rings enforce mandatory heterosexuality in the church and disempower adolescents by suggesting they have no agency. If they resist, they risk joining a dominant impure majority (Manning, 2015).

Similarly, Michael (2019) describes evangelical surveillance of the gendered body, particularly in mandating modesty standards for women. Piety and purity are measured within churches through the medium of clothing, influenced by the purity culture, demonstrating how "gender fractures the otherwise unbroken line that binds the believer to God through God's son" (Michael, 2019, p. 1136). Norms promoting heterosexuality within evangelicalism also center on whiteness, which relies on longstanding racial scripts about purity (Hammonds, 1997). Historically, White women are often considered innocent, while Black women are considered immoral and impure in health and political contexts (Hammonds, 1997). Additionally, Du Mez (2020) demonstrates how popular culture and theology define evangelicalism, arguing that White American male heroes inform and embody militant evangelical masculinity. Historically, evangelical consumer markets have capitalized on military discourses and popular culture to reproduce nationalism and defend White patriarchy (Du Mez, 2020).

Purity Culture

Purity culture is a significant subset of evangelicalism popularized in the 1990s. This movement generally espouses the belief that humans are naturally heterosexual. Advocates of this culture value abstinence before marriage, complementarian

roles for a husband and wife, and the indisputable link between gender and sex assigned at birth (Dawson, 2016; Jule, 2018). Complementarianism (Ward, 2018) is the view that men and women complement each other in their roles, and those roles should be mutually exclusive. Practically, it means there can only be one decision-maker, which prevents women from having access to such power. Some churches, informed by these messages, implement a dress code culture and designate how single men and women should socially interact with one another (Klein, 2018). Other churches have more lenient interpretations of how women ought to embody purity, allowing women to be pastors and take roles traditionally reserved for men. Within a specific church, those in power have yet to clearly define purity as a destination and as a lifestyle (Gailliard & Davis, 2017). However discreet or far-reaching, the norms attached to the idealization of purity represent one of the leading forces that drive resistance through the #ChurchToo movement in the United States.

The #ChurchToo hashtag is one expression of resistance constructed by current or former members of religious organizations. The movement impacted thousands, giving women who were/are members of evangelical churches the voice to speak out against structural constraints on gender and sexuality that ignored and concealed sexual abuse and harassment. However, prominent evangelical voices have developed varied responses to women's critiquing traditional doctrines of submission. Statements communicated by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, The Gospel Coalition, and Focus on the family, to name a few (Bartkowski & Read, 2003), claim that their theology empowers women through submission. Submission is "an expression of absolute power and strength, not of weakness" (Dawson, 2016, p. 5). According to Paul, women are, biblically speaking, instructed to "learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet" (New International Version Bible, 1978, 1 Tim 2:11- 12). Paradoxically, women obtain agency through constraints on their agency (Jenkins, 2014).

These powerful refrains in evangelical culture indicate that women continue to struggle with conflicting identities; nonetheless, they make spaces of resistance for themselves

(e.g., #ChurchToo) and interrogate the biblical basis of church norms. As postindustrial life continues to challenge the traditional religious doctrines on gender roles, it becomes increasingly important to discuss alternate forms of resistance in evangelicalism to support efforts toward equitable social change. For instance, Bendroth's (2015) work examines the history of the United Church of Christ, tracing out recent calls for both a return to tradition and values of the past and other calls to "break free of orthodoxy" (p. 192). Scholars have explored women's responses to such constraints (Burge & Williams, 2019; Sheldon & Honeycutt, 2011; Ward, 2010, 2018), but how those constraints are first conceptualized and negotiated in practice is still under-researched. Therefore, we turn to theories of resistance and agency to describe how women navigate gendered norms and inequity in the church, even in spaces that appear homogenous in belief.

Theorizing Resistance and Agency

Opportunities for exercising agency and resistance for members of evangelical churches happen within an already contested meaning-making process. Brasher's (1998) research suggests that women frame evangelicalism in various conflicting ways that reproduce and resist dominant gendered discourses. Rather than limiting resistance to a significant, romanticized movement, we extend Mumby's (2005) dialectical analysis to conceptualize resistance more broadly, situating it as an intrinsic part of organizational power. From a dialectical perspective, members of organizations are cognizant of managerial discourses. Consequently, they can utilize appropriate disciplinary mechanisms to operate on their terms and for their purposes (Mumby, 2005). For application in gender and religious studies, the dialectical framework offers an analytic tool for investigating the interplay of opposing and contradicting discourses that explain why and how members of organizations stabilize meaning to reproduce or subvert dominant norms and discourses. In other words, the dialectical framework explains how women do not experience contradictions simply as a process of synthesizing opposites, but instead implicates a far more complicated web of power in navigating tensions

and contradictions. Still, Foucauldian studies of organizational power tend to privilege structure over the agency of general organizational members, preferring to analyze "the disciplinary mechanisms of the workplace" (Mumby, 2005, p. 29), while obscuring the negotiations of power that occurs in everyday communication. For Mumby (2005), resistance occurs through communication behaviors that "dereify" taken-for-granted structures and instead interrogate their logic (p. 23).

Thus, resistance constitutes any small (re)negotiation of meaning in any corner of organizational life (Kondo, 1990; Prasad & Prasad, 2000); similarly, agency is simply the ability to "act otherwise" (Giddens, 1979, p. 14). Power is not monolithic, exercised from some sovereign point, but is local, with many points of origin (Scott & Myers, 2010; Trethewey, 1997). Even in a church that appears to have one dominant ideology, multiple discourses and practices (e.g., sermons, dress codes, and smaller church gatherings) offer myriad interpretive possibilities (Gramsci, 1971; Mumby, 1997; Townsley & Geist, 2000). Pockets of resistance and expressions of power reflect and respond to one another (Mumby, 2005). The dialectical approach to resistance offers a perspective that centers tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes as crucial and defining features of evangelical women's experiences.

Tensions, Contradictions, and Paradoxes

Tension-centered approaches to organizing encompass many theoretical traditions that approach tensions as an inevitable and welcome component of organizing. Within evangelicalism, we posit that competing structural messages situate the evangelical member as the subject of many discursive struggles, making tensions a crucial analytic construct (Townsley & Geist, 2000; Weedon, 1997). Normative meanings of evangelical beliefs, gender, sexuality, and identity clash within the expressions and re-expressions of evangelicalism. Such contradictions form "fault lines" for conflict (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 105) but do not necessarily lead to active struggles; instead, the scattered, repressed nature of these tensions conceals them from prominent sight (Cheney & Cloud, 2006; Papa et al., 1997). Tensions exist as constraints or "tightness" in

making decisions and responding to organizational conditions, whereas contradictions are mutually exclusive opposites defined by interdependence (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 69).

In a totalistic organization such as a church, feelings of connectedness and identification and reactions to organizational expectations may be more complicated or hidden (Hinderaker, 2015). However, eliminating tensions is not and should not be considered a possibility. Instead, instability and the existence of tension "[foster] an alternative logic for organizing" (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 137). Tensions are inherent and can be productive forces that are an inseparable part of organizing (Foucault, 1997; Putnam, 2019), rather than considered a disjunction to be eliminated.

Therefore, identity negotiation within such paradoxical identity guidelines becomes a complicated, repeated process. A paradox is a "contradiction that persists over time" and creates absurd situations and challenging choices for organizational members (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 72). Giddens (1991) and Foucault (1997) describe self-identity for members as a reflexive achievement amid shifting, tension-filled power dynamics. This achievement is even more challenging in organizations that regularly ask members to fulfill a paradox, such as the message of constraining agency within the purity culture. Ingersoll (2003) offers another example where participants discussed feeling called by God to fully embrace their skills and identity while simultaneously feeling incapable of expressing themselves in church. Members are reminded daily or hourly that they cannot ever meet the full expectations of their organization (or faith), often experiencing emotional exhaustion, and likely have decreased feelings of self-efficacy (Scott & Myers, 2010). Thus, paradoxical situations experienced by evangelical women can have unforeseen and detrimental consequences.

The study of discourses, or symbolic messages carrying meaning that inform each other, define, support, and reify social realities, reveals paradoxes (Canary, 2015; McPhee et al., 2014; Townsley & Geist, 2000; Weedon, 1997). For example, previous, normalized discourses around game wardens informed structures of law enforcement that contradict more recent understandings of police job performance (Sherblom et al., 2002). Although distinct, this example illustrates the way that

discourse can construct intractable contradictions that become magnified over time, similar to how women encounter paradoxes when drawing on evangelical discourses to navigate changing expectations in the church. When two different understandings of a profession attempt to be fused, paradoxes develop and create difficult decisions for members of that organization. Weedon (1997) explains how the combination of discursive and material practices uncovers the deeper power relations in constant conflict. When power operates discursively to produce particular performances and repress nondominant ideas and beliefs, it reveals conflicting power relations. To maintain their faith, evangelical women must communicatively navigate many conflicting gendered norms and discourses as they operate as active and vital members of their church.

Thus, women's stories of sensemaking amid clashes between evangelical discourses and practices can enhance reflection and expand collective consciousness about what is possible in the church (Windsor et al., 2014). In light of our goal to identify conflicting discourses and tensions in the experiences of evangelical women, the following research question guided us:

How do women in evangelical churches manage conflicting gendered discourses?

Women's stories offer insight into the sources of tension that provide constraints and opportunities for renegotiating evangelical identities.

Methodology

This qualitative study critically analyzes the stories women tell of their experiences with the evangelical church culture's conflicting discourses in their enactment of identity. This study draws conclusions about women's experiences within the evangelical culture in the United States but does not represent all evangelical churches. In-depth interviews with 25 women, primarily in a southwestern region of the United States, form the basis for the study. In this section, we accomplish the following: (a) describe the participants and their demographics, (b) outline the procedures for conducting the interviews, and (c) detail our data analysis process.

Participants

The selected participants revealed commonalities and differences in their identities that intersected with the constraints they faced in religious institutions (see Appendix for participant demographics). For example, most participants expressed their desire to know their faith more freely, but their specific beliefs on gender roles enacted in a church often contradicted one another. Additionally, all respondents are (or were) evangelical, but not necessarily fundamentalist. Participants ranged in age from early 20s to late 70s, yet offered similar insights about constraint. 14 of the participants attended a church, titled "Living Water" for the purposes of this study, composed of a majority of White members. Due to self-selection in that church, the sample of women was primarily White. Although this homogeneity limits the generalizability of the conclusions about evangelicalism, it presents an opportunity for a more precise analysis of White, evangelical feminist resistance within a dominant raced/gendered/classed cultural experience.

Data Collection

After the authors' Institutional Review Board approved this study, the authors used a snowball and convenience sampling through connections offered by interviewees. An online survey, posted on Facebook, asked a series of Yes-No questions (centered on their former or present attendance at an evangelical church) to determine if the individual would be an appropriate participant for this study. The first author conducted semi-structured interviews with eligible participants, with each participant choosing a pseudonym to keep anonymity. The interview guide concentrated on tensions women may have encountered in their experience with evangelical churches and the ways they navigated those tensions.

Twenty of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in a location chosen by the participant. The five others were conducted over the phone or by video conferencing software. We interviewed participants through a dialogic approach, offering a space for participants to address, reinterpret, and reclaim conflict through dialogue (Deetz, 2001). Our use of a

responsive interviewing approach built a friendly relationship with interviewees, with open-ended questions designed to allow for tangential stories by the interviewees (Riessman, 2008; Tracy, 2020). Our collaboration on this manuscript was enhanced by the first author's reflection about her evolving and changing identity as a long-term evangelical church member. The second author was raised in Catholic and Christian Reformed traditions and did not affiliate with any organized religion. Although the third author was raised and confirmed as a Lutheran, she ended any religious affiliation at 18 when she left home for college. With these differences in background, the authors provided alternate perspectives for each other while discussing results, weighing the first author's familiarity with the evangelical culture against the second and third authors' critiques and questions.

Analysis of Data

All interviews were audio-recorded and lasted 20–64 minutes. Interviews were transcribed verbatim for a total of 399 double-spaced pages. Data saturation was reached at 25 interviews, as participants' stories showed clear and repetitive themes when analyzed together (Riessman, 2008), and theoretical saturation when comparing the data with dialectical resistance research (Mumby, 2005).

The manual coding and data analysis involved three stages, using an iterative approach and identifying emergent themes of tensions, resistance, and agency. The first stage consisted of primary-cycle coding (Tracy, 2020), where we read the transcriptions multiple times, highlighting words and phrases representing participants' sensemaking of the church's constraints on their identities and opportunities for renegotiating evangelical identities. The first author's field note observations of the participants' emotions and behaviors were integrated during this first stage as well. In this stage, we also noticed an apparent hesitancy expressed by some participants to critique their church, while others were very open in their criticism.

In the second stage of analysis, we introduced several layers of in-depth coding (Tracy, 2020). We coded for mentions of expectations or instructions from church leadership, members,

and/or beliefs, revealed in all 25 interviews. We also noted women's conceptualizations of faith and their sensemaking of their perceived value in the church. Throughout the analysis, we frequently checked codes against the data, ensuring they were accurate to the participants' stories, using a constant comparative method (Tracy, 2020).

The third stage of analysis focused on grouping the initial patterns into predominant categories. After moving between the coding and the original transcripts, we identified three main communicative dialectics: (a) a dialectic between rational and emotional expression, (b) a dialectic between understanding and practicing faith, and (c) a dialectic between respecting and challenging evangelical authority. These three dialectics reflect the specific elements of control and resistance at work in evangelical churches, as described by participants. At this stage, Mumby's (1997) dialectical framework provided a lens for abductively understanding how women experience control and resistance through the three dialectics, thereby offering insight into women's sensemaking of their experience of gendered roles in their evangelical church.

Conflicting Expectations for Women's Prescribed Roles in Evangelical Churches

Participants describe feelings of being stuck between opposing demands in ways that require them to "divorce" themselves from the institution of religion and as a "confusion [that] is never resolved." Women's stories revealed their sensemaking and management of these opposing demands in their prescribed gender roles in the evangelical church, starting with the most fundamental building block for negotiating identity: knowledge creation. "Truth," as interpreted by the church, is essential in establishing meaning and generating certainty for members. These tensions impacted how women interacted within an evangelical organization that structurally favored men.

The following analysis explores: (a) the dialectic between rational and emotional expression and the discursive middle grounds that participants construct to resist or transcend it, (b) the dialectic between understanding faith and practicing faith in ways that allow for the renegotiation of identity, and (c)

the dialectic arising with the demand to respect the masculine evangelical authority while resisting in ways that allow for the construction of identities and practices that counter or challenge patriarchal norms.

The Dialectic Between Rational and Emotional Expression

The first dialectic in women's sensemaking reveals how participants offer meanings that (a) privilege theological rationality for its stability and certainty, (b) resist constructions of emotion as gendered, dangerous, and misleading, and (c) craft a flexible middle ground.

Theological Rationality Rooted in God's Word. First, theological rationality is connected to stable, elite interpretations of the Bible that provide certainty for participants as they make decisions about their lives. Throughout the interviews, rationality involves an objective "right way" to be faithful and perform religious identification, or in the words of a participant, "letting scripture correct me." For instance, Georgia describes how discovering doctrine solidified her identity, "I didn't even believe in doctrine. Why does anyone care about doctrine? As I started studying theology and understanding what doctrine actually was, in the questions and answers, I was like, oh my gosh, what have I been doing?" Questioning her practices, Georgia describes a need to realign her identity to fit with theological "doctrine," which offers concrete, rational facts about God and what she should be doing in the world.

The rational-emotional dialectic reflects how participants invest in specific structures of knowledge and truth, generating clashes between the competing epistemologies of modernism and postmodernism (Welcomer et al., 2000). Many women find the certainty associated with rational theology guiding their identity alignment. For instance, Samantha explains, "if [God] tells me don't do one thing, okay, I won't do it. I know I'm capable, I know I can make wise decisions, but God says, do it this way, and because I love God and I trust him, I say, okay, that's fine." Similarly, Suzette values theological rationality for the certainty that it brings to her identity. She says, "I'm very happy for the clear instruction on it [gender] because it opens a door that can

be very, very troubling to people. Living Water is clear from the get-go. And for me, I needed that." These succinct explanations construct the direct appeal of this binary logic and a rationale for not resisting it, thus reifying the church's power. These findings align with Strhan's (2010) analysis of an evangelical church that discursively privileged rationality, not as deliberative truth, but as truth stemming from God's word, over emotion. In this way, theological rationality designates a preference for consistency, stability, and certainty as expressed by participants' discourse.

Emotion as Gendered Expression. The church demands that women regulate their identities in two ways: (a) constructing women's emotion expression as dialectical to theological truth and (b) constructing emotion as an essentialist characteristic of women's identity that must be regulated differently depending on the religious context.

First, evangelicalism has grappled with postmodern challenges over truth and knowledge. Participant interviews provide evidence of women's perceptions of emotion as untrustworthy and truth existing externally and apart from people. Conservative evangelical cultures "imply a liberal, secular separation between 'public' and 'private' and a privileging of discursive rationality over emotions, whilst at the same time expressing a desire for coherence across all spheres of life that transcends such binaries" (Strhan, 2010, p. 205). This pattern of participant responses aligns with modernist rhetoric that often pits rationality against emotionality (Welcomer et al., 2000). For example, Georgia explains that:

> Our culture has decided that truth is within us. And when you lose the idea that truth is outside of you, then the only trick you know is what you know when you turn to emotions and all that. And so your emotional reactions and your feelings become truth, and you have nothing. All you have for a plumb line is that.

In other words, Georgia perceives emotions as not being a trustworthy and stable guide and thus must be regulated and subordinate to rationality.

Participants explicitly discuss emotion in negative and gendered terms. Women describe the pressure of "conjuring up" emotions during the women's conferences to appear moved

by the Holy Spirit. However, emotions are not considered prim and proper in the general congregation, indicating tension when the expression of emotion does not occur in the appropriate time and place, and the need for identity regulation arises. Leelee explains this tension as a normal product of gender differences, that women "shepherd women a bit better because we're emotional. That's not always a blessing. I don't always need somebody to affirm how I'm feeling." In this statement, Leelee constructs emotions as an essentialist characteristic of women that is valuable in shepherding others. However, it is also a site of a discursive struggle where emotions can be misleading—a way of knowing that should not always be "affirmed." Women experience emotion as governed by gendered discourses but must discern which of them should not be affirmed and under what circumstances. From this perspective, women's leadership through emotion is not as trustworthy, reliable, or certain as one rooted in theological rationality; thus, emotions present an inherent, confusing paradox for those who want to pursue a career in ministry.

As a result, the church creates a double bind for women—they are told that performing emotion at women's conferences and church gatherings is a natural and normal part of being a woman. However, simultaneously, women's emotion expressions are devalued and discouraged by members and leadership, demonstrating how powerful localized renegotiations of meaning are (Mumby, 2005). For example, Georgia candidly speaks to the feminization of emotion in the church:

> I don't like the emotional gushy gush gush of women getting together and bawling and crying and like getting all emotional. I'm like, let's be serious. And people think serious means emotion, or you have to have this big emotional response. And I am more like, no, let's really understand what God wants to speak into our hearts.

Georgia's statement naturalizes stereotypes of women as "gushy" or frenetic and emotional. However, her words also reveal a fundamental distrust and dislike of emotions that can betray her, especially when women's groups overuse them. In this way, theological truth is rational, emanating from the outside—what God speaks into hearts. On the other hand, emotion expression from the inside is to be doubted and questioned,

thus reproducing a masculinist ideal of religious identity (Ward, 2019). As an example of the church's identity regulation, Haley describes herself as a passionate and emotive person who was told "by superiors [in her church] that that is not okay, and that is uncomfortable for people." As a result, she explains that she feels emotions are "shunned." Thus, the women in this study express a range of perspectives that move across a dialectic, where some feel their church identity aligns with rationality and others describe a discursive struggle they engage in to manage the dialectic between rational and emotional expression in church participation.

Crafting a Middle Ground. Although the privileging of rationality is a biblically-based foundation for members enacting their faith, the practice for many participants encompasses far more than following simple directives. Eight participants speak about a connection with God that encompasses more valuable parts of their identities than just following rules set by a church. Flicka explains further, "You can't fit God in a box . . . and so for man to say, X, Y, Z, you put God in a box." Mary adds to this idea, recounting how she "did in some level accept that all truth is God's truth, and there was no place intellectually that [she] would venture that God wouldn't be." Sometimes this message came from the church and guided participants toward compassion and open-mindedness. Marie and Haley explain how there can be things members disagree on, but "our church adheres to the rule about compassion," and "church taught me that there is way more than [judgment]." These women want more than a script for their faith; the idea of rigid, robotic adherence to perceived biblical principles through such "rules" is a theological concept called legalism (Ward, 2018). Instead, women sharing this perspective wish to have a fully embodied faithful life, or as one participant, Dana, calls it, "empathetic alignment," where they dedicate their hearts and minds to following God. Empathy encompasses a changed mental and emotional state, going beyond robotic obedience and allowing believers a degree of freedom. Thus, women are caught in a tension-filled constraint as they purge emotional states that do not align with the "truth" from the Bible, yet the grounding they seek is not always clear.

The partially unknowable nature of "truth" creates opportunities for women, acting within their interpretations of biblical guidance, to go beyond the standard practices of their church, opening the way for the dereification that Mumby (2005) discusses. Ambivalence, flexibility, and an evolving faith and spirituality characterize this discursive middle ground and a shifting of the power dynamics. Some participants prioritize a "feeling" of faith and identification with a higher being. For example, Elena describes how her beliefs shifted after coming out about her sexual orientation, explaining that "during this whole transition, I learned things from new people and read and was in seminars and just being in a completely different, diverse place just woke me up to the fact that there is not one way to be a Christian or be any human being that has a faith or spirituality or identification with a higher being." God appeared to be outside of any church to Elena, which aided her faith journey. Leah views her faith similarly, and her identification with religion grew when she took ownership of it rather than placing the fate of her faith in her church, as she says, "my beliefs are outside of the church." Finally, Mariah told of how she grew up with a "black and white," rigid faith, and her new philosophy that grey areas exist transcends even what her church believes, allowing her to explore her faith more freely. At the same time, transcending the dialectic makes enacting Christianity more complicated because it is up to participants to navigate and negotiate their faith instead of adopting prescribed principles. From this view, participants attempt to construct a discursive middle ground between complete fidelity to their church's theological principles and flexibility with their faith.

The Dialectic Between Understanding and Practicing Faith

The clash between internal understandings and external performances of faith is the second dialectic in women's sensemaking of their religious identity. How women understand their faith to be and how they respond to differences with members of their faith reveals the tensions within an authentic display of faith. Discovering, understanding, and defending faith is described as a beautiful sensemaking process and a never-ending journey full of complications. This work is

intensely personal and is inevitably put on display by members, weighed against the standards of the self and other members. Both influences promote competing ideals, asking women to emphasize or hide parts of their identity (Acevedo-Garcia et al., 2013). The following sections illuminate (a) women's conceptualizations of the muddle as the partially unknowable starting points of their faith and (b) the standards of authenticity from participants' fellow church members.

An Unknowable Starting Point. The standard by which women measure their religious progress is, at least partially, unknowable in their lifetimes, reflecting the enigmatic nature of rationality. Suzette, a seasoned member at her church, explains the dynamic nature of her faith, "I'll boil it down and say it's messy . . . however, you interact, it might be right, it could be wrong, it might be corrected in the future, but it's messy, and we're comfortable with that." Her words indicate that she expects her understanding of her faith to contain tensions and inaccuracies, but she is welcoming those opportunities for spiritual growth. Additionally, Jane describes her faith as a "journey, not a destination," indicating that there is a balancing act between what she is doing now and where and how she will end up in her spiritual growth during this lifetime. Jane and others see their journey as filled with questions and tensions rather than the certainties they expected to find within their faith. Evelyn points to how her "identity isn't always one thing," and the only consistent part of her identity is that she is a child of God. This instability, or lack of a centralized truth around faith (Mumby, 2005; Scott & Myers, 2010), leaves room for interpretation beyond a woman's belonging to God, setting the stage for various tensions to emerge. Again, faith requires far more than people's adherence to an unquestioned set of church rules.

A recurring theme for some of the women in this study is the concept of a dynamic, moving faith, which contrasts with the more rigid identity management that other women describe as essential to their religious identity. Ten women speak to the perpetual movement of their faith, using verbs to describe how they enacted their faith, such as: "interweaving," "growing," and "walking alongside." Members such as Marie and Amber reference the role of their fellow church members and family in

this process, describing how they "walk alongside" each other to assist in their goal of an authentic, faith-filled life. Amber adds that faith is "interweaving that with everything we do." Their faith must be built-in to their life to keep them accountable. These tensions reflect the inevitable disorder that results from attempts to have fixed meaning from different sources, some yet to be discovered (Foucault, 1997; Putnam, 2019).

The Standards of Authenticity. Participants' words illustrate how they seek opportunities to be vulnerable. Twelve women describe the process of enacting vulnerability within a church group setting, with over half of those participants ascribing positive traits to such practices. Several women are open with the struggles they are willing to share with their small group of women, indicating that all is fair game in these private spaces. For example, Georgia describes needing to be "talked off the ledge" of hating her husband and any other "mess" she experiences in her marriage and beyond. She values the time with other women in her faith to share even the least attractive parts of her life. Similarly, Flicka accepts that everyone has "dirty laundry" to air with each other, but she, along with several others, describes the need for this to happen in a smaller setting. There is a precariousness to sharing, even among close friends. As women enact their own beliefs, they must also navigate the boxes in which other members will inevitably place them.

Even in light of the inherent messiness of faithful living, some women communicate expectations for authenticity in how fellow group members share their struggles. Michelle states, "I mean, you're there to grow and learn, right? And how can you do that if you pretend you're somebody that you're not? You know what I mean? . . . So if you're living, hopefully living authentically in every area, then you are who you are." Authenticity is a choice, in Michelle's words. Dana agrees, "How are people supposed to know if you don't say anything? Being that voice or that sharer of resources. Because that's uncomfortable if you are in a place of unmet expectations, your natural response is to distance yourself instead of pressing into the hardness/comfortability of it." Thus, sharing vulnerably and authentically is not only expected, but also needed, in her opinion, for a healthy church member to grow. Edna explains that everyone will be "a worldly

slave or a godly one . . . there's no such thing as neutral." The pattern in all these women's words is calling into question the expected identity that is rational, neutral, and obedient. Instead, women see these groups as a "counterfoil to male's dominance in congregational life" (Brasher, 1998, p. 64). For these women, the group is an authentic space where they can acknowledge failures and interrogate faith.

However, women describe the pressure of expectations placed on them in conversations with other Christians. Emma references how she self-censors her voice when she has not had time to prepare the material for her Bible study group, as she is "not as sharp with the material." Evelyn adds to this, saying how her sharing in a past small group "was more me putting on a face, not being completely real, impression management, trying to be really careful with what I put forward, especially since our deacon was in the group too." Ironically, she feels she had to hide parts of her belief system to keep up with others' perceptions of her authenticity. As Ward (2019) points out, the managerial discourse of the church often functions to regulate members' identities in an "appropriately" gendered manner. In this way, fault lines for conflict are implicit in disclosures about failures, growth, and the messiness of faith.

These observations point to the idea that there is "dirty laundry" not meant for everyone to hear and that some struggles may be outside the scope of what other members believe they see in an authentic evangelical woman. Thus, even if women feel they are training their minds to align with their faith, there lies a hidden bright line between the dedicated and the apathetic. The church asks women to "choose" to be wholly faithful in remaining accountable. However, if their faithfulness is challenged and reworked, they face a seemingly impossible task of negotiating two incompatible realities for women (Nicotera, 2015). The path to developing faith is ripe with mental muddles for evangelical women, starting within their minds and extending to their family and Christian friends.

The Dialectic Between Respecting and Challenging Evangelical Authority

Finally, interviews reveal how church leaders permit women to play roles that exist as conflicting forms of empowerment (Kirby & Krone, 2002). The women describe ways that stereotypical notions of gender can exist as empowerment and constraint simultaneously (Gill & Ganesh, 2007), forming the complicated web of power dynamics that Mumby (2005) discusses. The women's reflections demonstrate how these dialectics may enable or constrain their future actions in the church (Putnam et al., 2016), as well as to what extent women embrace or challenge their participation in roles that may also be degrading to them (Bordo, 1997; Davis, 1995). This tension centers on the contrast between respecting and challenging evangelical authority in the church and home. The subsections that follow offer women's perceptions of being valued or marginalized regarding (a) authority in the church and (b) roles in marriage.

Authority in the Church: Freedoms and Acceptances. Women's role or authority in the church is the topic of discussion for 15 women in our sample, ranging from feeling valued or excluded from playing a role or having authority in church operations. Their words indicate their strengths in the church and how the church recognized and used those strengths. As they reflected, women often questioned the actions of others who do not feel as they do, weaving in the importance of others' perceptions. Many women perceive the church as valuing them based on distinctions between men's and women's roles as prescribed by the Bible and church leadership. For example, Marie states simply, "[The pastors are] shepherding us like we're sheep, and they're shepherds. It's because he's [the pastor] responsible to the Lord for us." In the same way that Marie sees her role as following what the church has ordained, Georgia would agree, "Women cannot be pastors. You look at churches that have those strong females, and you just sit there, and you're like, this isn't working, it didn't feel authoritative. It felt emotional. It felt like, wow, I can see why the Lord has put us where he put us."

Georgia places those expectations on other women in her church and home, but in doing so, her words also reify the

gendered difference between rationality and emotion. From this perspective, submission to male leaders and yielding authority flow naturally from the starting point of men's rationality as the pinnacle of truth. Ruby attaches this delineation directly to the physical differences between men and women, "God, with his word, designed [gender roles] for good. Our bodies are different. Why wouldn't he make our roles different?" Olivia echoes this, "I like man to have that authority. I know it sounds demeaning, or it can sound bad, but as a woman, I have a different role, and that's okay with me." These women are comfortable and happy within their designated roles, but they accept a level of learning that always comes second to the rational male leaders' positions. Thus, the first reaction of an evangelical woman to a sermon or small group book discussion is doubt-filled until a male leader confirms and explains. Marie gives a practical example of how this played out when she first came to her current church after she told her husband how discouraged she was about not being able to understand the sermons, "One of my husband's professors said, it's going to sound like blah, blah, blah, God, blah, blah, blah, blah. And then eventually you go, 'Oh, I remember the word.' And you eventually know more." She communicates that her initial instincts are incorrect, and only with time will she be able to adopt the mindset and lessons that the pastor is preaching to her—again, clearly connecting the rational and emotional attributes to gender.

Many women in this study experienced a double standard where roles and actions acceptable and allowable for men are not permitted for women. For example, when Miriam became an elder in her church, she was questioned about this role by her in-laws:

> They literally made jokes about it. When we told them over dinner, they were like, "What are they going to call you? They can't call you elder; that is a male term. Maybe they can call you elderette, or eldera?"

This story showcases the straining of typical church roles and hierarchy of leadership, and the tensions women face when they have power that is "regarded by 'nature' as masculine" (Ward, 2019, p. 307). Olivia brings up the exclusion of women in this power hierarchy by describing the gendered designations for learning. She describes how women in the church want to go

deeper with theology in the ways men do in their 5:00 a.m. bible study group. She feels "like I'm missing out a bit." Additionally, Anne references the low representation of women on the church stage during a typical service, "I think that it gives a message that women are a little bit more marginalized and less involved in the life of our [church] body. Actually the women get things done. Women are the ones who really keep things ticking along." She feels that her church misses out when they exclude women from positions of authority. The restrictions directly cause women to feel marginalized in their church.

An Evangelical Wife's Role. Several other women raise complex issues around their role as a wife and their frustrations with how they are undervalued and voiceless in that position. Angelica describes "consulting" and "honoring [her] husband as the head of the household," but she wrestles with disagreement, saying, "Sometimes . . . I'm thinking, Oh, I don't want to be listening to my husband right now; I don't like what he has to say." At least four women articulate their concern that women are valued only in terms of serving in a role as wife and mother. Dana indicates that "modern Christianity has made females able to serve in only certain capacities, like caretaking, and they are only praised in those positions." Similarly, Evelyn says that a woman's authority, even when accomplishing great things, can be undermined by the narrow view that women should be married. She describes how her pastor's "featuring" of a spiritual growth pastor who was a woman sparked a congregational response of "it is a shame she isn't married." When the church communicates these messages to Evelyn and other women, it acts as a managerial discourse that reproduces the unequal power relations between women and men (Ward, 2019). Thus, women feel pressured to fit the mold as closely as possible to feel more integrated into their church and more aligned with their religious identity, stabilizing meaning from the church's leadership.

These messages can be extremely powerful, interweaving women's value inside and outside the church with marriage and relationships. Emery explains:

You have to fight against the invisible force that has been injected into your life forever, since the beginning. I remember they had a man come in and speak at the

women's chapel, and I thought that was so offensive. .
. . The speaker actually said women are created by God
with man-shaped holes in their hearts!

Mariah feels the same pressure to perform the role as heterosexual and married, I think my sexuality and gender expression never quite fit with what the church wanted me to be. . . . I don't feel comfortable walking into a church and disclosing that. I was told my entire life that it wasn't okay." Once again, we see Mariah stating her desire for a church to recognize women in all their complexity, not in the narrow way they feel confined by the church's beliefs and hierarchy of authority. Miriam, similar to Mariah, is frustrated that sexuality, more than anything else, is the focus of women's strength. Miriam states, "Clearly your value is in your sexuality. . . . All you are to the world is a pair of breasts and a vagina, and that shames women about their bodies and hurts them from having a healthy sex life later on in life. . . . I was so jacked up in my head about what to do about sex."

Participants frequently described divergent views on sex as they relate to gender roles. Mary discusses sermons where her pastor communicated, "Men think of sex 99% of the time, and the 1% are lying. Excuse me, I'm a woman in your congregation, so are you thinking of me naked now? If you're my pastor, what does that mean for me as a woman then?" This attitude, she felt, preceded any doctrinal takeaways she could have gotten from that church. Haley offers another example by describing how she felt after a traumatic sexual incident, "I felt after that experience that nobody would want me because I wasn't a virgin anymore, and I was trash. So I was suicidal and the whole thing— like losing one's faith is devastating!" Her church's reaction to this incident meant that she could no longer look at her faith the same way and had to detach her beliefs from the institution. Finally, Miriam describes one more example where her pastor asked her to welcome a gay man into her small group but not to say anything in support of his sexuality, "So our pastor basically put a gag order on me which was a total double bind and catch 22, because he was basically saying nobody else wants to have this gay guy in their Bible study, and your group is just liberal enough that he will feel comfortable, but don't tell him it is okay that he is gay." These stories point to the church's disseminating more prominent beliefs about bodily autonomy, with many of

the participants who have had these experiences deciding to leave the church.

However, even women who believe theology about women's being "natural nurturers" describe tensions they sense in today's expressions of that theology. For example, Emery feels "sad that there isn't more of a connection between the actual, lovely passionate views that come from Scripture and the way the church lives it out." Anne also suggests that society's notions of her theology exaggerate her beliefs of submission to men, "I think that there's a lot of kind of cultural ideas [that] have hitched a ride on the complementarian bandwagon, like, for instance, that idea that all women should be required to submit to Joe so-and-so down the street." Michelle echoes this same concern, worried about the pressure not to work or have a career when Christ would not support that. She states:

> When you look at the life of Christ, how much he elevated and loved women . . . he probably demonstrated a greater love and a greater compassion and set women high above, and it was important for him to record incredible women in the Bible.

In sum, the words of women in this study capture the ongoing tensions between what they see as legitimate critiques of evangelical church theologies but also the potential of theology to empower women in ways already in tune with the discourses of the church.

Discussion: Understanding the Complexities of Sensemaking in Evangelicalism

This study investigates how evangelical women navigate conflicting faith and gender role expectations. Using Mumby's (2005) perspective on power dialectics in organizations, we identified three dialectics of gendered power in the organizational activities of evangelical churches and women's experience of, negotiation with, and resistance to power. In the sections that follow we offer a brief summary of the findings, conclusions we draw from these findings, theoretical and practical implications, and finally limitations and directions for future research.

Summary of Findings

The analysis reveals how women reify power and enact resistance by negotiating the three dialectic tensions, offering evidence of women's shifting gender roles and power dynamics in the evangelical church. First, women voice perspectives that represent the dialectic between rational and emotional expression. Some participants described emotion as antithetical to the rational doctrine within church communities because it carries gendered connotations of femininity; for them, emotion functioned to demarcate the types of roles and forms of self-expression perceived as acceptable within the church. The participants who viewed emotion as antithetical to rationality were much more involved in their church communities and were less trusting of their own opinions, from Samantha's release of control in saying "okay, that's fine," if she was told something she was doing was against her faith, to Leelee's "that's not always a blessing" in describing emotional women's shepherding emotional women.

For other participants, emotion represented their experiencing of the fullness of their faith and the fuel or motivation to follow it. However, some of these same participants reified the stigma associated with emotional expression, even as it constrained their ability to enact the full potential of their faith. Most of the participants who described emotion as the key to deepening their faith had left the church. In particular, Haley, Mary, and Mariah used to be church leaders and could not embrace emotion in that role the way they wanted. They exited the church and now primarily explore their faith outside of organized religion.

Second, the results provided evidence of the dialectic between understanding and practicing their faith. Women consistently grapple with "grey" areas of their faith, which provided discursive openings or opportunities for practicing new articulations of their identity as evangelical women. Yet other women responded to this tension by accepting ambiguity and engaging in self-censorship when the church's expectations did not align with their standards. Typically, younger participants believed there was no grey space within churches and little room for them to grapple with their faith. However, when

churches housed an atmosphere conducive to the exploration of faith emotionally and intellectually, women voiced a greater satisfaction in their church community and leadership. Thus, we saw that the "muddle" and the "never-ending journey" as some participants called it, was used both to self-censor, as well as to embrace new intellectual and emotional lenses of faith.

Finally, results indicated how women navigated the third dialectic, respecting versus challenging evangelical authority. We learned that participants, young and old, who had attended a religious institution for both short and long periods had similarities in viewing men as the appropriate leaders for their church. However, the younger participants had quicker, shorter responses when asked about their comfortability with men as leaders in their church, such as Olivia's response, "I like men to have that role," and Ruby's answer, "Our bodies are different. . . . why wouldn't he make our roles different?" Older participants in favor of men's leading would reference God's design for their church in their answers and point to a higher order to religion that designates men as leaders. Married participants comfortable with men's leading frequently referenced husbands as sources of knowledge.

Participants, such as Anne, who expressed discomfort in men's being the primary leaders by observing the low representation of women on stage in her church, kept this quiet in larger circles of members. However, in small groups, women with this view were comfortable adopting the same tasks traditionally given men, namely reading theological books, and studying their faith rigorously. Women compartmentalized their discomfort, ignored the label of "elder" or "pastor," and taught one another the same disciplines that men taught. Thus, we observed women's compartmentalizing their discomfort, ignoring the label of "elder" or "pastor," and teaching one another the same disciplines that men learned. The women who had left religious institutions, such as Emery and Bonnie, were more outspoken about their criticism of the gendered imbalance of leadership and were overwhelmingly in favor of women in evangelical leadership.

Conclusions

We drew three conclusions from this research. First, using Mumby's (2005) perspective on power and control as a dialectical process in organizations, we learned the ways that women appropriated dominant organizational discourses as reflected in doctrine and the interpretations of male leaders, to dereify and transcend the either/or thinking that privileges masculinity over femininity. When participants described how women are "getting screwed" (Leelee) if they do not share more deeply how they are practicing their faith, they show how they developed their own disciplinary mechanism to operate within rationality, rather than encouraging a culture of "emotional gushy gush gush" (Georgia). Women in this submovement enacted resistance through negotiating higher intellectual pursuits of their faith. Women responded in the same way Giddens (1979) describes agency: "to act otherwise" (p. 14) by steering small group discussions towards difficult theological subjects. By asking questions of their husbands, leaders, and each other, women became agents in the meaning- making of truth. Participants refused to have different discussions than the men of their church, thereby appropriating the language of church leaders and advocating for themselves (Mumby, 2005).

A second conclusion we draw from this research is that participants constructed comfort in the grey spaces or middle ground between poles of the dialectics. The "messy," (Suzette) "never ending" (Jane) journey of faith made resistance possible even in seemingly homogenous religious institutions. Just as purity as a destination and a lifestyle is yet to be clearly defined (Gailliard & Davis, 2017), that openness allowed for faith as a "journey" (Jane), encouraging women to create a submovement that values their intellectual pursuits of theology (Marsden, 1991). The liberties that a messy faith offers women made this cultural shift possible. For example, Miriam describes the disdain her family and friends have for the term "elderette." While they laughed at this confusion, Miriam used this moment to deepen her understanding of the roles she was determined to subvert. Some evangelical women articulated identities that occupied the middle ground between holding absolute certainty of the beliefs they were studying and having an openness to learn from others

in their faith, making dereification of truth possible (Mumby, 2005). As Suzette said, "it might be right, it could be wrong," but there is comfort around that grey area. Thus, some women engaged with the discursive struggle in ways that empowered them to take action, for instance, conducting their own studies of doctrine (e.g., Flicka's realization that "you can't fit God into a box"). The participants' language exposes the dialectic nature of gendered power at work in the evangelical churches participating in this study.

The third conclusion we drew from this research related to the complexities of emotion as both a fuel for faith and a marker of weak doctrine. From Evelyn and Emma, we learned there was a precariousness to sharing their struggles with their faith. When women placed rationality and doctrine on a pedestal, it often led to feelings of inadequacy and the need to stay quiet and learn from male authority figures. These observations reflect Giddens (1991) and Foucault's (1997) description of self-identity as a reflexive achievement, as various influences constantly test and reimagine it. However, when women chose to integrate emotion with their adherence to their faith, they found higher satisfaction and fulfillment in their church. Some women created an environment where emotion could be viewed as a positive experience of their faith, rather than a delegitimizing identity characteristic. Thus, authenticity was a double-edged sword for evangelical women, as they experienced higher self-efficacy by sharing emotional revelations in smaller groups, despite having an increased feeling of inadequacy in those small groups.

Theoretical Implications

Mumby's (2005) dialectical resistance describes the potentiality in moments of tension and the welcoming of day-to-day struggles of meaning. Based on how women responded in such an environment, we observed a two-pronged theoretical implication from this study. First, although theories of organizational tensions typically point to a lower professional identification for members experiencing it (Mahon & Nicotera, 2011), the church is a site where women have a unique reaction, in part, we posit, because of the church's totalistic nature. Totalistic organizations, foster a monolithic pattern of beliefs

and practices. Many participants did not respond in extreme ways to the tensions they observed. Instead, they engaged in a discussion of their faith with other members. They thereby rewrote themselves as agents able to make meaningful conclusions about their church's doctrines, keeping a positive relationship with the church while critiquing it. Thus, women are breaking gender norms while operating quietly within those gender norms, a phenomenon that can go unnoticed within theoretical approaches to resistance and activism that prioritize public participation. This study shows the direct connection between a church and a member's core identity, thereby giving scholars a new glimpse into more complicated forms of resistance.

In this way, members engaged in "alternative logic[s] for organizing" by integrating rationality with emotion and critiquing evangelicalism's mishandling of gender role designation while still living within those roles (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 137). Participants like Elena described sharing emotional moments that opened new questions many women welcomed. The participants worked diligently to empower themselves through their dialectical engagement in rationality and their reconceptualization of emotion, seeing it as an opportunity for discernment rather than a "plumb line" (Georgia) blindly directing their reactions. Participants demonstrated comfortability with instability and tension ("[Faith] is messy, and we're comfortable with that" [Suzette]), fitting in between the threads of the church's structural messages and attempting to mold them. In this way, resistance is not a romanticized movement; compromise and "empathetic alignment" (Dana) accomplish resistance bit by bit. Thus, women increased their participation in their faith by observing ways that their understandings of theology and their church's discourses differ, extending our field's knowledge of dialectical resistance. This study supports the idea that women can affirm traditional religious values (Bartkowski & Read, 2003), while explicating the dialectical process women experience as they grapple with gender norms. The findings also add to our knowledge of communal coping (Basinger & Hartsell, 2021, p. 1967) by creating a joint action in response to a stressor within a totalistic organization.

Second, the participants' advocacy complicates the homogenous description of contemporary evangelicalism.

Elena discovered that "There is not one way to be a Christian." Our participants explored the process of navigating conflicting demands, while remaining committed to their religious identity. The participant engagement in intellectual and emotional dialogue as a basis for negotiating tensions in the church reveals the nuanced positions from which women craft their identities and responses. Their management strategies could be cross-applied in other totalizing organizations that rely on emotional appeals to control and motivate members, such as cults or self-managing teams in the workplace (e.g., Baron et al., 1999) and on concertive control (Barker, 1993; Larson & Tompkins, 2005). Thus, the analysis conceptualizes tensions and conflicting discourses as central to understanding women's experiences and identities in evangelical organizations.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There were limitations to this study that created new directions for research. For example, the majority of participants were White-passing. Future studies should interview Black, indigenous, and people of color whose perspectives could yield important insights about negotiating conflicting discourses. Additionally, participants were incredibly eager to answer our last question about the general oppression of women in the church and thus critiquing other churches, but they were less eager to discuss their church environments and personal pressures. The pattern we observed led us to wonder: are women more likely to consider others' exclusion over their own? Researchers need to gain more insight as to why women stay in places where they are excluded or made to feel they do not belong. Finally, the participants' focus on empathy and advocacy heightened our reflexivity. Empathy, largely stereotyped by popular media as a feminine response, is the result for which we, as female researchers, advocate and aim to practice when engaging in conversations between higher education and religious communities (Jule, 2018; Palczewski et al., 2019). The pattern we observed regarding how the participants viewed empathy points to opportunities for new research.

In closing, these findings open space for evangelical churches to examine the impacts of their norms of leadership hierarchies,

displays of faith, and marriage on women's agency and the role of emotion in faith. Studies of undermined or suppressed narratives in evangelicalism clearly show that the evangelical church is constantly in flux (Harding, 1991). However, we may need to look to the church's peripheral spaces and nondominant voices to extract this nuance. For example, Emily Joy proved that her singular story could turn into a multitude of women's voices through a single hashtag, #ChurchToo. Similarly, our participants speak to the power of many voices in unison. However, our participants also demonstrate subtle and non-public forms of resistance that the broader public may not recognize in open critiques of the purity culture; they are too complex to contain in a single hashtag. Ultimately, these small renegotiations of meaning and identity, even for a simple term like "elder," can transform and reframe gendered discourses over time.

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Appendix: Participant Demographics

Name	Family Status	Age	Interview	Attending Churh?	Self-perscribed Label	Evangelical currently?	Race
Amber	Married Mother	30s	In-person	Yes	Bible-believing Reformed Christian	Reluctantly	White
Angelica	Married	20s	In-person	Yes	Reformed Christian	Yes	White/Hispanic
Anne	Married Mother	30s	In-person	Yes	Reformed Christian	Indifferent	White
Dana	Single	30s	Phone	Yes	Bible-believing Christian	Reluctantly	Black
Edna	Married Mother	40s	In-person	Yes	Reformed faith	No	Hispanic
Elena	Single	20s	In-person	No	Relationship with Jesus; Spiritual	No	White
Emery	Divorced/Single	30s	In-person	No	Spiritual	No	White
Emma	Married Mother	30s	In-person	Yes	Christian	Reluctantly	Hispanic
Evelyn	Single	20s	In-person	Yes	Child of God	No	White
Flicka	Married Mother	60s	In-person	Yes	Faithful believer of God	No	White

Name	Family Status	Age	Interview	Attending Churh?	Self-perscribed Label	Evangelical currently?	Race
Georgia	Married Mother	40s	In-person	Yes	Reformed, conservative, devout	Reluctantly	White
Haley	Married Mother	40s	In-person	Yes	Episcopalian	No	White/ Native American
Jane	Widowed Mother	70s	Phone	Yes	Believer of Christ	No	White
Karen	Married Mother	50s	In-person	Yes	Christian faith	No	White
Leah	Divorced/ Single Mother	60s	In-person	Yes	Close to God outside church	No	Native American
LeeLee	Married	30s	In-person	Yes	Reformed Christian	Yes	White/ Native American
Mariah	Single	20s	In-person	Yes	Believer in Jesus	No	White
Marie	Married Mother	50s	In-person	Yes	Christian	No	White
Mary	Married Mother	50s	Phone	Yes	Ecumenical	No	White
Michelle	Married Mother	50s	In-person	Yes	Bible-believing	No	Native American
Miriam	Married Mother	40s	In-person	Yes	Christian	No	White
Olivia	Single	20s	Phone	Yes	Christian	Yes	White
Ruby	Married Mother	30s	In-person	Yes	Reformed person	No	White
Samantha	Married	60s	In-person	Yes	Faithful Christian	No	White
Suzette	Married Mother	60s	Phone	Yes	Believer of Christ	No	White

Note. Participants' answers to current evangelical identification were either "yes," "no," "reluctantly," or "indifferent." "Yes" refers to when participants promptly answered positively to the question, while "no" refers to a prompt negative answer. "Reluctantly" refers to when participants qualified their affirmative answer with at least two caveats, which most often related to the public's perception of evangelicalism. "Indifferent" refers to when the participant gave no positive or negative answer, and expressed her dislike of the label.

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Woman's Tongue: The Poetics, Politics, and Production of Feminist Rhetorical Practices in Reggae Music

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Abstract: In this paper, I examine the ways in which some Caribbean women contest established communication norms through rhetorical practices. Specifically, I argue that there is a particular brand of rhetorical resistance performed by several Caribbean women in response to the patriarchal and social expectations regulating their communication behavior. I refer to this idea as "woman's tongue" and define it as a dialectical tool used by Caribbean women to assert and contest established norms of communication while negotiating the politics of gender and class. Further, I posit that woman's tongue can make productive theoretical and disciplinary interventions by highlighting Caribbean feminist rhetoric and the politics of vernacular speech. Conceptually, this feminist rhetoric signifies the power of a woman's voice as prescient, incisive, and transgressive. I investigate how this feminist knowledge production is represented in and informed by Caribbean popular culture, specifically reggae music. Based on this analysis, I conclude a culturally relevant Caribbean feminist rhetoric can de-essentialize the rhetorical eminence of Euro-American communication philosophies in the study of communication phenomena. Such theories may remain relevant to the study of communication in the Caribbean, but they do not always capture the lived realities of inhabitants from non-Euro-American cultural and geo-political spaces. They also tend to exclude the indigenous knowledge produced in such spaces and the theoretical contributions other epistemologies can make to the field.

Keywords: rhetoric, language, feminism, Caribbean women, reggae, popular culture

ACROSS THE GLOBE, FOLKLORE as well as popular culture are replete with narratives warning us about the ills and perils of woman's speech. The idea that a woman's tongue is innately dangerous and untrustworthy spans many cultures, from ancient Greece, where Aristotle (ca. 350 B.C.E./2009) described women as "querulous, fonder of railing, and more contentious" than men (Book IX, pt. 1), to Jamaica, where women are often told to "kibber"[1] their mouths. This philosophy of women's speech as mischievous is persistent and appears in many forms and contexts. Take for instance, nineteenth century English poet M. W. Praed's tale of *Lillian*, in which he advises the reader that "the fairest of dames was a headless one" (Thistleton-Dyer, 1905, p. 64), meaning one who does not speak. There is also the well-known Chinese proverb, which warns that "the tongue is the

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[1] "Cover."

sword of a woman—and she never lets it go rusty" (McAndrew, 2015, par. 2). Proverbially, these lines seem to agree that when women speak, danger is imminent and as a result, the best rhetorical position for a woman to occupy is silence.

In this paper, I explore instances when women rhetors transgress the established norms governing communication behavior. Specifically, I examine the ways in which some Caribbean women controvert established communication behavior patterns when they engage in certain rhetorical practices. I argue that there is a particular brand of rhetorical resistance that Caribbean women perform in response to the patriarchal and sociocultural expectations regulating their communication behavior. I refer to this as "*woman's tongue*," a dialectical tool used by a number of Caribbean women to assert and contest patriarchal and class-related norms regulating their communication (Gordon, 2022). Conceptually, this feminist rhetoric signifies the power of a woman's voice as prescient, incisive, and transgressive.

This paper offers an opportunity to extend the literature on communication and rhetoric in the direction of Caribbean feminist scholarship. By exploring the local knowledge production associated with Caribbean women's resistive discursive experiences, the study also adds to the canon of Caribbean feminist studies, expanding the latter to include communication scholarship explicitly. I am particularly interested in examining how this feminist knowledge production is represented in and informed by Caribbean popular culture, specifically reggae music. Caribbean popular culture has long been the locus of "the Caribbean rhetor's expressions of language, culture, and identity" (Browne, 2013, p. 80). From literature to music, popular culture in the region has traditionally articulated an ethos wherein the rhetorical strategies, practices, and traditions of the people emerge as public performance. As such, I focus on one of the most prominent musical genres to emerge from Caribbean popular culture: reggae. By analyzing the music of women reggae artists from Jamaica, I argue that *woman's tongue* is a form of Caribbean feminist rhetoric that some women use to counter hegemonic communicative practices.

Specifically, I examine the songs of Tanya Stephens and Queen Ifrica, two of reggae's most prominent women. I choose to focus on their music due to the artists' profound influence on the musical traditions of their society, as well as their distinct reputations of being disruptors of the existing gender and political status quo through their musical stylings. Tanya Stephens and Queen Ifrica have been two of the most outspoken public figures in Jamaica, both in their music as well as public commentary, against the ills of patriarchy, including sexual harassment and rape of women and girls. Jamaica's passage of the Sexual Harassment (Protection and Prevention) Act, in October 2021 is partly credited to the public advocacy performed by Stephens and Ifrica over the years (*Jamaica Observer*, 2021).

Their music not only altered the conception of identity in Jamaican society, but also shifted the cultural and political landscape (Mahabir, 2001). In this respect, the music of Tanya Stephens and Queen Ifrica connects with a longstanding tradition of women in the Caribbean using music for social and political protest. In Trinidad and Tobago for example, Calypso culture has historically granted women a venue to exert control, voice social commentary, and fight for empowerment (Battistelli, 2019), and over the past 30 years, "women calypsonians have been constructing a new discourse using calypso to advance individual and collective change" (Mahabir, 2001, p. 409). Additionally, as Mountford (2001) argues, "writers, like all spectators of life, offer a fresh lens for understanding the nature of rhetoric" (p. 48). Song writers might easily be added to Mountford's account of the artist's role as an illuminator of public oratory. Subsequently, the music under examination offers an opportunity to explore emergent Caribbean feminist rhetorical practices as they are produced and distributed through popular music. This paper therefore asks: What do the rhetorical dynamics found in the music of the women reggae artists investigated tell us about the discursive milieu governing gender politics in the Caribbean?

Caribbean Feminist Studies: An Overview

There are many productive lines of Caribbean feminist inquiry, ranging from literary to sociological studies. For more than five decades, scholars have grappled with several essential

theoretical questions, including how Caribbean feminisms may help fuel interrogations of race, class, gender, and patriarchy (Mohammed, 1998; 2009; Reddock, 1990; 2007). The works of scholars such as Mohammed, Reddock and others have been innovative in their offerings of "diverse expressions of woman centered Caribbean experiences" (Balutansky, 1990, p. 539), focusing on subjects with "a deeply rooted spirit of resistance to the status quo in their respective societies" (O'Brien, 2000, par. 7). Further, Caribbean feminist studies have also been grounded in what Caribbean writer Velma Pollard (1991) describes as the conflict between women and the social system. The social systems with which Caribbean women often find themselves in conflict are tinged by the dynamics of colonialism and postcolonialism. Caribbean women's socio-political experiences are thus decidedly different from those of their American and European counterparts.

Caribbean feminisms are also simultaneously grassroots and middle-class in origin (Ford-Smith, 1986; Rosenberg, 2010), making the tension between social domains a central feature of feminist theoretical cogitations in the region. This tension is popularly depicted in the works of Caribbean women authors, whose writings have featured prominently in Caribbean feminist scholarship. Writers such as Jamaica Kincaid, Edwidge Danticat, Lorna Goodison, Velma Pollard, and Lakshmi Persaud to name a few, articulate a "feminist subversion" of authority (Cooper, 1995, p. 87). This discourse involves a transformative rewriting of the self, which, according to Carolyn Cooper, denotes the experimental and transgressive nature of Caribbean feminist discourse. Cooper engages similar feminist discursive philosophies in her own academic work, much of which challenges patriarchal and cultural norms related to women's sexual agency.

Far from being monolithic, Caribbean feminist discourses are embedded in a multi-modal thought production that demands acknowledgement of its plural nature. The scope of Caribbean lived experiences makes this acknowledgment a necessary academic endeavor. The reality of such diversity of Caribbean lived experiences also places limitations on the reaches of any theoretical undertaking concerning the study of Caribbean phenomena, including this paper. The

linguistic and cultural diversity of the Caribbean means that there are important rhetorical communication nuances that affect discursive practices across the region. There is no universal "Caribbean communication" per se, since there are Anglophone, Francophone, Spanish-speaking, and even Dutch Caribbean experiences, each marked by the influence of a distinct European colonizer. The Caribbean is therefore "an inherently heterogeneous socio-cultural space" (Mühleisen & Walicek, 2008–2009, p. 16). Although much of the geographical region shares a common history, it also "differs widely across linguistic, ethnic, and racial lines" (p. 16). Notwithstanding, as Mühleisen & Walicek go on to argue, "community [or in this case, regional] based approaches to language, gender, and gender roles can provide interesting and compelling insights about the particular without losing sight of more general, shared characteristics of the Caribbean" (p. 16). One can therefore discuss communication *within* the context of the Caribbean as a historically situated space with certain shared socio-cultural and political experiences, exploring how that heritage may inform certain rhetorical traditions. In other words, this essay offers *woman's tongue* as a type of feminist communication practice that is culturally relevant to the Caribbean as a place.

Language and Identity Work

Historically, the social norms and power dynamics governing communication behaviors gender "talk" (Palczewski et al., 2019) such that women's identities are typically constructed in relation to processes of speaking. Consequently, the rules that regulate the appropriateness of certain speech acts based on one's gender traditionally associate politeness and indirect speech patterns with women. According to Palczewski et al. (2019), this type of rhetorical style "is associated with stereotypical feminine conversational qualities tied to women's traditional responsibilities as caregiver and nurturer, including keeping harmony [and] showing interest in others" (p. 59). In contrast, many societies tend to associate humor, swearing, and direct or aggressive speech with men, while generally viewing such speech as distasteful when performed by women.

Regulative norms governing women's speech, such as those described above, reveal patriarchal and hierarchical structures of power. By curtailing women's speech acts, they aim to control women's subjectivity. These norms particularly threaten women who occupy lower socio-economic statuses in some societies. Speaking implies knowledge, awareness, and agency. It is not a passive act. Having voice means that one can potentially challenge the status quo and make demands. Therefore, it is not surprising that patriarchal customs and conventional gender hierarchies would aim to constrain women's use of language. In patriarchal societies with clearly demarcated class systems, women are not expected to *speak directly*, or to *speak up*, and certainly not to *talk back*. The social norms generally construe a woman who speaks bluntly or frankly as unruly and even dangerous. Such women, are customarily punished, ridiculed, demonized, or silenced in patriarchal cultures.

In the Caribbean, gendered social rules exist to police women's communication (Gordon, 2022). Many of them emanate from the vestiges of European colonial rule regarding social propriety (Schnepel, 1993), but some also come from the creolized spaces that emerged post-emancipation. There is no question that in many Caribbean societies, "socio-cultural values have led to the development of gender-specific rules for lexical items and other elements of language" (Mühleisen & Walicek, 2008–2009, p. 9). It is reasonable, then, to surmise that in Caribbean societies, quite a bit of gendered identity work gets performed through communication. For instance, hegemonic masculinity establishes specific expectations for women, children, and in some cases, upper-class men, to adhere to politeness rules when communicating (Coates, 1986; Mills, 2003). These same rules determine that masculine communication gets performed in opposition to the feminine, upholding the gendered binary of communication found across Caribbean cultures (Schnepel, 1993). For example, whereas women's reproductive functions are typically used to position them in domestic roles (Powell, 1984), manhood is generally linked to activities outside the home, including being sexually prolific and siring multiple children, usually with multiple women. However, when people engage in identity work through conversation, they do not necessarily always conform to given norms. When it comes to

performing identities through communication, rhetors can either follow or violate the socially recognized patterns and rules dictating behavior. People also "have more agency and diversity in actual talk than simple binary stereotypes suggest" (Palczewski et al., 2019, p. 59). The concept of *woman's tongue* offers an opportunity to examine the ways in which some Caribbean women challenge gendered norms and expectations through rhetorical performances.

Woman's Tongue: Unapologetic

she finds a woman's tongue
and clacks curses at the wind
- Lorna Goodison (2017, p. 27)

Woman's tongue is the local Jamaican name for the fruit from the tamarind tree, the flesh of which is very tart. Tamarind season is also a native phrase for the period just before crops are harvested when food is scarce. It is a time of waiting and, most certainly, endurance. Lorna Goodison's poem titled, "Tamarind Season," tells the story of a woman waiting for a change of fortune (Chamberlain, 1993). She does not wait patiently but "clacks curses at the wind" (Goodison, 2017, p. 27) to communicate her displeasure. Her tamarind tongue conveys her discontent and struggle, as well as her inability to passively accept the vagaries of the season. In these two lines, I find a powerful allegory that captures how language ideology delineates the communication practices of many Caribbean women. This ideology is based on a counter poetics that centralizes directness and impropriety. It offers a pattern of communication that is as unapologetic as the bite of the tamarind fruit. It informs my own, scholarly conceptualization of *woman's tongue* as a Caribbean feminist rhetorical epistemology born out of the region's specific discursive milieu.

According to Morgan (2002), "language ideologies are mirrors and tools that probe, reflect, refract, subvert, and exalt social and cultural production, reproduction, and representation" (p. 37). Language ideologies therefore empower the rhetor to de/re/construct communicative norms and challenge existing power structures. In the case of the Caribbean, *woman's tongue*

exemplifies a rhetorical philosophy of subversion that highlights a feminist stance against constraining gendered and class-based communication practices. As such, *woman's tongue* delights in the vernacular and the "vulgar" at times, relishing the ability to flout regulatory social conventions.

Woman's Tongue: The Values at Play When Women Speak

The woman's tongue, the wasp and the tamarind tree sting the most
- Jamaican Proverb

Euro-Americans often criticize Caribbean women's communication as being abrasive, aggressive, and loud, their accents only adding to that sense of dis-ease that their discursive styles seem to inspire among their decriers. Levied by detractors both within and outside the Caribbean, this reproach of Caribbean women's communicative expressions is rife with colonial overtones. The Victorian values governing the proprieties of women's speech lurk just below the surface, as does the essentializing hierarchy of White racial superiority. As such, the censure imposed upon Caribbean women's communication patterns reflects stereotypes of Afro-Caribbean women, developed during slavery to pathologize all aspects of Black womanhood (Jefferson-James, 2020). Liberally described by colonialists as "superordinate Amazon[s] who could be called upon to labor all day" (Jefferson-James, 2020, p. 101) and who lacked a "developed sense of emotional attachment to progeny and spouse" (p. 101), White society has long construed Caribbean women as immoral and utterly aberrant. The communication styles associated with Caribbean women are therefore shrouded in the pessimism codified during slavery, which still finds contemporary manifestations. Discursively, the values at play establish Caribbean women's verbal and nonverbal expressions in relation to the cult of Euro-American, White cultural propriety even to this day. When we communicate, we are doing so at the borderlands of respectability and often outside the realm of acceptable, White middle-class displays of womanhood.

Caribbean women's vernacular communicative expressions are especially fraught with these tensions. Socioculturally, there are gendered and class-related rules that guide women's rhetorical performances in the Caribbean. These values derive from European colonial systems of social stratification, which devalue Creole language[2] in general and reprove it in women especially. Women, particularly those from the upper and middle classes, are socialized to use formal language, which is usually the mother tongue of the former colonizer. In her observations of the relationship between language and gender among children in Guadeloupe, Schnepel (1993) observes how:

> Among young children in creolophone households, it is not uncommon to find little boys who know no French; and in francophone households, little girls who are unfamiliar with Creole… to understand this solidarity of language-and-gender, one must grasp the particular complicity which ties Creole to the sexual… In a general way, Creole is connoted with being "common" (vulgaire), "dirty" (malpropre), or "badly brought up" (malélivé). (p. 254)

These attitudes toward communication reflect Caribbean society's notions of respect and respectability (Mühleisen & Walicek, 2008–2009), as well as gendered propriety. Such attitudes further denote the strategic application of language to order and classify—to assert power and demarcate status. Vernacular communication is thus seen as a threat to femininity and social prestige.

In Jamaica, this language ideology is reified in the *uptown/downtown* phenomenon, a system of class stratification that hails straight from the plantation. These social categories are used to describe where one "belongs" in Jamaican society and represent the two main competing value systems that inform Jamaican cultural life. *Downtown* status is rooted in the country's African heritage and *uptown* status is dictated by the values

[2] Creolization is the product of historical forces such as plantation slavery, colonialism, and postcolonialism that have shaped the Caribbean in distinctive ways and are inextricably linked to an articulation of "Caribbean-ness." Creole emphasizes the intertextuality and hybridity of Caribbean social, cultural, and political expressions while simultaneously underscoring the subversiveness and generative potential of such Creolized expressions (Gordon, 2018). Creole can apply to a variety of Caribbean expressions such as music, religion, etc., but it is most often used to describe local vernacular language.

of the European ex-colonizers (Gordon, 2015). Racist social systems developed under plantation slavery created a stratified social system based on the devaluation of African culture and the privileging of Europeanism (Beckles, 2004; Shepherd, 1986). From this system, hierarchal distinctions originally based on race now privilege those with lighter skin and a middle-class background. Consequently, uptown and downtown become social status markers, the former associated with elitist, Eurocentric, and refined tastes and the latter connected to "ghetto,"[3] Afrocentric, and coarse aesthetics.

The uptown/downtown schema is implicated in ideas about femininity and propriety to which members of Jamaican society generally adhere. Nonverbally, markers of uptown culture, such as having lighter skin, communicate standards of beauty, economic success, upward social mobility, access to resources, and social standing. As one writer for the local newspaper, *The Gleaner*, points out "[t]he 'browning',[4] as any Jamaicans know, is that fabled ideal of female beauty and male power in our society: the just-right mix of black and white" (Moss, 2012, para. 2). Additionally, in Jamaican culture *Patwa*, or Jamaican English, is affiliated with the lower classes or downtown culture. Much of the local citizenry regard it pejoratively and in opposition to the Queen's English, which is valued as the lingua franca of the upper classes. Thus, at the intersections of gender, class, colorism, and stigmatized vernacular communication styles, there are constitutive implications for Caribbean women's speech.

One important caveat to note regarding the ideology of *woman's tongue* as discussed so far, is its iteration as a predominantly heteronormative feminist discourse. My intention is not to privilege binary assumptions about gender, nor to take for granted that discourses of gender are often constituted by complex social relations. Instead, what I aim to do in this essay is to present the idea of *woman's tongue* as *a* type of feminist communication practice, perhaps one that inadvertently reflects Jamaica's societal expectations of heteronormative sexuality. However, this limitation does not delegitimize the contributions of this essay. Here, I offer a productive investigation of an

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[3] Ghetto here meaning "vulgar" or "coarse."

[4] The term "browning" refers to a Jamaican with a lighter skin tone or complexion.·

underexplored dimension of feminist thought in the fields of communication and rhetoric.

Methods

For the purposes of this study, I utilize discourse analysis. In general, discourse analysis involves "examining the way knowledge is produced within different discourses and the performances, linguistic styles and rhetorical devices used in particular accounts" (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 200). Discourse analysis as a methodological tool is of particular relevance "when listening to people's own narratives of a situation" (Jankowicz, 2005, p. 229). I consider the songs written and performed by the women reggae artists included in this study to be their own narratives about the sociocultural status quo prevailing in their society. In this respect, discourse analysis helps me to understand the function of the different stories told in various songs, taking on what Adolphus (n.d.) refers to as a biographical analytical approach.

Discourse analysis also entails looking at the ways in which language is used in a given setting. Since discourses are not produced in a vacuum, they cannot be understood without considering their relevant historical and contemporary contexts (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). In this study, the Anglophone Caribbean, with its attendant colonial, postcolonial, and contemporized Creole heritage, sets the stage for particular "modes of existence, perception, attitudes, lifestyles and habits of [meaning] making" (Rohlehr, 1994, p. 383). An examination of how language operates within this sociopolitical and cultural context, then, leads to a clearer understanding of the potential discourses produced by the songs I analyze below.

The language the women use in their songs reveals important units of analysis in the current study. Accordingly, I treat the songs as a set of communication acts wherein I analyze the symbolic significance of the language used "in order to make inferences about the sets of meanings circulating about them" (Potter, 1996, p. 138). To do so, I analyzed the lyrical content of the songs according to the "commonalities and differences in orientation to speech topics" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 234), that is, according to emerging themes. I looked for signs of topical recognition among

lyrics, a process that Lindlof (1995) describes as the "beginnings, endings, interruptions, and ebb and flow of topic; the expressive modes of topic; and of course, the semantics of topic" (p. 235). I also coded information according to several textual features such as sentence structure, wording, and topical schema. In order to do this effectively, I required a deep understanding of the cultural context that produced the songs examined. This is important because unless the investigator is familiar with the culture, "it is hard to make sense of its linguistic forms" (Lindlof, 1995, pp. 234–235). As a person born and raised in Jamaica, I am well-positioned to credibly decipher the semantic nuances of the songs' lyrical content, adding interpretative value to the analysis. Via music platforms such as Genius and Lyrics.com, I examined lyrics from six of Tanya Stephens' albums and three of Queen Ifrica's albums, produced from 1994 to 2009, for this study. This time frame reflects the digital availability of lyrics from electronic sources used for the analysis.

As previously stated, I focus on the songs of Tanya Stephens and Queen Ifrica for this analysis because of the women's prominence as reggae artists as well as their reputations for disrupting the status quo. In 2022, VP Records, an influential, independent, Caribbean-owned record label, included both Stephens and Ifrica among its top twelve Jamaican women reggae artists "who have, in their own way, played their part in the development of the Jamaican musical landscape post-independence" (*Jamaica Observer*, 2022, para. 1). Tanya Stephens is widely known for her emphasis on women's empowerment in her music as well as in public discourse. In 2017, *L3 Magazine*, a Caribbean Urban publication based out of New York, dubbed her a "Musical Politician" who was "fierce and bold in her call to action for the protection of women and children against violence" (*L3 Magazine*, 2017, p. 7). Queen Ifrica is highly reputed among Jamaicans for her blistering lyrics, which often feature scorching political commentary. She is affectionately known as "Fyah Muma"[5] among her fans as a result. In 2017, *Billboard* music referred to Ifrica as "one of reggae's most compelling and outspoken artists [with] an ability to lyrically torch societal ills" (Meschino, 2017, para. 3).

[5] "Fire Mother."

Each of these artists embodies the rhetorical spirit of *woman's tongue* in distinct ways. First, my analysis demonstrates how Tanya Stephens' body of work discursively produces a direct counter-poetics that challenges prevailing gender norms. Her "rude girl"[6] poetics reject oppressive uptown and patriarchal models of femininity. In challenging middle class notions of womanhood, Stephens' lyrics recast the sexual politics of gender, metaphorically putting women on top and in positions of agency. I also position her voice as part of the feminist tradition embodied by Caribbean scholars, such as Cooper (1995), who embrace the expression of explicit female sexuality as resistant to marginalization, racism, and sexism. Second, I argue that Queen Ifrica's discourse reveals the collaborative and restorative dimensions of *woman's tongue*. While she directly relates to the experiences of her audiences, her music also affords her a public platform from which to confront systems that produce genocidal conditions for them. Queen Ifrica thus occupies a liminal position as both representative of an oppressed population and a crusader on their behalf.

Tanya Stephens: Direct Counter Poetics Challenging the Politics of Gender

Derisively, Tanya Stephens repeatedly tells men in her songs that, "oonuh nuh ready fi dis yet" (1997b).[7] It is a line from the song, "Yuh Nuh Ready Fi Dis Yet," that conveys her lack of conviction about men's oft vaunted sexual prowess. Like the woman from Goodison's poem, "Tamarind Season," the persona in Stephens' song is impatient and unapologetically vocalizes her frustrations through this refrain. Clacking "curses" at the perceived want of dexterity among the men that women encounter, the vocalist chants:

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[6] A "rude girl" in Jamaican parlance is a woman who violates the conventions of gender and traditional femininity via her speech, dress, and other cultural performances. The threat of violence is also part and parcel of a rude girl's personae since she brooks no disrespect. As such, one is advised to tread carefully when dealing with a rude girl. For the purposes of this paper, I therefore define a "rude girl poetics" as a pattern of communication, which embodies the fighting spirit of the rude girl.

[7] "You are not ready for this, yet."

>Have yuh ever wonder what mek a girl cum
>A woman fus fi satisfy before yuh say yuh done
>Yuh caan say a thing if yuh end up a get bun
>Caw yuh nuh ready fi this yet, bwoy. (Stephens, 1997b)[8]

In this stanza, the tone is biting and the language direct. There is no ambiguity about what Stephens is communicating. Plainly, she warns men that the current sexual status quo will not hold. They must be intentional about their partners' sexual pleasures as the first two lines indicate, or risk being cuckolded as the third line suggests. In other lyrics, like in the song, "Goggle," Stephens encourages women to mock such underperforming men and to "just chat them wid yu fren gal an giggle" (Stephens, 1997a).[9] This is a common theme throughout Stephens' rhetorical repertoire, to boldly interrogate the sexual braggadocio of many Jamaican men, whom her lyrics often present as "big fraud[s]" (Stephens, 1997a). Philosophically, the artist's discursive performances accomplish two things. First, they challenge the Western notion that women's communicative acts are typically indirect (Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1990), and second, they disrupt Caribbean notions of hierarchical gendered communication produced through colonial conditioning.

Regarding the first point, communication scholarship is replete with studies that categorize women's conversational style as primarily implicit. According to Palczewski et al. (2019), the primary attribute of this communication style is "rapport talk" (p. 64), meaning that when women speak, the focus is on collaboration and showing empathy. Women deploy this type of indirect communication to soften claims or requests and to uphold rules of feminine politeness. Although there are studies that show Black women's speech contradicts these assumptions (Pough, 2004; Atwater, 2009; Troutman, 2010), there is no explicit focus on the rhetorical practices of women from the Caribbean. Caribbean and African American women may share several communicative commonalities, however, as Browdy (2021) maintains, it is important to acknowledge "our

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[8] "Have you ever wondered what makes a girl come
A woman should be satisfied before you are finished
Please don't complain if your partner cheats on you
Because you are not ready for this, boy."

[9] "Gossip about them with your girlfriends and giggle."

culturally and ethnically diverse ways of understanding and doing rhetoric" (par. 35).

Not unlike what some scholars have noted about African American women's communication patterns, Tanya Stephens' rhetorical approach, or *woman's tongue*, violates traditional gender norms associated with rules of politeness. There is nothing polite about her lyrics nor does she hedge in expressing women's displeasure regarding the sexual performances of their male partners. Many of her songs also include imperatives that outline women's desire for sexual gratification from their partners as in the song, "Big Ninja Bike," in which the female persona states, "Me want a man whey have a big ninja bike fi me ride pon" (2008).[10] In fact, Stephens' communication choices most reflect what would be described in the literature as a "masculine" conversational style, which is direct and assertive. Contrary to Lakoff's (1975) arguments that women strategically use indirect talk to accomplish their goals in patriarchal settings, Stephens' poetics are characterized by direct talk that straightforwardly states what she thinks, feels, and wants. Hers is not a rhetoric that tries to persuade the listener about her point of view. She simply states what is, aggressively and not unlike the sharpness of the tamarind.

In this respect, *woman's tongue* can create important counterpoints to communication theories developed in places such as the United States and Europe. In part, these differences may be explained by the "oraliteracy" (Cooper, 1995, p. 82) of Caribbean language patterns, which is routinely delegitimized in Eurocentric views of literacy and goes unrecognized in Euro-American hierarchies of knowledge. The latter tend to equate orality with illiteracy while privileging scribal communicative conventions. These rules governing language, predominantly established in Europe, were exported globally via colonial expansionism by the European governing class, and created a dichotomous relationship between native languages, many of which were oral, and European languages. Scribality, or written words, therefore, became the yardstick by which literacy and subsequently knowledge was and continues to be measured by the ruling class. As a result, many communication theories

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[10] "I need a man who is well endowed with whom to have sex."

emanating from Euro-American schools of thought do not account for rhetorical patterns defined by oracy. They dis(miss) the fact that "oracy is not merely the absence of literacy; it is a way of seeing, a knowledge system" (Cooper, 1995, p. 81). The regulative and constitutive rules of language recognized in the current literature (McCornack & Morrison, 2019) give primacy to scribal communication and are not always applicable in contexts such as the Caribbean. Subsequently, Stephens' direct talk and unconcern for politeness differ starkly from ideas about women's rhetoric as established by Tannen (1990) and others. The vernacular, in which Stephens often talks, is oral in nature. Combined with the historical specificities of the Caribbean as a cultural space, this oracy produces different communication pragmatics than those expounded in the current literature. These departures readily create room for epistemological evolutions that reflect the contextual communication realities of places such as the Caribbean as in the case of *woman's tongue* and the feminist rhetorical performances of women such as Tanya Stephens.

Regarding established hierarchies of gendered communication, the frankness of Tanya Stephens' lyrics defies ideologized representations of language that deem explicit sexual talk by women inappropriate. Her language is not only explicit in its directness but also in its provocative textual, sexual politics. Stephens is, as she puts it in the song "Unapologetic," "shameless [and] unapologetic" (2013) about her rhetoric. She dares to talk openly about sexuality, which is usually the domain of men, and does so irreverently, further making her communication indecorous. In the song, "Handle de Ride," Stephens (1998), brazenly chides the male character that, "Yuh couldn't handle de ride," meaning that the person in question could not handle the sexual experience currently encountered. Stephens continues to mock the male persona, pointing out their embarrassing lack of performance in the lines "Hold down yuh head from me ya waan hide/Hit the curb and all a slip and a slide" (Stephens, 1998).[11]

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[11] "You are holding your head down because you want to hide from me
You've hit the curb, swerving all over the place."

The lyrics from this song convey a woman's deep disappointment with the sexual performance of her partner. However, instead of dutifully "faking it"[12] as many women are encouraged to do, she points out the shortcoming in spectacular fashion. She compares the efforts of the male persona in the song to a poorly maneuvered vehicle, going in every possible direction except where it ought to be heading. This constant mockery of men's sexual abilities is an expression of Stephens' rhetoric that challenges the patriarchal exaltation of traditional masculinity as always performed successfully. Under patriarchy, such talk from a woman is impolite and associated with ghettoized[13] femininity.

The fact that Stephens' discourse uses vernacular language further challenges its "respectability." As Schnepel (1993) recounts, there is a certain complicity that ties Creole, and other local Caribbean languages, to the sexual in a way that formal language is not. The two language domains, namely Creole and formal European language, "evoke the respective positions of the man and the woman in relation to sexuality: virility of the male versus modesty or reserve of the other" (p. 254). In other words, vernacular expressions and their associations with crassness and explicit sexuality are acceptable forms of communication for men but not for women who wish to be esteemed within the culture. Socially, for women, that type of lexical engagement is considered undignified, and so lowers their prestige in the eyes of society, especially since the vernacular is considered the language of the common and lower classes.

However, Stephens' discursive displays defy class. First, the women personae in the songs are neither explicitly "ghetto girls" nor uptown brownings. This is a noted ambiguity about their social class, which highlights the universality of certain problems induced by local gender politics. The issue of a woman's sexual gratification, or the lack thereof, is not bound by social status. Any woman may be confronted with this issue. Vernacular language therefore seems a decidedly apropos means of conveying this mutuality. Developed in colonial plantation society, Jamaican

[12] Faking an orgasm. This is in reference to the common practice among many women, who often fake orgasms in order to bolster their partner's self-esteem (see Alexander, 2010). Patriarchal expectations about gender and sexual pleasure may be at the root of this practice in many cultures, including Jamaica's.

[13] Vulgar, or unrefined, in this context.

Patwa can be considered a vehicle through which the society's most visceral experiences are captured and conveyed. Patwa is a repository of collective trauma and triumph, transmitter of local traditions and culture, and locus of the familial and communal. It therefore seems appropriate that Stephens uses this common language to communicate a collective predicament. In this respect, *woman's tongue* expresses deep regard for the vernacular. I am not arguing that *woman's tongue* as a feminist rhetorical strategy only values local language, nor that local parlance is the primary location of its epistemology. I am however suggesting that *woman's tongue* recognizes the potency of the vernacular and deploys it politically.

Tanya Stephens' rhetoric strongly resonates with the idea of *woman's tongue* as I have tried to outline it, especially as it relates to the articulation of a rhetorical agency that is both transgressive and liberatory. Take for example, the fact that the personae in Stephens' songs do not seem to be in the business of chasing propriety. They are more intent on commanding respect than in pursuing respectability. Stephens' discursive performances therefore reflect and contribute to a Caribbean feminist thought production that is grounded in demolishing the skewed hierarchies of power that continue to inform gender relations in the region (Mohammed, 2000). Those who subscribe to patriarchal values have mischaracterized *woman's tongue* as abrasive and emasculating. However, it signifies a language ideology of resistance, and one that mobilizes all the survival instincts borne out of waiting out the tamarind season to apply it to the necessary dialectic of the feminist inquiry. Another significant feature of *woman's tongue*, as I see it, is its grassroots politics that centralize community and overtly challenge the sociopolitical power structure. Below, I argue that the goal of *woman's tongue* is not civility. Its primary focus is political contestation in order to produce social change and renewal.

Woman's Tongue: **Collaborative and Restorative Fire**

That survivor over there
With bare feet and bound hair
Has some seeds stored
Under her tongue…
- Lorna Goodison (2001, p. 132)

In the poem above, titled "Survivor," we encounter another dimension of *woman's tongue*. The language paints for us a vision of Caribbean women's communication as restorative and resilient and informed by Indigenous knowledge. Here we can envision a woman post-tamarind season, her tongue no longer clacking with frustration but pregnant with poetry and wisdom. While this "flourishing feminist portrait" (Siklosi, 2020, par. 9) depicts women's language as agentic and conceptional, it also belies its disputative qualities. Like the poet Goodison, *woman's tongue* works creatively but also militantly, from an Indigenous standpoint, to produce an embodied communal knowledge base, the foundations of which provide a catalyst for social change. In this regard, *woman's tongue* is a grassroots feminist rhetoric concerned with language's reparative as well as dissentient abilities. Language is a cultural resource that emphasizes the role of collective responsibility and the need for defiance in pursuit of social justice. To illustrate the point, I turn to the lyrics of reggae singer Queen Ifrica, a self-styled lioness[14] whose music is widely recognized among Jamaicans for its militancy and fiery brand of political dissent.

Queen Ifrica: Grassroots Political Contestations

Queen Ifrica's poetics may be described as those of resistance as well as communal identification. Her rhetoric reverberates as that of a poet who is able to speak from inside the condition of the people (Baugh, 1986). She speaks in a voice in which "the communal and the personal are always shading into one another" (p. 15). This rhetorical attribute depicts a political and cultural synthesis that is often featured in grassroots feminist

[14] A lioness is a symbol in Rastafari culture that signifies a regal and fierce woman.

movements, such as those emanating from African feminist thought. Wane (2011) describes African feminism as "part and parcel of African women's lived experiences… [as well as] African Indigenous ways of knowing which are holistic and not compartmentalized" (p. 7). Through its fusion of the communal and personal, Queen Ifrica's rhetoric reflects these values. It expresses the collective nature of her grassroots feminist politics, which "tries to understand systems within a framework of wholeness rather than isolate interacting parts" (p. 8).

Ifrica's poetics may be further contextualized by the singer's Rastafari worldview. Rastafari is a Jamaican religion with roots in the local peasantry and African revival spiritual philosophy (Chevannes, 1994). According to Chevannes, Rastafari religious belief took root among the social unrest of 1930s Jamaica. These historical beginnings have, in part, marked the movement with a strong social justice and fiery doctrine. As such, Rastafarians coalesce philosophically around the idea of securing emancipation from "the system of social, cultural and … economic oppression on which modern Jamaica is built" (Chevannes, 1994, p. 1). These tenets also infuse Ifrica's discourse with a distinct grassroots ethos. She is a woman of the people who aims to heal self and community through her *woman's tongue* discourse. The song "Genocide" provides a poignant illustration of this philosophy:

> Queen Ifrica come again to tell di yutes dem di truth yea yeah
> Defending di poor all across di earth….
> A seek justice fi genocide yeah...
> Bun dem filthy ways JAH nuh like yeah. (Queen Ifrica, 2006)[15]

In this song, the themes of grassroots agitation, restoration, and communal identification are prominent. First, Ifrica immediately identifies herself as the protagonist of the song's narrative by stating her name at the outset. In doing so, the singer establishes herself as more than just an omniscient narrator. She is a first-person participant who can relate to the struggles of which she speaks. In this sense, Ifrica is part of the community. As with

[15] "Queen Ifrica is here once more to tell the youth the truth, yes, yes
Defending the poor from all across the earth...
I seek justice for genocide...
We will burn their filthy ways, Jehovah doesn't like it, yes."

the woman of Goodison's poem quoted earlier in this section, the main character in "Genocide" is a survivor. They too have endured the ravages of oppression alongside the downtrodden for whom they seek reparations.

This sense of survival *along with*, I argue, establishes a sense of connection or communal identification between Ifrica and others regarding political and social oppression, a motif that is indelibly etched in the singer's discursive performances:

Forget de likkle pay
It done before mi reach home
Mi naw go check mi neighbor fi no more loan...
Cause round every corner yu turn a de same concern.
(Queen Ifrica, 2011)[16]

In the lyrics from "It Hard," the singer's sense of shared experience is palpable. It comes through in the third line of the song in which the narrator references going to the neighbors for a "loan" during desperate times. Relying on one's neighbor in times of distress is part of the social capital paradigm that exists across many Caribbean societies, developed as a response to vicissitudes created by the many colonially induced deprivations. Durston (1999) describes social capital as "the set of norms, institutions and organizations that promote trust and cooperation among persons in communities and also in wider society" (p. 103). This understanding of social capital serves to reinforce the thematic concerns of community and commonality invoked in Ifrica's lyrics. Although the speaker here is hesitant to call upon their neighbor in this specific instance, the line makes it clear that they have done so before. They do not want to do it "no more (Queen Ifrica, 2011)." However, their reserve stems from an understanding that the situation is unsustainable, not only for the speaker but for their neighbor as well. The enormity of the problem renders it so, as implied by the last three lines, which indicate the widespread nature of the problem. Thus, through her rhetorical practices, Ifrica establishes a sense of community by presenting the idea of hardship and survival as a shared experience.

[16] "Forget about the pay that is not enough
It finishes before I even get home
I am not going to the neighbors anymore to ask for a loan...
Because everyone where one turns it's the same concern."

Simultaneously, while Ifrica identifies with the community on multiple levels, she also occupies a space of liminality, namely, a place between downtrodden community member and avenging crusader. This space allows her to move beyond surviving *along with* to become a grassroots agitator *on behalf of* the larger group. The song "Genocide," from which I quote earlier in the paper, best underscores this point. Metaphorically, the singer is on a quest for justice, signaling the artist's intention to seek some form of restitution for the predations of a "genocide" unleashed by "Babylon" (Queen Ifrica, 2006). In an *Iliad*-like journey that takes her "all across di earth," she battles demons or "blood sucking vampires" on behalf of the poor (Queen Ifrica, 2006). In this respect, Ifrica (2006) assumes the role of an avenger who tries to instigate restoration from the collective trauma of "genocide." Here, genocide becomes a metaphor for the social, economic, and political oppression that many ordinary citizens encounter at the hands of tyrannical or neglectful authority figures. It is also a symbolic reminder of the systemic nature of this oppression, the immensity of its destructiveness as well as its racial and class undertones. In such circumstances, the community may not be able to seek justice on its own. It may need a powerful agent to battle on its behalf. Given Ifrica's social status as a public figure with greater economic means than those about whom she often sings, she is well poised to be such a crusader. Ifrica takes on this role discursively by employing a particular feminist rhetoric, which I argue is part and parcel of *woman's tongue*.

To help reconcile the political and economic marginalization that tyrannical powers induce, Ifrica relies on a restorative rhetoric that is primarily symbolized by her quest for justice. This is evident in songs such as "Lioness on the Rise," where Ifrica (2009), makes it clear that "Bravery is a piece of [her] heart," meaning that she is perennially prepared to take on the systems that create injustice. This rhetoric is also represented by the imagery of fire that punctuates many of her songs, including "Genocide." In the latter, Ifrica (2009) promises to "bun dem filthy ways," meaning she intends to destroy the modus operandi of those in power. In essence, she wishes to raze the old social and political structures to make room for a new, more wholesome imaginary. The imagery of fire is also a

testament to the singer's Rastafari roots. In Rastafari culture, fire is a mechanism of cleansing and healing, which members of the Rastafari community often invoke to signify their intentions to rid society of oppressive forces.

Elsewhere, the singer lays out other dimensions of her rhetorical strategy, such as solidarity through cooperation. For example, in her song "Peace and Love," Ifrica (2002), invites the listener to "Come be a part of a brighter day," entreating the community to be part of the solution by sowing seeds of harmony. In "I Can't Breathe," she makes her commitment to the community clear, "I can hear my neighbour crying 'I Can't Breathe,' / Now I'm in the struggle / I can't leave" (Queen Ifrica, 2017). She is insistent, as in "Lioness on the Rise," that if ever required, she will "be on the front lines," defending her neighbors and community from unjust forces.

This unquestionable commitment to the community that features throughout Queen Ifrica's cogitations may be read as part of the longstanding emancipatory impulses that have characterized Caribbean women's behaviors since slavery (Barriteau, 2001; Zlotnik, 2012), and which seem to propel them to be defenders of family and community. As Shepherd (1991) writes:

> Black women represented a strong challenge to the slave system, not only in terms of their participation in overt resistance but by their resistance to acculturative forces of an increasingly creolizing society. She kept kinship bonds strong and the African culture alive because of her central role in cultural transmission. (p. 191).

What Shepherd describes here resembles a feminist compulsion derived from the particular circumstances of life under plantation slavery. The women described in the quote are clearly concerned with and resistant to the distribution of power within plantation societies. It is not surprising then, that this impulse finds its way into some Caribbean women's discursive practices, such as Queen Ifrika's.

Themes of community, survival, and resistance highlight the grassroots ethos of Ifrica's discourse. This ethos manifests in concern for the plight of ordinary people, which appears consistently in many of her songs. Ifrica's politics therefore resonate with many of the earliest strands of feminist thought

in the Caribbean, such as Shepherd describes above. However, it also departs from early twentieth-century Caribbean feminist movements that mainly championed the concerns of middle-class women (Reddock, 1990; Rosenberg, 2010). In this regard, *woman's tongue* draws attention to issues of class oppression that still exist in many Caribbean societies. As a form of feminist rhetoric, it is not just concerned with sexism or patriarchy but with oppression in its varied forms.

Conclusion

Through my conceptualization of *woman's tongue*, I attempt to outline what I see as important features of a Caribbean feminist communication epistemology. I aim to locate this understanding within Indigenous modes of knowledge production that are germane to the Caribbean as a geo-political space. *Woman's tongue* organizes a set of discursive principles that are grounded in the historical specificities of the region, including resistance to slavery, colonialism, sexism, and classism. *Woman's tongue* is also a distinctive product of Caribbean women's voices as shaped by their personalized, communicative responses to oppression. In describing this phenomenon, Zlotnik (2012) explains:

> There is evidence to suggest that slave women led one of the most fundamental forms of verbal expression: the song. They used this medium as they toiled in the fields using artistry and often malice, making penetrating statements about themselves, or heaping ridicule upon their masters. (p. 156)

In other words, in many instances, the response of Caribbean women to oppression has been rhetorical. According to Zlotnik (2012), documented accounts from European planters often described enslaved Black women as insolent, hurling verbal abuses at their managers and overseers. Caribbean women's rhetoric then, has its foundations in the verbal resistance women have been engaged in for centuries. Oppression, it appears, is that common denominator that ignites these communicative expressions and loosens the salt cords binding women's tongues (Goodison, 2017, p. 78). They may speak boldly to challenge sexism, as in the case of Tanya Stephens'

discourse, or to resist political and class oppression, as in Queen Ifrica's discursive agenda.

By analyzing the Caribbean feminist rhetorics that Tanya Stephens and Queen Ifrica espouse, I am not suggesting that this phenomenon is a definitive or universal communicative practice. I do, however, offer this perspective as *one* of the ways in which Caribbean women speak from a feminist standpoint. Certainly, scholars may explore *woman's tongue* as a phenomenon in other Caribbean popular musical forms such as Calypso, which suggests its relevance *across* different Caribbean cultural spaces. The music of prominent women Calypso artists, such as Calypso Rose, Singing Sandra, and Denyse Plummer, offers rich sites for future examination of woman's tongue as I conceptualize it.

Furthermore, I suggest that a culturally relevant Caribbean feminist rhetoric can de-essentialize the rhetorical eminence of Euro-American communication philosophies in the study of communication phenomena. Such theories may remain relevant to the study of communication in the Caribbean, but they do not always capture the lived realities of inhabitants from non-Euro-American cultural and geopolitical spaces. They also tend to exclude the indigenous knowledge produced in such spaces and the theoretical contributions other epistemologies can make to the field.

Finally, as previously stated, I recognize the limitation of predominantly heteronormative iterations of *woman's tongue* as a feminist discourse, especially in the examples from which I have drawn to illustrate the idea. A number of Queen Ifrica's discursive performances have expressed notes of homophobia, as in the song "Keep it to Yu Self," where the singer self-consciously outlines her disapproval of same-sex relationships. Nevertheless, I encourage the reading of woman's tongue as *a* type of feminist communication practice, albeit one that perhaps privileges heteronormativity. This concept certainly warrants further exploration. My intention here is not to reify a particular theoretical viewpoint, but to create a starting point for thinking about ways in which discursive elements of Caribbean women's communication practice may be explored and theorized.

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Hello, I'm Fat: An Autoethnographic Analysis of the Fat Experience in *Shrill*

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Abstract: Fat women feel enormous pressure to be thin. This pressure is exacerbated by media portrayals of fat women that show characters who are unruly, miserable, or comical. The series *Shrill* (2019–2021) combats fatphobic representations by offering Annie, a fat woman, as a lead character. She is neither a punchline nor a cautionary tale. *Shrill* elucidates the societal stigmas of being fat without victimizing its main character. In this essay, I offer an autoethnographic critical media analysis of *Shrill*. I explore the Western Body Positivity movement, the effects of the United States' hegemonic beauty ideologies, and my experiences as a White, fat woman alongside *Shrill*. I argue though the representation of Annie is a huge step forward, some narrative arcs remain problematic. The focus on self-love and reliance on a Black character to facilitate that self-love mirror the real-life dependency on and erasure of Black women in the Body Positivity movement.

"YOU'RE THE FIRST CURVY GIRL I've slept with," Tinder Boy says softly, stroking my cheek with this thumb and staring at the faded stretch marks on my stomach. We're both naked, but I suddenly feel on display. Before we had sex, he never mentioned my weight. Now, I feel he is hyper-aware of my fat body. The statement and gesture make me uncomfortable, but I write them off as well-intentioned pillow talk. Then, in the coming weeks, the comments continue. In response to my suggestion that we grab burgers for dinner, he sternly asks, "Don't you want to get in shape?" He also pressures me to work out, saying things like "I can show you some really easy cardio," or "I bet if you tried my routine for two weeks, you'd lose at *least* a few pounds." As a fat woman, I've spent my life hearing rude remarks about my body, but Tinder Boy's words open a new wound. He is the first person I trust to see the parts of myself—the cellulite that spreads across the back of my thighs, the protruding flesh of my lower belly, and the silver marks that encompass my torso—I hide out of fear and disgust. Although he never articulates a dislike for my body, his persistent judgements about my health and diet convey his revulsion. His words become reminders that my fat body is something to be ashamed of, and I soon dread sharing it with him. I keep my shirt on during sex and start

asking to keep the lights off. I soon avoid Tinder Boy seeing my bare body at all costs, determining no person, not even one who is willing to have sex with me, will ever accept my fat body—so I shouldn't either.

Tinder Boy and I met on the dating app of his namesake. I am newly 18 and he in his early 20s. He's no stranger to dating; this is my first relationship. He's tall, thin, attractive, and fronts an indie band, so when he chooses me, a young, 207 pound woman, I feel euphoric. I spend every moment I can with Tinder Boy. He is charming, witty, and most of all, he is the first person to ever like me. I put my life on hold to be around him. I leave work early and cancel plans with friends; I make myself constantly available. But he keeps me a secret. I never meet his family or make it on his social media—these privileges are reserved for the thin women he will date shortly after we end things. He is ashamed of being with a fat person. Of being with me. I crave a defined, and public, relationship, one where I don't beg for clarity, but as a fat, young woman, I believe this secretive relationship is my only option. Because fatness is constructed as unattractive and unhealthy (Longhurst, 2014), I believe my body is shameful, and I am unworthy of love. I accept Tinder Boy's scraps, hoping if I am easygoing enough, he will be gracious enough to continue looking past my fatness.

Finding Myself in a Hulu Original

I discover *Shrill* (2019–2021) a year after my relationship with Tinder Boy, immediately registering the similarities between the main character's relationship and my own. Although many women endure relationships with mediocre men, the stigma that surrounds larger bodies exacerbates this issue for fat women (Gordon, 2021; Tovar, 2017; West, 2016). By analyzing the show, I came to understand how common my experience with Tinder Boy was for many fat women, and how much of my life has been constructed by my fat body. Through *Shrill*'s portrayal of its main character Annie, the series highlights her relationship struggles, experience with generational fatphobia, low self-esteem, and process of working through each of them. After watching, I came to realize how my self-image, family dynamics, and dating life have all been impacted by my weight. *Shrill* establishes a

new standard for fat women's representation on television by portraying these social challenges in a nuanced and realistic manner. However, the show also relies on a Black character to do the emotional labor for its White lead, consequently ignoring the societal frameworks that disadvantage more marginalized fat bodies. These shortcomings are impossible to overlook, and reminiscent of the central flaws in the Body Positivity movement. In the following pages, I offer a critical-autoethnographic media analysis to argue for the ways *Shrill* rewrites narratives of fatness in media while simultaneously lacking the needed intersectionality to address the systemic oppression of fat bodies. To support this argument, I follow the arc of Annie's story over the course of three seasons while exploring my early dating experiences and revisiting my childhood and social development. I then offer my current understandings of fatness within a larger social justice framework to critique the show's privileging of whiteness.

Shrill, streaming on Hulu and nominated for an Emmy in 2021, is based on Lindy West's memoir of the same name. The series follows Annie, a successful journalist in her 20s, navigating dating, friendships, and a career. *Shrill* offers audiences something rarely seen before, a woman who does not have to choose whether she will be fat or happy. Prior to *Shrill* and shows like it (e.g., *This is Us*, *Orange Is the New Black*, and *GLOW*),[1] being a fat, White female on television meant being miserable, disgusting, or a joke (see *Roseanne*, *Friends*, M*ike & Molly*, and *Insatiable*). In United States' culture, fatness violates the code of feminine behavior, specifically White femininity. Because our culture privileges "imperialist, capitalist [and] white supremacist patriarch[al]" systems (hooks, 2012, p. 4), women's beauty standards rely upon proximity to White ideals of beauty, which reiterate thinness as healthy, virtuous, and necessary (Strings, 2019). Wolf (1990) argues an intense social pressure exists for women to spend considerable time, money, and effort upholding said beauty standards. If and when women uphold the beauty mandate, they are socially rewarded, usually with a man to provide for them (Jackman, 1994). When women do not adhere to normative beauty standards they are masculinized and classified as unruly and gluttonous. Further, they are constructed

[1] Though *Shrill* is not the only series to portray fat characters with nuance, it is the first which resonated with my fat experience.

as sexually deviant, either being over or under-sexualized (Rowe, 1995). Holmstrom (2004) suggests stereotypes about fat women lead to an oversaturation of thin bodies and a lack of fat bodies on screen. When fat women are portrayed, they often remain single, alone, and unhappy, whereas positive media portrayals of women often show thin, attractive protagonists who find a handsome man to love and care for them.

The misrepresentation and underrepresentation of fat women in media have real life effects: they work to perpetuate hatred and reiterate fat bodies as deviant and unworthy of respect (Taylor & Gailey, 2019). Consuming media with this trope, and therefore internalizing a thin ideal, damaged my body image, and I am not alone. Fifty percent of girls and undergraduate women report feeling unsatisfied with their bodies; low self-esteem is a common characteristic of the estimated 20 million United States women with eating disorders (Wade et al., 2011). Although research links factors other than media consumption to poor self-esteem in women and girls, movies, television, and magazines emphasize thinness as necessary for women's happiness (Fouts & Burggraf, 1999). Thinness thus becomes a patriarchal tool used to determine the worth of women, and the negative traits associated with fat women stigmatize them.[2]

And yet, there is no clear definition of fat. Tovar's (2013) work claims definitions of thinness and fatness are constructed by dominant social ideologies, are culturally specific, and evolve over time. Gordon (2020) suggests the term fat is a neutral descriptor for those who are predominately plus size, or people who wear United States clothing sizes 14 and above. Although, she argues there are no distinct rules for "who qualifies as fat enough to be fat" (p. 8). Despite the ever-changing and

[2] Because neither race nor gender identity are explicitly mentioned by Wolf, Jackman, Rowe, Holmstrom, or Taylor and Gailey, I assume their respective research focuses on fat, White, and cisgender bodies. The authors are all White, and their work centers stereotypes of White fatness in United States culture. Further, because gender identity is never addressed, the privileging of cisgendered people can be assumed. Standards of body size differ among races (Tovar, 2013) and possibly gender identities; this positions fat, White, cisgendered women as controversial while fat women of color and fat trans people go unnoticed/are invisible on television (e.g., a quick Google image search of "fat women on TV" brings up an overwhelming majority of White, cis characters). This phenomenon furthers White is the invisible race and cis the invisible gender identity, reiterating the authors' privilege of excluding this necessary distinction.

complicated notions of body size, thinness prevails, and fatness remains equated with being inherently undesirable, unattractive, and unhealthy (Greenhalgh, 2015; Stefani, 2019). As such, fat is something many United States women avoid at all costs. However, *fat talk*, or women speaking about the size or shape of their bodies in a negative manner, is common practice (Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011). The commonality of fat talk suggests most individuals have been told they are fat or have likely felt fat, arguing the societal norm of anti-fatness influences all, even those who are not cisgender women. Many people have felt the pain of hating their bodies but only some of us have faced the discrimination of living in a body deemed unworthy of love, happiness, and equitable treatment, concepts central to the narrative arcs of *Shrill*. Annie and I live in those bodies. Annie and I are fat—we claim an identity based on shared experiences of marginalization due to body size. *Shrill* authentically represents the discrimination fat White women face, from Annie's mistreatment in romantic relationships to her mistreatment in the healthcare system. Like Annie, I have always encountered social othering from my fat body. As such, I believe it necessary to incorporate my own experiences in the analysis of *Shrill* to convey the omnipresence of fatphobia for United States women.

Critical-Autoethnographic Media Analysis

My analysis of *Shrill* began as a way to praise the media piece for its groundbreaking portrayals of fat characters in television. However, according to Stocchetti and Kukkonen (2011), critical media analysis involves "thinking critically about the impact of the media on the distribution of power in society" (p. 13). As a result, I realized *Shrill* did more than positively portray a fat woman; it was one of the first media texts to establish fatphobia as a systemic problem rather than a personal issue. The series illustrates this concept by showing the complexity of Annie's life; though she is able to find happiness and success, she still experiences societal fatphobia and eventually reckons with the product of this discrimination, her own anti-fatness. *Shrill*'s narrative of the fat experience was one that reflected my own life. Though my work began as a way to explore the cultural

impact of *Shrill*, like Manning (2015), I "couldn't get past me" (p. 56) while analyzing the series. I found myself relating to virtually all Annie's experiences, and it became apparent that by incorporating my own stories, the analysis would be deeper and richer than without. Manning and Adams (2015) define critical autoethnography as the "use [of] personal experience to identify harmful abuses of power, structures that cultivate and perpetuate oppression, instances of inequality, and unjust cultural values and practices," (p. 193) further explaining that using critical autoethnography to analyze popular culture allows for autoethnographers to investigate their own assumptions and values. Considering these notions, I recognized superimposing myself with Annie allowed me to examine my life through the lens of *Shrill* while studying the pervasive cultural impact of fatphobia.

Deciding on this framework, I researched others who have combined media analysis with autoethnography to structure my essay. Although initially framing my work after Manning (2015), revising this manuscript required I also address the hegemony I condemn through a lens of intersectionality. To achieve this, I looked to Rennels (2015), Collins (2004), and Boylorn (2008), determining their contributions, respectively, modeled discussions of identity, intersectionality, and intersectional autoethnography. Following Rennels (2015), I want my personal stories to reflect the lived experience and intricacies of my marginalized identity. One of those intricacies is the privilege I experience from my whiteness. To properly understand the dynamic of fatness for a White body, I need to employ an intersectional analysis. Collins (2004) claims intersectionality is the viewing of identities, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, as inextricably linked and mutually constructing systems of power. Intersectionality provides the structure for the discussion of how my whiteness and fatness, my privileged and oppressed identities, can function simultaneously.

Not all fat women will encounter fatphobia in the same, or even similar, ways. Although I may experience fatphobia, I will never experience fatphobia and racism simultaneously. Likewise, because I am White, my body is more marginalized by its size due to racialized notions of body normativity. Using Collins' (2004) definition of intersectionality, Boylorn (2008)

uses autoethnography to analyze Black women on reality television, emphasizing the importance of examining privileged and marginalized identities when critically analyzing media. With her work in mind, I understand my analysis of mediated, fat, cis-gendered, female bodies must also, indisputably, include race. Though the essay does not cover the extent of my life as a White, fat, cis-gendered woman, nor does it speak to the experiences of all fat women, it does include influential periods of my experience as a fat person, all of which connect to *Shrill*. For the purpose of this essay, I analyze the TV representation and life experiences of White, cisgender, able-bodied, middle-class, and educated fat women. These are the identities Annie and I share, and as such, are a crucial focus. These moments begin with my experience of dating a bare-minimum boyfriend, also known as Tinder Boy.

Full-Time Dirtbags

Seeing a fat woman on TV and watching her struggle with similar relationship issues helped me realize I was worthy of more than Tinder Boy. Like me, Annie struggles with insecurity because of her body, and that lack of self-worth is prevalent in her dating experiences. In the show, Annie has her own version of Tinder Boy, Ryan. Ryan refuses to acknowledge his relationship with Annie and continuously treats her as disposable. In the series premiere, viewers learn Ryan refuses to wear a condom, and Annie is afraid of insisting he does because she doesn't want to lose him. As a result, Annie gets pregnant. However, this was not the first time Annie had unprotected sex with Ryan. In fact, Annie has taken the morning-after pill numerous times. However, unbeknownst to Annie, because she is over 175 pounds, the pill is less effective, and this most recent time, she becomes pregnant, later having an abortion. Ryan is, as Annie's roommate Fran says, "a full-time dirtbag," [1.05] but Annie's response to his problematic behavior always comes in the form of quiet acquiescence. She continuously forgives him, and I understand why. When I watched Ryan flirt with another woman in front of Annie [1.03], I was transported back to nights with Tinder boy:

It's cold, and there is only one, thin sheet, so we hold on tightly to one another on his mattress. His phone buzzes. I ignore it, only thinking about how happy I am in this moment, and how it will be the only thing in my mind for the next few days. His phone buzzes two more times. He untangles his limbs and sits up to answer. I glance at his screen, immediately wishing I hadn't; he is responding to messages on dating apps. He quickly puts his phone away and wraps his arms back around me. I say nothing. I kept silent at times like these because, like Annie, I believe he is my only chance at a relationship. The silence crushes me. It's exhausting, but I stay quiet because I don't want to be alone. Poor treatment from an unkind man is better than no man. Having a man makes me feel validated as a woman.

I want, more than anything, to be loved. I, like Annie, compromise my treatment to have the chance to experience love, or what we accept in its place. My weight has always impacted my romantic life, and watching Annie go through the same issues I have make me feel less alone in my experiences of insecurity. As someone who has been fat for her entire life, I was taught to be grateful for any male attention I received, no matter how toxic. The need to feel romantically validated comes from being socialized as a cis-gendered woman, and the constant self-awareness that comes with that identity. Women consistently think about how they present themselves, because how we appear to others, especially men, determines how we will be treated (Berger, 1972). An integral part of this treatment relies on physical appearance; thinness is not only reiterated as a standard for beauty, but as a prerequisite to being loved. Because I have never met this standard, I've spent most of my life feeling undeserving of romantic affection, or, really, happiness in general. My experiences mirror Annie's own journey, as she continuously sacrifices herself for Ryan's affection. Initially, Annie is forced to sneak out of the backdoor of Ryan's house after sex because he does not want his roommates to see her [1.01]. When he finally takes her on a real date, he invites his rowdy friends who make a scene at the crowded restaurant [1.02]. Annie then gives Ryan the chance to redeem his poor behavior, by inviting him to an important work event, but he stands her up [1.03]. Throughout season 1, Annie routinely accepts Ryan's terrible behavior and rarely calls him out on it. In season 2, Annie begins

to respect herself and sets boundaries; Ryan promises to be a better partner and so he becomes her boyfriend. However, not much changes in terms of his behavior, and though Annie is now comfortable criticizing him for it, she stays with him, showing how little she thinks she deserves romantically.

Midway through season two [2.04], Annie arranges a dinner for Ryan to meet her parents. Before dinner, there is a heartwarming scene between the couple where they discuss their excitement for taking this new step in their relationship. However, dinner is ultimately ruined by Annie's mother, Vera. Vera makes repeated self-deprecating comments about her own eating habits: "if you see me reaching for that bread, I give you permission to slap me," and "this is WAY too much food." After dinner, Annie is noticeably frustrated with her mother's behavior and as she tries to communicate her anger to Ryan, he interrupts, asking, "During sex, do you ever think I'll ever be able to make you squirt?" Not only does this prove Ryan was not listening, but he lacks the emotional capacity to sense how Vera's comments would upset Annie.

Tinder Boy offers similar comments during a dinner date. While waiting outside for our table, I mention how excited I am to eat pizza, as carbohydrates are my mother's latest enemy, and were recently forbidden in my house. Taking a drag of his Black & Mild, he responds, "Maybe she has a point. You shouldn't be eating all of those empty calories…it isn't healthy." His concern has nothing to do with health. He is implying I am fat because I lack self-discipline, a stereotype Crandall (1994) theorizes as inherent in United States' notions of fatness. Tinder Boy sees my fatness as what Ringel and Ditto (2019) call a moral failure, reiterating that I should too. I instantly realize how insensitive, and incorrect, his statement is, but never call him out for it. At dinner, I only eat one small piece of pizza while Tinder Boy finishes my leftovers. I leave the restaurant hungry and sad, but not alone.

Annie and I stay because we've been conditioned to believe the bare minimum men give is better than what fat women deserve: to be alone and unhappy. This notion didn't start with Tinder Boy. Nor did it start with the outside pressures of the world. It started at home. Like Annie, one of the most

frequent and harmful iterations of the need to be thin began with my mother.

Self-Hatred Starts at Home

In addition to feeling connection to Annie's difficult relationship with Ryan, the complicated relationship she has with her mother, Vera, mirrors my own. Vera and Annie's relationship proves fat stigma impacts more than romantic relationships, as it is not just romantic love of which Annie feels unworthy. Vera's consistently pressuring her daughter to change her weight leads Annie to believe her mother will never truly love her because she is fat— a feeling I also understand. According to Nichter (2000), women have been taught for generations that thin is the only acceptable body type, and my mother, like Vera, exemplifies this practice.

Vera, who is not fat but endlessly self-conscious about her body, continuously and passive-aggressively prods Annie to be thinner. She buys Annie pre-packaged diet food and encourages her to exercise more, subtly reminding Annie she needs to lose weight. While on a walk together [1.02], Vera nudges Annie to work out, stating, "it's easy, Annie, just put it on your calendar and just stick to it!" During a tearful monologue [1.04], Annie recalls a moment where her mother made her a separate dinner from the rest of her family, a bowl of Special K, so "boys could like her." Vera, a woman who follows a "Thin Diet," is more concerned with how society will perceive her daughter's body than how Annie will perceive her own body. Annie and her mother show how body insecurity is a vicious generational cycle, nearly impossible to break (Hilton, 2019).

Annie's experience with generational fatphobia is reflected in my own life. When I was young, I watched my mother, my first role model, be regularly and openly dissatisfied with her appearance. She would try new diets, avoid being in photos, and routinely mention how fat she was, and how she needed to lose weight. As a child who had a body type similar to my mother's, I started to become aware of her frustrations and adopt them. I became the 8-year-old who worried about my stomach growing or the ways my thighs jiggled when I ran; I was aware of others watching my body and I started to judge myself through their eyes. However, I had no refuge when peers'

judgments turned into fat-shaming. Because my mother also scrutinized fat bodies, home wasn't a place for comfort when others commented on my body; she echoed their cruelty. By internalizing my mother's comments about weight, I grew to hate my body and pressured myself to be thinner, a common reality for many girls (Oliveria et al., 2019).

But of course, the pressure to be thin was not just from my mother or the media, it also came from my peers. Growing up in the Sunshine State, swimsuit season was year-round, and because of this, I rarely had a break from clothes that show my body. It was exhausting. Not just my body but my skin was also constantly on display. I experienced many moments of direct fat-shaming because of this situation. A second-grade birthday party is one of the first instances I can remember.

It's a month into the school year, and I'm invited to an all-girls pool party for one of my classmates. I'm excited to swim, so I immediately change into my Lizzie McGuire one-piece when I arrive. I run from the bathroom to the pool, holding my towel over my shoulder. When I see my friends, I notice I'm the only girl in a one-piece. I'm not allowed to wear a bikini; my mother stopped buying them after my rounded belly stuck around past my toddler years. I quickly drape my towel over my shoulders, wrapping it around myself in the hopes of hiding my body. I walk to the side of the pool, placing my legs in the water so I can talk to my friends without fully revealing my one-piece. Although I didn't know it at the time, I may not have been alone in my feelings of body dissatisfaction. As Dohnt and Tiggemann (2004) note, girls as young as six show a desire for thinness.

After some insistent begging, a few classmates convince me to get into the pool. I am so caught up in playing that I quickly forget any previous insecurities. Eventually, a mother calls us over for cake and presents. We reunite with our towels and huddle around the birthday girl, eagerly anticipating the Publix sheet cake. When the adults are out of earshot, a classmate asks why I am wearing a one piece. Answering for me, another responds, "Because she's fat." I'm shocked; I've never been called that word before, and though I don't quite understand its meaning, I know it isn't good. The adults return, and I feel tears sting as we sing "Happy Birthday." I'm again mortified about my choice in swimwear, so much so that I call my mother

to come pick me up. I never finish my cake. When I'm invited to another pool party weeks later, I beg my mother to let me stay home. She declines the RSVP.

That fat-shaming tainted my swimming for the next decade, and, even today, is a memory I vividly recall. From as early as age seven, my peers, who were primarily White, singled out my fatness, reiterating that I was different from, and inferior to, their standards of beauty and normalcy. Annie flashes back to a similar memory when confronted with going to a pool party as an adult [1.04]. A young Annie is shown avoiding the pool on a family vacation, as she is insecure about publicly wearing a swimsuit. Later that night, she sneaks out to the empty pool to swim alone. She is happy and relaxed swimming by herself. Young Annie is only comfortable in her bathing suit is when no one is watching her. I watched this scene and saw myself. It made me feel like I wasn't alone, and that connection is life-changing for a girl who has spent her entire life feeling the isolating shame of body insecurity.

Luckily for Annie, the trauma of swimming begins to diminish for just the reason it was triggered, her attendance at the "Fat Babe Pool Party" [1.04]. After convincing her boss to let her cover the event in the newspaper for which she works, she goes to the party with her roommate, Fran. When Annie and Fran walk in, they are greeted with a variety of fat babes dressed in colorful swimsuits. The women are carefree, simply existing as beautiful people comfortable in their skin. Annie, uncomfortable in a bathing suit, is wearing jeans and a blouse. She makes it clear she is only there "as a journalist," but her attitude slowly changes as she begins to experience the joy of the party. In one powerful scene, a babe grabs Annie's hand and leads her to the dance floor. At first, Annie is uncomfortable, but as she watches the other women dance, she releases doubt and joins in. Annie and the women become a colorful blur, unbothered by what jiggles, or their inability to hide their fat rolls in the broad daylight. Instead, they enjoy themselves in the moment. With this boost of newfound confidence, Annie discards her modest outfit and reveals a color-blocked swimsuit. Liberated, she jumps into the pool with childlike abandon. In this brief second, Annie has broken through her insecurity and allowed herself to experience pure, in-the-moment happiness.

This scene offers the revolutionary concept that fat *or* happy is no longer a choice she must make.

Although swimming or dancing may be normal for an average-sized character, they're radical experiences for plus-sized people. For a fat person to dance, swim, or simply be comfortable in their body without worrying about others' judgment is an act of rebellion (Laurion, 2019). When I watched Annie dive into the pool with the other fat babes, I felt liberated and also jealous. I have yet to find a fat community and, though I've found validation online and in media, I am still consistently fat-shamed in person. After posting a picture of myself in a bikini on Instagram, my former roommate posted a screenshot of an article detailing the dangers of obesity, editing the post to underline what she considered to be the highlights and praising the FDA for funding a new weight management program.

Even as empowered as *Shrill* allows me to feel, there are times when I long to be thin and break free from the stigma that follows my fat body. I can only imagine the power of seeing *Shrill*'s Fat Babe Pool Party as a little girl; I may have felt okay about the way my body looked. Just as *Shrill* inspires me, the series is sure to inspire the generation of girls growing up now. There is no denying the importance of this representation and the power a show like *Shrill* has, but there is still more work to be done and *Shrill* is not without fault. *Shrill* remains focused on Annie's individual journey to self-love and only marginally addresses systemic fat oppression. Further, Annie's process of self-love is heavily reliant on the support she receives from Fran, her Black best friend and roommate. This narrative reiterates Black women's performing emotional labor to heal White women, a trope that mimics the treatment of Black women in United States liberation movements.

What We Owe to Fran

Fran is a Black, fat, and queer woman who exists unapologetically in her body. Her character is revolutionary for television, yet much of her early storyline revolves around teaching Annie self-love. The show's early focus on self-love and dependency on Fran to facilitate that self-love is problematic, especially as *Shrill* never holds Annie accountable for solely relying on Fran's

support. This narrative mirrors the reliance on and erasure of the real-life Black women who first advocated for liberation in the Western body movement (Coles & Pasek, 2020; Dominici, 2020; Henneberg, 2018; Stewart & Breeden, 2021), and most recently, the Body Positivity movement. By centering Annie's journey of White self-love, and ignoring Fran in the process, *Shrill* shows its unwillingness to tackle the structural issues and white supremacy that impede fat liberation.

In the series premiere, when Annie and Fran discuss Annie's unwanted pregnancy, Annie reveals her fear that she will "never get to have" the experience of motherhood because she is fat and unworthy of love. Fran is frustrated by her mindset and wants to change it, insisting, "we need to untrain you from thinking of yourself in such a brutal way" [1.01]. As the roommates head to their friend's cabaret [2.02], Fran asks Annie to wear the Christmas present she bought her: a sheer bra with hearts covering the nipples. Annie is hesitant at first, but Fran insists. Fran showers Annie with praise and at the cabaret, Annie dances as confidently and carefreely as she did at the Fat Babe Pool Party. Later, when Annie expresses insecurity while getting ready for a coworker's birthday [2.02], Fran again steps in, styling Annie's hair and providing the requisite compliments.

In these moments, *Shrill* becomes another story of a White woman learning self-love from a Black woman. This narrative is dangerous, as it seems to give Fran special abilities that fix Annie's low self-esteem, framing her as a "magical negro," a Black stock character who possesses magical powers used only to help a White protagonist (Entman & Rojecki, 2001; Gabbard, 2004; Glenn & Cunningham, 2007; Hughey, 2012). Fran, unlike typical instances of this trope, does have her own storylines, but they remain secondary to her care for and support of Annie. With Fran's help, Annie finds confidence, self-worth, and, in the final season, becomes aware of her White privilege. As a result, Fran becomes another instance of a "Black Best Friend" in television, a character Brooks (2020) describes as providing "…new cultural knowledge and experiences and a buffer against worrying if you are racist" (para. 4) for White main characters. However, Fran is written as a supporting role, which complicates her treatment in the series. Although it may seem justifiable for *Shrill* to utilize a secondary character to assist a protagonist's journey, relying on

Fran to facilitate Annie's inner-work reiterates Black women's role as caregivers in White women's lives. Ultimately, *Shrill* fails to reconcile Annie's reliance on Fran for self-confidence and emotional comfort, and, in doing so, mirrors a larger issue of White women's failure to reconcile their dependance on Black women for support (Morrison, 1971; Respers France, 2021).

What We Owe to Black Women

Like Fran's emotional labor in *Shrill*, the United States Body Positivity (BP) movement simultaneously sustains and dismisses the work of Black women. BP is a social movement which offers promising ideals of body acceptance and self-empowerment (Sastre, 2016; Stokes, 2013). Yet, it is not the only campaign for body liberation, as the effort is comprised of various movements (see Fat Justice [Gordon, 2020], Fat Acceptance [British Broadcast Corporation, 2021], and Health at Every Size [Association for Size Diversity and Health, 2020]). BP is the most current and popular, and has received the most public critique, so I believe it is necessary to position the movement as a focus of this essay. However, despite Black women such as Johnnie Tillmon (1972) and Margaret K. Bass (2000) developing the first iterations of BP, White individuals largely ignore their work, just as *Shrill* ignores the emotional labor of Fran. These oversights highlight the way *Shrill*, although a groundbreaking media piece, places White experiences at the forefront of its activism, much like the White women, including myself, who have co-opted the BP movement.

Fatphobia's racial origins began with the Transatlantic Slave Trade, when White scientists created racial hierarchies to justify slavery. Race scientists labeled enslaved people as gluttonous and stupid, specifically depicting southern African women as grotesque, hypersexual, and animalistic, while White women were thin and virtuous (Strings, 2019). According to Strings:

> The reason for fatphobia['s] affecting white women is because fatphobia is related to anti-Blackness… if there was an entire movement in the United States where white people were trying doggedly to prove that they were white and not Black, then it's very important for white women not to be fat. (Carlan, 2020, para. 13).

The legacies of these racist ideologies solidified global White supremacy and marginalized Black women's bodies, and can still be seen today in the rhetoric of the "obesity epidemic" and the use of Body Mass Index (BMI) to determine health (Dougherty et al., 2020; Ray, 2014).[3] And still, much of the aforementioned research surrounding United States beauty standards positions fatness as detrimental to perceptions of White women, ignoring its structural, racist roots.

As such, the earliest moments of BP come from Black women. Fat, Black activists, such as Johnnie Tillmon and Margaret K. Bass, presented the first notions of the movement. Tillmon's (1972) essay argues her fatness, in conjunction with her race and class, led to her "count[ing] less as a human being" (para. 1-2). Bass' (2000) work deals with her experiences of self-loathing and fat prejudice she faced growing up in the segregated South. Today, Black women such as Roxanne Gay, Sonya Renee Taylor, and Candice Marie Benbow remain influential activists for fat liberation.[4] Gay (2017) intimately describes the psychological struggles with her body in order to analyze the cultural ideals of pleasure, consumption, appearance, and health. Taylor (2018) introduces the concept of radical self-love, a process which begins by acknowledging the damage from society's hierarchy of bodies, or the conditioning to attach value and self-worth to bodies by resenting thinner bodies and tormenting fatter ones. Benbow (2020) famously critiques Beyoncé for her lack of size inclusion in her athleisure line, Ivy Park. Benbow's public critique of the cultural icon reiterated that only centering

[3] Ray (2014) argues time allocated for physical activity and social constructions of bodies are privileged to support races and genders other than Black women. Because Black women are largely disregarded, their level of physical activity and overall physical health suffers, hence, they are more likely to be classified as obese. Similarly, Dougherty et al. (2020) argue structural racism is present in BMI, as their study found the scale disproportionately reports lower BMIs for White participants and higher BMIs for Black participants.

[4] I have chosen these women as their work is crucial to my understanding of intersectionality. Though, they are only some of the many influential Black activists in the body liberation effort (see Clarkisha Kent, Simone Mariposa, Sauycé West, Jessamyn Stanley, Stephanie Yeboah, Imani Barbarin, and Jari Jones, to name a few). To better understand the impact of Black activism in the movement, and the structural racism of fatphobia, I encourage beginning with the following works: Sabrina Strings's (2019) *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*, Roxanne Gay's (2017) *Hunger*, and Sonya Renee Taylor's (2018) *The Body Is Not An Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love*.

"Black" and "woman" is not enough, and true intersectionality must also be inclusively fat (Stewart & Breeden, 2021). These contributions further BP and hold the effort accountable, yet, these women are rarely included in mainstream conversations about the movement.

Despite Black women's trailblazing in liberation efforts such as abolition, suffrage, #MeToo, and now BP, their work is erased from the movements while the experiences of White women remain at the forefront (Green, 2019). Many credit the modern BP movement with Connie Sobczak and Elizabeth Scott, two White, straight-sized[5] women who began the organization The Body Positive. Unlike the intersectional and structural approach of Black activists, Sobczak and Scott's BP invokes a self-love framework that emphasizes members' unlearning their negative body image (The Body Positive, 2022). Because this version of BP puts heavy emphasis on internal, individual change, dismantling systemic privilege and oppression is almost non-existent. This approach to BP erases the work of the Black women who began the movement, and because of its palatable emphasis on individuals and self-image rather than systemic inequality, this iteration of movement saturates mainstream media. Self-love-focused discussions of BP have been on *The Today Show*, referenced in over 26.8 billion videos on TikTok, and featured in major news sources such as *The New York Times* (Salam, 2017), *The Washington Post* (Puhl, 2021), and NPR (Godoy, 2020).

The exclusion of Black women in BP is most blatantly seen through the movement's champions. As noted, Lindy West was given a Hulu original to bring her experiences to an international audience (*Shrill*) whereas Black women get little, other than the opportunity to educate West's protagonist. Tess Holiday and Ashley Graham have become household #BodyPositive names, while Jessamyn Stanley and Stephanie Yeboah are only occasionally compiled into "Black Body-Positive Role Models to Follow on Instagram" (National Eating Disorders Association, 2022) lists. The real-life dismissal of Black women in BP mirrors *Shrill*'s reliance on and lack of recognition for Fran. These instances are glaring failures of the television series and the

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[5] Non plus-size, usually United States sizes 00-12.

liberation movement, proving both may never truly be inclusive of anyone outside a White, fat identity.

I am no better than *Shrill* or the modern BP movement. My privilege of existing in a White, small fat[6] body allows me to focus on self-love, rather than the inequalities those in more marginalized fat bodies face, such as food insecurity (Cooksey Stowers et al., 2020) or mistreatment in healthcare (Keating, 2019). I've never struggled to fit into public transportation seats or needed a seatbelt extender, and my size is available at mainstream retailers, all instances which larger fat people seldom experience. Most importantly, I've never experienced physical violence on account of my fat body, an occurrence that is often fatal for fat, Black bodies (Kukla & Richardson, 2014; Mollow, 2017). Having the luxury to focus on self-image instead of the systemic problems that plague fat bodies is indisputably a product of my whiteness. As a White woman, my fatness othered me from my race. Because I was denied the social capital of thinness, I was devalued within whiteness. As a result, my initial journey, like Annie's, focused on deconstructing that mindset.

I now understand liberation for fat bodies takes more than self-love, and having time to come to that conclusion is a privilege itself. In accepting my fat body, I wasn't purposefully excluding the experiences of Black activists in BP, but my ignorance was dangerous. I furthered the whitewashing of body liberation and the erased the same experiences I condemn *Shrill* and the BP movement for disregarding. I now understand it is crucial for BP and other liberation efforts to center the systemic oppression of fat people and include marginalized voices, but this intersectionality was learned from Black women such as Gay, Taylor, Benbow, Stanley, Yeboah, and my own friends. Although learning from activists grounded me in the theory, conversations with the Black women in my life helped me to understand the nuances of the practice.

It's our second semester of undergrad, and my friend Kayla and I are procrastinating writing our final papers. Sitting on her dorm bed, we listen to an indie record and scroll through various social apps. Kayla swipes on Tinder, groaning, "I never

[6] A term used to describe United States plus sizes 18 and lower. As I write this, I am a size 18 and 235 pounds.

match with anyone in Daytona. I have so many options back home, but always *nothing* here." Thinking we're lamenting over our experiences as fat girls on dating apps, I respond, "I know. Everyone here is so fatphobic." Kayla pauses, and gets off the bed. She grabs her Brita, and, as she pours herself a drink, reminds me she experiences much more racism at our conservative, predominately White university, "These boys are racist. I've never had someone call me fat here, but they have no problem telling me Black girls 'aren't their type.'" Her response prompts instant embarrassment. I stutter back, "Oh yeah…I'm sorry" before asking for a glass of water. Frankly, I realized I centered my own insecurities in assuming her dating life was hindered by her body size.

Kayla reminds me my fat experiences are not universal, and moments like these serve as indications that my own mindset and understandings of how to deconstruct whiteness are still developing. Like Annie, I have allowed my whiteness to cloud my critique of fatphobia, and, more broadly, my understanding of societal inequalities. However, having the opportunity to discuss womanhood, fatness, and race with the Black women in my life provides a better understanding of the intricates of our respective experiences. Yet, I understand the safe space provided by these women, one where I can make mistakes in navigating these differences, is a privilege in itself. In addition to listening to and amplifying the voices of Black women, I must do the work—in my ways of thinking, personal life, and scholarship—to combat frameworks which center whiteness.

Only The Beginning

Fat people deserve the right to accommodating airplane seats (West, 2016), to visit doctors and receive unbiased treatment, to be paid the same as their thin coworkers (Shinall, 2014) . Fat people of all races, genders, sexualities, and abilities deserve to be heard in conversations about body liberation. Fat bodies deserve to be valued as much as thin ones. It is not a crime to exist as a fat woman, and although it has taken me 22 years, I am finally ready to accept that I am fat. As Annie says [1.04], "I've wasted so much time and money and energy, for what? I'm fat. I'm fucking fat! Hello, I'm fat!"

Even with the influences of BP and media such as *Shrill*, there are still times when I wish I was thin. My experiences along with society's stigma against my weight have caused my sense of what it means to be a worthwhile human being to be permanently warped. As much as I try to reverse the damage, I am not sure I will ever be able to escape the ideologies of beauty and normalcy and stop associating my weight with my value as a human. One of the most realistic elements of *Shrill* is its portrayal of this conundrum; though Annie is on a journey to empowering herself, her body image issues are not solved instantaneously. Annie is navigating how to exist comfortably in her body but still falls victim to feeling the pain of being fat. This realness is what makes her character so intriguing; she represents every woman's moments of self-doubt. Like Annie, each day I work to be more accepting of my body while at the same time, a day doesn't go by when I don't feel badly about being fat. When I get dressed, I am reminded of how others will negatively perceive my fat body and I scrutinize it through their eyes. When I get dinner with a friend, I ensure I eat the exact portion they do, in an effort to distance myself from stereotypes. Some days are better than others, but there is an ever-present conflict inside of me, battling whether or not I should be happy with my outward appearance.

Annie is confronted with her own anti-fatness in season three. After Annie and Ryan's breakup, Annie's friend Amadi sets her up on a blind date with his friend, Will [3.02]. Upon arriving, Annie discovers Will is fat and is immediately thrown off, thinking Amadi only set them up because they are both fat. Angry and confused, Annie sabotages the date because she can't shake the feeling that being with another fat person is offensive, and inherently wrong. This sentiment is present in my own dating life; the majority of my partners have been thin, and I wonder if this is a coincidence or my internalized fatphobia. Despite working to unlearn fat is a moral failure and beginning to accept my fat body, I've often dismissed the idea of dating another fat person. My mindset is a product of the societal narrative that I am only worthy of love from another fat person, so I see thin people's affection as a prize to be won. In my dating life, I gravitate towards thinner bodies, and when I've had thinner partners, it feels like a personal triumph. This

notion is perpetuated by the lingering fatphobia I harbor, as I can never fully unlearn the ideologies that surround my weight. Even with all progress I've made, the years of pain and shame I've felt towards my body still haunt me.

Fatphobia pervades culture. However, new, positive media portrayals of fat characters are beginning to rewrite the perceived notions of fatness. Shows like *Shrill* are important because they give representation to a group that has been marginalized from society. Not only does *Shrill* normalize fat bodies, it does something very few shows have before: gives fat women permission to comfortably exist. Annie shows audiences that a person can be fat and also beautiful, smart, and worthy of love. *Shrill* goes against society's mainstream ideologies by bringing the everyday life of a successful, happy, and loveable fat woman to a broader audience. The show does a remarkable job of not only presenting body acceptance and fatphobia but portrays these issues in a realistic light, with the main character, Annie, struggling through them. Her problems are not solved at the end of an episode, the season, or even the series finale, reiterating the idea that the journey of self-love is not linear. The important dialogues about the complicated journey of self-acceptance and understanding systemic anti-fatness allow me to feel represented in a way no media piece has ever before. And yet, like all media texts, the series is far from perfect. Its initial focus on Annie's self-love and reliance on Fran reflects the worst aspects of the BP movement, evidence that even some of the best fat representation has significant flaws. Still, the series has empowered me, and I am sure other fat women, on a journey to accepting our fat bodies. *Shrill*'s representation is just one narrative of the fat experience, but for the generations of women who have felt the pain of living in a body society deems unworthy, that one story is groundbreaking.[7]

[7] At the time of completing this essay, a new campaign, Roses for Every Body, is calling for fat representation on *The Bachelor*, a reality dating show focused explicitly on finding love. With demands such as casting a minimum of five diverse, fat contestants each season and giving equitable screentime to these contestants, the campaign advocates for fat visibility, as well as the notion that fat people are worthy of love (Halle Corey, 2022). The effort to include fat bodies on *The Bachelor*, a mainstream reality television show, gives fat contestants the opportunity to acquire the same platform, and social capital, of previous, thin contestants. Although *Shrill* is only one story of the fat experience, its narrative helps to normalize positive representations of fat people on-screen, aiding in the reversal of decades of harmful exclusion.

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Medusa Bronze

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It may be known Medusa mourned her fate,
As far as Fate had chosen her for rape;
As well that Perseus had swung his blade,
And severed head from neck, her locks from limb,
And took her head to be his talisman.

But how Minerva's "gift" was still one more
Unwelcome will enforced upon her own,
Is little known and seldom shared. But here
In whole her story's told: for there are three—
The molestations of Medusa Bronze.

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Medusa was a quiet girl, they say.
She danced in fields of flowers sweet and soft.
Lads all around, by her bewitched, they fell;
She shunned them all and stepped beyond their grip.
A lifelong maidenhood would be her choice.

But Neptune, god, did chance upon the sight
Of her bronze hair and deem it lovely fair.
He bids her love, she tells him naught but "no,"
And flees into Minerva's temple there.
The god delights to follow her in haste.

Medusa begs the god to let her be.
But Neptune laughs; he loves to catch his prey.
No one, he thinks, has right to tell him no.
And so Medusa strives and flees in vain—
Though great her flight, she can't outlast the sea.

He grabs her locks and coils them in his grip,
And drags her deep beyond the colonnade—
Enchanted by the blood that swells within—
Ignores her cries and sees her beauty bare.
He fills his lust, and leaves her there to weep.

Minerva, goddess with the silver eyes,
Maid, clad in armor made of bronze and mind,
Of wisdom, battle strategy, and craft,
Had heard Medusa's sobs and come in time
To understand the cause of anguished cries.

With steely eyes and jaw clenched tight, she watched.
She, powerless to help Medusa's plight
Against the quaking storm of Neptune's might,
Was filled with pity, rage, and scornful spite.
Earth-shaker left and out Minerva stepped.

She clothed Medusa; skin of bronze still bare.
Medusa trembled long, began to shake.
Minerva, angered by a world that says
To some: "What you desire is yours to take,"
Decreed Medusa wouldn't be dismissed—

This girl, who lately danced in flowers tall,
Who walked in peace below the boughs of trees,
And laughed to see the sun bestow his light
Upon a babbling brook with tune so sweet;
This girl is used again against her will.

Minerva, she who turned Arachne dread,
Transforms once more this girl who has no say:
Medusa feels a gentle, light caress,
Much softer than those salt-worn hands at play
Upon her body long; so grasping, course.

Minerva, she thus turns Medusa Dread—
A Gorgon's face and lively locks that hissed,
A gaze to turn a man or god to stone,
And toughened scaly skin of greenish hue—
All this Minerva does with just a kiss;

A kiss of sympathy and ownership,
A kiss of goddess to her votary,
A kiss imbued with power, shaping fate.
A kiss, at once, of power to the weak,
Of sculptor to her statue or her tool.

Minerva, always crafty, always keen,
She seeks to use Medusa's gift as hers,
To put her rival, Neptune, down at last.
No one, she thinks, would dare to tell her no,
For godly gifts must always be repaid.

"I give you power for revenge, my girl,
To seek it as I wish; you will not fail.
Renowned in legend you shall be by men,
For turning Neptune, god of shaking seas,
Into a solid god of sterile stone."

Thus, having given that divine command,
And changed the girl as she, the goddess, wished,
The grey-eyed god-maid left Medusa too—
Minerva never asked, she never thought
What might Medusa want for her own life.

At length, Medusa rose and crossed the floor,
At length, her strength renewed and courage seized,
She at the statue of Minerva knelt.
She did not kneel in rev'rence or in thanks,
But rather knew she'd find reflection there.

It hurt, it hurt, such pain as hers, it hurt.
Her body felt no longer hers, it hurt.
She cursed the Fates, she cursed her fate, she cursed.
She wept and wept and was afraid to look
And see what she, Minerva, wrought of her.

But there reflected bright in shield of bronze,
She saw her hair a wreath of writhing snakes,
Her skin as green and scaled as tarnished bronze.
That dreadful face, it gave her such a fright:
Medusa was the first to flee her sight.

How could, why would, such dreadful things occur?
It hurt, it hurt, such pain as hers, it hurt.
Her body hurt, her mind—it roared, her heart—
Her heart, she felt, it was no longer whole.
Why would, how could, such awful things occur?

Her first encounter shrieked and turned to stone,
And, horrified, Medusa turned away.
Yet two more followed quickly after that,
And many saw, and fled to warn the rest.
And so her tale was spread throughout the land.

Afraid and shamefaced, she would stay away
From those who could be found to look her way.
So, quickly so, she left for lands unknown,
Beyond the grasp of common man alone.
The gentle soul, she left her comfort home.

She traced the sky to where it touched the earth,
And there she found the Titan Atlas strong.
She closed her eyes and asked what he could see,
If there were men around this edge of earth,
Or if there was a place for her to stay.

The ancient one bent low and saw her face,
Then straightened tall and told her she was safe,
For none but gods, and her, had ever come.
She rested, in a sanctuary cave,
There by the Garden of Hesperides.

Though urged to take revenge against Neptune,
Medusa knew not how he might be found.
And as her anger hadn't sparked a hate
For him in that soft, gentle heart of hers,
She turned her efforts to worthwhile pursuits.

She walked the garden, tended fruit and tree.
She spoke with Atlas, Titan, eyes shut tight.
She learned again to dance and laugh and sing.
She healed her wounds, and grew content—felt free.
And yet, the Fates had other plans, it seems.

At length, Minerva thought to turn her eye—
For Neptune roamed unslain; she wondered why.
She turned her eye to earth and scanned the land,
Where nothing but a fading tale remained
Of Gorgon dread, Medusa, who had fled.

Minerva, out of patience with this girl
Who dared to take her gift and not repay—
Minerva turned her wrath from god of seas
And placed it on the Gorgon she had made.
Resolved, she'd rid the world of what she'd wrought:

When comes a'looking Perseus to prove his name,
She leads the young man to the Gorgon's cave,
While saturating him with tales of death,
Of countless dozens killed and turned to stone,
She hands to him her shield and bids him go.

When Perseus arrived, he heard a voice,
A soft and slith'ring song, a melody
With words that spoke of hope, and sun, and light;
It was a song with words of lovel life.
But, to his ear, it sounded grim as death.

For though the words were so, they came through stone—
This stone, this cave in which Medusa dwelt,
Was tall, with curving walls and narrow halls—
And from a throat that slithered normal speech:
Medusa's voice was sound that could appall.

And so, in fear, he waits. Medusa sleeps,
Then in he creeps. He lifts Minerva's shield
And sees the world in bronze and firelight.
He rears his sword—she blinks and screams—he swings—
So fast that once again she cannot fight.

And down, her head, it falls upon the ground,
Her final scream affixed upon her face.
And Perseus, he picks it up. He grins.
The smile upon his face, he thanks the gods.
He closes, carefully, Medusa's eyes.

The hero, with his proclaimed trophy, went,
And sought to rest before his journey home.
He went to Atlas, Titan, asked for help.
The Titan saw Medusa's head and wept,
In anger, shook the earth and cursed the boy.

So Perseus, he opened up her eyes,
Medusa's eyes, and lifted up her head.
The Titan looked, and turned to mountain stone;
Medusa's head was used to kill her friend.
No solace, then, not even after death.

When Perseus had dropped the shield and gone,
Minerva came to take her shield again.
She paused a moment by the woman slain,
Recalled Medusa's glimpse at changéd form;
Minerva gave her shield a different face.

In place of hammered bronze, Medusa's face
In grimace wide, a fright to all who fear.
The face a weapon, though no power left,
Unless the sight itself could petrify.
Immortalized Medusa, framed in bronze:

A metal used to forge the statues tall,
And used to form the shields of mighty gods,
By heroes taken up as mighty arms,
The bronze of strength, of gold that doth turn green,
of shine that time will tarnish and besmirch;

So rightly thus her name: Medusa Bronze.

ANYA ROP (BA, Calvin University) has just graduated with a BA in Classical Studies from Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This is her first published poem, and her first attempt to share some part of her work with the world, though she writes both poetry and prose avidly. If writing is the breathing out and reading is the breathing in, she is currently working on taking deep breaths in—that is, reading in her spare time.

"Look for positive people": Construction of counternarratives within r/transgender_surgeries

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Abstract: The subreddit r/transgender_surgeries offers a platform for transgender and gender diverse people to seek and share information on gender transition. Through a rhetorical analysis of the discourse present throughout this subreddit, we found that the subreddit users construct a counternarrative of resilience. By utilizing tools of narrative identification pertaining to the medical processes of gender transition, the subreddit users co-create a space that seeks to redefine the hegemonic narrative of transgender identity. This counternarrative of resilience is revealed through an analysis of the broad corpus of discourse on the subreddit page. Examining the textual and metatextual levels of meaning through the use of Leximancer allows scholars to understand the larger discourse present in the narratives expressed by participants in the subreddit. Leximancer concept mapping directs scholars to thematic discourses, by which the larger rhetorical analysis is able to reveal the overriding shape and direction of subreddit's users. The focus on positivity and community allows the group to act as a site of resistance from cissexist restrictions and definitions of trans bodies to subvert social and medical stigmatization and gatekeeping. However, this group's discourses often mirror and fall prey to hegemonic discourses of gender and transition.

Keywords: counternarrative, transgender, Reddit, Leximancer, health rhetoric

"I'd say don't concentrate on fears and doubts too much. Try to concentrate on what you feel would make you really happy." - post from the r/transgender_surgeries subreddit

OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, transgender and gender diverse (TGD) people have been looking for answers on how to transition in an increasingly hostile political and social climate (Price et al., 2020; Veldhuis et al., 2018). Following the election of former President Donald Trump, there has been an increase in cissexist rhetoric and policies that have directly attacked TGD communities in the United States. Bathroom laws have barred people from using bathrooms that do not match the gender on their birth certificate, transgender people have been banned from military service, and states across the country have

implemented laws against minors accessing gender affirming medical care such as hormone treatment (Gonzalez et al., 2018; Spade, 2015). These policies and regulations on TGD people increase the vocalized and enacted stigmatization of TGD identity and bar TGD people from accessing gender affirming medical care (Bockting et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2018; Holt et al., 2019). The cissexist policies and increase in cissexist political rhetoric throughout the United States place TGD people at heightened risk of negative mental health impacts, and directly impact the health, safety, and well-being of many TGD people (Price et al., 2020; Puckett et al., 2021).

Beginning April 15, 2016, amidst the vitriolic anti-LGBTQ+ and specifically anti-trans rhetoric of Trump's 2016 election cycle (see Gonzalez et al., 2018; Price et al., 2020; Veldhuis et al., 2018), a group of TGD Reddit users and TGD affirming health practitioners created the subreddit r/transgender_ surgeries in order to allow for a space in which TGD people could discuss openly and anonymously topics about "surgeries, surgery results, surgeon satisfaction, and the costs incurred by transgender men and women" (r/transgender_surgeries, 2016). Although the group was originally created as a space for sharing and seeking information, the overall trends in the subreddit have evolved to that of support, affirmation, and resilience through re-envisioning the cisnormative determinants of TGD identity. Through the sharing of advice and personal stories, a narrative of community strength and resilience emerged within the discourse of medical transition. This subreddit constructs a source of counternarrative (Harter, 2006; Lindemann-Nelson, 2001), facing down cissexist rhetoric and political action that seeks to restrict access to medical transition and care for TGD people.

In approaching online forums and other forms of digital mass media, the amount of content can be overwhelming and difficult to analyze from an interpretivist, rhetorical lens. Through the use of the Leximancer tool (a data analysis software that creates concept maps from large texts), we distributed the discussion of the r/transgender_surgeries subreddit into easily identifiable categories, naming the most frequent discussion points, and generating a concept map that outlines the top categories of discourse in the subreddit through color coordination, visual

shaping and connection, and word contextualization. As a tool, Leximancer offers a means through which researchers can break down the mass bulk of discourse in online forums and generate manageable subcategories paired with direct quotations and discourse from the group users to allow the themes from the data to direct a rhetorical approach. In relation to TGD identity and surgery, Leximancer paints a picture of the dominant trends taking place in these online forums, demonstrating the words and ideas that TGD people in this group use to generate and share their own experiences and narratives with others. Through these thematic groupings and direct quotations from the subreddit users, a narrative of identification and support develops through the directives of surgery, body plasticity, and gender identity. This subreddit in particular is compelling due to the conversations that proceeded as ways to share information and developed into conversations of personal affirmation and support, assisting not only in surgical transition but also moving beyond surgery to personal narratives of self-discovery with the aim of deconstructing the internalization of cissexist assertions of TGD identity both inside and outside of the subreddit.

The process of McClure's (2009) narrative identification exists in this subreddit and is evident through the use of the Leximancer tool. TGD subreddit users come together across gender, sexuality, race, geography, and socioeconomic status to construct a counternarrative that subverts the cisnormative narrative of TGD erasure and marginalization and restructures dominant discourses of victimhood and medical gatekeeping toward discourses of empowerment and strength. The r/transgender_surgeries subreddit exemplifies the narrative tools used to challenge cissexist definitions of TGD identity. The themes in the subreddit trace the development and enactment of a TGD narrative of strength and resilience within oppressive cisnormative social, political, and medical systems. This study aims to analyze the overarching narrative that has emerged from r/transgender_surgeries, examining how the emerging counternarratives respond to increasingly hostile political discourses surrounding medical transition and access for TGD people. We examined the central narratives in this TGD subreddit using Leximancer to 1) analyze the resistive force of these online spaces in responding to anti-trans political action,

and 2) to explore new avenues for conducting rhetorical analyses of digital mass media platforms.

Health, Rhetoric, and Narrative Theory

In this study, we use critical rhetoric to explore the construction of counternarratives through the co-construction of narrative and narrative identification. Critical rhetoric seeks to identify and deconstruct systems of power and oppression in order to reconstruct a world in which no one person, group, or people is privileged over another (McKerrow, 1989). In relation to discourses surrounding health and the body, a rhetorical approach identifies and maps the web of power and oppression throughout societal constructions of health, dictating the acceptable constructions of the body, labeling those that are "normal" and othering those that are deemed "abnormal" (Butler & Bissell, 2015; Jordan, 2004; Shugart, 2011). Humans construct meaning and public knowledge through shared stories (Fisher, 1984). Therefore, narratives are ontological as they construct the knowledge that dominant powers determine as truth within public discourse. Through the structuring of social reality, narratives then construct social hierarchies and have the power to reify systems of power, serving as an ideological function that produces and maintains power structures (Mumby, 1987). Narratives act as a force to construct and enforce hierarchies of power by legitimizing and delegitimizing certain groups over others (Price, 2022). Dominant narratives therefore serve as a political production of the world that articulates systems of meaning in which dominant norms arise, generating a hegemonic ordering of reality that restricts personal identity and societal sense-making.

Narratives not only serve to reproduce hierarchies of power, but also have the power to fight against these repressive systems through the co-construction of meaning and a reworking of master narratives. Langellier (1989) argues for the use of personal narratives as a means through which to give voice to muted groups. According to Langellier, personal narratives are mediated through environmental and sociocultural contexts, and fit within the "ground rules" or established structures of dominant culture. The sharing of personal narratives has the

performative power to enact change on "the level of the individual performer, of the social group, or even the culture" (Langellier, 1989, p. 254), by dismantling normative values. Fisher (1984) asserts that as humans, we embody and embed narratives within cultural, social, and political relationships. Narrators co-construct meaning and signification with audiences in order to reconstruct shared values. Narratives have the power to identify and deconstruct hegemonic hierarchies of oppression through a co-construction of meaning.

The understanding of narratives as political and ideological functions that privilege certain groups over others plays out especially within health contexts, as health is embedded in cultural systems of power and meaning (Eckhert, 2016; Lupton, 1994; Price, 2022; Prosser, 1998; Shugart, 2011). Personal narratives and the construction of *counter*narratives work to subvert hegemonic stigmatization of historically marginalized groups. Counternarratives are stories that resist "an oppressive identity and attempt to replace it with one that commands respect" (Lindemann-Nelson & Lindemann, 2001, p. 6). These counternarratives exist in conversation with dominant narratives to "transcend dualistic tendencies that too often reify the 'outsider' subjectivity" (Harter et al., 2006, p. 12). Within the medical realm, narratives "wrestle with complexities that face contemporary health care participants' identity construction, order and disorder, autonomy and communication, fixed and fluid experiences" (Harter, Japp, & Beck, 2006, p. 26). The construction of counternarratives of gender identity and the body thereby function within the dominant language of the body while working to subvert the often reductive biological and medical binaries of gender that restrict access to medical care for TGD people.

Identity is socially constructed, dictating that society stigmatizes some while legitimizing others (Alexander, 2005; Li, 2017; Spade, 2006; Stryker, 2007, 2017). Gender works as a social construction that polices bodies and identities (Gatens, 2003; Prosser, 2006; Spade, 2006, 2015). In health care settings, access to gender-affirming care and gender-transition medical resources are tied to social and political power constructs that largely seek to reify the gender binary (Spade, 2006, 2015; Stryker, 2017). In the face of medical gatekeeping and denial,

narrative can be a tool for sense-making through narrative sharing surrounding personal experience (Gray, 2009). McClure (2009) argues that Fisher's (1984) function of narrative in particular must be expanded to incorporate Burke's (1969) theory of identification, through which groups co-construct meaning that can thereby be used to counteract hegemonic master narratives that dictate who does and does not matter. Narrative identification creates a collective identity towards action, fighting against oppressive systems of power (Selby, 2001). However, these narratives can only exist in relation to the dominant narratives (Langellier, 1989). Therefore, in order to have social power and resistive force, the narratives must incorporate a negotiation of dominant social constructs of articulation in order to work towards deconstructing hegemonic regulation of personal identity.

For TGD people, narrative can be a tool for both self-identification as well as a means toward collective action. As trans scholar and activist Jay Prosser (1998) explains, "Narrative is not only the bridge to embodiment, but a way of making sense of transition" (p. 9). Narratives of gender transition are intricately tied to the body as a sense of self as well as a medical function (Prosser, 1998; Spade, 2006). These transgender narratives serve as a means of diversifying the conceptualization of gender as a singular binary toward the incorporation of gender diversity both socially and medically (Prosser, 1998; Spade, 2006; Stryker, 2007; Stryker et al., 2008). The restrictions of identity expression and medical transition that the current dominant political climate places on TGD people function as "practices of social domination, regulation and control that threaten social abjection; they operate by attaching transgender stigma to various unruly bodies and subject positions, not just to 'transgendered' ones" (Stryker, 2007, p. 61). The construction of narrative identification and counternarratives in TGD communities can assert a regulatory power over which medical providers TGD people seek out, what they tell their health providers, and how they present their gender identity and transitional needs, in order to avoid stigmatization, medical gatekeeping, and denial of medical care (Spade, 2006). Therefore, trans narratives surrounding access to medical care and health discourse have the power to counter and deconstruct social and medical gatekeeping surrounding

TGD identity, gender-affirming care, and access to medical gender transition.

As TGD people navigate the medical realm, they perpetually face stigma and discrimination based on their gender and TGD identity. In 1994 the term "transsexualism" was removed from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders* (DSM) and replaced with "gender identity disorder," which was in turn replaced with "gender dysphoria" in 2013 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Stryker, 2017). These changes in the DSM and medical terminology highlight how health research and standardization are working to move away from stigmatizing, cissexist definitions of TGD people towards developing affirming care. However, due to stigmatization and a lack of access to gender affirming health care, TGD people continue to be at higher risk for mental health disorders, suicide attempts, and HIV/AIDS (Bauer et al., 2009; Bockting & Cesaretti, 2001; Bockting et al., 2013; Bockting et al.,1998; Bockting & Rosser, 1999; Erickson-Schroth, 2014; Hughto et al., 2015; Link, 2017; Stryker, 2017; Vipond, 2015). These health disparities stem from a lack of resources available to both TGD communities and the medical practitioners working with them (Holt, Hope, Mocarski, Meyer, et al., 2019; Holt, Hope, Mocarski, & Woodruff, 2019; Holt, Huit, et al., 2019; Hope et al., 2016; Meyer et al., 2019; Stryker, 2017).

Today, the onus for finding and maintaining gender affirming care is largely on the shoulders of TGD patients, as they often find themselves in the role of educator to medical practitioners (Bockting & Cesaretti, 2001; Coleman et al., 2012; Holt, Hope, Mocarski, Meyer, et al., 2019; Holt, Hope, Mocarski, & Woodruff, 2019; Namaste, 2000). As the medical world and the DSM grapple with reconfiguring their understanding and definitions of transgender medical identity, TGD patients struggle to find health care providers who have "'good brains,' not just a 'good heart'" Holt, Hope, Mocarski, Meyer, et al., 2019, p. 3). In other words, TGD patients are often stuck with well-intentioned, but grossly uninformed medical practitioners sometimes insensitive to the particular dynamics of TGD health. TGD patients then are left with the responsibility of training their medical providers on the needs of TGD people.

The current socio-political environment places TGD people at heightened risk of stigmatization and social rejection that leads to an increase in mental health problems for TGD people and barriers to gender affirming medical care (Bauer et al., 2009; Erickson-Schroth, 2014; Gonzalez et al., 2018; Holt, Hope, Mocarski, & Woodruff, 2019; Meyer et al., 2019; Stryker, 2017; Vipond, 2015). The history of erasure and rejection of TGD people is inherent within the medical systems currently in place throughout the United States. Therefore, it is important for scholars to analyze the ways in which TGD communities construct and share the resources that dominant medical systems have historically failed to provide.

Furthermore, dominant health narratives surrounding TGD identity both in health care and in U.S. sociopolitical spheres tend to focus gender affirming health care within a narrow conceptualization of TGD identity, often limiting who "qualifies" as transgender (Price, 2022; Price et al., 2021; Spade, 2006; Stryker, 2017). For instance, much of TGD representation in popular television focuses on depictions of TGD characters that, while evolving, continue to reinforce the pathologization of TGD identity as a mental health disorder, fixated on a full medical transition (generally male to female) as the only means of self-actualization (Capuzza & Spencer, 2017; McIntyre, 2018; Price, 2022; Price et al., 2022; Vanlee et al., 2020). Although this narrative of full medical transition speaks to the experiences of many, it further others those who do not identify with this experience (Capuzza & Spencer, 2017; Price, 2022; Price et al., 2021). These social discourses reinforce limited narratives of TGD identity and often inform the medical gatekeeping surrounding TGD access to gender affirming and transition related care.

Within the subreddit r/transgender_surgeries, users join the conversation either as active participants or silent observers in order to discuss the vast array of elements involved in gender transition and the medical aspects of life as a TGD person. The creators originally constructed the subreddit group as a means of providing information on gender affirming medical resources, costs, and general knowledge about the medical process of transitioning. However, the group has evolved beyond simple

information sharing to a reconstruction of the health narrative of TGD subreddit users.

Medical research has a history of erasing TGD people who continue to suffer the effects of the devaluation of TGD life (Bauer et al., 2009; Ciszek et al., 2021; Holt, Hope, Mocarski, & Woodruff, 2019; Hope et al., 2016; Styker, 2007, 2017). The medical language of biology continues to be couched within a system that privileges cisgender, heterosexuality above others, using this hegemonic template by which to compare all other identities (Eckhert, 2016). Therefore, health practitioners reference medical care for TGD people within a frame that perpetuates a narrative of difference, habitually placing these communities outside of the norm. As gender affirming and gender-corrective medical practices have become more common, TGD patients are often required to prove their gender identity through psychological evaluations, periods of living in their desired gender role, and engaging in certain aspects of medical transition before being allowed consideration for others regardless of their transition desires (Hausman, 2006; Hope et al., 2016; Stryker, 2017). In many cases, these practices reinforce a binary definition of gender and gender transition that fits the needs of some while denying the needs of others (Stryker, 2017).

Political language surrounding TGD healthcare frames gender transition and TGD identity within a system of deviance that utilizes frameworks of immorality and disgust (see Haider-Markel, et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2017; Vanaman & Chapman, 2020), ignoring the systemic effects that this narrative produces in the lives of TGD people. The dominant narrative of TGD healthcare continues to be entrenched in cissexist, heteronormative health care systems that devalue TGD life (Ciszek, 2021). According to Lucaites and Condit (1990), advocating for change "requires a rhetor to speak *against* the dominant ideology, but from *within* its own vocabulary" (p. 18). In appropriating the language of the dominant group, marginalized health communities attempt to reframe the narrative in a manner that allows for recognition from hegemonic societal structures; however, this reframing uses a dominant, in this case, cis-centric language that perpetuates cisgender as the norm.

Within TGD Reddit discourses, users share and perform narratives to re-center the history of medical erasure in order

to re-envision the ideology around TGD identity and medical intervention. The personal narratives and use of narrative identification within the subreddit r/transgender-surgeries construct counternarratives toward community support, developing its own language to counteract cissexist dictations of gender.

Socially Marginalized Users' Communication in Online Spaces

Scholars have explored the experiences of socially marginalized users in online spaces (e.g., Farber, 2017). However, few studies have explored how TGD people use and take part in online communities in relation to health, community support, and advocacy. This study therefore seeks to better understand how these groups serve as a place of knowledge construction and potential support networks. Farber (2017) conducted a critical discourse analysis of a sample of 38 posts from the r/TransMen subreddit to understand the patterns and themes that emerge in relation to transgender men's communication on fitness, sex, gender, and virtual technologies. Farber found that users engaged in communication associated with ideals of the 'masculine' body and gendered norms, and suggested that spaces like r/TransMen served as a way to re-map online communities as spaces where users co-construct the body and gender.

Park, Conway, and Chen (2018) built upon this research by thematically analyzing discourses of subreddits focusing on depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder to identify the themes of discussion, reasons for engaging in those online mental health communities, and the overlap and differences between the particular communities. The researchers argued that seeking information, support, and community leads to further increases in negative mental health as it can cause a downward spiral within the discourse and reinforce feelings of hopelessness, but likewise bolsters community connections and support networks. Psihopaidas (2017) furthered this study, examining how medical standards' use of the "wrong body" model subsequently impacts how users communicate and understand their gendered selves. Psihopaidas also discussed

that life is restructured through online communities as a way to make sense of the gendered self.

Shifting to online community building, Cipolletta et al. (2017) interviewed TGD people who participated in online communities and found that online communities were their main resource for support and medical advice. TGD people maneuver between the online and offline worlds to negotiate their gender identity and to empower their real-life experiences (Marciano, 2014). As Hegland and Nelson (2002) note, the TGD "self" might be further experienced through an online space, where TGD communities can maintain social interactions, support each other, and avoid isolation.

Moreover, scholarship has explored how pseudonymous sites like Reddit serve as spaces where participants tend to self-disclose and provide communities for consultation and support (Balani & De Choudhury, 2015) as well as for seeking information on specific health conditions (Derksen et al., 2017). Reddit is a large social site where all posts are submitted by users, and participants create their own communities, known as subreddits, under larger groups such as r/health and r/worldnews. Subreddits like r/transgender_surgeries represent niche communities that are likewise important places where users can seek support, consultation, and advice, even if they are not posting and actively participating themselves. Analyzing Reddit corpora can assist in understanding public conversations about health (Pirina & Çöltekin, 2018), and in the case of the current study, it can allow us to better interpret the overall conversations held by its users about a critical issue that is largely overlooked and undervalued by larger public voices. We intend to make sense of the larger conversations that actually occur on the subreddit r/transgender surgeries given the political and sociological developments that may have influenced what members seek from the community, and to analyze the counternarratives that emerge from the overarching discourses.

Artifacts

We, the authors, believe that it is necessary to disclose our personal identities and research approach in order to ensure transparency in the research and analysis because this is an

interpretive argumentative analysis of a marginalized population with a history of researcher abuse. Although both authors are cisgender, we strive in the analysis to accurately and clearly represent TGD voices and experiences in the Leximancer content map and subreddit discourse. We have worked to include TGD scholars and advisors throughout the research and evaluation process to ensure that we are not misrepresenting the experiences of the TGD subreddit. Both authors have previously and are currently working with TGD community-based research advisory boards on previous and ongoing projects. Members of one of the research advisory boards have shared their personal experiences and narratives in information seeking and Reddit use, as well as read the findings of this manuscript to ensure that we are not misrepresenting the narratives inherent within the data set. Likewise, both authors have previous and ongoing research with gender-diverse communities, including current work developing a digital advisory board of gender-diverse groups using a community-based participatory approach. We focus our language and findings in the analysis on representations of subreddit users' voices through their posts and comments, utilizing the terminology and narrative conceptualizations presented by TGD Reddit users.

To collect posts made to the subreddit r/transgender_surgeries, we used Crimson Hexagon (2019; now Brandwatch), a subscription-based library where individuals can download historical social media posts from sites such as Twitter, Reddit, and QQ, among others. We collected all posts and comments (*n* = 4,676) made to the r/transgender_surgeries subreddit from the subreddit's inception on April 15, 2016, through February 17, 2020, as this was the last date for which data was available at the time of the study. At this point there were 3,002 members of the subreddit. For the purposes of this analysis, we only included the text of each post for analysis, rather than the use of timestamp, author handles (which are typically pseudonymous in nature, given the Reddit platform [e.g., Britt et al., 2020]), and other metadata. In order to preserve the online anonymity of participants, we have removed all identifying information from the shared posts.

Approach for Artifact Analysis

We took two steps to analyze the conceptual phenomena that emerged in r/transgender surgeries: (a) Leximancer was used to perform an initial thematic analysis, which was then (b) used to guide the study. Leximancer generated a concept map based on the themes in the first step, which then guided the interpretive analytic process. Leximancer examines natural language processing using word-like associations to observe and extract concepts from a data set (Smith & Humphreys, 2006), which is useful when analyzing large data sets. In this case, because we were analyzing a community with a large amount of information and wanted to examine the overarching rhetorical nature of discourse, it was necessary to use the relational analysis of text data provided by Leximancer to carry out this process (see Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Procedurally, Leximancer works by the following: researchers input their data set of natural language text data, reducing the data to their word-like co-occurrence based on weighted frequencies and a co-occurrence matrix. The software constructs a thesaurus for each concept made of words and phrases that are highly relevant to the text based on the word co-occurrence statistics which create the semantic meaning around the text. The software then examines the data again during the relational extraction phase, and the concepts from the information emerge based on word co-occurrence count, relative concept co-occurrence frequency, and overall count in the data, from which the researchers build themes to determine whether the themes are meaningful in the data.

Notably, although Leximancer employs these natural language processing procedures, it is the researchers' responsibility to provide input in each phase of the data cleaning (reviewing the concepts and ensuring the data is appropriately categorized; see Lemon & Hayes, 2020; Smith & Humphreys, 2006). Then, researchers manually review each theme and, if needed, change the name (in this case, we felt it would be a violation of the community to do so and wished to preserve the texts given, and instead make rhetorical sense of the overall meaning). As a result, we defined Leximancer as the "first step" in conducting the analysis in this study in order to guide the rhetorical analysis. It is not treated as the full scope of the analysis,

which may be a limitation of the software, and researchers are encouraged to make judgments in their analysis, as with any computer-assisted platform. However, we felt it was necessary to gain a perspective of the overarching communication within the community as a whole in order to make sense of the overarching phenomena in r/transgender_surgeries.

Leximancer allowed us to first look at the broad phenomena in r/transgender_surgeries, which then led us to address the nuances in the communication. We examined the discursive practices in the texts and rhetorically analyzed how participants produce ideas, and create and maintain social practices, which is a key feature of communication in subreddits. This approach allows us to make sense of the texts of r/transgender_surgeries, and in this case, perhaps view the contemporary role that Reddit serves as a conduit for sense-making among TGD communities when discussing matters associated with medical transition. Zappen (2005) argued that the context of new digital rhetorics encourages "self-expression, participation, and creative collaboration" (p. 321), characteristics which, as technologies evolve, can be further scrutinized as we seek to uncover how users make sense of common characteristics within their unique subcommunities.

Structure of Conversations

Leximancer generated a concept map consisting of an initial set of ten themes, following the processes from Smith and Humphrey's (2006) validation and guidelines. Notably, though the initial concept map provides distinct themes that warrant further interpretation of r/transgender_surgeries, we must further examine how those themes coalesce into clusters that guide the conversation. As prior studies that use this approach describe, the larger themes encapsulate lower-level themes (e.g., the most dominant theme, "comments" includes lower-level themes such as "support," "gender," "trans," and "explaining"). Moreover, the color of each theme (see Figure 1) denotes its prominence in terms of how frequently that concept within that theme appears in the data and follows the ROYGBIV color spectrum. The most dominant theme appears in red, to orange,

to yellow, following a pattern of gradation, to green, blue, indigo, and violet, which is the least prominent theme.

At this structural level, the dominant themes identified on the concept map include "comments," "positive," and "today" as the overriding major themes, with other prominent themes of "people," "studies," "mismatch," "happy," "role," "training," and "boy" branching out from the three largest themes. Based on color, size, and placement, the dominant themes of "comments," "positive," and "today" hold the largest sway connecting the other seven periphery themes.

To provide a rhetorical analysis of the co-construction of narrative presented within the concept map of Figure 1, we will focus our analysis from the direction of the three major themes, "comments", "positive," and "today," analyzing the overlapping subcategories and the overall directional trends present throughout the discourse of the subreddit. We have maintained the categories that emerged from the concept map in order to keep the language that the TGD subreddit members used to direct the interpretation and narratization of the TGD community's discourse. Individually, these categorical titles or "terms" are not significant when taken away from each other. Rather, the convergence on the three overlapping areas building on each other offers a multivariate reading of the textual discourse present. In other words, standing alone the themes do not add much, but when brought together they give a sense of the complexity of narrative identification and sense-making in the larger subreddit discussions. These terms as categorical themes offer a means of consistency in discussing how narrative constructs the broader discourses of medical accessibility and support in online TGD communities.

Analysis

Metatextual Discourse, Subversion and Assimilation

"Comments" as a theme presents itself as a metatextual discourse and conduit for the other themes present, namely those of "positive" and "today." As a categorical topic, the term "comment" often refers readers and contributors on the page to the comments of others for further information; the term is

embedded within statements of information sharing, advice, and support. For example, one subreddit user wrote: "Persistently and in depth questioning the gender assigned at birth can be a sign in itself. Cis people usually do not do this. For them it's a few short thoughts of how it might be, and they move on. A few things from (https://www.reddit.com/r/asktransgender/comments/924xd8/help_am_i_trans/e34kaeo/) post might help." Although "comments" is part of a hyperlink within the post, this theme situates itself as a continuously rotating discourse as it refers readers to previously made posts as well as external sources.

"Comments" functions as a rhetorical agent through the application of commentary within the conversations at large, as well as a connector between the overriding themes throughout the subreddit page. The sub themes in "comments" are "explaining," "therapist," "gender," "support," and "trans," developing a narrative quality of medical and emotional support with articulations of TGD identity. As one user commented, "Many Planned Parenthood[s] do informed consent. And quite a few people use a therapist from college and ask if they would be supportive. A gender therapist may be preferable though. [...] I'd say pick what you feel could help. *hugs*." "Comments" as a theme in particular shows texts of positive resource sharing and support networking. Most importantly, the term "comments" itself appears as a connector to outside resources and previous discourses that direct the conversation and the reader away from solely the present conversation to a broader more general evaluation of the narrative taking place.

In evaluating the major category of discourse, the subthemes of "therapist," "gender," "support," and "trans," in particular, play a major role in the construction of medical *counternarrative*, as the posts come together to construct a narrative of community support and connectedness through online commentary and guidance. This often arrives in the form of advising group users seeking information and support to search for a gender therapist and looking at online resources to help evaluate their gender identity and feelings of dysphoria, if present. For example, one user wrote:

> it sounds like you have depression. It may be a good idea to look for a therapist asap. A number of people

ask for a therapist for emotional purposes (which is true) and pick someone who has, amongst others, gender on their list. [Here](https://www.reddit.com/r/Transgender_Surgeries/comments/7pa2ha/assortment_of_resources_people_found_helpful/dsfmso0/) are hints on how to look for a therapist. [...] Next its[sic] up to you when and how to come out ... the kind of explanation can play a role with acceptance. There are more and more studies showing its[sic] a *biological* condition, due to development before birth. Brochure explaining with pictures and citing studies at the end: http://www.beaumontsociety.org.uk/downloads/doh-transgender-experiences.pdf

This conversation is repeated throughout the subreddit page, as a tool for aiding in the "coming out" narrative, reframing TGD identity away from an association with mental disorder and abnormality toward a generic biological marker. This methodology in particular works to restructure cissexist assertions of TGD identity as deviant and abnormal within a biological framework that can more easily be related to cis support networks. This is potentially problematic as it couches TGD identity within a cisnormative framing of "acceptable" medical treatment, re-enforcing the dominant narrative of pathologizing TGD identity as a medical condition in need of treatment or correction. However, the advice presented works toward helping TGD people build their support network within a cis-dominant world through tactics of safety, assimilation, and personal narrative negotiation. As one user commented:

It's up to you when and how to come out ... be mindful of your safety in case, try to have resources in place, look for support etc. A number of people use an explaining text or letter. It gives the opportunity to sum up a few things, and to point to explaining resources. And a number of people wait a while until there are results before they come out widely.

As this comment demonstrates, the advice surrounding the process of "coming out" takes place within a recognition of the

safety of the individual, acknowledging the potential danger at play. These advisory comments serve to both reinforce a cis-centric pathologization of TGD identity, while also developing a space for support and connectivity.

As shown in the above post, one of the major elements of this discussion thread is that of "coming out" to cis friends and family. The comments within r/transgender_surgeries are not merely presented as information-sharing specifically about the medical processes of gender transition, but rather structure the discourse of medical transition within a narrative of building support networks both inside and outside of the TGD community. As one user explained:

> It's like installing a software once that cannot be changed later so the only possibility is to change the hardware to what the software (the brain) expects. There can be a mismatch of software (brain) and hardware (the body) due to various factors (hormone levels during a certain time of development before birth etc. […] looking for support may be a good idea. And sometimes the kind of explanation can play a role with acceptance. Some cis people need to understand there are others out there who feel opposite to how they feel.

These discourses of coming out and cis-centric explanations of TGD identity serve to subvert hegemonic political narratives of TGD as a mental disorder and establish the narrative of biology and hardware malfunction. The metaphor of incompatible hardware separates TGD identity from questions of performance and morality in keeping with a dis-embodied analysis of parts that must fit together to function properly. This discourse of software and hardware shifts the narrative of TGD medical intervention away from personal desire and medical eligibility, and instead focuses on the conceptualization of the mechanical systems of the body functioning on a strictly biological level. This separates the agency of the body from the person in question and frames the necessity of medical intervention as ensuring that all parts work together to the best of their ability. Unfortunately, this narrative oversimplifies gender and transition as a biological issue, without generally acknowledging the social, political, and environmental factors that are often a part of conceptions of gender and transition. Although gender

and sex are tied to biological functioning (brain and body), there are a variety of different non-biological elements that construct perceptions and expectations of gender and the processes and barriers of different forms of medical transition. In gearing this comment towards cis-centric hegemonic acceptance, the comment reinforces limited understandings of the diversity of TGD medical processes and identity.

Through the larger category of "comments", the sub themes of "therapist," "gender," and "support" come together to build up a community that seeks to deconstruct the medical gatekeeping of TGD bodies through language and analogy that centers TGD identity as a biological system of parts. However, this discourse does so within a cissexist narrative that continues to locate TGD identity in binary constraints of gender, sex, and transition, although this may be due to the nature of the subreddit as one focused on gender transition surgeries. "Comments" as a category functions as a structural piece connecting both the internal and external discourses of transgender surgeries and medical transition to the subreddit conversations as it spreads from personal use of analogy in "coming out" narratives to incorporate medical and therapeutic resources toward a deeper understanding of the TGD self and survival tactics in a cissexist nation.

Constructing Resilience through Community

Overlapping and branching from "comments" is the major theme of "positive." In and of itself, "positive" offers a poignant look into the overall discourse of r/transgender_surgeries as it centers the discourse within a view of the affirmative and optimistic: for example, "Try to concentrate on positive things. It may also be possible to regularly do a few things affirming the gender people identify with for motivation." Overlapping with the top of "comments" in Figure 1, the size and scope of positive is more than that of any other category. "Positive" within the subreddit serves as a means toward positively reframing personal narrative and serving as encouragement to those who are seeking support. "Positive" moves beyond the "comments" of the subreddit to incorporate major exterior sources of community engagement and support, most notably

that of PFLAG.[1] PFLAG is an organization geared at developing support systems and information for LGBTQ+ people, families, and allies (see the website at PFLAG.org/about). As one of the categorical sub themes, "www.pflag.org," is a central tenant to the discourses surrounding positivity. As one user wrote:

> Looking for support, like from support groups, lgbt places or PFLAG (http://www.pflag.org), and connecting to other trans people may also be a good idea. I'd say just try to look for positive people. […] Especially, PFLAG might also help with parents. They may know someone parents may accept as [an] authority. And if you feel really low, please reach out ... there are helplines, for example www.translifeline.org http://www.glbthotline.org/talkline.html Some also have a chat. *hugs*

As demonstrated by this user, "positive" as a theme relies on connecting the readers to resources of community engagement, activism, and aid in finding the right path of medical transition.

The subreddit page began at the beginning of Trump's term as president, when many TGD people feared for their rights and their safety. The subreddit page constructs a positive space of resistance and community engagement through the sharing of resources and community networking. The advice within the discussion centers on, as many users put it, "looking for positive people" and "concentrating on positive things" in order to fight against and dispel periods of gender dysphoria and depression resulting from stigmatization and marginalization. These conversations incorporate seeking professional help and reaching out to the community at large. Although not discounting or denying the emotional and mental toll that gender dysphoria, anxiety, and depression have on the body, these conversations continually assert a separation from TGD identity labeled as a mental health disorder and instead point to the many external causes of discrimination, rejection, and gender suppression that often led to these dysphoric, depressive, and suicidal states that were increasingly common at this time (see Price et al., 2020).

The language surrounding "positive" focuses on encouraging users to "connect to other trans people," and reach out to

[1] When originally created, PFLAG stood for "Parents, Families, and Friends for Lesbians and Gays", however in 2014 the organization changed its name to PFLAG to more accurately represent its members (PFLAG, 2023, par. 19).

the larger LGBTQ+ community, offering up specific online and physical sites in which this may be possible. The rhetoric of "positive" constructs a narrative ideology of community support and identification, structuring the conversation away from the pathologization of TGD identity, and instead moving toward collective action and engagement in the broader public discourses of TGD politics and medical intervention. Many subreddit users shared the stories of their medical transition and surgical experiences as moments of connection and positive encouragement for those seeking information and community outside of the Reddit space. For example, one user shared images of their rhinoplasty, stating "Here is a photo of my rhinoplasty results from Doctor Deschamps-Braly. This is after one revision." In sharing resources and building upon systems of community engagement, these posts rely on narrative identification through shared personal experiences in order to connect with others both inside and outside of the group, which in turn structures a counternarrative of community strength and power within medical and social hegemonic realms.

Suppression and the Trans Spectrum

The category "comments" acts as a bridge between the themes of "positive" and "today", bringing together these two categories in their shared discourse of community resources and resilience. "Today" as a theme presents a narrative of dealing with dysphoric emotions, stigma, and discrimination on a systemic scale through focusing on this moment and how far resources for TGD people have come in the last decade. "Today" serves as a temporal locator of the metatextual discourse of "comments" and "positive" in that it locates the emotionality and text in a specific moment in time, that then moves beyond that moment into the overarching narrative of support networks as they continue to build and expand. In looking at the subthemes of "transgender", "Reddit", and "resources", this category again emphasizes community connectedness and broadening of the definition of *transgender* away from the binary to a spectrum of gender and trans identity. As one commenter explains:

I think the internet really glorifies being trans. Each person needs to know for themselves but there are scores

> of people who tried to suppress and regretted it later. In the meantime, they went through cycles of repressions and breakthroughs, which can be stressful. Looking for the correct treatment, which is transition as people feel necessary, may be a better idea [...] It is possible to step by step reconnect to how people really feel. And it's a trans spectrum.

This comment links the reader to different resources available and the different possible processes of transition, mirroring the language of other posts that encourage a step by step, day by day process of gender transition and self-discovery as a means of combating the internalization of cissexism and gender dysphoria. This encourages users struggling with gender dysphoria and the process of transition to focus on what can be achieved "today," rather than the road ahead. The repetition of "trans as a spectrum" and the necessity of focusing on the day-to-day progress of gender transition and personal gender identity counter some of the cis-centric language of hardware, software, and biological malfunction apparent in the "comments" theme and seek to shift the TGD health narrative away from the narrow conceptualization of TGD identity as necessitating full transition and surgical intervention. One user commented:

> It may be possible to do things step by step, to start with clothes in neutral styles first, to look for a gender therapist, to look for support, etc. There is a saying you can eat an elephant but not in one bite. Trans people often learned to suppress how they really feel when they grew up because they made experiences it would not be accepted. […] It is usually a step-by-step process, starting with easily reversible steps first. And even on HRT [Hormone Replacement Therapy] usually nothing is permanent the first weeks or depending on dosage even months and psychological changes can be amongst the first. Many have a feeling of relief.

By focusing discourse on the individual and individual needs in relation to community support and the dearth of different processes and resources available, these conversations deconstruct cissexist dictations of TGD identity within a limited biological binary toward a re-definition of the medical discourses of gender as a spectrum. Although many of the surgeons and

doctors referenced in the exterior resources accept the medical recognition of gender as a spectrum, one of the major themes within posts of the "today" category stems from interactions with therapists and doctors that attempt to enforce a binary system of gender identity onto the subreddit users regardless of whether or not they identify along the gender binary. The flow of posts and responses from these original messages serve to support and affirm the spectrum of TGD identity and offer a counternarrative of community support and individual agency in deciding the right medical path of transition.

Contributions at the Periphery of Dominant Conversations

Themes that emerged on the periphery of the discourse (such as "studies," "people", "mismatch," "happy," "training," "role," and "boy") contribute additional messages that provide insight into an important function. These themes do not directly contribute to the rhetorical sense-making because they are lower in their prominence in the concept map and are disconnected from the core themes (for instance, the theme of "happy" is only connected to "people"), but they drive the discourse forward through their engagement within the larger narrative, rather than serving as the specific points of conversation. Themes such as "happy," that are context-specific, exist on the periphery of community conversations, associated with dialogue representing the ways in which subreddit users make sense of their lived experiences, as well as references to conversations that intersect with other themes (such as "people," which intersects with the theme "happy"). For instance, the post below references how participants expressed the term, and how it contributed within conversations:

> After people find out it can be like a dam breaking. Looking back often things finally make sense. Preferences ... things people did, etc. I'd say try to concentrate on what you feel would make you really happy. Don't concentrate on fears and doubts too much. It can keep people spinning in circles. Usually people feel what would make them happy. Try to go into the direction it points to. [...] Often trans people learned to repress how they really feel when they grew up, and to adapt to others. Try to reconnect to

> a feeling of genuine happyness [*sic*] and try to do things
> along those lines.

In this instance, the user offered advice to someone, shared a resource from another community (r/asktransgender) and provided advice on maintaining a positive attitude. Thus, although the theme of "happy" on its own does not connect to the larger subreddit group discourse, comments such as this relate to the overall importance of the discussions associated within metatextual conversations. Such comments further elucidate the role of supportive communication and positive interactions and the role they have on the dominant narrative that is at play in the larger conversations that emerge within the TGD subreddit community. In other words, these minor themes help to direct the conversation.

Other examples, such as themes of "studies" and "training", further indicate this trend. Although "training" is on the periphery of themes, as it is only connected to the theme of "positive" and no others in the concept map, it nonetheless drives the dominant conversation, serving to shape community conversations by bolstering narrative identification rooted in advocacy and support. As such, these themes, as well as the others that exist outside the dominant text, serve an important role in directing the conversation because they are essential supporting elements in driving the core of the discourse. For instance, regarding the theme of "training", participants share support, resources, advice, and knowledge regarding vocal training. Vocal training in this case refers, in some comments, to sharing resources associated with voice modulation and gender dysphoria. In one example, a user offers support and additional resources, such as gender therapy, self-presentation, and additional subreddit communities:

> Some people try alone, some people look for a therapist
> for a few lessons. And a few things that help fast may be
> using more intonation (more going up and down with
> voice), talking more slowly and less loudly, and using a
> more breathy voice. And a number of things from [this]
> (https://www.reddit.com/r/asktransgender/comments/
> bvimfy/extremely_confused/eqeiqno/) post might help
> you too. There are explaining resources there and hints
> concerning looking for support, there is a vid[eo]

in the resources with unobtrusive things that could be
done regularly for motivation, there are hints there
concerning presentation, starting with neutral styles
first, and there are also hints there concerning looking
for a gender therapist.

Much of this advice is directed more closely at transwomen
because transmen, although not always, tend to need less
vocal advice due to testosterone thickening the vocal cords
and lowering the voice pitch. Such contributions further help
to clarify the nature of these themes and make sense of the
overarching way in which these peripheral comments direct
the larger discourse. By choosing to share resources and
serve as a supportive member of the community, for example,
this user contributes to an identification with the r/transgender_
surgeries group as one that provides community support and
advocacy, helping to shape the space as one that counteracts
ideological narratives that TGD communities experience within
the public sphere.

The subreddit discourses reflect the construction of users
coming together within the community to engage in sense-
making by sharing collective resources, building a network, and
sharing personal narratives. Notably, as these topics exist on the
periphery of the conversation and do not always directly reflect the
topic of the community purpose, subreddit users are conversing
about support and sharing information and resources, which
contributes to a narrative that centers itself toward communal
support as a place of refuge, counteracting hegemonic norms.
Moreover, while the core of the conversation focused on the
themes of "positive," "comments," and "today," which likewise
contributed discourse toward an overarching narrative that
was both metatextual as well as reflective of positive effects on
the community, the peripheral themes served in a supporting
capacity that likewise sought to challenge the established
narrative norms. For example, engagement in communication
that used discourse such as "happy" to help shape community
language and "studies" served as a way to engage with materials
that could build empowerment toward advocacy, while topics
such as "training" provided the appropriate resources and
likewise, positive reinforcement. Therefore, these topics served
to help drive the core conversations, even if those topics or

utterances of words themselves were not as frequently conversed. As such, these topics served to help construct the space as one of resilience and support, whether users actively communicated within the space or chose to view the contributions of others.

Discussion

Bringing together categories and themes of discourse present throughout the r\transgender_surgeries subreddit, the users construct a counternarrative of resilience, support, and agency through the use of narrative identification and the co-construction of meaning pertaining to the medical and surgical processes of gender transition. These counternarratives both conform to and subvert hegemonic narratives of predeterminism in gender identity and transition as a binary construct. In this case, narratives of predeterminism refer to the dominant assertions that TGD people always and exclusively seek to fully transition both socially and medically (see Price, 2022; Vanlee et al., 2020). Although this is true for many, this narrative is not representative of all TGD people. These conversations use the language of biology and medical procedures in order to construct TGD identity and transition as a process of functionality and affirmation of the self. These discourses likewise actively assert the need to move away from limited definitions of gender transition as a set binary track towards a more complex and inclusive understanding of the diversity of gender and TGD existence.

The construction of a counternarrative exists within the language of cis-dominant ideology to reshape the meaning of transgender toward the understanding of normalcy and gender diversity. This language acts as a form of agency in strengthening community engagement and connectedness through the sharing of resources in order to break down cissexist medical gatekeeping that persists in centralizing cisgender as the norm, and all others as deviating from the acceptable. The subreddit serves as a space of resilience and support in affirming the diversity of TGD identity and encourages gender questioning as a means of self-exploration toward both a healthy mindset and healthy body. This counternarrative combats the hegemonic, cissexist definitions of the healthy body, incorporating surgical

means of gender androgyny and non-binary medical practices that decenter gender binarism and a biological binary as the means to gender actualization (e.g., surgeries that break down the gender binary by constructing new genitalia while leaving existent genitalia, such as for generally binary transmen, a metaoidioplasty enhances the appearance of the tissue surrounding the penis which had been enlarged by testosterone or for binary transwomen, constructing a vaginal opening while leaving existent genitalia in place). The focus on positivity, community, and support allows the group to act as a site of resistance from cissexist assertions of the "acceptable" TGD body while working within dominant language and cis-perceptions of health in order to subvert social and medical stigmatization and gatekeeping.

The use of Leximancer in guiding this rhetorical analysis serves to structure the conversation along an ideological map with both textual and meta-textual levels of meaning, as the categories alone hold very little meaning until placed in relation to the ongoing discourses within the group. Notably, Leximancer's utility is valuable for identifying the overarching themes so that we can follow the rhetorical construction of themes present within the text. However, it is not a replacement for the interpretation that researchers must take in examining the topics as a whole. For instance, the themes of "comments," "today," "positive," "people," and "studies" emerged and demonstrated how these words interweave throughout the discourse of the subreddit.

These categories revealed a starting point for researchers to begin the process of rhetorical analysis, as Leximancer separates the threads into discursive topics, maintaining researcher access to the interactions between the subreddit users. Within the categories, sub-categories pertaining to personal identity, transformation and transition, and resources of activism and help became clear, with an overall trend of turning survival into resilience and resistance in an era of cissexist political and social resurgence. These findings reveal an opportunity for future research that seeks to examine the process of narrative identification of TGD communities and how they participate within unsupervised groups, such as those on Reddit. These unsupervised groups have affordances that allow for anonymity

or personal identification as well as the opportunity to better understand the resilience and strength from TGD individuals who participate online.

It is important to note, however, that in using Leximancer as a means of identifying categories, the rhetorical analysis and identification of texts inherently focuses on the larger most identifiable themes. This means that many of the undercurrents of discourse and divergence within the subreddit go unevaluated as they do not necessarily contribute to the *master narrative* constructed in the broader discourse as presented by the Leximancer map (Figure 1). This became clear during our analysis in two ways. First, although there was a focus on language surrounding the gender and trans spectrum, the majority of surgical and medical resources shared focus more on male-to-female transition resources than any other, although this is not necessarily uncommon in online discussions labelled "transgender" unless specified for transmen. This does not negate the message of the diversity of trans identity and experience, but rather situates the conversation as potentially more relational to certain trans experiences than others. Secondly, this form of analysis made it difficult to identify discourses of discrimination or aggression in the group. However, a brief analysis of a random sampling of the subreddit posts identified a number of cissexist internet trolls posting in the group. The blatantly discriminatory and cissexist users were subsequently removed from the group, further demonstrating the subreddit as a space of support.

Conclusion

This research leads to opportunities that transcend the subreddit text into public discourse and sense-making as the constructed narratives traverse the lived experiences of the subreddit users into real-world medical settings. These counternarratives of resilience map the discourse of discrimination, marginalization, and erasure of TGD people in medical practice through the repeated articulation and sharing of personal experience and stories in these online public forum settings. The importance of this locale for community support and resilience de-structures the power hierarchy of cissexist medical practices and serves as a decentering of cis-centric definitions of health and the body.

Although these conversations demonstrate how the onus of medical care continues to be placed on TGD people as they inform and educate medical practitioners on their individualized needs and desires, these spaces of information-sharing and narrative co-creation also construct a means of reward and punishment for medical practitioners based on the TGD users' interaction with medical practitioners. This study then is an evaluation about how groups like this r/transgender_surgeries are not only empowering within TGD culture and community supports, but also construct disciplinary power over which TGD people seek medical practitioners for medical attention and care. Although users of this subreddit group constructed a means of support networking within themselves and the boarder TGD community resources, they also demonstrate a counter-hegemonic force that works to erase medical practices that center TGD healthcare as a variation on cis-gender health, and reward those center TGD experiences and needs from within existent medical systems.
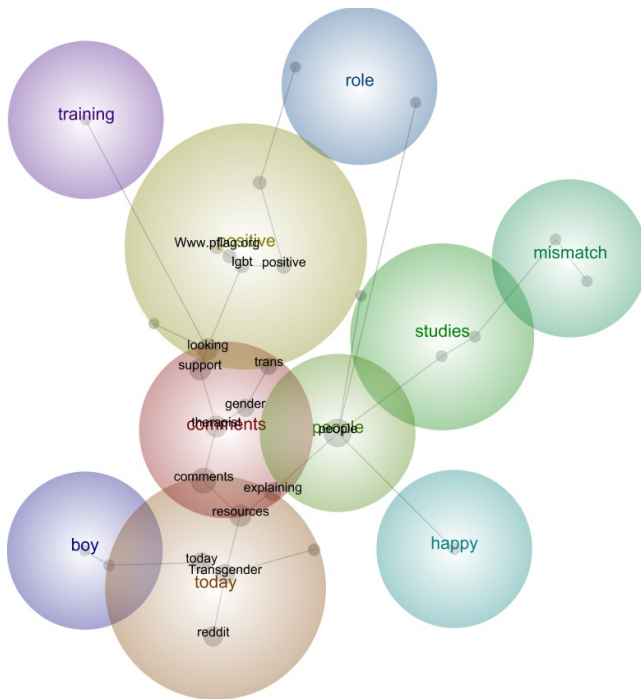

Figure 1. Concept map outlining themes discussed in r/transgender_surgeries.

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Reputational Discrediting as an Institutional Strategy to Undermine Formal Feminist Complaint: Baylor University's Delegitimization of Patty Crawford

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Abstract: This essay theorizes reputational discrediting as an institutional strategy used by organizations to delegitimize formal feminist complaints by recasting them as stereotypically feminine complaints. Drawing on the work of Sara Ahmed, it posits that reputational discrediting is characterized by four organizational tactics: depicting the complainer as (1) weak, (2) deceptive, (3) vindictive, and (4) a threat to the institution. To demonstrate this, the essay analyzes statements from Baylor University and its then-Title IX coordinator, Patty Crawford, following Crawford's resignation and allegations that Baylor denied her necessary resources as the Title IX coordinator. The essay then concludes by discussing the theoretical and practical implications of reputational discrediting and distinctions in how it impacts Black women and women of color versus white women like Crawford.

Keywords: feminist killjoy, complaint, Title IX, sexual violence, reputational discrediting

IN SEPTEMBER 2015, INCREASING CONCERNS about sexual assault at Baylor University prompted the administration to commission an independent investigation into the extent of sexual violence at the university (Kalland, 2015). The investigation revealed an overwhelming failure by the university to comply with Title IX requirements and pushed Baylor to overhaul its athletic, safety, and sexual assault training and reporting policies. In October 2016, amid this overhaul, Baylor's long-time Title IX coordinator, Patty Crawford, resigned and alleged on national television that Baylor withheld Title IX resources from her and retaliated when she attempted to improve sexual assault reporting at the university (Ericksen, 2016).

Despite Crawford's highly public complaints and the subsequent public outcry, Baylor managed to quell the backlash and recover not only its academic accreditation but also its public support by early 2018 (*Big 12 Sports*, 2018). That Crawford's complaints were so quickly forgotten and over-coded by Baylor's return to grace is both remarkable and perplexing. This rapid dismissal of Crawford's concerns, I believe, can be explained by

Baylor's strategic reframing of Crawford's public complaint as simply her whining and overreacting.

I argue that Baylor's response to Crawford's complaints is one of *reputational discrediting*, wherein institutions delegitimize formal feminist complaints and recast them as stereotypically feminine complaints, or as exaggerated and overly emotional stories driven by the complainer's desire for personal gain and tendency to overreact. Drawing on the work of Sara Ahmed, I posit that reputational discrediting is characterized by four tactics: depicting the complainer as (1) weak, (2) deceptive, (3) vindictive, and (4) a threat to the institution. The strategy resituates the complainer and their character at the center of the discourse, which enables universities or organizations to individualize and hold complainers accountable for weaknesses that are actually widespread, institutional failures.

Ahmed's work has extensively cataloged the various approaches complainers and feminists use in their attempts to change institutions as well as complainers' experiences as they perform this work. She highlights the association between feminists and unhappiness, noting that regardless of the provocation, those in power popularly and institutionally construct feminists who speak out against violence as the cause, or even inventor, of the problem and are perceived as disrupting the happiness of those around them (Ahmed, 2010; Ahmed, 2012; Ahmed, 2017c). Ahmed also considers the ways that institutions use warnings, strict procedures, and personal attacks to discourage speaking out or complaining about violence and emphasizes the importance of making complaints even in the face of these institutional barriers (Ahmed, 2019; Ahmed, 2021). I approach the relationship between institutions and feminist complaints with this foundation in mind, but invert Ahmed's focus, analyzing the strategies of *institutions* rather than the strategies of those who complain about them. Focusing on the ways that institutions frame complainers, specifically in the context of complaints of sexual violence, not only refines existing understandings of feminist complaint, but also offers a framework for considering broader organizational responses to those attempting to change the institution, whether publicly or privately.

Previous communication scholarship has devoted attention to the institutional responses to complaints, applying Ahmed's criticisms in a variety of significant ways. Research has highlighted the way that institutions polish, or disguise, their flaws (Phipps, 2020) as well as explained why victim-survivors' fears about being perceived as complaining discourage them from making official reports about sexual harassment or violence (Sundaram & Jackson, 2018). Scholars have also applied Ahmed's theory of complaint to different media and platforms, focusing primarily on flagging content on social media as a de-personalized version of official or formal complaint (Gerrard, 2020). These studies enhance communicative understandings of complaints, how individuals interpret and explain their own choices about whether or not to complain, and how institutions discourage complaints or preserve their reputation by ensuring that complaints that are filed remain confidential. The question of how institutions respond and work to restore their reputations in instances where the complainer chooses to complain and the complaint is made public, however, has received little attention. This research takes up that question, supplementing contemporary theories of complaint and exposing one way that institutions discredit those who do complain in order to save face or preserve their images.

This essay proceeds in five parts. In the following section, I lay the foundation for my analysis, identifying the details of Crawford's resignation, the texts I analyze, and my methodology. After this, I provide a conceptual basis for my understanding of complaint, engaging Sara Ahmed's theorizations of complaint, the feminist killjoy, and the diversity worker. Next, I unpack each of the four tactics of reputational discrediting and apply them to Baylor's discourse about Patty Crawford. Following this, I discuss the significant distinctions in the way Baylor leverages this strategy against Crawford, a white[1] woman, versus the ways reputational discrediting might occur for Black women and women of color. Finally, I conclude by outlining the theoretical and practical implications of this work.

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[1] I capitalize Black, but not white, both to linguistically decenter whiteness and white supremacy (Matias et al., 14) and to recognize that Black "refers to a culture, a community, and an ethnicity" while white differs in that it is associated "with more specific origins like Irish or Jewish" (Alton & Guthman, 2017, p. 21).

Historical and Methodological Foundations

Context and History

The law firm Pepper Hamilton performed the external inquiry Baylor had commissioned into sexual assault cases at the university, wrapping up the investigation in May of 2016. The findings revealed widespread failures on the part of the university to educate "its administrators about Title IX" and also found the "school ill-equipped to handle allegations of sexual assault fairly and impartially" (Auerbach, 2016, para. 3). Along with the scathing report, Pepper Hamilton issued Baylor 105 recommendations in areas such as athletic policies, sexual assault reporting, counseling, and campus safety in an effort to ensure the university's compliance with "Title IX, the Clery Act and the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013" (Baylor University, 2016a; SI Wire, 2016, para. 4).

Patty Crawford, Baylor's Title IX coordinator at the time, originally played a strong role in the university's efforts to implement the recommendations, bolster campus sexual violence resources, and improve its handling of Title IX allegations. However, in October 2016 Crawford abruptly resigned and filed a complaint against the university with the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, claiming that Baylor was actively hindering her efforts to ensure the university was Title IX compliant (Ericksen, 2016). Shortly after her resignation, she sat for interviews with *CBS This Morning* and *60 Minutes*, where she alleged that the school had failed to support her and had even discouraged her from doing her job as Title IX coordinator. Crawford argued not only that Baylor failed to provide her with the necessary "authority, resources or the independence to do the job appropriately," but also that "she was purposefully held back by a group of senior leaders she felt were more interested in protecting the school's brand than protecting its students" (Ericksen, 2016, para. 6; Martin, 2016, para. 3).

Baylor's original press release highlighted Crawford's supposed dissatisfaction with her marginal role in implementing the Pepper Hamilton recommendations, positioning that disappointment as the catalyst for her resignation but stopping short of criticizing her character (Hays & Lauber, 2016). The

release stated that the university appreciated Crawford's "leadership in establishing fair and equitable Title IX processes that are also supportive of the needs of survivors" (Hays & Lauber, 2016, para. 15).[2] After Crawford's *CBS This Morning* appearance and *60 Minutes* interview, however, Baylor increasingly blamed her for the very problems of which she had complained and began using her disappointment and supposed emotionality to discredit both Crawford and her grievances.

Rather than legitimizing the complaints or even addressing them head-on, administrators instead commenced a measured attack on Crawford's character and credibility. To do this, Baylor published a set of documents shortly after Crawford's resignation that painted her not as leveraging a legitimate complaint but as simply being whiny and attempting to save her professional reputation. Characterizing Crawford's allegations as emotional and deceptive enabled Baylor to delegitimize her complaints and redirect public attention toward their efforts to address sexual violence on campus.

This redirection was remarkably successful and by May of the following year, Baylor was claiming full implementation of all 105 recommendations from Pepper Hamilton (Baylor University, 2017a). Within 14 months their sanction from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges had been lifted (Baylor University, 2017c) and the Big 12 Conference returned "Baylor to full participation in future Conference revenue distributions" (*Big 12 Sports*, 2018, para. 3).

Texts and Method

Crawford's allegations were covered by several news outlets, both local and national, but this research focuses on direct statements from the affected parties: Baylor University and Patty Crawford. In terms of the university, the primary texts of analysis are the "Patty Crawford Timeline" (Baylor University, 2016e) and "Fact Checking Report" (Baylor University, 2016c). Baylor published the two documents the morning following Crawford's *60 Minutes* special and the two

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[2] The original press release from the night of Crawford's resignation is not available on Baylor's Title IX site or archive.

systematically dismantle Crawford's claims about a lack of resources and support.

The "Patty Crawford Timeline" (Timeline) tracks notable events and dates from Crawford's 2014 hiring through her resignation and *CBS This Morning* interview two years later. It includes information such as when Crawford received pay raises and bonuses, snippets from emails and thank you notes she had sent to then-Interim President David Garland and Baylor's Board of Regents, and details about the resignations of several Title IX investigators under her. Although none of the events in the Timeline are framed in a way that directly refutes Crawford's complaints, Baylor framed the document itself as a response, claiming that "The sampling of emails, texts and interviews illustrate a very different story than Crawford's claims to CBS News that she was 'set up to fail'" (Baylor University, 2016e, para. 1).

The second document, the "Fact Checking Report for *60 Minutes*," (FCR) takes more direct aim at Crawford's claims and Crawford herself. The FCR (Baylor University, 2016c) includes "*Baylor's responses to excerpts of questions posed in on-camera interviews by 60 Minutes*," and condemns Crawford's claims, motives, and management abilities, occasionally using quotes from Crawford as evidence for its arguments (para. 1). I center my analysis on these two documents because they were Baylor's most immediate and direct responses to Crawford's complaints. Baylor also published smaller press releases refuting the accuracy of particular claims and responding to specific questions about Crawford (Baylor University, 2016d; 2017b), but none of those articles or reports address the details of Crawford's allegations.

I analyze the Timeline and FCR alongside statements made by Crawford and her lawyer, Rogge Dunn, which were largely made to the media, not issued as official press releases. In focusing on statements directly from or on behalf of the actors involved, I am less concerned with corroborating the details or accuracy of Crawford's complaints than I am with understanding how Baylor was able to strategically delegitimize them. To do this, I conduct a thematic analysis of the Timeline, FCR, and additional statements from Baylor as well as Crawford and Dunn, specifically focusing on emerging themes resembling or representative of the feminist killjoy (Ahmed, 2017c).

By thematic analysis, I am referring to the process of analyzing texts and classifying them "according to key themes, concepts and emergent categories" (Ritchie, Spencer & O'Connor, 2007, p. 220). In conducting this research, I followed Ritchie, Spencer, and O'Connor's (2007) approach to thematic analysis, which includes reading the selected texts and isolating significant recurring themes within them, "devis[ing] a conceptual framework" through which to organize the themes, and applying that framework to the texts via a process of indexing (p. 221).

A close reading of the focal texts yielded themes of "contradiction," "exaggeration," and "lying" as composing the category of "falsity;" themes of "additional needs," "emotional distress," and "family time" composing the category of "emotionality;" themes of "career," "ego," "retaliation," and "self-preservation" in the category of "self-promotion;" and "administrative incompetence," "employment benefits," and "managerial weakness" as themes comprising "professionalism." Finally, I synthesized the themes and categories to understand how Baylor strategically delegitimized Crawford's complaints. This analysis revealed the four tactics of reputational discrediting highlighted above: positioning the complainer as (1) emotionally and professionally weak, (2) deceptive because they have exaggerated the problem and contradicted themselves, (3) vindictive in their attempt to displace blame onto the institution and preserve their career and reputation, and (4) a threat to the institution through the combination of their incompetence, selfishness, and continued identification of problems within the institution.

Complaint, Killjoy, and the Diversity Worker: Building a Theory of Feminist Complaint

Categorically defining complaint or developing a concrete theorization of it is difficult because, as Ahmed (2021) explains, it "can be an expression of grief, pain, or dissatisfaction, something that is a cause of a protest or outcry, a bodily ailment or a formal allegation" (p. 4). Ahmed makes a compelling case for such an expansive and phenomenological understanding of complaint, arguing that the various meanings are always in conversation with

one another and that "complaint as formal allegation brings up other, more affective and embodied senses" of complaint as well (2021, p. 4). The elasticity of this understanding is not particularly conducive to a thematic analysis oriented toward exposing the specific ways that institutions delegitimize complaints, however. Thus, I offer two specific forms of complaint, one of formal feminist complaint and the other of stereotypically feminine complaint, as conceptual tools for understanding Crawford's allegations and Baylor's response.

Previous scholarship occasionally uses "feminist complaint" as a term of art, but there is no mutual understanding of what it means or how it is distinct from "female complaint" (Ahmed, 2021; Berlant, 2008; Green, 2012). Bonnie Washick (2020) works to cohere the disparate interpretations of feminist complaint, theorizing that "Feminist complaint flags hegemonic, patriarchal norms," an understanding which reflects the comprehensive nature of complaints (p. 557). I read this alongside a narrower interpretation of complaint as "a formal statement…something you officially lodge," to develop an analytic of formal feminist complaint (Ahmed, 2017a, para. 4). *Formal feminist complaint*, I theorize, is a traditional, official statement which flags, or exposes, hegemonic, patriarchal norms. In using hegemonic here, I am referring to dominance and oppression through economic, social, and cultural systems that intersect with patriarchy, such as classism and anti-blackness.

I juxtapose this concept of formal feminist complaint against the notion of a *stereotypically feminine complaint*, which leverages tropes of the feminist killjoy to paint the complainer as unhappy and selfishly motivated. Designations of stereotypically feminine complaints exercise "old and familiar negative stereotypes" of women as overly emotional and overreactive and women of color specifically as angry and pushy (Ahmed, 2021, p. 131). Within this frame, complaints are individualized and reinterpreted as instances of complain*ing*. This is significant because "To be heard as complaining is not to be heard," (Ahmed, 2021, p. 127). Ahmed (2021) elaborates, "To hear someone as complaining is an effective way of dismissing someone. You do not have to listen to the content of what she is saying if she is just complaining or *always* complaining" (p. 127, emphasis in original).

Ahmed's figure of the feminist killjoy helps to characterize the relationship between these analytic understandings of complaints. The killjoy, the one who is "not being made happy by the right things," is a figure who risks the happiness of those around her by calling out racism and sexism wherever she sees it (Ahmed, 2017c, p. 53). Prior research has taken up the killjoy in terms of killjoy responses to harassment, violence, and injustice. Authors have considered the ways killjoys form community in the face of systemic inequities (Kuo, 2019), individually resist or cope with the "expectation that women perform a compliant femininity" (MacDonald, 2019, p. 78), and expose status quo injustices to those who would rather remain in the dark (Bissenbakker, 2018). This research collectively creates a framework for interpreting the killjoy's own resistive strategies across a variety of situations and media.

In a similar vein, contemporary scholars have affirmed and expanded on Ahmed's argument that Black women and women of color are more likely to occupy the killjoy role than their white counterparts. Rhetorical research argues that Black women who point out racism are coded as angry and aggressive, making the killjoy "a historically significant subject position" for Black feminists (Salzano, 2020, p. 51). Scholars also note that women of color assume a "double burden" of calling out not only sexism but also racism, which often includes highlighting the racism within white feminism (Sultana, 2018, p. 234). The work emphasizes the significance of race in determining who occupies the position of the killjoy but leaves open the question of how institutional responses to killjoys do and do not shift according to the killjoys' subject positions. Theorizing the killjoy alongside institutional responses to complaint, as I do in this essay, builds knowledge about institutions' strategic responses to killjoys and the ways that a killjoy's identity and position within the institution modify those responses.

Complaint, Ahmed posits, is one way that the killjoy can impede both her happiness and that of people close to her. "To complain is how you would stop yourself from being happy, to stop others from being happy too, complaint is a killjoy genre" (Ahmed, 2021, p. 1). The killjoy arises within formal feminist and stereotypically feminine complaints because she is both the one willing to make institutional reports or disrupt institutional

happiness and the one coded by those institutions as whining and being grumpy when she makes such reports.

From the feminist killjoy then develops the figure of the diversity worker. The diversity worker is best understood as an *institutional* killjoy because, much like the killjoy, diversity workers kill the happiness and success of institutions in their efforts to transform those systems (Ahmed, 2017c). To be a diversity worker, Ahmed (2017c) outlines, is to be "appointed by an institution to transform the institution," whether or not the institution is genuinely willing to be transformed (p. 94). Diversity work is that which is oriented toward making institutions more accessible, accommodating, equitable, and diverse, and, as such, it often falls into "Black feminist and feminist of color hands" simply because they are the people for whom institutions are most inaccessible (Ahmed, 2021, p. 23). This means that to occupy the position of the diversity worker is to occupy the position of the killjoy, not necessarily because of one's personal beliefs or actions but just because of their institutional position.

The stereotypes undergirding the feminist killjoy and diversity worker, i.e., women as whiny, emotional, sensationalist, and innately threatening to institutions, form the foundation of stereotypically feminine complaint. These tropes carry a negative association that enables complainers to be both personally and organizationally discredited by institutions. Additionally, regardless of how the complaint itself is characterized, just the *act* of complaining can also provoke a killjoy designation. This means that institutional killjoys and diversity workers are uniquely primed for discrediting if they do what the job requires of them because those requirements include criticizing and attempting to change the institutions for which they work.

An organization may respond to feminist killjoys through reputational discrediting, which involves reinterpreting formal feminist complaints as stereotypically feminine complaints, thereby distancing the institution from the allegations being made; centering the complainer rather than the substance of the complaint; and recasting the individual complainer, rather than the institution, as the one at fault. This idea of individualization as it relates to sexual violence has been robustly critiqued in a variety of contexts, including rape prevention, female empowerment and agency, white womanhood, and neoliberalism

(Hall, 2004; Hill, 2016; Kulbaga & Spencer, 2019). Authors have also problematized the idea of relying on institutions to meaningfully combat sexual violence, citing the various ways that positioning sexual violence as a political-legal concept merely extends institutional power and influence while justifying state-sanctioned violence against men of color (Bumiller, 2008; McKinnon, 2016). More specifically, Harris (2013, 2019), Hirsch and Kahn (2020), and Wade (2017) emphasize the relationship between sexual violence within institutions and Title IX on college campuses, cautioning against individualizing sexual violence at universities. Harris's (2013, 2019) work synthesizes much of this argument, as she highlights the dangers of agential narratives of rape prevention and response as well as the lengths to which institutions will go to discredit complaints of sexual violence or position the violence as an isolated incident.

Taken collectively, these works provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how institutions, whether university, state, or otherwise, delegitimize and individualize complaints of sexual violence from those whom they govern. There is, however, an important distinction between being *part of* an institution, meaning one works within the institution itself and participates in the creation of institutional norms, versus being *governed by* an institution, where one exists in institutional spaces as a subject whose actions are regulated by institutional rules and guidelines. Institutions' responses to complaints, I argue, shift in accordance with their relationship with the complainer. Such a shift means research dedicated to complaints from those *within*, or *part of*, institutions is necessary for understanding institutional strategies oriented toward delegitimizing and discrediting complaints more broadly.

In the following section, I offer one institutional strategy used to discredit internal complaints, reputational discrediting. In doing this, I map the four tactics of reputational discrediting, recasting the complainer as weak, sensationalist, deceptive, and threatening, onto the Timeline, FCR, and various statements from Crawford and Dunn. I argue that Baylor undermines Crawford's formal feminist complaints by repositioning her claims as stereotypically feminine complaints.

Reputational Discrediting as an Institutional Strategy for Undermining Feminist Complaint

Patty Crawford's public complaints that Baylor refused her the necessary resources and support to do her job and that the administrators cared more about preserving the Baylor brand than they did protecting their students are formal feminist complaints in that they are official allegations of wrongdoing on Baylor's part. Rather than offering an equally formal response or initiating corrective action though, Baylor shifted the narrative to one where Crawford's complaint was not formal but was instead merely indicative of gendered stereotypes of women as weak and whiny. I argue that the four dimensions of reputational discrediting work to strategically undermine and discredit Crawford's allegations.

The Feminist Complainer as Weak

As the first step in recasting Crawford's formal feminist complaint as a stereotypically feminine one, Baylor constructed an image of Crawford as emotionally and professionally weak. More immediately obvious is the emotional aspect, which Baylor made clear in the Timeline by quoting emails from Crawford herself. The Timeline (Baylor University, 2016e) highlights an incident in a graduate class where Crawford disclosed what was supposed to be confidential information about a sexual assault at another university. After a student in the class complained about the lack of privacy and professionalism Crawford had exhibited when talking to the group, Crawford responded by apologizing and writing that she was "emotionally and mentally spent" when she had attended the class (Baylor University, 2016e, para. 8). A few weeks later, she is quoted as telling her supervisor, "I am struggling with maintaining my momentum in this position. Every day there are issues that go beyond my scope and in this climate I do need some forgiveness and sensitivity" (Baylor University, 2016e, para. 9).

Ahmed (2021) discusses what it means to admit being emotional in *Complaint!* as she writes, "Emotion comes out in telling the story; emotion makes it hard to tell the story… How do you pull yourself together to share an experience if

an experience is of breaking apart?" (p. 15). Crawford's job requirements, such as hearing sexual harassment and assault complaints and working alongside university administrators to reduce those complaints, made her work emotionally draining. In working to overcome the emotions accompanying her job, Crawford reached out to her supervisors to explain that she needs and is trying to pull herself together. Baylor though, leveraged this very admission to discredit Crawford and her complaint. As Ahmed (2017c) notes, "our emotions can become their objects. We are dismissed as being emotional. It is enough to make you emotional" (p. 38).

Baylor's statements concerning Crawford illustrate the way that diversity workers are locked into a vicious cycle of emotional discrediting. The work diversity workers are asked to do is inherently emotional, yet necessary if they are committed to their positions. The institutions they work for can then use that emotionality as a tactic to delegitimize both the diversity workers themselves and their complaints about the institution. Emotionality becomes sufficient to discredit diversity workers' efforts because once someone can be characterized as *always* emotional, their complaints become a product of that emotionality, not a response to real-world circumstances and violence. Their complaints are "refuted or dismissed as simply a personal tendency, as if she disagrees with something because she is being disagreeable; as if she opposes something because she is being oppositional" (Ahmed, 2017c, p. 38).

Crawford's call for "forgiveness and sensitivity" was used to portray her as emotionally weak and needy (Baylor University, 2016e, para. 9). The FCR (Baylor University, 2016c) similarly lends itself to the argument that Crawford is needy, as it details an incident where:

> After a difficult week during which she disclosed to colleagues her level of emotional distress, Patty Crawford was directed to take four extra days off with pay during Labor Day week in 2015. The time off with pay was an act of support intended to improve her emotional wellbeing and to enable her to spend quality time with her family. (para. 7)

Baylor's argument here illustrates the way that institutions can weaponize neediness or requests for support as if they are

individual, personal failings. The fact that Crawford needed additional support is interpreted to mean that she does not quite fit within Baylor's institutional framework and that she may even be a burden to the university. "To have needs that are not met by an existing arrangement is to become needy," Ahmed (2021) explains. "The implication is that by asking for a modification so that you have what you need, you are imposing yourself upon others; you are even putting yourself before others" (p. 143). Emotionality is therefore understood as selfish, which begins to blur the lines between emotional and professional weakness.

The blurred line between emotionality and professionalism is not only a product of Crawford's emotional needs, however. Emotionality, specifically in organizational or institutional contexts, is read as antithetical to organizational goals and success. For institutional actors, rationality, or "intentional, reasoned, goal-directed behavior," is the ideal basis for decision-making (Mumby & Putnam, 1992, p. 469). In contrast, emotionality in decision-making is considered foolish and "emotions are devalued, trivialized, or treated as inappropriate at work" (Mumby & Putnam, 1992, p. 469). In admitting that her emotionality was impacting her decisions and that she needed additional university support to work effectively, Crawford became not only weak but also a danger to Baylor's ability to achieve its goals.

The way Baylor frames Crawford's supposed lack of professionalism, difficulties in getting along with other employees in the Title IX office, and ineffectiveness as an office manager illustrates the relationship between emotionality and professional weakness. The Timeline (Baylor University, 2016e) consistently emphasizes Crawford's management struggles, noting that on October 12th, 2015, "A Title IX investigator resigns after expressing frustration working for Baylor and Crawford in particular" (para. 7). It continues, remarking that on December 15th, 2015, "A second Title IX investigator resigns, citing difficulties working for Crawford…Baylor HR begins working with Crawford on a 'development plan' to help her better manage the Title IX office" (para. 10). Then, in mid-August 2016, "A Title IX staffer accuses Crawford of discrimination. Crawford reports to the HR Director that she is being 'eaten alive' by dissension on her Title IX team," and

on September 16th, 2016, "A third Title IX investigator resigns, citing difficulties working for Crawford" (paras. 21, 26). The Timeline (Baylor University, 2016e) also notes that Baylor attempted to help Crawford improve her management skills by recommending she "attend a one-day management seminar" but that she "decline[d], saying she [was] too busy" (para. 11).

The FCR (Baylor University, 2016c) goes further than simply noting the events illustrating her supposedly poor management. It claims that:

> Although [Baylor] worked tirelessly during [Crawford's] tenure at the university to help her succeed, Crawford lacked the administrative skills to manage the Title IX office. Three Title IX investigators each quit within a year of being hired after reporting problems with her management style. (para. 5)

Reagan Ramsower, Baylor's Senior Vice President (VP) and Chief Operating Officer (COO) during Crawford's tenure at Baylor, made similar statements when asked about her departure. He explained that he authorized a retreat for the Title IX staff in July of 2016 because "There were concerns about everybody feeling connected to the coordinator, and [he] hoped this would help the coordinator build her team" (Ericksen, 2016, para. 24). The consistent focus on departmental resignations and Crawford's management style across both official and unofficial responses from Baylor reflects its attempt to portray her as professionally weak, a strategy that could be taken to underline Crawford's role as a feminist killjoy. Baylor then implicated this supposed professional failure within a broader framework of Crawford's emotional and personal weaknesses, weaponizing allegations of emotionality as a defense against her complaints.

The Feminist Complainer as Deceptive and Sensationalist

The second component of Baylor's strategy to recast Crawford's complaint as stereotypically feminine, centered around portraying her as sensationalist and deceptive. Once one has been designated as a complainer, "It might then be assumed that the problem [you are complaining about] would go away if you would just stop talking about it or if you went away" (Ahmed, 2017c, p. 37). In this way, Ahmed (2017c) notes,

"The charge of sensationalism falls rather quickly onto feminist shoulders: when she talks about sexism and racism, her story is heard as sensationalist, as if she is exaggerating for effect" (p. 37). Baylor's messaging to Crawford herself fit within this narrative, as Dunn, Crawford's lawyer, contended that "the university's upper management gave [Crawford] the conflicted message of telling her to do her job, but then indicated that, 'If you weren't here, we wouldn't have all these problems.'" (Lavigne & Schlabach, 2016, para. 6).

Within this narrative, the very presence of the diversity worker becomes the cause of the violence they have been hired to address and any violence they argue exists is attributed to their tendency to make "things harder than they need to be" (Ahmed, 2017c, p. 142). Crawford's own commentary illustrated this as well, for she told CBS, "I continued to work hard, and the harder I worked, the more resistance I received from senior leadership…that was not something the university wanted" (Lavigne & Schlabach, 2016, para. 3). Baylor appointing her as their Title IX coordinator, she argued, did not reflect an institutional desire to meaningfully address the problems she had supposedly been hired to solve. Instead, her efforts to address Title IX violations at the university actually became the more concerning matter for Baylor administrators. "It is as if these problems are not there until you point them out," Ahmed reflects (2017c, p. 39).

Baylor also characterized Crawford as sensationalist by implying that she was exaggerating, or even lying about, the supposed lack of support she received from the Baylor administration. The Timeline (Baylor University, 2016e) quotes thank you notes and emails Crawford sent to Baylor's Senior VP and COO, Reagan Ramsower, and Baylor's then-interim President, David Garland, as well as various other members of the Baylor Board of Regents. In these thank you notes, she praised the recipients for their "leadership," "generosity, support, and advocacy," and "commitment" (paras. 16, 22, 25). The Timeline (Baylor University, 2016e) similarly notes the extensive amount of funding given to the Title IX office throughout Crawford's tenure. The document highlights a salary increase for Crawford "outside of Baylor's annual review cycle," "a special 20% bonus for Crawford and her staff along with $50,000 in discretionary

spending for the Title IX office," and a $12,000 "weekend retreat at Lake Austin" all between the beginning of May and end of July of 2016 (paras. 13, 15, 17). Baylor argued that this information "illustrate[s] a very different story than Crawford's claims to CBS News that she was 'set up to fail,'" which very clearly frames Crawford as sensationalizing or embellishing her complaint that she was denied adequate resources and support (Baylor University, 2016e, para 1).

The FCR much more directly accuses Crawford of lying, shifting the narrative from one of mere sensationalism to one where Crawford is intentionally deceptive. As Ahmed (2017c) writes, "it is as if the point of making her point is to cause trouble, to get in the way of the happiness of others, because of her own unhappiness" (p. 37). In the first "Fact Check" of the report, Baylor argued that they were "unaware of a single person who has verified Patty Crawford's false and misleading claims" and cited "Baylor Regents, administrators and Human Resources executives…Crawford's own colleagues" and "Crawford herself " as all providing evidence or statements which contradicted her complaints (Baylor University, 2016c, para. 3). Baylor continued to characterize various claims Crawford had made to CBS as "absolutely false," a "fabrication," and "false and malicious claims" throughout the rest of the document (Baylor University, 2016c, paras. 11, 13, 19).

Baylor weaponized beliefs that the complainer is "making something from nothing, much out of little" to cast doubt on other claims Crawford made as well (Ahmed, 2021, p. 171). In implying that Crawford exaggerated problems of sexual assault at the university, Baylor called her trustworthiness and reputation into question, which then enabled it to make much stronger claims that Crawford was actively deceptive. Once Baylor positioned Crawford as sensationalist and deceptive, it was able to dismiss her complaint as, at best, an exaggeration of reality, and, at worst, a total fabrication.

The Feminist Complainer as Selfish and Vindictive

Once a complainer is understood as deceptive, the question arises of why they would act that way, or, as CBS asks Baylor, "*Why would Patty Crawford just make something like that up?*" (Baylor

University, 2016c, para. 4). The answer to this question denotes the third tactic in Baylor's attempt to undermine Crawford's formal feminist complaint, which is claiming that the complainer must be selfish and vindictive. Selfishness here can be attributed to a desire to cover a personal weakness, further one's professional goals, or a combination of the two. Baylor's response to CBS reflects both rationales, for it commented that, once it became clear that "Crawford lacked the administrative skills to manage the Title IX office," she "began seeking employment elsewhere and sought to blame Baylor for her own shortcomings" (Baylor University, 2016c, para. 5).

Baylor accused Crawford of attempting to blame it "for her own shortcomings," indicating that she was selfishly trying to preserve her reputation at the expense of the university's. This is consistent with Ahmed's (2021) argument that "a complaint is often understood as masking a personal failing of some kind" by displacing the blame for said failing onto another person or institution (p. 148). If Crawford was truly as managerially incompetent or weak as Baylor claimed, then it logically follows that Crawford, worried about employee turnover and department ineffectiveness, would have been looking for a way out that preserved her reputation. Blaming Baylor for her administrative weakness, Baylor argued, was how Crawford attempted to escape the situation.

The fact that Crawford had begun to look for other jobs implied that she was thinking in terms of career or professional advancement when she made her complaint about a lack of resources and support. "It is as if she puts a complaint forward as a way of putting herself forward; the complaint is treated as self-promotional," Ahmed (2021) explains, "a complaint is treated as how you are promoting yourself" (p. 168). Within this interpretation of complaint, false or sensationalized complaints might be put forth with the specific intent of advancing one's interests or agenda. For Crawford, this might mean that observers interpret her complaint about resources as simply a tool to elevate her profile, make her more appealing to other universities, or recover her credibility as a manager.

Baylor's press releases shortly following Crawford's resignation also portray her as only complaining to preserve her professional reputation. KWTX, a Central Texas news station,

reported that the university's original release announcing Crawford's resignation attributes the resignation to her being "disappointed in her role in implementing the recommendations that resulted from the Pepper Hamilton investigation" (Hays & Lauber, 2016, para. 14). The statement accuses Crawford of being selfish in her concern about her role within a larger institutional movement, keeping the focus on her goals and complaint rather than the truthfulness of her claims.

Baylor's official statement responding to Crawford's resignation also calls Crawford's motives for complaining into question when it references the mediation session between Baylor and Crawford that occurred on the day of her resignation. In the session, the two parties discussed Crawford's claims that Baylor was retaliating against her for doing her job and Baylor supposedly offered Crawford a $1.5 million settlement, which she rejected because it was conditioned on her signing a non-disclosure agreement (Hays & Lauber, 2016). Baylor's public response to Crawford's resignation was to comment on her demands going into the mediation session. In the response, Baylor remarked, "Her demands in advance of mediation for one million dollars and book and movie rights were troubling" (Baylor University, 2016b, para. 2). Although it did not explicitly reference or refute Crawford's complaint, the statement shed doubt on whether Crawford engaged with Baylor in good faith or whether she had ulterior motives for complaining about the university. "The institutional response to complaint," Ahmed (2017b) explains, "is to treat the complaint…as being motivated in some problematic way: as if the complainer has some other agenda such as a desire to target others or to damage the university or to elevate themselves" (para. 14). Baylor did not necessarily situate Crawford as actively malicious, but they encouraged the audience to consider her complaint as stemming from a desire for self-promotion and preservation at the university's expense.

The Feminist Complainer as a Threat to Institutional Happiness

Finally, once the complainer has been reconstituted as weak, deceptive, and vindictive, the institution can situate them as a threat to the institution itself. In the case of Baylor, this means that accusations that Crawford created problems for

herself did not remain simply questions of her sensationalizing the problem, they became examples of her creating threats to the university. Ahmed (2017c) theorizes that, in institutional spaces, "The diversity practitioner can be heard as the obstacle to the conversational space before she says anything: she too poses a problem because she keeps exposing a problem" (p. 99). By continuing to expose sexual violence at Baylor, Crawford became the real problem for the university.

Dunn, Crawford's lawyer, contended that "Crawford increased reporting of sexual assaults and sexual violence by 700 percent" while at Baylor and "handled 'hundreds' of cases," a massive increase from the four sexual assaults Baylor reported in 2014, the year before Crawford's appointment (Lavigne & Schlabach, 2016, para. 5). The administration's response to this influx of reports though, Crawford alleged, was not to increase protections for students but to close ranks and work to preserve the school's public image (Lavigne & Schlabach, 2016). The Board of Regents and administrators, she argued, perceived her work as threatening the Baylor brand, making Crawford herself a threat as well because "when you have evidence that something is wrong, that can be used as evidence that what you are doing is wrong" (Ahmed, 2021, p. 47).

Baylor also positioned Crawford as a threat to the institution simply due to the nature of her job as Title IX coordinator, which is significant in what it means for her ability to do her job. Ahmed (2017c) notes that because the diversity worker's job is to facilitate institutional change, they are perceived to be at odds with the institution. "Even when you have been appointed to bring about certain kinds of change, you encounter resistance to what you are trying to bring about" (2017c, p. 96). As such, increasing efforts by Crawford to fulfill the requirements of her job were purportedly met with mounting resistance and retaliation as Baylor made decisions "based on more protection for the brand rather than protecting [its] students" (Martin, 2016, para. 7). This also contextualizes Crawford's claim that "Baylor set [her] up to fail from the beginning in November of 2014," since it illustrates the fact that hiring a diversity worker is not the same as being interested in *doing* diversity work (Martin, 2016, para. 4).

Because of her professional commitment then, Crawford did pose a real threat to Baylor's happiness, given that its institutional happiness seems to rely on maintaining an image of the university as "a wholesome Baptist environment" (Lavigne & Schlabach, 2016, para. 7). Baylor, however, drew on perceptions "of diversity workers as hostile" or even threatening to the institutions for which they work to situate Crawford as a different sort of threat (Ahmed, 2017c, p. 101). In doing this, Baylor crafted a public narrative wherein it was invested in doing the necessary work to combat sexual violence on campus, but *Crawford* was standing in the way with her stereotypically feminine complaints.

The Feminist Complainer as Non-White

Conceptualizing reputational discrediting in the context of white women's complaints or white diversity workers, which I have done above, reveals the nature of institutional violence against those doing feminist and diversity work within institutions. Reputational discrediting as a tactic deployed against non-white women, however, functions in more extreme, visceral ways. Although white women are characterized as emotional, weak, and manipulative, these are designations that still largely position them as passive actors who perhaps did not intend to harm the institution and so should not be held entirely responsible for the damage they may have done. Black women and women of color are not afforded that same benefit of the doubt.

One example of this distinction arises in the way that Baylor engaged Crawford's emotionality as a white woman versus the way that institutions engage the emotions of Black women and women of color. Ahmed (2017c) notes that if "you are heard as an angry person (an angry black feminist or an angry woman of color), then what you are angry about disappears" (p. 38). She indicates that being heard as angry and being heard as emotional spur different institutional responses. Perceiving a complainer as emotionally weak, complaining, or whiny may engender annoyance or the dismissal of the complaint as simply an overreaction on the part of the complainer but perceiving a complainer as angry or aggressive evokes hostility and defensiveness. According to Jones and Norwood (2017),

"When Black women exercise voice…they disrupt the racial and gender comfort…and upset embedded notions of racial and gender superiority" which may "lead to a defensive projection of blame" (p. 2054). Ahmed (2010) notes a similar phenomenon, explaining, "Reasonable thoughtful arguments are dismissed as anger…which makes you angry, such that your response becomes read as the confirmation of evidence that you are not only angry but also unreasonable!" (p. 68). Not only are Black women who complain accused of being sensationalist in their "unreasonability" then, but institutional actors also characterize them as angry and aggressive to divert attention from the object of complaint (Jones & Norwood, 2017).

A second example relates to the notion of self-promotion. Black women and women of color, Ahmed (2017c) explains, have "to insist on what is simply given to others" and are "heard as insistent, or even, for that matter, as self-promoting" when they do (p. 127). This tendency to characterize women of color as self-promoting enables organizations to refashion their complaints as simply excuses for failing or falling short of institutional expectations. The perception that women of color are blaming personal failings on the institution then means that any effort to challenge the institutional structure becomes a means of self-promotion. "When you point out structure," Ahmed (2021) contends, "it is as if all you are doing is projecting your own identity onto the situation such that when you are describing who is missing, you are simply concerned with being missing yourself" (p. 156). That supposed concern with "being missing," as Ahmed puts it, functions as further evidence of women of color's precarious position in institutions because it highlights "the improper nature of…residence" (Ahmed, 2017c, p. 127). Additionally, any attempts by Black women and women of color to change the institution or acquire accommodations are "used as evidence they are pushing their own agenda" and being bullies, or "pushy minorities" (Ahmed, 2021, p. 150).

This question of residence, or fit, within the institution is complicated not only by race but by institutional positions and norms as well. "You have a fit when an environment is built to accommodate you," Ahmed (2021) explains, "You are a misfit when there is an incongruous relation of your body to thing or…to world" (p. 140). She contextualizes fit to whiteness,

arguing that institutional spaces and structures are shaped by and for the people occupying those spaces. Such a relationship leaves those with less "proximity to whiteness" and therefore less "proximity to a certain style of respectable middle-class conduct" to insist on accommodations in order to reside in the institution and minimize the discomfort of those around them (Ahmed, 2017c, p. 128).

The correlation between whiteness and institutional comfortability implies that Crawford, as a white woman, ought to have fit comfortably within the Baylor environment. Baylor's systematic and strategic dismantling of her character and reputation, however, illustrated the opposite. Reputational discrediting, specifically in terms of Baylor framing Crawford as emotional, was able to overwhelm the safety that Crawford's whiteness should have provided her. The prevailing expectations for institutional killjoys, as Ahmed (2017c) describes, are "appearing to fulfill the happiness duty, softening [their] appearance, smiling because or when [they] are perceived as too harsh…almost as if [they] are apologizing for existing at all" (p. 131). In complaining at all, Crawford resisted the duty to institutional happiness; in complaining publicly, she actively jeopardized that happiness and became a threat by refusing to apologize for working to change the institution. Crawford's denial of the happiness duty became evidence that she was out of place at Baylor, that she was "the woman who does not fit," which then justified the university's public refutations of her complaints (Ahmed, 2019, p. 173).

It was not that Crawford or her identity inherently posed a threat to Baylor's happiness and success, however, it was her position that rendered her an institutional killjoy. This is significant because even if Baylor framed her as threatening institutional goals, that is a different sort of threat than is assigned to Black people or people of color working in institutions. The diversity worker may smile "in order to manage how diversity is perceived" or make diversity work appear less threatening, Ahmed (2017c) clarifies, but "A black woman or woman of color might have to smile all the more because she is perceived as angry or too assertive" (p. 101, 58). The distinction between perceiving a job or position as hostile versus perceiving a person or identity as hostile is critical because it implicates the

way audiences respond to the complainer and determines the options the complainer has in the future.

Jones and Norwood (2017) lay out the ways that the trope of the hostile or angry Black woman becomes a mechanism by which to justify white aggression toward Black women and displace blame from white institutions. Audience responses, therefore, differ in that the emotional diversity worker, Crawford, receives institutional pushback and retaliation, while the angry Black woman is subjected to increased institutional and socio-cultural violence, putting her psychic and physical safety in question (Jones & Norwood, 2017). The complainer's ability to shed this designation of "hostile" or "angry" is also largely contingent upon them *not* being a Black woman or woman of color. Although diversity workers can retreat from the institution that is framing them as threatening, much like Crawford did upon her resignation, Black and brown "bodies are in an instant judged as suspicious, or as dangerous, as objects to be feared, a judgment that is lethal" (Ahmed, 2017c, p. 143). Crawford's ability to withdraw from Baylor and face few to no consequences from being labeled a threat is a privilege that Black women and women of color then are often unable to access.

Conclusion

In this essay I argue that institutions strategically deploy reputational discrediting as a response to formal feminist complaints, recontextualizing them as though the complaints are merely a result of women being weak and whiny. This strategy works by first situating the complainer as weak, both personally and institutionally, which enables the institution to frame them as reactionary and sensationalist. Institutions spin that sensationalism to depict the complainer as actively deceptive, which is then explained by characterizing them as self-interested and vindictive. Finally, now that the complainer has been proven untrustworthy and intentionally malicious, they are framed as a threat to the institution itself, discrediting both their reputations and their complaints. Baylor University's public response to Patty Crawford's formal complaint about a lack of resources illustrates the four components of this strategy, with Baylor painting her as emotional, administratively incompetent,

intentionally misleading, self-promotional, and destructive to justify dismissing her public complaints.

Additional research on complaint and reputational discrediting may draw on the work previous scholars have done on Ahmed's contributions to affect studies and emotion as they relate to communication (Dobson & Kanai, 2018; Edbauer Rice, 2008; Rand, 2015). There is much to be said about Ahmed's theorization of "stickiness" and the ways that feminist killjoy tropes accumulate negative feelings and pass those onto those objects with which they are associated (Ahmed, 2021; Mendes, Keller, & Ringrose, 2019; Rossiter, 2013). Similarly, theorizing reputational discrediting alongside the idea of institutional polishing (Phipps, 2020) may offer significant insights into how reputational discrediting could work to restore institutional reputations following complaints, not just discredit the complainers. A third line of future research would concern the institutional strategies deployed in instances where diversity workers are Black women or women of color. This would enable a more comparative analysis of the distinctions in how reputational discrediting operates along racial lines.

The strategy of reputational discrediting offers a way to understand other institutional responses to sexual violence accusations and the success of approaches that rely upon victim-blaming or gender stereotyping. Legal strategies, university policies, and even inter-group negotiations over feminist complaints may deploy this same process to avoid holding institutions publicly accountable and convincingly blame the complainer. Understanding distinctions between formal feminist and stereotypically feminine complaints also provides one explanation for why feminist movements have stalled in attempts to achieve cultural popularity and social change, despite having made massive legal and policy gains (Morris, 2019). As of November 2019, 69% of American women surveyed by National Geographic and Ipsos did not identify as feminists, yet over half "believe that men have it easier" than women and "close to half would agree that women experience difficulties on the basis of their gender" (Morris, 2019, paras. 6, 4). The logical disconnect of these statistics corresponds to the disconnect between the different interpretations of complaint. Formal complaints or structural criticisms, such as concrete

reports or statistics related to women receiving fewer resources or opportunities, garner considerable support. There is far less agreement, however, when it comes to supporting individual feminist beliefs and actions or individual women's experiences within those institutional structures.

Exposing reputational discrediting as an insidious strategy used by institutions to delegitimize formal feminist complaint is also independently valuable for three reasons. First, it informs us about how institutions might respond to sexual violence complaints across media and platforms. Reputational discrediting may be popularly adapted to delegitimize complaints, even if they are not formal or official allegations, especially if those complaints come from women and/or feminists. This is because, at its root, reputational discrediting relies on weaponizing widely recognized stereotypes of women and feminists alike.

This knowledge is especially valuable as we move through the #MeToo era and must develop tools for analyzing allegations of sexual violence or harassment both in and out of the workplace. Communication scholars have long been, correctly, arguing for deeper interrogations of the whiteness and white feminism which undergirds contemporary discussions[3] of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements (Battaglia et al., 2019; Corrigan, 2019; Dougherty & Calafell, 2019; de la Garza, 2019). Building on Ahmed's understandings of the feminist killjoy and diversity worker is one way to do this, as women of color, particularly Black women, are most likely to receive these designations. Analysis centering killjoy figures complicates existing discourses of sexual assault and harassment which obviate race or position white women as the spokespeople for all women (Dougherty & Calafell, 2019).

Second, reputational discrediting provides a framework for understanding public perceptions and interpretations of Title IX workers, and diversity workers more broadly. Reputational discrediting as a response to complaint offers an organizing

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[3] "Contemporary discussions" here references the popular uptake of these movements, not their beginnings. It is important to note that popular interpretation has largely divorced the #MeToo movement and movement against sexual violence from its origins in Black and women of color feminisms. See Angela Onwuachi-Willig's "What About #UsToo?: The Invisibility of Race in the #MeToo Movement" and Kimberle Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" (among others) for further reading.

trope that may be useful when considering negative treatment and perceptions of diversity workers in both private and public institutional spaces. The turnover rate for Title IX coordinators is extraordinary, with many universities having had upwards of three coordinators between 2011 and 2019 (Brown, 2019). This research, in theorizing how institutions respond to diversity workers' complaints, offers a mode of understanding the ways that employers may contribute to high turnover rates by overlooking, deeming insignificant, or filtering out Title IX coordinators' legitimate concerns.

Finally, deconstructing institutional anti-feminist approaches to discrediting complaints offers us ways forward that may make alternative worlds possible, or at least better the odds for those who make complaints in the future. In understanding how formal feminist complaints and diversity workers threaten the institution, we begin to expose the institutional violence that silences complainers. "In making a complaint, we keep a history alive; we do not let go. Feminist memory can become a counterinstitutional project," Ahmed highlights (2019, p. 216). Even when strategies of reputational discrediting prevail and complaints are stopped or silenced, we use those complaints and the knowledge they generate to build a "complaint biography;" a living history that we carry with us as we continue to chip away at institutional walls (Ahmed, 2017a, para. 17).

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"Do you think this is not happening?": Rhetorical laundering and the federal hearings over Planned Parenthood

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Abstract: This essay offers a rhetorical reading of Congressional hearings investigating the Center for Medical Progress's (CMP's) videos falsely accusing Planned Parenthood of selling fetal tissue. Despite the suspect nature of the allegation at the time it was levied, and subsequent investigations rejecting the CMP's claims, the notion that Planned Parenthood profits from the sale of fetal tissue has persisted alongside accelerated antiabortion jurisprudence and vitriolic rhetoric. This acceleration and persistence may be the result of what I term "rhetorical laundering" wherein suspect evidence is justified as worthy of study in a credible public forum, only to have its treatment in that forum insulate the evidence from criticism such that it adopts the weight and character appropriate to federal hearings. By virtue of its treatment by politicians, the evidentiary force of the CMP videos changed from questionable to actionable and facilitated uncompromising antiabortion legislation and jurisprudence suggesting abortion is a social ill. This transfiguration of the videos afforded a fringe antiabortion political imagination, one that envisions those who seek and perform abortions as indices of social rot, urgency that justifies the (violent) removal of abortion providers generally and Planned Parenthood specifically by importing moralizing and dehumanizing language into the broader political culture. The essay concludes with implications of this laundered evidence for both communication studies and public policy.

Keywords: abortion, public policy, political communication, congress, political violence

IN 2015, THE ANTIABORTION GROUP Center for Medical Progress (CMP) released undercover videos alleging Planned Parenthood violated federal law by profiting from the sale of fetal tissue. The videos presented CMP employees posing as buyers for fetal tissue to suggest Planned Parenthood was illegally selling human remains through the organization's programs for fetal tissue donation for medical research. Forensic analysis revealed the videos were edited to imply illegal behavior, and CMP's allegations were suspect when the videos were viewed in full. Among the almost 90 minutes of excluded footage, the distributed videos removed dialogue in which Dr. Deborah Nucatola, the senior director of medical services at Planned Parenthood, says "affiliates are not looking to make money by doing this." They "just want to break even. Every penny they save is just pennies they give to another patient" (Levitan, 2015, para. 4–5). In one video alone, CMP excluded over four

thousand words and 30 minutes of footage, including statements contextualizing Planned Parenthood's donation programs while explicitly denying profit from the sale of fetal tissue (Levitan, 2015). Specifically, reimbursement for costs associated with facilities maintenance and transportation is allowed by federal laws governing exchange of tissue for medical and research purposes, whereas profiting from the sale of that tissue is not. The CMP videos featured undercover individuals discussing with Planned Parenthood representatives how the organization received renumeration for the storage and transportation of fetal tissue and, when antiabortion activists selectively edited, conflated profit seeking behavior with reimbursement.

Despite exculpatory analysis commissioned by Planned Parenthood, 12 states launched investigations into clinics within their borders. Three federal investigations were formed as well, with former Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH) contending, "Recent videos exposing the abortion-for-baby parts business have shocked the nation, and demanded action" (Planned Parenthood's Federal Funding, 2015). No investigation returned evidence of substantive wrongdoing (Wolf, 2018). Even after Planned Parenthood's apologies for Nucatola's seemingly callous tone portrayed in the videos and discontinuation of their tissue donation programs, the push to defund the organization continues unabated today and includes ballot initiatives in states like Kansas and Kentucky working to ban abortive services under the guise of "protecting taxpayer dollars." Indeed, despite skepticism towards CMP's allegations at the time based on their ethically questionable "undercover" activism, exculpatory evidence prior to and after the federal investigations, and CMP's head David Daleiden eventually being fined over two million dollars for trespassing and defamation in the production of the accusatory videos (Hellman, 2019), the federal hearings allowed for the (re)circulation of longstanding antiabortion tropes and a newfound urgency in vilifying abortion providers. Ultimately, the 2015 Planned Parenthood controversy offered partisan ideologues a justification for defunding abortion providers to transcend the discursive gridlock endemic to the U.S. abortion debate pre-*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022; Coker, 2017; 2020), and laid some rhetorical groundwork for

the eventual overturn of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022).

The justification results from a process in the federal hearings whereby the CMP videos adopt a two-fold insulation from criticism to facilitate their integration into popular political discourse. First, GOP politicians and witnesses obfuscate the videos' problematic attributes by using the documentary flow of federal hearings to elevate and insulate the videos from criticism. Second, the debate engendered and bolstered by the videos offers a foothold for a punitive antiabortion political imagination (e.g., Asen, 2002; Coker, 2020) through seemingly damning confirmatory evidence that empowers states to act against abortion providers generally, and Planned Parenthood specifically. I conceptualize this phenomenon as "rhetorical laundering" that (re)configures problematic evidence for broader public consumption. I build on that theorizing through rhetorical analysis of the mode by which some evidence acquires force, be it virality, ideology, or, in this case, legitimacy granted by political treatment.

This essay joins an ongoing conversation concerning how questionable evidence derives and maintains its justificatory force even in the face of refutation, a question important to movements for gender equality and reproductive justice (Dubriwny & Siegfried, 2021). In *Awful Archives*, Rice's (2020) study of conspiracy rhetoric and the evidentiary practices that surround outlandish claims, she implores scholars to consider the "narrativity" (p. 21) of evidence by attending to the multiple registers through which evidence operates. By considering evidence beyond questions of its veracity, scholars locate contributory forces like magnitude, location, and affect that transform the impact evidence can have when woven into a broader totality. This study answers Rice's call by considering how participants in federal hearings laundered the CMP videos from questionable to actionable, and by attending to how that laundering implicates movements for reproductive justice and movements invested in gender equality. Indeed, the laundering of the CMP videos empowered rollbacks of reproductive rights through statutory frameworks barring organizations from federal funding on spurious grounds (North, 2018), and normalized otherwise extreme antiabortion language like "abortionist,"

which appeared over twenty times in Justice Alito's Supreme Court opinion overturning *Roe* (*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 2022).

Though the continued march of antiabortion legislation, jurisprudence, and demagoguery in America is overdetermined, we ought not discount the suasive force of narratives and evidence brought by politicians and activists from the fringe and elevated via high-profile spaces for mainstream consumption. That elevation alters the contours of what Asen (2002) calls "political imagination," or the collective rhetorical construction of subjects in debates concerning legislation, democracy, and public culture. Despite the comparative recession of punitive antiabortion discourses in the last decade of political culture (e.g., Coker, 2020; Saurette & Gordon, 2015), in the last five years a significant encroachment on reproductive rights has occurred almost entirely unabated in the form of state level limitations and antiabortion jurisprudence alongside a disturbing increase in violent rhetoric demonizing abortion providers and the people who employ their services. As of this writing, conservative media spaces and antiabortion groups continue to peddle the discredited accusation that Planned Parenthood profited from the sale of fetal tissue alongside vitriolic antiabortion rhetoric, including a 2019 resurgence of the suspect allegations from Fox News personality Laura Ingraham.

Additionally, conservative media has recirculated the Planned Parenthood allegations to "mixed" truthfulness ratings from factcheckers as they report on contemporary investigations into Vice President Kamala Harris's legal career concerning California's pursuit of Daleiden and his organizations.[1] This laundering and (re)circulation is troubling because it elevates misleading evidence that confirms a long-held narrative from some antiabortion activists that those who perform abortions are vile, unscrupulous, and must be (violently) removed. By laundering suspect evidence, politicians lent credence to a political imagination that has led to violence

[1] Fox News, the *Washington Examiner*, and the *Federalist* were but three outlets who used the resolution of Planned Parenthood's lawsuit against CMP founder David Daleiden in 2019 to launch further attacks against the organization by reiterating CMP's misleading claims. The proliferation of this misinformation concerning Planned Parenthood on antiabortion websites has continued unabated, even as the federal goverment and Republican-led states work to remove funding from the organization.

against abortion clinics and justifies draconian restrictions on reproductive services.

The following section highlights the intersection of political imagination and federal hearings through the lens of the U.S. abortion debate to explain how hearings can change the nature of evidence in a political imagination. I then analyze the three House hearings to offer insight into how evidence can be transfigured and incorporated into a longstanding political imagination of the antiabortion movement. I conclude with the implications of rhetorical laundering and suspect evidence for both communication studies and public policy debates.

Imagination and Public Policy

Anderson's (1991) work on nationhood suggests notions of community are "*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 6). Because of distance, imagination plays a central role as a discursive construction of both the political other, and the results of policy actions (Anderson, 1991; Asen, 2002; Castoriadis, 1997). Political imaginations are both generative of and wedded to the material and social structures through which they take shape. They are discursive constructions that envision both the potential and the subjects of political actions like legislation. These constructions "may not be discerned by aggregating the products of individuals' imagination. [Collective imagination] emerges instead through social dialogue as people in their everyday lives encounter others in contexts of varying structure, scope, and formality" (Asen, 2002, p. 6). In politics, imagination manifests in how the subjects of legislation and legislation itself both rely on discursive constructions of one to justify the other. The existence of an imagined subject may justify a policy, or legislation may call an imagined subject into being. Considering this reciprocal relationship, political imaginations may supplement extant evidence, or persuade in lieu of that evidence existing.

The difficult relationship between imagination and evidence lies, in part, on the nature of evidence and justification. Rice (2020) suggests that many contemporary debates, political

and otherwise, rely on the palpability of evidence, a sort of "thingfulness" that can be evaluated, manipulated, or used by rhetors to support their contentions (p. 6). Rice suggests scholars and lay persons alike "critique some arguments as 'lacking evidence,' a shortcoming that causes teachers to instruct students on the best way of 'finding evidence'" (p. 6). There is great temptation for scholars to organize evidence by evaluation, demarcating evidence from non-evidence through criteria like authenticity or presence, but that temptation encourages a myopia that (incorrectly) suggests there is "no evidence" for outlandish claims like conspiracy theories or fringe political ideologies. Rice suggests evidence is not simply an emergence of truth, or an event that clarifies a position; rather, performance and discourse can become a mix of "poetics and evidential truth" (p. 8) capable of furnishing support for a contention. Evidence, in Rice's reading, requires a rhetorical framework that shifts questions away from validity or evaluation towards what evidence "*does* and can potentially *do*" (p. 8).

In the U.S. abortion debate, the relationship between political imaginations and legislation has often rested on questions of what evidence *does*. Stormer (2015) notes the historical frames used to describe those who seek and perform abortions relied on anecdotes and limited evidence confirmatory of broader worldviews on abortion to encourage ways of being against the legality of the procedures. Those worldviews, and the imaginations they inspired and bolstered, were contested via medical discourses, social dialogues, and political fights that haggled over what counts as evidence. Ziegler (2020) corroborates this reading in the present, noting that much of the modern legislative battle over abortion in the United States has centered on what evidence does, specifically evidentiary questions concerning the potential harm abortion poses to both women and children. Ziegler (2020) suggests activists employed strategies to create a rhetorical landscape where "rather than arguing only about core values, those on opposing sides came to disagree about who counted as an expert and what kind of evidence deserved attention" (p. 180). Morality does not entirely recede from view, but medical and political elites privilege technical and evidentiary questions such as when life begins and how clinics ought to be regulated as justifications for legislation

relative to ideological objections to abortion. The evidentiary emphasis has a recursive relationship with public imaginations of abortion; as the legislative process emphasizes evidentiary concerns over moral posturing, imaginations respond by seeking, elevating, or inventing confirmatory evidence.

This elevation and invention of evidence sidelines political imaginations which identify abortions and the women who seek them as immoral and deserving punishment. The shift away from punitive discourse came after backlash against antiabortion violence and altered rhetoric from the pro-choice movement (Saurette & Gordon, 2015). Perhaps the clearest demonstration of this shift towards evidence with underlying moral tension is the mid-2000s battle over "partial birth abortion," or abortions performed in the second or third trimester after the point of viability. Ziegler (2020) notes that antiabortion political imaginations animated by disgust, such as rhetoric describing the closure of Kermit Gosnell's clinic in visceral terms to foster outrage and moral indignation (Winderman & Condit, 2015), may have structured the political beliefs of some segments of the population. However, those imaginations receded due to Congressional testimony on the medical merits of specific procedures. The prevalence of regulation and paternalistic rhetoric in the modern abortion debate is an index of the importance of evidence, and a predictor of the kinds of regulations that government will implement. As imaginations of abortion emphasized medical necessity with distinct risks, the orientation of subsequent policies leaned towards regulation over outright bans. In turn, as the debate focused primarily on the technical elements of abortion access, those proffering a political imagination centering on the technical (lack of) danger abortion presents bolstered political support for regulation.

As evinced by the expansion of Women Protective Anti-Abortion Arguments (WPAAs) in the 2010s, a political imagination prioritizing regulation for the sake of women's health suggests abortion harms women and that women are incapable of advocating for themselves without paternalistic intervention from the state (Coker, 2020; Saurette & Gordon, 2015). Rather than imagining abortion providers as indicators of social rot to be excised (Stormer, 2015), prior to the overturn

of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), antiabortion discourses typically privileged regulation in the name of women's safety as seen in *Women's Health v. Hellerstedt* (2016), and *June Medical Services LLC v. Russo* (2020). Despite the gradual closure of clinics, Ziegler (2020) notes impatience from both antiabortion politicians and activists who wished for (and were eventually granted) the full removal of *Roe v. Wade* (1973). Those advocates wish to curtail abortion access without requiring pretense, condition, or debates about medical evidence, an unpopular proposition as evinced in part by the public opinion fallout from the 6-3 decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) removing the constitutional right to reproductive medicine (Majority of Public, 2022). Though a plurality of Americans identified as pro-life in 2009, Pew Research Center data in the last five years suggests a wide acceptability of abortion under specific conditions even considering increases in ideological polarization (Public Opinion, 2017), numbers which increased after overturn of *Roe v. Wade* (1973). Ultimately, absent a significant evidentiary shift, outright bans on abortion rely on brute partisanship and largely unpopular actions.

The federal hearings over the CMP videos constitute the conditions for such an evidentiary shift, however, as the hearings supplement and legitimate an otherwise fringe political imagination of abortion: namely, one that envisions abortion as a social disease, and those who seek and perform them as violent immoral agents. That legitimation occurs within the hearings partially through what Park (2021) calls "grandstanding" behavior wherein politicians circulate incendiary contentions or evidence that simultaneously validate like-minded partisans while engaging opposing partisans through mediated channels that cultivate outrage. Though the public rarely consumes footage of federal hearings in its totality, news networks across the ideological spectrum routinely treat those hearings as events worth (re)circulating for the sake of punditry, engagement metrics, and (occasionally) the public good. That circulation tracks with both the rise of ideological news networks such as Fox News and MSBNC, and the increased tendency for politicians to use hearings to advance "electoral and public policy goals" (Dancey et al., 2020, p. 2).

Ultimately, as recent scholarship on Supreme Court confirmation hearings demonstrates (e.g., de Saint Felix & Corrigan, 2022; Coker, In Press), the formation and execution of government hearings provide opportunity for (re)negotiating issues of public importance. Hearings influence the prevalence or credibility of representations by amplifying and twice circulating them; once in a serious setting with policy consequences, and again in using depictions as justification for a policy's enactment (Asen, 2002). The depictions that circulate during a hearing suggest what legislators *believe* to be true about a subject or wish to be true as a justification for enacting policies and, as such, evidence's existence in a federal hearing amplifies the possibility of repetition, (re)circulation, or (re)integration into a broader public debate (Duffy, 2015).

Beyond amplification, the very character of evidence may shift because of its existence in a hearing. Politicians reserve federal hearings for issues of public importance, such as the enforcement of laws or current events that warrant investigation. From that presupposition, there exists the capacity for rhetorical laundering wherein evidence can appear more legitimate by virtue of its treatment in a federal hearing, thereby sustaining the circulation of that evidence. Rice (2020) argues that locations where one treats evidence, be that an archive, a police evidence locker, or an attic, influence evidentiary weight and force by contextualizing bits of data and aiding in the ability for citizens and scholars to "assign a fixed form to buzzing and unruly sensations" (p. 135). That assignment of meaning is made simpler through frameworks like federal hearings that contextualize controversial pieces of evidence within and against investigations into legitimacy. Keremidchieva (2013; 2014) suggests the Congressional Record is less a mediator of rhetoric than it is an agent of institutional contextualization. Politicians use public statements and the formal structures of Congress to "assemble the disparate elements that would constitute the terrains of government, the essence of political issues, and the norms of congressional deliberation" (p. 57). This assemblage constitutes a mode of (re)configuring the relationship between political imaginations and evidence such that the evidence

adopts the "weight" appropriate of the documentary flows of the state.

In that vein, the discussion of the CMP videos in the federal hearings laundered otherwise suspect evidence which enhanced the justificatory force of a receded facet of an antiabortion political imagination. In legal parlance, laundering refers to making illicit profits appear legal or legitimate through a variety of means including moving the profits through multiple convoluted structures or fraud. As demonstrated in the analysis below, rhetorical laundering relies on similarly convoluted discursive moves including flattening differences between kinds and veracity of evidence, integration into broader political imaginations that lend credence to the evidence and utilizing the documentary flow of the state to obfuscate the problematic nature of evidence. This process is distinct from propaganda or general mis and disinformation (see Freelon & Wells, 2020), as it concerns specifically the transfiguration of the character of evidence rather than the gestalt of a narrative or the constant (re) circulation of demonstrably false statements. The CMP hearings demonstrate a process by which suspect evidence is suggested, via the force of a political imagination, to be worthy of investigation. That investigation lends credence to the notion that the evidence *could* be legitimate, a form of laundering that removes doubts or objections to the CMP videos. Once laundered, the videos are (re)integrated into the same antiabortion political imagination that justified investigation in the first place.

Taken together, this section considers the intersection of political imagination and evidence use in the context of the U.S. abortion debate to demonstrate the conditions under which a process of evidentiary transfiguration—conceptualized here as rhetorical laundering—can take place. In the subsequent analysis, I demonstrate, first, how this process occurs within the federal hearings over the CMP allegations through politicians' use of a fringe political imagination as justification for investigation. Second, I isolate the rhetorical moves that abstract the videos through the documentary flow of the hearings, and finally I conclude by substantiating how opponents cast Planned Parenthood as a prototypical villain in an antiabortion political imagination to cement the plausibility of the CMP allegations.

Imagination and the Federal Hearings

The CMP videos presented a justificatory problem, as they were suspect on several grounds, and politicians, abortion supporters, and Planned Parenthood itself refuted the CMP's accusations prior to the federal hearings. Planned Parenthood hired Fusion GPS, a Washington DC based firm, to analyze the videos to determine veracity. The firm's conclusions, released prior to the hearings, suggested significant issues with CMP's claims resultant from selective and malicious editing (Levitan, 2015). Additionally, Congressional Democrats had engaged in fact-finding inquiries prior to the three Republican-led hearings and concluded the CMP videos did not represent evidence of wrongdoing. These actions compounded an existing legitimacy problem; David Daleiden, the founder of CMP, had been part of antiabortion advocacy through Live Action, an organization that liberals accused of misleading editing in the past following the release of different undercover videos at Planned Parenthood (Redden, 2016). In the hearing *Planned Parenthood's Federal Funding Cecile Richards*, then CEO of Planned Parenthood, indicated politicians ought to be investigating Daleiden's record of deceptive practices, if the videos were to be taken as evidence. Furthermore, in 2019 a federal jury in California awarded Planned Parenthood two million dollars in damages from Daleiden, finding his organization had engaged in "fraud, trespassing and illegal secret recording" in the process of creating and releasing the CMP videos (Hellmann, 2019, para. 2).

The purpose of the above is not to demonstrate or suggest whether the hearings were necessary, or the questions "resolved;" from a technical perspective, there are few rules concerning when and why Congress can empanel a hearing. Rather, the notion that the accusations from the videos were widely disputed in 2015, and subsequently demonstrated to be maliciously edited, suggests the extent to which partisan ideologues would have to work to present the evidence as a legitimate basis of political action. Against this backdrop, a defense of the hearings was necessary. As such, politicians mobilized a fringe antiabortion political imagination to justify interrogation of the CMP videos.

In what follows, I analyze the transcripts of three federal hearings empaneled to investigate the CMP's allegations. Of the

three investigations between August and September of 2015, only one included a representative from Planned Parenthood, and none included representatives from the CMP. I divide the analysis into three parts. The first segment details the importation of a fringe antiabortion imagination into the federal hearings over Planned Parenthood. This importation constitutes the first move of laundering evidence, as the force of the imagination lends credence to the CMP's claims and justifies investigation rather than dismissal. The second portion isolates the rhetorical moves used to justify treating the videos as evidence of wrongdoing independent of their veracity, thus facilitating their laundering. The final section explains how Planned Parenthood figures into the antiabortion political imagination vis-à-vis the videos, thereby justifying political action and completing the laundering of the evidence.

Establishing Imagination

As established in the prior section, in the last 20 years, the antiabortion movement has been divided on regulation versus full abortion bans, a division demonstrating competing imaginations of women who seek abortions and doctors who perform them (Ziegler, 2020). The division concerns the acceptability of abortion on moral versus technical grounds. As evinced by legislative regulation over outright bans, antiabortion political imaginations based in totalizing morality and disgust at abortion have receded relative to technical framings of the procedure that justify limitations in the name of women's health. However, in the federal hearings over the CMP's claims, two elements of that fringe antiabortion imaginary circulate to establish the CMP accusations as plausible to justify investigation. The first is fetal centric framing which conflates the term "fetus" with "baby" or "child" to generate disgust at abortion consistent with the CMP's accusations (Rowland, 2017). The second is invoking the specter of the "abortionist," a greedy villain looking to exploit women, again achieving consistency with the CMP's claims.

Fetal centric framing begins with the assumption that a child in utero, at virtually all stages of pregnancy, constitutes a human in need of protection (Rowland, 2017). The simplest way to elevate the status of a fetus is by subbing the technically accurate

"fetus" or "child in utero" for the affectively charged "baby" or "child." In the Oversight and Government Reform hearing *Planned Parenthood's Taxpayer Funding* (2015), for example, former Rep. Steve Russell (R-OK) notes "We've heard testimony today that 2.7 million received services [from Planned Parenthood] in the last reported year. That number is actually over 3 million when you add the 327,000 aborted children" (p. 79). Similarly, antiabortion activist Gianna Jessen's testimony in the Judiciary hearing, "Planned Parenthood receives $500 million of taxpayer money a year to primarily destroy and dismember babies. Do not tell me these are not children. A heartbeat proves that, so does 40 ultrasounds" (Planned Parenthood Exposed, 2015, p. 17). Rowland (2017) suggests humanizing a fetus as a class in need of protection indistinct from an infant or a toddler is a way to demobilize rhetoric of choice. By skirting past both legal and medical understandings of viability, antiabortion politicians and activists center the fetus in the conversation as indistinguishable from a living, breathing child.

This conflation facilitates laundering the CMP videos through the affective force of an antiabortion imagination driven by disgust and outrage, as it implies abortion disregards the life of a sacrosanct protected class, a transgression consistent with trafficking in fetal tissue. Note that this disregard is animated not by the technical elements of medical procedures that had previously been privileged as evidence in federal hearings over issues like late term abortion (Ziegler, 2020). Rather, disgust activates moral sensibilities and binary thinking that override technical framing to recenter the unobjectionable unspoiled innocence of children against women's needs for medical autonomy (Winderman & Condit, 2015). Fetal-centric language disguised as child-centric language, then, justifies investigation into the CMP's claims on moral grounds that demote technical concerns like accuracy or veracity.

Beyond intensifying the affective impact of the CMP allegations, centering the fetus illustrates the moral calculation of subsets of the antiabortion movement: that abortion is murder in all instances and is therefore morally impermissible (see Packer, 2013). Former Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-VA), Chairman of *Planned Parenthood Exposed*, calls the session to order by declaring, "Any discussion of abortion is inherently difficult as it is unquestionably

the taking of a human life" (Planned Parenthood Exposed, 2015, p. 4). Similarly, former Rep. Joe Pitts (R-PA), Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health hearing *Protecting Infants: Ending Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Providers who Violate the Law* (2015), notes "What must such a baby feel when she is approached by doctors who come to kill rather than to cure?" (p. 4). Humanization of the fetus necessitates its protection, thus justifying a hearing over the CMP allegations even if extant evidence and political discussion suggested that Planned Parenthood neither harmed nor exploited any literal children.

The moral overweighing the technical is furthered, also, by conflating the vast majority of abortive procedures conducted at Planned Parenthood, those induced via a pill or a procedure called dilation and evacuation (D&E), with comparatively rare circumstances of terminations after the point of viability. In these hearings, abortive procedures that are now defunct or illegal are described in gruesome detail to illustrate abortion in the political imagination as consistent with the CMP accusations of trafficking in fetal tissue, thereby facilitating antiabortion activists and politicians' laundering of the videos. When asked by former Rep. Trey Gowdy (R-SC) to describe a partial birth abortion in *Planned Parenthood Exposed* (2015), antiabortion activist and lawyer James Bopp Jr. responds:

> A partial birth abortion, as defined under Federal law, is where a physician partially delivers, usually the trunk and legs, of the baby, leaving only the head in the birth canal, and the baby is alive. And then takes an act to kill the baby at that point, usually thrusting scissors into the back of the skull in order to kill the baby, and then completes the delivery. (p. 172)

Aside from the relatively astounding grandstanding—"partial birth" abortion is not an accepted medical term, and the closest procedure, intact dilation and extraction for miscarriages or second and third trimester abortions, are rare and entirely unlike Bopp's explanation—this description in the context of the CMP videos encourages politicians and the public to view Planned Parenthood with extreme prejudice. Gratuitous details, including the description of scissors with the modifier "usually" betrays the importation of a moralizing antiabortion political

imagination into the hearings. The importation does not simply nod towards outrage. Rather, the combination of viscera with an unfeeling doctor activates an affect of disgust at the center of fringe antiabortion imaginations (Winderman & Condit, 2015). The transposition of disgust describes a way of being against abortion, an orientation that precludes the acceptability of the procedure or those who perform it based not on technical expertise or safety but rather moral depravity. Winderman and Condit (2015) note that disgust, rather than simply anger or horror, is a trope of some antiabortion activists relying on intimate and grisly details toward the end of banning abortion. That trope bolsters indignation and moral certitude at the core of antiabortion activism, and rarely will disgust manifest in the liberalization of abortion policies which often rely on technical and medical designations (Winderman & Condit, 2015). Disgust, in this context, proscribes a specific target, abortionists, and implies action must be taken to right this moral wrong, especially considering the CMP's allegations. Similarly, Rep. Pitts in *Protecting Infants* (2015), describes a horrific scene detailed in one CMP video. A fetus is off camera, and two individuals are shown about to perform a medical procedure. The fetus:

> had a face. It wasn't completely torn up. Its nose was very pronounced. It had eyelids. Since the fetus was so intact, she said: Okay, well, this is a really good fetus, and it looks like we can procure a lot from it. We are going to procure a brain. That means we are going to have to cut the head open. (p. 43)

The visceral imagery inspires disgust, and that disgust is then transposed onto a generalized imagination of abortion consistent with the CMP videos to launder the evidentiary quality of the allegations.

An exchange between former Rep. Steve King (R-IA) and pro-choice lawyer Priscilla Smith in *Planned Parenthood Exposed* (2015) illustrates how this conflation of procedures offers the capacity for indignation and disgust:

> KING: You would not assert that it is inhumane to dismember an unborn baby.
> SMITH: I would not say it that way. I would say it is not inhumane to perform a D&E abortion on a pre-viable fetus, absolutely.
> KING: A pre-viable fetus would be an unborn baby, would they not? We are back to that. (p. 157)

The insistence that every abortive procedure, at every part of a pregnancy, constitutes murder demobilizes arguments defending Planned Parenthood and increases the plausibility of the CMP's allegations. Dubriwny (2005) notes the normalization of abortion as a safe medical procedure was a necessary response to rhetoric setting abortion apart from routine medicine. Though visibility of medical procedures may center the debate on women, rather than moral abstractions, discussing a procedure can generate disgust directed at supporters of abortion rights. In the hearings, understanding abortion as a routine medical procedure is disrupted by indignation, thereby justifying investigation into CMP's claims. Consider Rep. Larry Bucshon's (R-IN) contention:

> I am a physician who has operated on premature babies as young as 23 weeks' gestation … I find the discussion, the callousness of the discussion, particularly appalling in the videos based on that, as well as the fact that I am a father of four and a pro-life person. (Protecting Infants, 2015, p. 128)

Bucshon demonstrates the interplay of disgust and morality; because of the appalling nature of a callous discussion of destroying innocent life, it is impossible for him to be anything but antiabortion.

Ultimately, when politicians and activists employ the language of fringe elements of an antiabortion political imagination, they complicate the ability to contest the pretext of hearings and, indeed, the presuppositions of the videos themselves. Following justifying the hearings, rhetorical laundering manifested in strategies designed to treat the videos as evidence of wrongdoing independent of their veracity.

Integrating Suspect Evidence

One core strategy used to skirt past the evidentiary problems with the CMP videos concerned framing the questions and testimony as normal, rigorous investigation without ideological lean. This framing launders the CMP videos from manipulations to bits of neutral evidence in a broader political debate. At the beginning of *Planned Parenthood's Taxpayer Funding* (2015), former Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) states: "We hope to have a good, lively debate. This is what Congress is intended to do, and we need everybody in this room—we need everybody's participation along the way" (Planned Parenthood's Taxpayer Funding, 2015, p. 1). Emphasizing what Congress is "intended" to do normalizes the investigations into clearly manipulated videos, skirting past assertions that the pretense of the hearing was questionable. Hearings are clearly partisan tools, but they routinely feature falsifiable statements characteristic of a deliberative democracy (Park, 2021). By naturalizing a partisan investigatory process, rhetors establish a framework through which those investigating view subsequent testimony and evidence.

The established framework offers rhetorical cover for suspect evidence by abstracting it, configuring the videos as part of a larger debate. In *Planned Parenthood Exposed* (2015), Democrats entered into the record documents signed by upwards of two hundred organizations supporting Planned Parenthood's actions both in general, and specifically in the context of fetal tissue donation. Furthermore, Democrats indicted the veracity of the videos, and questioned the partisan motivation for the hearings. In multiple hearings, they attempted to use procedural measures to object to the showing of the video without context, or to strike elements of testimony when it became apparent that the full videos were not available. Rep. Diana DeGette (D-CO) notes the videos were verified as inaccurate, as Democrats "did a complete investigation into the allegations made in these deeply altered video tapes. The conclusion was that this committee has received no evidence to substantiate the allegations that Planned Parenthood is engaged in the sale of fetal tissue" (Protecting Infants, 2015, p. 8).

Despite these corrections, Republican Congresspeople articulated the videos as worthwhile evidence to launder their

problematic qualities. Rep. Tim Wahlburg (R-MI) clarifies in the middle of his questioning time "I just want that stated for the record, Mr. Chairman, as we have a lot of controversy about the videos. And yet, the eyes show it, but ears even more so hear what was said" (Planned Parenthood's Taxpayer Funding, 2015, p. 37). Keremidchieva (2014) notes an emphasis on the record itself rather than the evidence in question abstracts evidence to divorce it from its wider context and controversy. This severance launders the evidence whereby its evidentiary force is independent of its validity; as the context of the CMP videos recedes, actors were increasingly able to treat the videos as actionable evidence independent of their content.

Having established the capacity for the edited videos to be treated as evidence of wrongdoing, antiabortion participants suggested those in the hearing should overlook the suspect characteristics of the video. When pressed as to whether the majority on the committee was in possession of the full, unedited videos and transcripts, Rep. Franks (R-AZ) replies "The answer is, no, that we are not. But … we are in possession of enough of it to indicate that living human viable babies are being murdered at Planned Parenthood, and their body parts are being harvested" (Planned Parenthood's Taxpayer Funding, 2015, p. 168). The veracity of the videos is immaterial; their reality is both unquestionable, and not worth being questioned. Former Rep. Raúl Labrador (R-ID) argues:

> I do not know if we are ever going to be able to answer that question whether it was illegal for them to do what they were doing. The real tragedy is that we are confronted today with is that human beings have been reduced to mere commodities in this practice, and Federal dollars are contributing to it. (Planned Parenthood's Taxpayer Funding, 2015, p. 176).

The existence of the videos is evidence enough, and those presenting and defending the videos use their existence to supplement an imagination of Planned Parenthood.

Though some chose to treat the videos as evidence of wrongdoing, others established frameworks beyond deliberation to launder the videos' problematic qualities. Former Rep. Joe

Barton (R-TX) argued the accuracy of the videos was immaterial, as Planned Parenthood hadn't denied the claims:

> The ranking member of the full committee, Mr. Pallone, has indicated they have been heavily edited, and that may be true. If he says it is true, I am going to assume that it is true. But what has been made available publicly, to your knowledge, has anybody from Planned Parenthood disputed what has been made publicly available? In other words, has anybody said, "That is not true, we don't do that?" (Protecting Infants, 2015, p. 66)

This sleight of hand, wherein explicit denial is the only rhetorical move signaling innocence, precludes a scenario where full denial of the video's content was not possible and thereby launders the video as evidence of illegal activity. This laundering is apparent when one considers Rep. Brett Guthrie (R-KY), who states in *Planned Parenthood's Taxpayer Funding* (2015): "nobody is debating the quotes that are in there. I mean, we need to look at the whole video, I agree with that. Nobody is debating the quotes" (p. 72). There was not, as Guthrie indicated, audio manipulation of Nucatola. Rather, conversations were spliced together to *imply* illegal behavior and clarifying language was edited out. As such, a full denial by Planned Parenthood was not feasible (or, given the legality of their programs, necessary).

The documentary flow of federal hearings can, as Keremidchieva (2014) suggests, encourage individuals to consider not the particularity of evidence but the context into which that evidence is woven, a broader totality that does not rely entirely on the veracity or strength of its individual components. This abstraction sets the stage for a final move in rhetorical laundering: casting Planned Parenthood as an archetypal villain in the antiabortion political imagination, thereby cementing the plausibility of the CMP allegations.

Imagining Planned Parenthood

The final step of laundering the CMP videos occurs when antiabortion politicians and witnesses (re)articulate Planned Parenthood as a proto-typical abortionist organization to clarify the plausibility of the CMP accusations and justify immediate political action. The abortionist is self-interested, looking to profit

from illicit action, and does not consider the impact they have on the women they target (Winderman & Condit, 2015). Rather than treating doctors as professionals engaged in treatment fitting a patient's needs, the abortionist is incompetent, callous, and greedy.

In each hearing, the abortionist is invoked to justify further investigation into the CMP's claims and tie the organization closely to profit motive and loose morals. In *Planned Parenthood Exposed* (2015), former Rep. Trent Franks (R-AZ) argues:

> I find it so crushingly sad that the only time this little baby was ever held by anyone in its short life was by those who cut his face open and took his brain. Have we forgotten that it was not so long ago that authorities entered the clinic of Dr. Kermit Gosnell? They found a torture chamber for little babies that really defies description. (p. 5)

Gosnell is a prototypical abortionist, in the sense that he was callous, reckless, and profit-motivated (Winderman & Condit, 2015). These characteristics match those circulated prior to the 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade* to articulate both abortion, and those who perform the procedures, as indices of "social decay" (Stormer, 2015, p. 351).

Beyond references to Gosnell, themselves powerful for mobilizing disgust and outrage to link Planned Parenthood with immoral and illegal activity, witnesses and Republican politicians couple the organization to abortionists through accusations of being profit driven at the expense of their patients. James Bopp Jr. in *Planned Parenthood Exposed* (2015) asserts Planned Parenthood "receives substantial financial incentives for harvesting fetal tissue, and their love of money supersedes all other consideration" (p. 21). Beyond "their love for money," Planned Parenthood is set apart from other medical providers because they operate in the black. Casey Mattox, then Senior Counsel for the Alliance Defending Freedom, suggests in response to questions in *Planned Parenthood's Taxpayer Funding* "there is a substantial reason for the taxpayers to be very concerned this is an organization that is able to profit off of Medicaid. […] Medicaid is not usually a program that you can profit from, but it seems that Planned Parenthood has found a way" (p. 112). In the same hearing, Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) asks of Mattox "Unlike other

Medicaid providers, they have been able to avoid some of the oversight and corrective actions that most Medicaid providers would expect. Can you elaborate on what they have been doing to maybe what they have been getting away with all these years?" (p. 111). The thinly veiled accusation of impropriety articulates profit motive alongside the imagination of the abortionist, and Planned Parenthood's Medicaid renumeration adopts a sinister undertone. This articulation casts the organization as financially motivated at the (implied) expense of women, an articulation consonant with the CMP videos. Recall that this same shell game—treating reimbursement as profit—is at the center of the CMP allegations, thereby laundering the core claims of the CMP videos independent of their suspect quality.

Financial motivation for fetal tissue is set alongside a conversation about the profitability of abortion. Former Rep. Cynthia Lummis (R-WY) insists "Let's talk about Planned Parenthood revenue from abortions. If you look at the 2013 statistics that you report, abortions from—if you—from revenue would have been over 86 percent of your nongovernment revenue" (Planned Parenthood's Taxpayer Funding, 2015, p. 23). There are disputes within the hearing concerning the "profitability" of abortion; then-CEO of Planned Parenthood Cecile Richards was unable to say for certain how much money clinics receive in exchange for abortion procedures annually, and many politicians engaged in napkin math wherein they took rough estimates from tax documents to assert the profitability to approaching "86% of nongovernment revenue" (Planned Parenthood's Taxpayer Funding, 2015, p. 23). Abortion as a means of profit was a trope circulated pre-*Roe* to demonize both those who performed abortive procedures, and motives of individuals advocating for women's reproductive care (Stormer, 2015). As that trope is consistent with, and reinforced by, the CMP allegations, the discussion of money articulates Planned Parenthood alongside abortionists and launders the plausibility of the videos.

As configured by the fringe antiabortion imagination, Planned Parenthood fails to consider the murders they have committed or the women whose lives they have ruined. Gianna Jessen in *Planned Parenthood Exposed* (2015) bluntly claims:

> Planned Parenthood uses deception … to achieve their monetary aims. I will illustrate how well they employ this technique with the following quote: "The receptivity of the masses is very limited. Their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is enormous. In consequence of these facts, all effective propaganda must be limited to a very few points and must harp on these slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan." Adolf Hitler. (p. 14)

The use of hyperbole, comparing advocacy for Planned Parenthood to Hitler, is closely tied to the CMP videos; one empowers the use of the other. For Planned Parenthood to be capable of the actions described by the CMP, the organization would have to be at a level of moral failing hardly known in modern politics. Consider the opening testimony of antiabortion activist and former CEO of Americans United for Life Charmaine Yoest in *Protecting Infants* (2015):

> Today, I will focus on three issues that have received less attention to date, specifically Planned Parenthood's involvement in killing infants born alive after an abortion, performing illegal partial-birth abortions, and coordinating potentially unethical and illegal organ and body part harvesting at the corporate level. The flagrant disregard for both life and law at Planned Parenthood that the videos depict is, unfortunately, not surprising. (p. 29)

The notion that "flagrant disregard" is "not surprising" belies an underlying imagination of individuals who provide abortive services as an immoral force. The videos are confirmation for what she already knew, thus achieving status as worthwhile evidence.

Implications

This analysis details the laundering of suspect evidence into a broader political imagination via federal hearings such that both the evidence and the imagination justify action against Planned Parenthood. Elevating the CMP's allegations for public consumption relies on rhetorical laundering that circumvents evidentiary objections and results in further (re)circulation

following their treatment in the federal hearings, as evinced by both statements and actions from the Trump administration, and the persistence of the allegations in conservative news spaces even following the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* (1973). Despite direct attacks on the veracity of the videos, their imagery was incorporated into the antiabortion political imagination and recirculated for public consumption. I conclude with a discussion of (re)circulation facilitated by rhetorical laundering, and the risk of increasing violence against abortion providers even following the overturn of *Roe*.

This study highlights a mode by which politicians and witnesses can (re)interpret evidence in places of rhetorical force to bolster otherwise fringe political imaginations and facilitate circulation for public consumption. Rice (2020) notes that contemporary concerns about support for positions rarely revolve around the *amount* of evidence; there is often a body of evidence for even the most outlandish claims. As such, the character of evidence is of specific interest for scholars of communication and society, as we are often subject to the evidentiary force of "preferred" sites of memory or credibility. If the magnitude or location of evidence transfigures its very character, we may be compelled to take the evidence seriously through informal expectations or formal frameworks. Rice's (2020) example of a police evidence room is instructive; by simply existing in a precinct's lock up, the very character of an object changes alongside our expected treatment of it.

In the context of the CMP videos, federal hearings become a "preferred" site of evidence that launders the questionable attributes of the CMP's claims and bolsters them through attention and repetition of an antiabortion political imagination. The treatment of the videos in the federal hearing generates an "aura of technicality" (Rice, 2020, p. 43) that justifies further exploration and lends credence to an otherwise fringe element of the antiabortion political imagination while normalizing proselytizing on the distinction between moral and technical debates (e.g., *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, Kavanaugh Concurrence, 2022). Bad faith actors and partisan pundits have repeated that mode, and will continue to do so; there will be no shortage of questionable evidence in the future,

much of which may be subject to the same laundering seen in this analysis.

To demonstrate, (re)circulation of the CMP claims and corresponding antiabortion imagination occurred immediately following the hearings and resurfaced as Planned Parenthood sought legal action against Daleiden in 2019. Shortly after the hearings, in the second Republican Primary debate of 2016, Former Hewlett Packard CEO and presidential candidate Carly Fiorina contended that a video existed showing a Planned Parenthood staffer with "a fully formed fetus on the table, its heart beating, its legs kicking, while someone says we have to keep it alive to harvest its brain" (ThinkProgress, 2015, para. 4). In a later interview, Chuck Todd explained to Fiorina the video was a re-enactment and misrepresented Planned Parenthood's practices. Fiorina responded: "Do you think this is not happening? … This is happening in America today. And taxpayers are paying for it. That is a fact. It is a reality" (ThinkProgress, 2015, para. 8).

Similarly, former President Trump relied on disgust to animate antiabortion supporters. In the third presidential debate of 2016, then candidate Trump contended, in response to Clinton's answer on the question of late term abortions, that "what Hillary is saying, in the ninth month, you can take the baby and rip the baby out of the womb of the mother just prior to the birth of the baby" (Carmon, 2016, para. 8). Antiabortion advocates, politicians, and Trump himself repeated this visceral language throughout his presidency, including in the 2019 State of Union in reference to an upcoming debate on a bill that would have punished doctors who failed to provide care "in the case of an abortion or attempted abortion that results in a child born alive" (Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act, 2021, sec. 3). The extremity of Trump's language, and the permissiveness towards his misrepresentations, are overdetermined, but the present study suggests the evidentiary shifts isolated in the analysis set the groundwork for his use of disgust to further mobilize a segment of the electorate. Those evidentiary shifts, in turn, laid the rhetorical groundwork for the majority decision in *Dobbs*; Alito's use of language like "abortionist" and highly selective narrative of history and the evolution of public opinion capitalized on a legal, political, and rhetorical culture

unconcerned with the veracity or specificity of evidence about abortion (*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 2022).

Beyond illuminating how rhetorical laundering can alter the character of evidence and facilitate (re)circulation, there exist further considerations in the realm of public policy; namely, the way this evidence could be used to justify actions against reproductive healthcare providers even after the 2022 overturn of *Roe v. Wade* (1973). The essay closes with two areas of concern: shifting legal frameworks empowering action against Planned Parenthood on the weight of the CMP evidence and bolstering fringe imaginations supporting the wholesale and violent removal of abortion providers.

First, efforts to defund Planned Parenthood rely on statutory frameworks that vary based on state and federal guidelines responsive to evidence of wrongdoing. Justice Kavanaugh's concurring opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) explicitly notes the decision "does not prevent the numerous States that readily allow abortion from continuing," and a good faith reading of the majority and concurrences in Dobbs suggests the court is simply relegating the decision back to states (*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, Kavanaugh Concurrence, 2022, p. 4). In that same breath, however, the treatment of the CMP videos in the federal hearings offers the possibility that laundered evidence justifies actions against Planned Parenthood *even in states that enshrine abortion access*. Consider statutory changes made by the Trump Administration to reverse Obama era guidance regarding Medicaid reimbursement to increase state flexibility for determining provider standards. That flexibility, when bolstered by laundered evidence of Planned Parenthood's wrongdoings, could and would be used by state legislators to attempt to lock the provider out of funds (Wolf, 2018). If one state bars Planned Parenthood from funding "for cause," a labeling made easier through reference to laundered evidence, other states may be obligated to deny Planned Parenthood funding as well (North, 2018). As of this writing, these defunding attempts in multiple states have been subject to legal challenges, albeit now with better prospects than defunding attempts prior to the CMP allegations and *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022). Ultimately, when paired with statutory changes and

antiabortion jurisprudence, evidence that has moved through the documentary flow of the state adopts a serious and potentially actionable character.

Beyond legal minutia, the laundering of the CMP videos affords weight to fringe elements of the antiabortion imaginary that suggests the immorality of abortion justifies its violent rejection even as the Supreme Court strips abortion access from people across the country. Contemporary scholarship suggests retributive antiabortion discourses implying or justifying violence, such as those resulting from the Gosnell case, are much less common in recent years (Winderman & Condit, 2015; Ziegler, 2020). In their place, some antiabortion groups have employed Women Protective Anti-Abortion Arguments (WPAAs), which use paternalism to limit abortion access. By laundering evidence through a fringe antiabortion political imagination, conservative politicians in the hearings eschewed WPAAs, and the technical solutions they imply, in favor of moral posturing that demonizes Planned Parenthood. The laundering dictated the orientation of the resulting policy; where paternalism imagines incompetent entities to be regulated for their own good (Coker & Coker, 2022), the depravity outlined in the CMP videos justifies wholesale elimination of abortion providers.

More troubling, even following *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) there exists the possibility of extrajudicial violence by antiabortion zealots may increase considering (re) circulated evidence of Planned Parenthood's guilt. Though there is a temptation to suggest that antiabortion violence will decrease now that the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the Department of Justice notes that property damage, intimidation, and outright violence against reproductive health care providers have persisted in 2022 (United States Department of Justice, 2022). The language of the CMP allegations facilitated violence; consider the deadly 2015 attacks against a Colorado Planned Parenthood. Assailant Robert Dear Jr. told police, "No more baby parts" after his arrest for an antiabortion terrorist attack resulting in the death of three people (Coffman, 2015, para. 1). Violence against abortion providers often feature discourses which frame abortion as a grave sin to justify violence in contravention of the technical framing endemic to the U.S. abortion debate generally, and even the language of *Dobbs v.*

Jackson Women's Health Organization (2022). Though Dear Jr. was almost certainly not spurred to violence by the federal hearings alone, the amplification of false accusations justifies a dangerous trajectory for antiabortion activism that persists even after *Dobbs* (United States Department of Justice, 2022). If the aftermath of the Planned Parenthood hearings—openly partisan attacks on institutions, politicians continuing to ignore sound science, and outbreaks of violence—are any indication, deeper understandings of public policy rhetoric accounting for this kind of laundered evidence must become the norm.

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Introduction

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ON FRIDAY, JUNE 24, 2022, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) overturned *Roe v. Wade* (1973). Though many of us were vigilant and perhaps even expecting the outcome because a justice leaked the decision weeks before, the official word was no less shocking and hurtful.

As feminists of various shades of purple, we know that the personal is political. The Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender (OSCLG) and *Women & Language* are uniquely positioned to fight the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (1973). We have the power, and therefore, the responsibility, to challenge those who threaten the reproductive health and autonomy of others.

We are called to fight.

Indeed, the personal is political. I have never been in a situation that would require me to need an abortion or experienced the pain of pregnancy loss. However, I have had medical procedures that state legislatures (including both my home state, Arkansas, and where I live and work, Kentucky) are now calling into question. I have had two dilation and curettage (D&C) procedures as part of our fertility journey to ensure that my uterus was healthy. I started birth control at 19 years old, and stayed on some form of it for 18 years. I debated sharing these very intimate details, but if I can't do it in *Women & Language*, then where can I? My mother, Hazel A. Smith, planted the seeds for my own liberal feminist/womanist roots. In her simple words, "people should have the right to live how they want. It's inhumane to prevent others to their rights. Their rote to vote, their right to be who they want to be, the right to an abortion." As a Black woman, the repeal of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and the world that we live in without its protections scares

the hell out of me. Yet, I recognize that I have the privileges of an education and (mostly) affordable healthcare. Though I can never truly imagine what battles others must fight in their struggle for (reproductive) autonomy, I attempt to empathize. My effort includes curating this forum.

Readers of our forum will notice distinct, yet closely related themes across the submissions. It is along these trains of thought that I have ordered the contributions. The first through line is that of language. Of course, within the pages of this journal, we likely all recognize the power of naming. However, we should never take this power for granted. Second, I also attempted to group those contributions that encourage us to think more about how the repeal of abortion rights impacts specific communities, even as it impacts all of us. The final essays inspired me to think more about the connections between reproductive justice and technologies. Of course, the entire forum illustrates the power of recounting accurate history. It also reminds us that, as feminists, there are more issues on which we agree, and that we must be stewards in our care for ourselves and each other.

I shared the call above with those members of our Editorial Board and ad-hoc reviewers who listed reproductive justice as one of their areas of interest. Those colleagues, in turn, shared the call with their networks. When I sent out the invitation to the forum, I felt rather shy; I didn't know how my fellow feminists would respond. I should've known that they would show up and show out! I want to thank our contributors,

Ghanima Almuaili
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Emily Winderman

for their service. I also want to give very special thank you to Tasha Dubriwny, who wrote the powerful closing essay.

I am proud of the range of viewpoints, perspectives, identities, and intersectionalities represented in our forum. Unfortunately, we don't hear all possible voices; for instance, I wanted to have contributions that explore how the repeal of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) impacts those who possess gender identities across the spectrum, from people who have navigated fertility struggles, and more intimate, less formal essays. Therefore, I encourage/beg/beseech that those not represented in this forum to carry their discussions to their dinner tables, classrooms, and voting boxes. I am sure that even those who will identify with the perspectives shared here likely have their own theoretical nuances as well; I am asking that they communicate their perspectives, too.

I stand in solidarity with all people who believe in bodily autonomy and reproductive choice.

That's who my mother raised me to be.

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A Working Glossary of Key Terms in the Abortion Discourse

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IN HER PIONEERING STUDY of abortion rhetoric, Condit (1990) articulates the unique force of vocabulary, or what she calls "units of discourse" (p. 11), on the contours of the abortion landscape. Condit argues, the additive process of proposing and contesting vocabularies works to influence the "public understanding of abortion" (p. 14) and, perhaps more importantly, "produce a legitimated set of terms by which public action would be guided" (p. 97). Mapped onto the American political system, these vocabularies often diverge into "dual tracks" that "partisan groups that have a fervent ideological commitment … in a polar outcome of the issue" and activists insistent "on the dominance of their own ideology in pure form" (p. 166) sustain. Although pro-life/pro-choice is the most visible binary within abortion rhetoric, Mikołajczak and Bilewicz (2015) argue that "polarized categories are numerous" within abortion discourse to discuss everything from the pregnant person, to procedures and the object of abortion itself, as protagonists on both sides construe the conversation to suit their agendas (p. 1).

Additionally, participants in the abortion dialogue frequently deploy strategic ambiguity to manipulate the vocabularies of the discourse. McCullough and Chervenak (2008) explain strategic ambiguity as "using an historical, familiar, and uncontroversial *descriptive*" term and "bootlegging in the *normative* meaning" to obfuscate the "intellectual requirement of justifying the normative meaning" of the repurposed term (p. 36, emphasis in original). For example, "the discourse of 'unborn child' conflates descriptive and normative uses and bootlegs in independent moral status of in vitro pre-embryos, in vivo embryos, and fetuses" (p. 38). In addition to the passage of fetal personhood laws which rely on this specific linguistic bootleg, strategic ambiguity is essential to the passage of restrictive abortion laws reliant on the intentional conflation of terms.

The Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act passed in 2003, which banned the use of a specific abortion procedure medically known as an *Intact Dilation and Evacuation* is a prime example of the intentional conflation of terms. Armitage (2010) argues the term *partial-birth abortion* has no medical basis but "secured people's abhorrence even before they knew the details of the procedure" and was "used as a way to 'open a new front in the abortion wars'" by drawing attention "to abortion procedures" (p. 23). "Rather than attack *Roe v. Wade* or abortion generally, antiabortion forces … made a conscious decision to mount an oblique attack" on a relatively rare but comparatively intense form of abortion through the strategic "development and deployment of the term 'partial birth abortion'" (p. 31). The *Gonzales v. Carhart* (2007) court case solidified the salience of a new rhetorical strategy for the antiabortion movement—masquerading the antiabortion agenda in medicalized rhetoric.

Through the use of pseudo-clinical terms, antiabortion activists mask their agenda with feigned concern for the health and safety of women and their unborn children. The strategy was on full display through the early 2000s as conservative lawmakers furiously passed targeted restrictions on abortion providers (TRAP) laws brimming with pseudoscience and laden with what Calkin (2022) identifies as "woman-protective arguments" that "rely heavily on scientific and medical language to portray abortion as a dangerous procedure" (p. 382). Commenting on the salience of these pseudoscientific arguments Ziegler (2016) laments, "As long as the abortion conflict rages on, the line between facts and ideology will be hard to draw" (p. 116). As antiabortion activists continue to successfully advance their agenda using strategically ambiguous pseudoscientific terms it becomes increasingly important that we heed the call of Grimes and Stuart (2010) to use "Medically accurate, dispassionate terminology" that "precisely convey[s] meaning and, simultaneously, preclude[s] possible misinterpretation" (p. 95). Although Grimes and Stuart (2010) entreat health care providers to "take the lead in using and promoting proper medical terms" (p. 95) the onus belongs to everyone, but especially scholars and activists, to do better as well.

To help promote the use of proper medical terms, I have provided the following glossary with "dispassionate terminology"

(Grimes & Stuart, 2010, p. 95) accompanied by their problematic counterparts in parenthesis when applicable (i.e. Intact Dilation and Evacuation *not* Partial-Birth Abortion) followed by a brief explanation to facilitate the identification of misinformation and strategic ambiguity. The included terms are prominent in antiabortion laws as identified by the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM; 2022) and are continuously misused as highlighted by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) in their 2022 *Guide to Language and Abortion*. All definitions are from either ACOG's online dictionary or the glossary included in the World Health Organization's (WHO) 2022 *Abortion Care Guideline*. This glossary is organized into three categories: terms related to the subject and object of abortion, terms related to abortion care, and terms with limited or no medical basis.

Glossary

Terms Related to the Subject and Object of Abortion

Ectopic Pregnancy – **A pregnancy in a place other than the uterus, usually in one of the fallopian tubes.** These pregnancies are not viable and can be life-threatening without treatment. ASRM (2022) cautions, currently only Arizona explicitly recognizes ectopic pregnancy in its abortion laws as a threat to the life of the mother (p. 4).

Embryo/Fetus (Unborn Child) – **Embryo refers to the stage of development from fertilization to 8 weeks after which the embryo transitions to a fetus.** ACOG (2022a) cautions, "Centering the language on a future state of a pregnancy is medically inaccurate. As long as the pregnancy continues, the language should reflect the current state" (p. 2).

Embryonic/Fetal Cardiac Activity (Fetal Heartbeat) – **Cardiac activity detected via ultrasound labeled as embryonic before 8 weeks and fetal after.** ACOG (2022a) clarifies, "Until the chambers of the heart have been developed and can be detected via ultrasound (roughly 17–20 weeks of gestation), it is not accurate to characterize the embryo's or fetus's cardiac development as

a heartbeat" (p. 1). "Heartbeat bills" ban abortions once a fetal "heartbeat" is detected, usually around 6 weeks, even though the ultrasound is registering cellular electrical activity and not an actual heartbeat at this point.

Gestational Age **– The number of days or weeks since the first day of the woman's last normal menstrual period (LMP).** For individuals with regular cycles, ovulation occurs during weeks 2–3 with implantation occurring 1–2 weeks later, at which point they would already be considered 4 weeks pregnant both medically and legally. Considering it may take 2–3 weeks after implantation to register a positive result on a home pregnancy test, gestational age bans, especially those beginning at 6 weeks, will likely prevent many from accessing an abortion before they even know they are pregnant (Nash, 2019).

Miscarriage (Spontaneous Abortion) **– A loss of pregnancy that is in the uterus (ACOG, 2022b).** The WHO's (2022) definition is more detailed, characterizing the loss as "spontaneous" and indicating it occurs prior to 24 weeks gestation, after which the event would be classified as a stillbirth. Although both terms are medically acceptable, miscarriage is preferred as it "avoids association with induced abortion" (Alves & Rapp, 2022, para. 3).

Uterus (Womb) **– A muscular organ in the female pelvis. During pregnancy, this organ holds and nourishes the fetus.** ACOG (2022a) rejects womb as "a non-medical term that can be used to apply an emotional value to a human organ" (p. 2).

Terms Related to Abortion Care

Abortion (Elective Abortion) **– An intervention to end a pregnancy so that it does not result in a live birth.** ACOG (2022a) warns, the distinction between "therapeutic" or "elective" abortions "diminish(es) the value of abortion care" and inserts unnecessary judgment of an individual's medical and personal choices (p. 2).

Abortion Procedure (Surgical Abortion) **– The use of transcervical procedures for terminating pregnancy (WHO, 2022).** ACOG

(2022a) elaborates, unless complications arise abortions are not surgeries so "referring to it as a procedure is clinically accurate" (p. 1).

***Dilation and Curettage/Evacuation/Intact Dilation and Extraction (Partial-Birth Abortion/Dismemberment)* – Procedures during which the cervix is dilated to facilitate the removal of tissue from the uterus. Curettage occurs prior to 12 weeks via curette whereas evacuation occurs post 12 weeks using a suction device. Intact dilation and extraction is an extremely rare procedure used to remove fetal tissue of advanced gestational age (ACOG 2022b).** ACOG (2022b) explains, terms like partial-birth abortion or dismemberment are medically inaccurate "inflammatory, emotional language and centers the procedure on the fetus, rather than on the pregnant person" (p. 2). Additionally, providers also utilize these procedures outside of abortion care including for miscarriage, stillbirth, and even fertility treatments.

***Medication Abortion (Chemical Abortion)* – The use of pharmacological agents to terminate a pregnancy (WHO, 2022).** ACOG (2022a) cautions against using chemical abortion because the "term is designed to make medication abortion sound scarier than the safe, effective medical intervention that it is." (p. 1).

Terms with limited or no medical basis

***Abortifacient* – A substance, traditionally pharmacological, that induces an abortion.** This pseudoscientific term does not refer to the drugs utilized during a medication abortion but instead is utilized by antiabortion activists to misrepresent forms of contraception that prevent implantation of a potentially fertilized egg (Dreweke, 2014).

***Abortion Reversal* – A scientifically unfounded procedure claiming to reverse a medication abortion through the administration of progesterone.** Despite not meeting clinical standards, antiabortion legislators have attempted to add

education about the procedure to informed consent laws (ACOG, n.d., para. 1).

***Late-term Abortion* – The colloquial term used to describe abortions after the first trimester which has no clinical or medical significance as late-term medically refers to pregnancies at 41+ weeks of gestation.** ACOG (2022) recommends either "abortion later in pregnancy or reference [to] weeks of gestation" (p. 1).

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Abortion and Miscarriage Are Synonyms: Substandard Gynecological Care in the Wake of Abortion's Criminalization

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THE RECENT U.S. SUPREME COURT decision overturning the federal right to abortion has health care providers, patients, attorneys, health-organization administrators, and more, scrambling to understand what abortion is and, just as importantly, what it is not, within the context of the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) ruling. Ultimately, none of these stakeholders have found a clear and consistent answer to this query because abortion, as both a colloquial and technical term, is necessarily slippery, case-dependent, and contingent. Abortion engenders complex variables that are interconnected and impossible to disentangle and assess categorically, which is what is required to satisfy a legal burden of proof. Given that what an abortion is or is not will only ever be unclear in these respects, we argue that efforts to wrangle abortion into a succinctly demarcated set of (il)legal activities will result in substandard gynecological and obstetric care across-the-board. In large part, this is the case because abortion is—and always has been—technically synonymous with miscarriage. In this respect, criminalizing abortion makes suspect all gynecological and obstetric issues. If abortion and miscarriage are the same, then pregnant and birthing people (and even those who have the potential to become pregnant) are always already at risk for breaking the law in light of the possibility that a fetus they carry will not make it to term.

In what follows, we further the case about resultant substandard gynecological care in the wake of abortion's criminalization by, first, considering how abortion has long been used as a synonym for miscarriage and noting that the terms "abortion" and "miscarriage" are rarely employed in

medicine without a significant qualifier. Second, we reflect on how abortion care overlaps with many basic gynecological and obstetric interventions. Finally, we consider how, in some countries, abortion's illegality exists alongside the complete elimination of access to gynecological and obstetric care for large numbers of people.

Since its first known use in the 1500s, abortion has been etymologically linked to and understood as synonymous with miscarriage (Oxford English University Press, 2022). Even over the last century, legal cases that are contingent on clear definitions for these terms have shown this connection to be explicitly true. For instance, in *People v. Robert Stanley Nixon* (1972), a Michigan appeals case in which a physician had been found guilty of performing an abortion, the ruling noted that:

> The term "abortion" by itself does not connote that the expulsion of the fetus is either the product of a criminal act or that it was induced by an artificial means. At least for the purposes of a legal discussion the terms "abortion" and "miscarriage" may be considered synonymous. (p. 2)

Correspondingly, though years later, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defined abortion as the "expulsion or removal from the womb of a developing embryo or fetus," only differentiating later (and in smaller print) the modern, colloquial associations between miscarriage and "spontaneous abortion," and between abortion and "induced abortion" (Oxford English University Press, 2022, para. 1).

Further evidence that the two terms have consistently been widely equated is available in medical contexts, considering they are rarely employed without qualifiers. Abortions are "elective," "incomplete," "induced," "medical," "septic," "surgical," and "therapeutic," to name just a few descriptive adjectives. Miscarriages are "chemical," "ectopic," "habitual," "inevitable," "missed," "spontaneous," and "threatened," also to name just a few common terms that allow for needed clarification. To refer to an abortion or a miscarriage without further descriptors is to offer health care providers insufficient information about what has unfolded and whether an intervention is required. Yet the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) ruling includes no such descriptor, holding that the "authority to regulate abortion is returned to the people and their elected representatives" (p.

1). Given that the literal meaning of abortion is "miscarriage," this ruling goes beyond mere suggestion to explicitly encroach upon health care practitioners' ability to provide fundamental gynecological and obstetric care. In U.S. states with antiabortion trigger laws, written to go into effect at the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), gynecological and obstetric care-team norms and patient-provider interactions have been upended to the point that providers are leaving their jobs to practice in other states or re-training in other areas of medicine. This is especially harmful in places already considered *maternal care deserts*, where it is a struggle to obtain care regardless of the legal repercussions (Yousry, 2022, para. 15).

Just as abortion and miscarriage are synonyms, so, too, are the vast majority of their treatments and care regimes. The same interventions used in treatment for medically induced abortion are used in cases of spontaneous miscarriage, as they are in a myriad of other gynecological and obstetric conditions. For instance, misoprostol—the drug often referred to in popular media as "the abortion pill" (Adams, 2022, para. 3)—is commonly prescribed to expel the contents of the uterus in cases of early, missed miscarriage or even to induce labor or treat postpartum hemorrhage (Allen & O'Brien, 2009). Similarly, dilation and curettage (D&C) is a standard method for inducing early-stage abortion. It is also a procedure used to prevent excessive bleeding following a spontaneous miscarriage, diagnose and treat uterine conditions through endometrial sampling, and identify and remove polyps and tumors (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 2022).

With so much overlap between abortion care of all kinds and standard gynecological and obstetric care, the criminalization of abortion—at the very least—slows the procurement of gynecological and obstetric care as providers and patients must work to prove the legality and necessity of these interventions. With time and timing being so central to issues of reproductive health and pregnancy, any delay in care and treatment has the potential to inflict significant harm, and even death. In this respect, criminalizing abortion substantially reduces the quality of gynecological and obstetric care patients receive. Perhaps even more troubling is that the criminalization of abortion and associated treatments severely limits all access to

gynecological care, regardless of quality, in that providers and appointments become more challenging to find and insurance offers less coverage for reproductive health care across the board. As the President of the American Medical Association explained recently, these circumstances serve only to exacerbate "health inequities by placing the heaviest burden on patients from Black, Latinx, Indigenous, low-income, rural and other historically disadvantaged communities that already face numerous structural and systemic barriers to accessing health care" (Resneck, 2022, para. 11). Moreover, following health care interactions riddled with legal concerns and suspicion, many will decide to delay or avoid all manner of future medical care. The result will be a sharp decline in life-saving interventions such as gynecological screenings, prenatal examinations, and postpartum support, and an increase in dangerous practices such as the use of unregulated and potentially toxic herbal remedies for ailments such as unexplained bleeding and pain, both of which are indications of health conditions that require immediate medical intervention.

Examples from around the globe offer warnings of further encroachment onto basic gynecological and obstetric care in the wake of the U.S.'s antiabortion legislation. In Kuwait—a country with stringent abortion laws punishable with an up-to 15-year prison sentence—women without a marriage contract have been deemed ineligible for gynecological services of any kind. Signs posted on gynecologists' office doors offer the following instructions: "Patients requiring testing for women's gynecological diseases are kindly required to bring their marriage contracts" (see Figure 1).

This message positions unmarried women as inherently suspicious to the degree that all access to reproductive health care is denied. In Nicaragua, a complete abortion ban has created an environment where routine gynecological visits can result in imprisonment as providers turn over patients who show signs of having had an abortion recently or even years in the past (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Moreover, in Poland, where abortion is also banned without exception, multiple women have lost their lives after health care professionals refused to remove a nonviable fetus from their bodies (Bennhold & Pronczuk, 2022). These cases demonstrate how attempts to regulate

specific aspects of reproductive health care such as abortion will—in practice—come to encapsulate a more comprehensive range of life-changing restrictions because of the significant overlap in definition, care, and treatment across gynecological and obstetric interventions.

To summarize, we argue that the history and contemporary use of abortion as a generative term reveals that abortion is inherently central to the provision of gynecological and obstetric care in the United States and around the world. To designate abortion as the boundary between legal and illegal practice is also, in this respect, to undermine the indispensable work of gynecologists and obstetricians. A call for clarity, therefore, is not enough to alleviate the problem at hand, though attention to terms and their meanings certainly would have complicated the seeming ease with which *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) re-criminalized abortion and altered the landscape of U.S. reproductive health care now and for years to come.

Figure 1. Photograph taken at the Al-Saqr Medical Center in Adailiya, Kuwait, by journalist Arwa Al-Wagayan on September 8, 2019. The poster reads, "Patients requiring testing for women's gynecological diseases are kindly required to bring their marriage contracts." Printed with permission from Arwa Al-Wagayan.

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"The Term 'Life' Should Return to Us": Learning from Latin America's Green Wave

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ON SEPTEMBER 1, 2021, TEXAS ENACTED what was, at that time, the most draconian antiabortion law in the United States. Texas' S.B. 8 banned abortion after six weeks of pregnancy and then went one step further—it deputized citizens across the state to enforce the law. The following week, as U.S.-based scholars, journalists, providers, and activists sought clarity on the social and medical implications of this new law, Mexico's Supreme Court ruled that the criminalization of abortion was unconstitutional and announced that it would offer legal support to those facing criminalization in more conservative Mexican localities. Then, months after failing to place an injunction on the Texas law despite clear violation of legal precedent, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* (1973) in its ruling on an antiabortion law in Mississippi (*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 2022). This devastating turn of events upended nearly 50 years of constitutional protection for abortion rights in the United States. The abrupt change in the legal landscape left many across the Western hemisphere stunned.

Although the United States has led the moral charge in favor of reproductive rights for decades, it is no longer at the vanguard. Regarding abortion rights, Mexico now stands above its increasingly less democratic neighbor to the north. The move to decriminalize abortion in Mexico works in concert with an expanding group of predominantly Catholic Latin American countries doing the same, including Uruguay (2012), Argentina (2020), and Colombia (2022)—pushing back on the myth that the Roman Catholic Church has undue influence in Latin America. While many in the United States prepared to confront a post-*Dobbs* landscape—a new borderlands of abortion care wherein access expands and contracts across state lines—those of us paying attention to global movements of solidarity

and radical feminist activism began to look to Latin America for innovative ways of moving forward. Our desire to engage a hemispheric feminist perspective on reproductive justice (RJ) is inspired by: the massive gains Latin American feminists have made in recent years regarding access to reproductive health care, a wish to re-embrace historical linkages between feminist activism in the Global South and the emergence of reproductive justice frameworks in the United States, and the need to learn from Latin American feminists' rhetorical reframing of denial of reproductive services and medical care as an act of gender-based violence.

It is critical to note that the RJ movement is rooted in transnational organizing and struggles for human rights across borders and, more specifically, deeply informed by feminist movements in the Global South (Price, 2010; Ross, 2006). In narrating the origins of reproductive justice, visionary Loretta Ross notes:

> Women of color from the US participated in all of the international conferences and significant events of the global feminist movement by forming small but significant delegations to these meetings. A significant milestone was the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 in Cairo, Egypt where women of color assessed how women in other countries were successfully using the human rights framework in advocacy for women's reproductive health and sexual rights. Shortly after the Cairo conference, women of color in the US coined the term Reproductive Justice by envisioning from the perspectives of women of color engaged in both domestic and international activism. (2006, p. 12)

Thus, drawing inspiration both from global feminist movements and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, U.S.-based RJ advocates centered human rights doctrine in the development of their framework and critical analysis (Price, 2010; Ross & Solinger, 2017). The power of global connection and solidarity echoes throughout Ross's early reflections: "As activists in the US, we needed an analysis to connect our domestic issues to the global struggle for women's human rights that would call attention to our commitment to the link between women, their

families, and their communities" (2006, p. 12). Zakiya Luna (2020) describes this move by RJ activists as the "revolutionary domestication of human rights" (p. 4), a radical insistence on bringing international understandings of human rights home to the United States.

During the early years of the RJ movement in the United States, Latin American feminists were reshaping the rhetorical foundations of their movement, centering the end of violence against women and girls. In 2003, Argentine feminists Marta Alanis and Susana Chiarotti decided to distribute green bandanas at a women's gathering to promote abortion rights as a cornerstone of feminist struggle—an idea that was, at the time, controversial. The bandanas were an homage to Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (they wore white cloth to cover their heads), a group of mothers who demanded the return of their children and family members captured, tortured, and disappeared during the U.S.-backed dirty wars in Argentina (1974–1983).

For Alanis and Chiarotti, green was a reclamation of life. Countering powerful antiabortion sentiments that presumptuously claimed the moniker "pro-life," Chiarotti noted, "the term 'life' should return to us" (quoted in Schmidt, 2022, p. 11). Claiming the valuation of life as central to the movement, the green wave ushered in a different paradigm for abortion care. In lieu of centering individual choice, Latin American feminists placed a critique of reproductive violence at the heart of the struggle for abortion access and reproductive health care.

As scholars and activists, Alanis and Chiarotti have written extensively about reproductive violence, offering powerful indictments of the state and cultural forces that both sanction and exacerbate this violence and promoting possible paths toward justice (Alanis & Echegaray, 2011; Alanis & Sippel, 1999; Chiarotti, 2009, 2010; Steele & Chiarotti, 2004). For example, Chiarotti's work charting abortion criminalization highlights not only the gendered abuse inherent in the denial of care, but also its cascade effects, which include cruel and humiliating treatment from medical personnel in the wake of pregnancy loss (Steele & Chiarotti, 2004). In short, criminalizing abortion has a normalizing and cumulative effect, sanctioning medical harm by those tasked to do none at all.

In calling the denial of reproductive health care state-sanctioned violence, Latin American feminists deliberately drew on the history of brutal dictatorships that supported and engaged in torture, disappearance, and murder of women and girls across the continent, including in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Peru, and decades-long internal conflicts in Colombia, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. As Latin American feminists and scholars note, gender-based violence proliferated with the extension of U.S.-backed economic trade deals including North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), fueling widespread violence and femicides in Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and exacerbating existing economic turmoil and violence in Chile and Argentina. In 2022, the United Nations released its report on gendered violence as a "shadow pandemic," noting, "Gender-based violence against women and girls is systemic and persistent in the region. It knows no borders, affects women and girls of all ages and happens everywhere, from the domestic setting to public places" (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2022, p. 1).

Feminist scholar Marisa Revilla Blanco (2019) contends that in Latin America, the force that unifies all feminist activism and ideology under one mantra is the fight to end gender-based violence (p. 48). From the 2002 *Ni Una Más* (Not One More) mobilizations begun by feminists in Mexico to the 2015 *Ni Una Menos* (Not One Less) campaign started in Argentina, activists created vast grassroots networks prepared not only to combat impunity for crimes committed against women and girls, but also to demand legal changes to strictures that denied care to those suffering from violence (Bermúdez & Bonino, 2019; Wright, 2010). The discursive framing of "not one more" of us killed and "not one less" of us alive, became a critical battle cry grounding all forms of violence as acts against bodily autonomy, choice, and everyday forms of heteropatriarchal oppression (a common refrain became: "es acoso, no es un piropo" or "this is harassment, not a compliment"; Revilla Blanco, 2019, p. 48). Revilla Blanco maintains that this framing allowed for a more heterogeneous movement to emerge—one that encompassed (although not without conflict) a deeper grappling with claims

made by women of different ethnic and racial groups, as well as lesbian and transgender women.

As the movement traveled across borders, green became the color of life, resilience, and power, reverberating from the ground up. In 2019, a Chilean feminist collective LASTESIS produced a spectacular performance known as "un violador en tu camino" (a rapist in your path) as an embodied anthem denouncing sexual violence. A diverse coalition led by young women performed the "flashmob" act in front of courthouses, police stations, embassies, and in the streets around the globe—many blindfolded, often wearing green. As activists danced, they chanted phrases such as "el estado opresor es un macho violador" (the oppressive state is a macho rapist). Each verse clearly and eloquently countered heteropatriarchal justifications for and processes of sexual violence. The metrical rhythm in the line, "El patriarcado es un juez, que nos juzga por nacer y nuestro castigo es la violencia que ya ves" (The patriarchy is a judge, that passes judgment upon birth, and our punishment is the violence that you now see), recalled an ancestral pain, deepening through the incantations of a thousand-person chorus in cities and towns all over the world (BBC News Mundial, 2019). The song became a viral sensation, bringing activists in more than 50 countries worldwide to their feet (GeoChicas, 2021). "Un violador en tu camino" has been translated into and performed in multiple languages and strategically adapted to the exigencies of particular locales—for example, activists staged a U.S. performance outside of the New York County Court during Harvey Weinstein's criminal trial and, later, outside Trump Tower (Serafini, 2020).

Access to reproductive health care, especially the decriminalization of abortion, has been and remains central to feminist demands against state-sanctioned gender-based violence. El Grupo de Información en Reproducción Elegida (GIRE), concerned with the intersections of abortion access, obstetric violence, maternal mortality, and protecting the human rights of women and girls, made explicit these connections when the group was founded by Mexican feminists in 1992. GIRE, like other feminist groups in Latin America, believe the state must answer for its failures in addressing and (often) supporting violence against women and girls (GIRE, 2018).

Importantly, as Latin American feminists made demands to the state, they also insisted on the enactment of human rights as relational and rooted in community. For instance, in Mexico, the story of the abortion-providing feminist group called Las Libres began as a reaction to policies that curtailed abortion access in instances of rape. In 2000, Verónica Cruz, the founder of Las Libres, decided that she wanted to go beyond marches and provide access to safe abortion for survivors of rape (Taladrid, 2022). With the use of abortion medication, Cruz established an underground network of *acompañantes*, women who had self-induced abortions via misoprostol would then accompany another woman in need. Over time, Cruz began to advocate for access to abortion for all those who wanted it, not only survivors of sexual violence. She also worked with attorneys in Mexico to overturn the convictions of women in prison accused of abortion (Lajous, 2011). Like her Argentinian counterparts Alanis and Chiarotti, Cruz began to advance the idea that abortion must be decriminalized in Mexico, helping to pave the way for Mexico's Supreme Court decision in 2021. As U.S. constitutional rights to abortion crumbled the following year, Cruz's underground network extended across the U.S.-Mexico border, providing medication abortions to those in the United States seeking care (Taladrid, 2022).

In this moment of profound rupture, we urge U.S. feminists to take heed—to insist on naming abortion care denial as *violence*, and to reclaim *life* from those whose politics regularly undermine and diminish it. "We are all in favor of life," Chief Justice Zaldívar of Mexico's Supreme Court stated as he explained his reasoning for issuing the decriminalization of abortion in Mexico. "The only thing is, some of us are in favor of the life of women being one in which their dignity is respected, in which they can fully exercise their rights" (Quoted in Kitroeff, 2022, para. 8). Latin American feminists and their allies have provided crucial rhetorical infrastructure for reframing and renaming our battles for reproductive freedom in a hemispheric context. We desperately need this framing. Scholars of U.S. history are advocating that using the term femicide to examine and combat violence against women and femme people—on the rise since the pandemic—is apt if we take a deeper look at our history (Hamlin, 2023). Indigenous activists in Canada and the United

States have tried to call our attention to the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women that challenges "normalized" patterns of violence: "Contrary to non-Indigenous women whose homicides are most likely to be caused by intimate partners, Indigenous women are just as likely to be killed by a white male stranger or acquaintance" (Olson-Pitawanakwat & Baskin, 2021, p. 10). And recently two Harvard epidemiologists concluded that the leading cause of death for pregnant women in the United States is homicide—due in part to a unique combination of intimate partner violence and easy access to firearms (Lawn & Koenen, 2022). Denial of abortion care is one slice of a much larger gender-based violence paradigm in the United States.

Feminists in the Global South are leading the charge against gender-based violence. Not only are they providing material care to U.S. residents, as in the case of Cruz and Las Libres, but have also urged us to join them. As Paula Avila-Guillen, a human rights activist and attorney from Colombia, and Kelly Baden, founder of the cross-state cohort of state legislators committed to reproductive freedom called State Innovation Exchange (SiX), recently declared in *Ms. Magazine*, "Our call for continued global conversations on abortion can move us beyond a U.S.-centric framework and into a global movement for change. Let's welcome the Green Wave to America with open arms" (Avila-Guillen & Baden, 2022, para. 8).

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(Never) Going Back: Black Feminist Impatience for a Post-*Dobbs* Future

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JUST MONTHS AFTER the *Roe v. Wade* (1973) decision, the April 1973 issue of *Ms. Magazine* published the graphic image of an anonymous White woman's corpse with the caption "Never Again" (Rios, 2022). In April 1975, the feminist magazine *Goldflower* published the same image with the headline: "Do you want to return to the butchery of back-alley abortion?" Since *Roe v. Wade* (1973), *back-alley abortion* has been the prevailing linguistic shorthand that mainstream abortion rights advocates have employed to remember the criminalized abortion era. Although, at first blush, it might seem as if back-alley abortion is about *space*, its rhetorical work is equally about *time*. Baked into the rallying cry "We Will Never Go Back" is an enthymeme whose implied premise references a time to which we shall never return—the era of back-alley abortion. Although historians of abortion generally reject the framing of criminalized abortion through the back-alley metaphor because it minimizes the practices of "doctors of conscience" who took on significant risk to their professional standing (Joffe, 1996; Reagan, 1977), "back-alley abortion" has served as a temporal rhetoric marking how the specter of legal abortion has been at risk of regression. The phrase largely resonated with an economically privileged audience of White women who believed that the legal protection of abortion was enough to ensure that the procedure could be accessible, safe, dignified, and free of coercion. However, invoking the memory of the "back-alley abortion era" has also obscured recurring patterns of reproductive injustice never resolved by *Roe v. Wade* (1973).

Researching the rhetorical history of back-alley abortion, I have long programmed a google alert for the phrase, which had remained consistent until the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) decision. Back-alley abortion previously reflected a past of unsanitary spaces and criminal, unscrupulous providers that threatened to return. In the days and weeks

following the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) decision, new temporal contours of the phrase emerged. For instance, a review of the HBO Max's *The Janes* (2022) declared that the documentary was "a crystal ball, a time machine, and a warning," noting how it "opened with a harrowing account of a back-alley abortion" and demanded "audiences to recall a time before *Roe v. Wade* while grounding us firmly in the terrifying present" (Heinrichs, 2022). Implied in post-*Dobbs* back-alley appeals is that the threat is gone, the past is present, and the future will be dystopian forced reproduction without immediate action.

Scholars in this forum and elsewhere have long argued that a legal right to abortion enshrined in the right to privacy and appeals to *choice* have been unavailable to and out of touch with the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx birthing people for whom eugenic programs have systematically attempted to control and curtail reproductive capacity (Davis, 2019; de Onís, 2015; Fixmer-Oraiz, 2019; Goodwin, 2020; Harper, 2020; Ross, 2017). These histories served as exigencies for the development of the reproductive justice movement—that it is a human right to *not* have children, to *have* children, and to parent children in safe and sustainable communities (Ross, 2017). As we pause to contemplate the role of language in enacting a future of reproductive justice, we must also think deliberately about just temporalities. Rhetorical temporalities grounded in the intellectual tradition of Black feminism offer historical lessons in maneuvering around reproductive oppression and provide concrete avenues to navigate the struggle ahead.

From "We will Never Go Back" to Black Feminist Impatience

Questions of abortion and temporality have long traveled together. Appeals to *remembering* a forgotten past have been tethered to the racial project of encouraging White Anglo-Saxon women to give birth and outlawing abortion in the 19th century (Stormer, 2020). *Roe v. Wade* (1973) tethered the limits of *choice* to a Constitutional right to privacy by establishing the *trimester* framework. During the first third of pregnancy, one could elect termination. However, to "balance" self-sovereignty with so-

called state interest in life, the framework restricted abortion once a fetus was viable.

Because the temporal hegemony (Carey, 2020) instantiated by *Roe v. Wade* (1973) established a time by which abortions could be restricted, antiabortion activists have successfully manipulated time by deploying incremental strategies of restriction to maneuver around legal rights. For instance, mandatory waiting periods rely upon temporal deferral to reflect and listen to one's conscience. Waiting periods disadvantage people living in poverty or rural areas who may miss several more workdays—especially if they must travel for a procedure. Crisis pregnancy centers deploy deceptive marketing and clinical practices that lure people seeking termination with the promise of free pregnancy tests and ultrasounds, deferring care until they have "run out the clock" on their legal options to terminate (Thomsen, 2022). Heartbeat bills do not outlaw abortions outright but do so when fetal cardiac activity is detected, well before fetal viability—sometimes earlier than a person knows they are pregnant (Edgar, 2017). Texas's heartbeat bill engages temporal strategies to shutter clinics and make access to the procedure more difficult. Doing so disproportionately impact low-income pregnant Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color who experience higher pregnancy mortality rates than their White counterparts (Eugene et al., 2022).

The fearful and paralyzing adage of "never going back" to the era of back-alley abortions cannot comport with the long-urgent and unmet demands of reproductive injustice's racial and economic distribution of precarity. Meeting these demands requires that we resist the linear timelines of progress(ion) in favor of orienting ourselves towards "moments that reoccur, accumulate, and overlap" (Gomez, 2021, p. 188).

Because Black feminist theories undergird the reproductive justice framework, Tamika L. Carey's (2020) *rhetorical impatience* offers a temporal orientation attuned to the cyclical and repeated nature of reproductive injustice. According to Carey, "Rhetorics of impatience are performances of frustration or dismissal and time-based arguments that reflect or pursue haste for the purpose of discipline" (p. 270). As "the disciplining arm of a Black woman's self-care project" necessary for survival, rhetorical impatience counters pre-*Dobbs* White mythos of hermetically sealed, but

threatened, abortion rights with the assumption that "equity and justice are late" (Carey, 2020, pp. 270, 273). Reproductive justice is late because the histories of enslavement, eugenics boards, and long-acting reversible contraception abuse compound with ongoing practices of obstetric violence and rising Black maternal mortality rates. With deft and flexible tactics for managing the "temporal hegemony" of feigned linear temporalities of reproductive progress, rhetorical impatience accounts for the need to dismiss irritants, enact "indignant agency," and engage in redress depending on how the situational nuances threaten the well-being of Black women (Carey, 2020). Rhetorical impatience challenges temporal hegemony by locating situated apertures for agency amid concretized reproductive regimes.

Rhetorical impatience has notably contributed to the historical battle for abortion rights. For instance, in an alternative timeline, we might not be marking the death of *Roe v. Wade* (1973)—but rather *Abramowicz v. Lefkowitz* (1969). This 1969 class-action lawsuit argued in the Southern District Court of New York made Constitutionally grounded arguments and brought people who had pre-Roe unwanted pregnancies to testify. In the face of disrespectful dismissal by the state's attorneys, Black feminist Civil Rights attorney Florynce Kennedy engaged in each of the temporal tactics of *rhetorical impatience* that Carey (2020) theorizes to counter the delegitimizing interruptions of her witnesses' narratives. Doing so ensured the court record included their voices, even though the New York's narrow repeal of abortion laws rendered the case moot. Kennedy frequently engaged in spectacle to enact impatience which enabled her to "not rely completely on the courts" (Randolph, 2015, p. 168).

Those navigating a post-*Dobbs* future need impatience in its multiple manifestations. For instance, clinic defense workers who escort patients in the face of anti-abortion protestors may feel tempted to respond to dehumanizing epithets. However, because defense workers are not there to debate—but rather to support patients' emotional and physical needs—engagement would decenter the individual most requiring community care and put them at risk for potential violence (Rankin, 2022). In this case, impatient dismissal to keep patients moving is most likely to produce an outcome aligned with reproductive justice's sensibilities. Other cases benefit from different impatient

tactics. With no federal regulation in place at crisis pregnancy centers, activists enact indignant agency and help people seeking abortions repossess valuable time in early pregnancy by providing Yelp and Google reviews to warn people about the deceptive practices at clinics that do not provide termination (Chan et al., 2022).

Rhetorical impatience recognizes the endurance necessary to fight for reproductive justice and encourages a forward horizon while recognizing that the past practices of reproductive injustice have left a wake (Sharpe, 2016). Appeals to "never go back" to back-alley abortions, although evocative of harrowing and unsanitary circumstances, maintain regressive temporal orientations to a past that continues to unfold.

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Roe v. Wade and the U.S. Military: Ongoing Battles for Service Members' Reproductive Rights

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ON FRIDAY, JUNE 24, 2022, the United States Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* (1973), landmark legislation that deemed abortion a Constitutional right under the 14th Amendment. This decision dismantled 50 years of legal abortion protections, stripping power from the individual and returning it to the state (Housman, 2022). In rapid succession, abortion rights were dismantled when trigger laws became enforceable across half the United States (Guttmacher Institute, 2022), stripping bodily autonomy and ushering in a wave of collective anxiety, depression, and shame (Moniuszko et al., 2022). When we heard of the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), we three—friends, scholars, and military spouses who research the intersections of race, gender, and power in the military—immediately worried about how service members would be impacted, particularly within contexts of violence against women and LGBTQ+ individuals in the military. Using homeland maternity and reproductive feminicides as grounding arguments, we explore the impact of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) on American service members and their reproductive futures.

In *Homeland Maternity*, a conceptual framework developed by Fixmer-Oraiz (2019) to critically analyze the policing of pregnancy in homeland security culture, she asserts that we continue to increasingly "face stunning hostility to sexual and reproductive self-determination" (p. 2). Post 9/11 digital surveillance, the increase of white nationalism, the declaration by the Supreme Court that the Constitution of the United States

"does not confer a right to abortion" (*Dobbs v. Jackson's Women's Health Organization*, 2022, p. 69), and countless other legislative actions by organizations and governments provide evidence of our homeland maternity state. If the current trends continue, the end result may be an increase in reproductive feminicides, violent acts against women in reproductive contexts, i.e., structural limitations to reproductive options, reproductive access, and reproductive safety (Hernández & De Los Santos Upton, 2018). Reproductive feminicides in the United States and throughout Latin America are rooted in histories of colonialism and violence that have eradicated cultural values and histories, prevented access to life-saving health care, separated families, and ultimately fractured the goals and lived experiences of reproductive justice (Hernández & De Los Santos Upton, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021). With the criminalization of pregnancy historically and contemporarily in full force, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) highlights how the homeland security state and the policing of pregnancy are intimately intertwined. For women, transgender, and nonbinary individuals currently serving in the US military, there are added layers of complexity as their bodies are regulated by both civilian restrictive practices and military gender politics. Moreover, for the military, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) is "a matter of national security" (Hunter et al., 2022, p. 21), underscoring the importance of this discussion.

Fourteen percent of all active-duty service members in the United States—about 200,000—are women (Department of Defense, 2022). Women serve at the highest levels across branches in all military occupational specialties; however, they continue to face significant barriers as they navigate the gender politics of the military. Collectively, women service members are often judged by their reproductive decisions, such as being accused of intentionally getting pregnant to avoid deployment (McSally, 2007). The reproductive health of women service members provides evidence of destructive institutional and social norms and practices. Specifically, women service members are more likely to have an unintended pregnancy, miscarriage, and ectopic pregnancy than their civilian peers; moreover, they are more likely to experience intimate partner violence and be sexually assaulted, further heightening risk for an unintended pregnancy (Hunter, 2022; Ippolito et al., 2017; Rivera-Alsina

& Crisan, 2008). Compounding the pressures military service women face choosing to medically terminate a pregnancy is the Hyde Amendment, federal legislation that blocks use of federal funds for an abortion (Ibis Reproductive Health, 2018). Under Hyde, reproductive individuals serving in the U.S. military may not receive an abortion procedure on base unless the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest or threatens the life of the child bearer (Ibis Reproductive Health, 2018). Proving a pregnancy meets the conditions outlined by Hyde may require a police report, multiple notes from medical professionals, and other documentation which creates added burden and additional trauma (Henshaw et al., 2009). Moreover, a majority of the Armed Forces' largest bases are located in conservative states, which severely limits or bans access to abortion even when the conditions of Hyde are met (Kaplan, 2022). Individuals who need an abortion may be forced to travel out of state and have their leave approved by the Chain of Command. Although recent protections have been afforded to service members choosing to undergo this medical procedure (Secretary of Defense, 2022), concerns regarding lack of confidentiality, abortion-related stigma, and career-related impacts remain as a policy directive issued as a memorandum (Secretary of Defense, 2022) does not erase oppressive military cultural norms impacting women service members (Grindlay et al., 2017).

As the post-*Roe v. Wade* (1973) landscape continues to emerge, women of color and members of the queer community may be additionally burdened as abortion-related restrictions exacerbate existing barriers navigating the health care system and accessing culturally inclusive care for needs (Artiga et al., 2022; Branigin & Chery, 2022; Corbett, 2022). Within the context of the military, women of color and the queer community experience higher rates of sexual harassment; moreover, they may be more likely to experience gender discrimination and sexual assault (Breslin et al., 2022; Burks, 2011). In addition, soldiers who identify outside of the heteronormative, may experience sexual violence as a result of the traditional and often conservative gender and sexuality norms that dominant certain areas of the military (Burks, 2011). Women of color and members of the queer community are also less likely to report rape and sexual assault, which may limit their ability to meet the "proof"

requirement under Hyde (Henshaw et al., 2009). Finally, within the decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* (1973), Justice Clarence Thomas argued the Supreme Court had an obligation to review "demonstrably erroneous" decisions (*Dobbs v. Jackson's Women's Health Organization*, 2022, p. 3), including landmark cases that confer the right for married persons to obtain contraceptives (*Griswold v. Connecticut*, 1965), the right to engage in consensual sex (*Lawrence v. Texas*, 2003) and the right to same sex marriage (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015).

Current debates about the impact of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) on service members highlight the contentious struggle over surveillance and bodily autonomy, with the Pentagon reassuring service members that it will provide support for those seeking abortions (Cooper, 2022) while the conservative right simultaneously asserts the Department of Defense cannot legally fund elective abortions (Olohan, 2022). Ultimately, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) has significant implications for service members, including the potential for cultural backlash against women in the military; continued surveillance and control of reproductive decision-making; gendered stereotypes, privacy concerns, stigma, continued stress, and barriers for women in the military; and continued concerns about military recruitment and retention issues (Horton & Roubein, 2022; Hunter, 2022). The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) removes much more than abortion rights from service members. It signals a loss of bodily autonomy, bodily rights, and "the capacity to fight for those rights at all" (Fixmer-Oraiz, 2022, para. 15).

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Exploring the Incel Response to the *Dobbs* Ruling

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ONE OF GLORIA STEINEM'S most popular quotes stated, "We've begun to raise daughters more like sons . . . but few have the courage to raise our sons more like our daughters. What effect would that have?" Steinem made a profound point about raising children, and despite fathers' professing their love for being *girl dads* and women's raising their sons to understand gender equality, reproductive justice activists are still fighting against a culture deeply rooted in anti-woman/feminist ideals. As a result, adolescent boys and young men do not fully understand the limitations society places on women's choices and the vulnerabilities of women to continuous cycles of digital[1] misogyny and linguistic violence from men who identify as men's rights activists (MRAs),[2] members of the Men Going Their Own Way Movement (MGTOW), or involuntary celibates (Incels).[3]

We cannot underscore the importance of language and its ability to construct and reshape reality. The language used by Incels reinforces patriarchy and supports real-life institutionalized misogyny. Linguistic violence against women has shifted support away from abortion rights and created digital communities dedicated to circulating misogynistic ideals in the manosphere.[4] In this essay we will briefly discuss the rise of men's rights online communities that promote linguistic violence

[1] Digital is inclusive of websites, blogs, social media posts, online forums, and YouTube channels.

[2] Aiston (2021) defines men's rights activism as a movement that advocates political changes for the benefit of men.

[3] Aiston defines Incels as self-identified "good guys" who believe they are entitled to a relationship with a woman but are incapable of finding a partner (2021, para. 5).

[4] The manosphere is defined as a world where Incels and other misogynists communicate their hate for women and society's social structures that supposedly prevent Incels from being successful (Futrelle, 2021).

against women and discuss the Incel response to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) within the Incel community. Finally, we suggest the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) ruling, as well as pro-life supporters and Incel communities, are deeply influenced by America's historical attitudes toward a woman's right to bodily autonomy.

Incels and other participants in the manosphere perceive themselves as victims of feminist ideologies. They encourage a return to "traditional values" that place men in control and propose a smaller role for women in the public sphere. Part of this return to "traditional roles" focuses on controlling women's reproductive rights. To better understand how Incel communities discuss abortion rights, we started with the work of Klee (n.d.) and Futrelle (2022), which led us to review forum threads in two Incel communities: Incel.is and the Reddit forum Men's Rights: Advocating for the Social and Legal Equality of Men and Boys Since 2008.

Incel.is is a website that includes a discussion forum for community members, a blog where authors publish articles regarding Incel topics of interest, and a link to a Wiki page. Since 2008, members viewed the Incel.is Wiki page over 7 million times. In one particular thread, "Hoes Mad; Roe v. Wade Has Been Overturned" had 28 replies to the original post and was viewed 944 times by other community members (Incel.is, 2022a). Based on the comments, members saw the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) as a positive attack on feminism and a "big hit to sluts" (Incel.is, 2022b). The use of the term "attack" indicates that members contextualize themselves being at war with women and feminism. In one thread, members celebrated women's supposedly being forced to control their sexual desires for fear of not being able to end an unwanted pregnancy. In the same thread there were posts that did not agree with overturning *Roe v. Wade* (1973) because other Incels view children as a financial burden; therefore, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) would force more men into paying child support. A common topic within these communities was the financial drain that women and children pose for men, and the language used in these posts dehumanized women by calling them hoes, sluts,

foids,[5] normies,[6] and whores. Despite celebrating the latest ruling, members also framed their comments around a disdain for governmental intervention in the lives of citizens.

"Reddit's Men's Rights: Advocating for the Social and Legal Equality of Men and Boys Since 2008" is part of the larger Reddit network where people post images, videos, and written communication in forums related to their interests. This particular Reddit forum has 345,000 members worldwide (Reddit, n.d.). In the Reddit forum an ongoing theme focused on men's rights being taken away because of the work the women's rights movement achieved. Members placed men's rights and women's rights on opposite sides and neglected to discuss *rights* in the context of one's humanity. Additionally, most conversations focused on women being stripped of *all* their civil rights, not just their reproductive rights.

Although our focus is abortion, the blatant disregard for human life and linguistic violence indicates another problem—homegrown domestic terrorism and White nationalism. Historically, White supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) committed acts of aggression against abortion providers. In 1985, the KKK published abortion providers' personal information on posters across the nation (National Abortion Federation, 2022, p. 8). Former Klan member John Burt told the *New York Times*, "Some day we may all be in the trenches together in the fight against the slaughter of unborn children" (National Abortion Federation, 2022, p. 8). In 1993, abortion provider Dr. David Gunn was killed by a white supremacist who was mentored by former Klansman John Burt" (National Abortion Federation, 2022, p. 8) and today's White nationalists[7] also support the anti-abortion movement. According to the National Abortion Federation (2022), prominent members of

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[5] Femoid/foid (female humanoid) is a derogatory term Incels and men's rights activists use to describe women (Aiston, 2021).

[6] Normie is a term used to describe a regular person who has "conventional, main-stream tastes, interests, viewpoints" (Dictionary.com, n.d., para. 1).

"White nationalist groups espouse white supremacist or white separatist ideologies, often focusing on the alleged inferiority of nonwhites. Groups listed in a variety of other categories—Ku Klux Klan, neo-Confederate, neo-Nazi, racist skinhead and Christian Identity—could also be fairly described as white nationalist" (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2021, para. 1).

anti-abortion groups including Operation Save America and Baby Lives Matter were active in the January 6th insurrection:

> Convicted arsonist and anti-abortion extremist John Brockhoeft live-streamed from outside the Capitol. Derrick Evans, a member of the West Virginia House of Delegates and frequent protester at the state's sole abortion clinic entered the Capitol and was later charged with two federal misdemeanors and resigned his seat. Jason Storms, National Director of Operation Save America, . . . shared a video of himself on the scaffolding at the Capitol calling for revolution. There's video of Tayler Hansen, Founder of Baby Lives Matters, inside the Capitol next to the woman who was shot. Jeff Durbin, Founder of Apologia Studios and an associate of Operation Save America shared multiple videos of himself at the Capitol on January 6th. Oklahoma State Senator Warren Hamilton, an associate of Operation Save America, appeared outside the Capitol with other Senators. (p. 8)

Highlighting the intersection between White nationalists who demonstrate anti-abortion extremism and Incel violence is important because there have been several cases of Incel behavior within the manosphere that manifested into physical violence against women; therefore, it is not an unfounded concern that Incel violence could extend to abortion clinics now that *Roe v. Wade* (1973) has been overturned. If we consider men who self-identify as Incels also have a proclivity toward White nationalism and meet in digital Incel communities, it is plausible the anger directed at women could shift to women who seek abortion care.

A 2021 study by Pelzer et al. considered the prevalence of Incel language in communities like Reddit and established that the manosphere was dangerous, "incel forum culture becomes destructive since members fuel one another's depression, rage, and appearance fixation instead of supporting each other to mature and develop" (p. 22). They concluded that hatred towards women was the most common denominator in Incel language and over time, members' language became increasingly more violent until the posts began to sound similar in tone and language use. The normalization of Incel language is dangerous for three reasons; (a) it can produce extremists,

domestic terrorists, and men who think violence against women is acceptable; (b) it dehumanizes and objectifies women and creates "community" for young, impressionable minds; and (c) it removes the abortion debate from a contextual frame that unpacks the intersecting needs of women and birthing people. Violence against abortion clinics, practitioners, and patients is not our only concern but also that a generation of young men find and circulate incorrect information about abortion, gender equality, and men's rights in digital spaces.

Men find solace in the manosphere because communities of misogynists validate their perceived victimhood and promote gender-based violence toward women. These relatively unmonitored spaces radicalize men and encourage them to validate each other's rage and violence by creating a groupthink space void of critical engagement. Unfortunately, rather than engage in critical reflection on their circumstances, many misogynists return to the manosphere for direction and add to their bias and misunderstanding. The result is disgruntled, disenfranchised men who do not understand abortion rights and the effect that *Roe v. Wade*'s (1973) repeal has on society regardless of gender.

Misogyny and linguistic violence against women are fundamental to Incels and the manosphere. The violent nature of online groups has spilled beyond digital spaces and threatened the safety of girls and women for the past two decades. And now, unless we continue to identify trends in misogynistic communities, they will persist in perpetrating harm on women and femmes. We argue that reproductive justice activists must study online spaces because pools of toxic language can affect some people's ability to critically understand the consequences of the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) ruling as well as other reproductive injustices.

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Menstrual Histories, Reproductive Futures

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WHEN THE *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) opinion leaked in the summer of 2022, I was thinking about menstruation. In the immediate aftermath of the news, friends, family members, and even general acquaintances messaged me to say they had or were considering deleting period tracking software from their smart devices. Upon opening Instagram and Twitter that evening, I was floored by the number of posts I saw urging others to do the same. Having spent the better part of the last decade studying, writing, and speaking about menstruation, I was not surprised that my loved ones would choose to share this information with me. Nor was I shocked that period tracking apps were a topic of conversation on the social media feeds I play a major role in curating. I suppose what I felt was relief that, in a moment where access to abortion was the most obvious concern, people were talking about menstruation at all.

There are, of course, connections between menstruation and pregnancy. Data about an individual's menstrual cycle, including when menstruation begins and ends, can be used to determine the beginning and ending of a pregnancy. As more and more states have passed anti-abortion legislation since *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022), this data can be incriminating for those who have had or are seeking abortions. Risks to the privacy of such data are not just theoretical. In 2021, users of the period and fertility-tracking app Flo, which currently boasts over 200 million members, sued the company in a class-action lawsuit after Flo sold its users' data to third parties, including Google and Facebook. Heightened anxieties about the safety of personal health information stored on period tracking apps post-*Dobbs* are not only valid, but they reflect the long-standing entanglement of menstrual politics and reproductive regimes in the United States.

Knowledge about menstruation informs reproductive politics. Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz (2019) has traced reproduction regulations across lines of identity, illustrating that they have and continue to help codify White supremacy in the United States

and secure it as central to national identity. These regulations do not begin with pregnancy, but with menstruation. As early as the mid nineteenth century, menstrual science was instrumental to constituting gender, race, sex, class, and ability categories. Physicians, educators, scientists, and employers have long used strategies of menstrual surveillance to monitor and protect the reproductive potential of "healthy," White women of means and discourage birth from those belonging to groups imagined as threatening to the nation, including Black and non-Black women of color, poor women, undocumented women, disabled women, and queer folks. It is imperative that we continue to have conversations about where and how to safely access abortion and reproductive health care, and how to protect and nurture those who give and receive that care. It is also essential, perhaps now more than ever, that an awareness of the legacy of menstrual politics in our nation's history shapes those conversations. Here, I elaborate on two of these menstrual histories and clarify how each figures very centrally into contemporary concerns about reproductive and bodily autonomy that loom large in the wake of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022).

Physicians began serious inquiry of menstruation around the 1870s, amidst widespread concerns about declining White birthrates and race suicide. The study of menstruation using the scientific method and the resulting medicalization of the phenomenon define this period of menstrual history, a time Sharra L. Vostral (2008) calls the era of "scientific menstruation," (p. 22). Physicians such as Edward H. Clarke and Clelia Duel Mosher employed race science and natalist and eugenic thought to conduct studies of White female subjects' menstrual flow. They published books and medical journal articles arguing menstrual difficulties were pathologies unique to females of the "civilized races" with fragile dispositions and, were they to be able to fulfill their duties as mothers, should be treated with, to name a few prescriptions, bedrest, strength training, withdrawal from school, and the wearing of loose clothing (Mosher, 1911, p. 56). Doctors excluded Black women from these studies because, as Dorothy Roberts (1997) reminds us, medical authorities viewed them as uncivilized and masculine. As such, menstrual difficulties were thought not to affect Black women and, even if they did, most medical experts believed Black women were unfit

for motherhood anyway. The result of these studies was that scientific menstruation linked periods to femininity, femaleness, and Whiteness as well as concretized pregnancy as the telos of menstruation for White women of means.

Reverberations of scientific menstruation, in part, fashioned the political climate that led to *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022), which allows for new uses of menstrual surveillance to police who can and cannot have and/or parent children. In 2019, for example, Rachel Maddow reported for CNBC that former head of the Office of Refugee Resettlement and anti-abortion advocate, Scott Lloyd, had been keeping a spreadsheet containing detailed information about the menstrual cycles of migrant girls detained at the U.S.-Mexico border. The menstrual data helped determine if any of the girls were pregnant as well as the ages of fetuses. With this information, border officials were able to prevent girls, some as young as twelve years old, from getting abortions. Their babies were sent to foster care centers that were, at the time, funded by the Trump Administration and alleged to discriminate against non-Christian and LGBTQ couples (Wright, 2019). Lloyd's spreadsheet indicates that menstrual surveillance can directly inhibit access to abortion care. Contextualized by menstrual histories, this is dangerous for anyone seeking an abortion who the state may otherwise see as a desirable mother. On the other hand, it also leaves those deemed "unfit" for motherhood susceptible to reproductive injustices—in this case, forced birth and family separation.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, schools gradually took on the responsibility of disseminating medical experts' knowledge about menstruation. At women's universities, physical education classes taught their middle-and-upper-class White students how to strengthen their bodies for childbirth without harming their reproductive organs and causing menstrual complications (Verbrugge, 2000). Meanwhile, hygiene departments instilled discretion and aesthetic upkeep as elements of personal hygiene that promoted healthy menstrual cycles and produced "modern" women (Park, 1996). Such classes often required that students note and document the characteristics of their menstrual cycles so they could perform exercise safely and use appropriate menstrual products when

necessary. Thus, teachers were privy to students' menstrual data, allowing them to access information about potential pregnancies and reify links between menstruation and gender, race, class, and ability.

We have already begun to see histories of menstrual surveillance in schools replicate. In January 2023, the Florida High School Athletics Association announced that they would stand by their decision to require student athletes to report their menstrual information and histories not just to the physicians overseeing their physicals, but to their schools. Since *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022), Florida has become particularly hostile for youth, instituting a 15-week abortion ban and imposing restrictions on gender-affirming care and the participation of transgender athletes on school sports teams. Allowing schools access to menstrual data intensifies this hostility by opening the possibility for school officials to become aware of student pregnancies indicated by missed periods and out transgender students. Menstrual histories show us that, for at least a century, schools have relied on menstrual surveillance to help craft and maintain identity categories that reproductive regulations target. It is not surprising that, today, schools use menstrual data to violate reproductive privacy and contest identity.

These historical and contemporary examples of menstrual surveillance are just some of many I could have used to illustrate that menstrual politics have, do, and will continue to impact access to reproductive and abortion care, especially now. I could have written about how remnants of the Rhythm Method give religious leaders access to people's menstrual data, I could have detailed the workout programs on my Nike Training app called "Move Like a Mother" and "Harness The Power of Your Menstrual Cycle," and so on. I hope the effect is the same, though: that we are all thinking more critically about the role menstruation plays in reproductive regimes past and present. As we imagine what reproductive justice looks like without *Roe v. Wade* (1973), that vision is incomplete unless we understand how menstrual politics factor in. Onward to that future. And, in the meantime, delete your period tracking app.

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Feminist Solidarity and the Politics of Care

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THE COLLECTION OF ESSAYS IN THIS FORUM traverse the complex terrain of reproduction in the post-*Dobbs* context. In this response, I highlight three of the key themes that tie the essays together—attention to language, a focus on diverse contexts and identities, and a concern with how best to move forward toward a transformative future—and I then turn to offer another layer to the reproductive justice orientation that so many of the authors here embrace. Specifically, I consider how reproductive justice's orientation around terms like solidarity, collective, connection, and community (see Fixmer-Oraiz & Murrillo, 2023; Ross, 2017) may be fruitfully placed in conversation with a feminist practice of care and solidarity.

The essays share a general concern with language as that which shapes public understandings of abortions and the people who seek them, crafts policies that enable or constrain our access to reproductive care, and provides the foundation for resistance and social change, although as the concerns of each—from the language of Incel communities (Lawson & Harper, 2023) to the temporal orientation of "We will never go back" (Winderman, 2023, p. 285)—are quite distinct. What is often exciting about forums such as this one is the ability to place essays in conversation with each other, and the contributors' deep and abiding concern with language is a fruitful intersection. Consider, for example, Jensen and Almuaili's (2023) careful examination of the distinction (or lack of one) between *abortion* and *miscarriage* and their argument that abortion care is central to reproductive care. Restricting women's access to abortion care through criminalization "substantially reduces the quality of gynecological and obstetric care patients receive," particularly for marginalized populations (Jensen & Almuaili, 2023, p. 269). Placed in conversation with Fixmer-Oraiz and Murillo (2023), the criminalization of abortion—the denial of abortion care that makes all reproductive care precarious—is "state-sanctioned gender-based violence" (p. 279). We can amplify Jensen and Almuaili's claims by engaging

in the vocabulary of Latin American feminists, a vocabulary—
and concomitant orientation—that reframes abortion denial
as violence and embraces "life" as central to efforts to secure
women's human rights.

Notably, it is not just women's right to abortion that is at
stake in the reflections about *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health
Organization* (2022) in this forum. A second connecting point for
many of the essays is the careful discussion of whom the decision
may impact, across a broad spectrum of identities and contexts.
Certainly, many contributors recognize that populations already
marginalized will find their ability to access abortion severely
restricted. Hernández, May, and McDermott (2023) give
texture to this awareness of differential impact by drawing our
attention to the context of women, transgender people, and
nonbinary individuals serving in the military. As they carefully
explain, the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022)
decision exacerbates the already difficult process of navigating a
restrictive health system and accessing culturally inclusive care.
For service members the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) not
only portends increased surveillance and control of reproductive
decision making, but also amplified gender stereotypes, privacy
concerns, stigma, and stress. Surveillance of bodies outside of
the specific context of military may take the form of menstrual
surveillance. Offering up menstrual histories as one way to
understand the peril of the post-*Roe* context for all reproductive
bodies, Conner (2023) reminds us that athletic programs in
schools have long relied on menstrual surveillance to "craft
and maintain identity categories that reproductive regulations
target." (p. 312). We might consider, as Conner does, how
menstrual tracking lends itself to both the identification and
then exclusion of transgender students from athletics and the
regulation of potential student pregnancies. Taken together,
when considering the ramifications of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's
Health Organization* (2022), the essays in this forum insist on
an inclusive perspective that incorporates diverse cultural and
institutional contexts and the bodies that inhabit them.

Finally, questions of language, identity, and context are
necessarily connected to the third theme that traverses the essays:
the future. As the authors of this forum discussed in one of our
meetings together, one contribution we hoped to offer was a

sense of productive practices, frameworks, and vocabularies for activists, feminists, and scholars as we move forward in the post-*Dobbs* context. The urgency to chart productive practices, or in basic terms, to think about what we should do next, has only increased over the past few months. January 20, 2023 marked the annual March for Life in Washington, DC and cities across the nation. Although some March participants, while enthusiastic, felt that the pro-life movement now seemed unfocused, national leaders were quickly identifying new priorities. The final goal for the movement is the elimination of abortion, and to reach this goal, movement leaders are now focusing on national- and state-level legislation banning abortion and restricting/banning medication abortions (McDaniel, Kitchener, & Boorstein, 2023). The March's path mirrors the new focus on legislation, with the March now ending at the U.S. Capitol instead of the Supreme Court. The end of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), in short, is not the end of the movement to eliminate abortion.

With this context in mind, I highlight three practices we can engage now to work toward a future where reproductive care is guaranteed for all, which emerge when we place the essays in conversation with each other. First, speak with precision. As Furgerson's working glossary reminds us, debates about abortion more generally are infused with "fervent ideological commitment" (Condit, 1990, p. 166 as quoted in Furgerson, 2023, p. 259). From using the dispassionate terminology Furgerson provides to reclaiming the term life, carefully constructing the vocabulary through which we advocate for (and write our scholarship about) reproductive health and freedom is necessary. Second, act smartly. Here, I am thinking particularly of Conner's essay and her ending instructions, "delete your period tracking app" (2023, p. 312). To delete a period tracking app is to be aware of the political implications of menstrual surveillance. That awareness comes with engagement—engagement with the news, politics, friends, communities, and so forth. To act smartly, then, is to act as an engaged member of your community and perhaps (as I explore below) to act with care. Acting smartly is also potentially to act with impatience, recognizing that abortion-as-choice rhetorics never served the interests of all people (Winderman, 2023). Black women engaging in rhetorical impatience—from "talking back" to radical truth telling (Carey, 2020, p. 270)—

work with the assumption that equity and justice are overdue. Acts of impatience are underscored by urgency and haste; the time for equity and justice is now.

Finally, we must deliberately shift away from a liberal choice and rights framework that positions reproduction (along with many other issues) as the province of individuals and embrace a framework that positions reproduction, healthcare, employment, childcare, and so forth as collective concerns (see Fixmer-Oraiz & Murillo, 2023; Winderman, 2023). One such framework is reproductive justice (RJ). As theorized and enacted by women of color beginning in the 1990s, reproductive justice is "rooted in the belief that systemic inequality has always shaped people's decision making around childbearing and parenting, particularly vulnerable women" and brings a social justice and human rights vision to questions of reproduction and beyond (Ross, 2017, p. 291). The RJ framework does more than expand the field of concern for scholars and activists (for example, RJ activists value and assert people's right to have children, not to have children, and to parent children in safe and healthy environments); it insists on making the link between individual and community (Ross, 2017; Ross & Solinger, 2017). Reproductive justice draws some of its analytical force from a global human rights framework and thus insist on the "dialectical, or interactive, relationship between individual and group rights…the rights of a group must be protected in order for individuals to exercise their human rights" (Ross & Solinger, 2017, p. 84). What this means in practice is a recognition of the interlocking structures, systems, and discourses (including, but certainly not limited to racism, sexism, classism, gentrification, environmental degradation, incarceration) that enable and constrain choices, as well as a more holistic, intersectional approach that seeks the complex foundations of problems (see Ross & Solinger, 2017).

A turn toward RJ may also provide an avenue for the type of feminist coalition building necessary to answer the material challenges faced by particular groups in a post-*Dobbs* context: coalitions grounded in feminist care. As Jensen and Almuaili (2023) and Hernández, May, and McDermott (2023) explain, restricting abortion will impact already marginalized communities the most. Not surprisingly, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg had reached this same conclusion in the years before

her death. Consider this brief except from her interview with Jeffrey Rosen in 2019. Rosen asks, "And if *Roe* were overturned, how bad would the consequences be?" Ginsburg's immediate reply, on which she later expands, is, "It would be bad for non-affluent women." When Rosen asks, "How can advocates make sure that poor women's access to reproductive choice is protected? Can legislatures be trusted, or it is necessary for courts to remain vigilant?," Ginsburg eventually finds her way to this answer, "It will take people who care about poor women" (Rosen, 2019, questions 2 & 3). We can and should push back at Ginsburg's uncritical use of "women" and we can and should expand beyond "poor." But I am more intrigued at this moment with the word "care." What does it meant to care about poor women? Does RJ enable or encourage a certain type of care? Ross and Solinger do not use the word "care," but they do point to the necessity of uniting across differences when they note that we "must work together across barriers to accrue the power need to achieve and protect our human rights" (2017, p. 111). More pointedly, they draw from Barbara Smith (1983) to note that as an activist practice, RJ is a movement of solidarity that that is based on our actual need for each other (Ross & Solinger, 2017). RJ in this sense recognizes the interconnections of people across difference and encourages an acknowledgement of and working with those differences to "make our movement whole" (2017, p. 110).

I recognize that "care" is not an innocent term; weighing down care are histories of (among many other things) gender (naturalizing women's care for others) and colonial, nationalistic, racialized practices of care (e.g., Spivak's 1988 description of white men's saving brown women from brown men). Care can be a powerful steamroller, flattening differences and reifying hierarchies. But, RJ advocates could invoke care as Corrigan and Vats do, a decolonized radical care "where collaboration is prioritized and where growth is modeled and nurtured through intimate networks of collective solidarity and mutuality" (p. 225). Ginsburg's concern—that people will not care—must be answered, and the answer may lie in practices of care that emphasize mutuality, coresponsibility, and common interests (Mohanty, 2003, p. 521). Feminist theorist Selma Sevenhujsen,

who writes on ethics of care and social policy, points to another reason why care may a fruitful concept for the movement for RJ:

> The notion of human nature embedded in the ethic of care diverges from the unilateral individualism which is central to many a moral theory and thus also the normative assumptions of many policy theories. Relationality and interdependence are core concepts in the ethic of care. (2003, p. 183)

To practice care as feminist solidarity is to resist the myth of liberal individualism and rhetorics of choice because care is based on a recognition of interdependence. More specifically, a feminist practice of care could place emphasis on human interconnectedness, amplifying recognition of the structural conditions and discourses that regulate all (reproductive) lives, albeit in very different ways depending on one's social location.

I want to conclude this response by suggesting that embracing reproductive justice as a framework and working in solidarity with others is a particularly important move for a specific group: White women. It was not too long ago that a White woman, one representing the United States, blazed across national television screens on the way to visit migrant children separated from their parents at the United States/Mexico border wearing a jacket that read, "I really don't care, do u?" (Jennings, 2018). Although Melania Trump later insisted her lack of care was directed toward the liberal media, the jacket's message is a striking one given the concerns and justified anger of women of color feel about White women's historical failure to act in solidarity—their historical failure to care—regarding reproductive rights and a host of other issues. Consider Anna Brent-Levenstein's (2022) assessment of recent White feminist activism:

> Rather than addressing this persistent lack of abortion access for poor women, white feminists have been wrapped up in 'girlboss feminism,' which emphasizes individual achievements and feel-good messaging over structural changes. Even the 2017 Women's March on Washington was largely based in white women's outrage over the Trump presidency as they could sense their impending marginalization. Meanwhile, women of color had been sounding the alarm bell for decades. (para. 4)

Brent-Levenstein's (2022) message is clear: a true coalitional politics "requires structuring advocacy in a way that ensures that the most vulnerable members win first and win big" (para. 8). I urge all of us to practice feminist care as we chart new paths forward. Like Brent-Levenstein, I hope our practice of care crafts networks of solidarity across differences and works strategically for justice for the most vulnerable.

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