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DISTINGUISHING SUPERVISOR COERCION FROM SEXUAL HARASSMENT

JOANN KEYTON

A dysfunctional and negative work climate can be caused by supervisor coercion, the use of threats, or intimidation to gain compliance. These same abuses of power that create sexual coercion can also lead to sexual harassment. This article examines the similarities and differences between supervisor coercion and sexual harassment based on the language feature theorems of contextualization of work environment, multiple meanings, sexualized meanings, personal relationship attempt, and unwantedness by receiver. Findings suggest that participants can make distinctions between coercion and sexual harassment based primarily on the presence or absence of sexualized meanings in supervisor-subordinate interaction.

Keywords: coercive power, legitimate power, coercion, sexual harassment

Coercive power has long been acknowledged in organizations (see French & Raven, 1959) and has often been connected with legitimate power based on a supervisor's formal authority over subordinates. Coercive and legitimate power can be confounded as coercive power is derived from a supervisor's legitimate authority to punish employees (e.g., controlling work environment, hours, or tasks). Coercion is a form of influence (Cleveland, Stockdale, & Murphy, 2000) that can be abused. Another abuse of power is demonstrated in sexually-harassing behavior. As Mink (2000) explained: "Sex is at once a means and an end for the harasser: a means to exert power and an end secured by power (including, sometimes, force) ... it is never 'just about sex' but always about power" (p. 27).

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As negative behaviors displayed by supervisors, coercion and sexual harassment share similar characteristics. Both are declarative speech acts in that the supervisor brings a state of affairs into being by uttering the messages (Cooren, 2000). Both messages occur because the relationship is power-dependent (Cleveland, Stockdale, & Murphy, 2000). Both are messages from the “single most important organizational member for any worker” (Gutek, 1985, p. 37). Both are discursive practices (Clair, 1998) composed of intimidating, hostile, and coercive supervisory actions. Both actions represent relational control (Rogers & Farace, 1975) in that the supervisor attempts to restrict the options of the subordinate. If the supervisor is effective, the subordinate acquiesces out of fear for his or her job or to maintain a relationship essential to producing income. Both are based on verbal and nonverbal cues. Both are unwanted. The difference? Supervisor coercion is a legal, although unpleasant and unprofessional, workplace behavior; sexual harassment has legal consequences, both for the harasser and the organization.

One issue that repeatedly surfaces in scholarly research and legal cases is *what constitutes sexual harassment?* The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guideline does not define what constitutes sexually harassing behavior. Thus, it is left to courts to make legal declarations about what constitutes sexual harassment *in this case*. Despite the nearly 30 years of court decisions, “they have not produced a consensus about what sexual harassment really is” (Mink, 2000, p. 28). But long before a complaint of sexual harassment has found its way through organizational and EEOC reporting procedures, employees (and organizations) must deal with the practical matter that employees may feel and believe they have been sexually harassed despite what any court may ultimately decide. Thus, in addition to identifying what constitutes sexual harassment, a reasonable question to be answered is: How is sexual harassment different from other dysfunctional workplace behaviors?

VERBAL MESSAGES OF COERCION AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

One aspect of verbal communication common to both supervisor coercion and supervisor sexual harassment is the potential for face-threatening acts. Sexual harassment can involve verbal sexual abuse, whereas coercion often concerns verbal abuse of the nonsexual variety. The increase in the study of organizational bullying suggests that nonsexual coercion can create an environment of psychological threat (Vega & Comer, 2005). Although both verbal coercion and verbal sexual harassment create a threatening environment, they have different legal foundations and paths of recourse. Can employees and organizational policy makers make a distinction between these two offensive behaviors — a distinction that can help employees and lead employers to know how best to address and remedy the situation?

Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) provides a basis for comparison. The theory posits that individuals' desire to save face (i.e., the image revealed to others) can cause them not to be direct in orders, requests, and warnings. In other words, a supervisor's coercive or sexually harassing verbal actions may not be explicit, but rather couched in ambiguity. Interestingly, it may be the subordinates' desire to save face (their own and that of their supervisor) that gives the supervisor an opportunity to be coercive or harassing. Subordinates are generally respectful and polite while interacting with their supervisors because the social and professional context demands it (Thimm, Koch, & Schey, 2003). That is, until the subordinate hears enough of a request, he or she cannot make an interpretation about whether the request is work-related. The social norms at work may give the supervisor talking time in which the subordinate decides if the request is standard and compliance is appropriate, or if it is one that he or she will resist (Thimm et al., 2003).

As Goldsmith (2006) explained, when individuals have the need to commit a face threatening act, like that of verbal coercion or verbal sexual harassment, there are a variety of politeness strategies for making that act less threatening. A face threatening act may be a blunt or direct statement (the most threatening, not polite), the message may be delivered directly with positive nonverbals or the use of informal language (less threatening, more polite), or the individual may hint ambiguously by making the request indirectly (least threatening, most polite). Politeness strategy selection by a supervisor will influence how the message is interpreted by the subordinate. For example, Carson and Cupach (2000) found that subordinates perceived their supervisors to be angrier, less fair, and less communicatively competent when supervisors used more direct face threatening acts.

Recently, Keyton and Menzie (2004, 2007) developed propositions about which language features denote sexually harassing messages and how those language features interact to create receivers' interpretations of sexual harassment. Taking a message focus is important in that communication between supervisor and subordinate is the "conduit through which professional relationships are established, and the conduit through which sexual harassment is expressed" (Keyton & Menzie, 2007, p. 88).

Specifically, four structural properties or tangible traits (sender's personal relationship attempt, receiver's demonstration of unwantedness, presence of potential multiple meanings, and sexualized content) and two language functions that contextualize messages (sender's presumed and expressed power and expression of the work environment) were manipulated in four theorems to distinguish among friendly professional interaction, flirting interaction, dysfunctional or coercive interaction, and sexually harassing interaction. According to Keyton and Menzie (2007), each of the language features is necessary but not sufficient for sexual harassment to exist, and both language features and contextual functions of the conversation interact to create sexual harassment. That is, sexually harassing talk can occur because it is embedded in other talk that can appear normal.

The six language features, therefore, provide greater detail about why a particular set of messages constitutes sexual harassment than taxonomies of sexual harassment (for example, see Gruber, Smith, & Kauppinen-Toropainen, 1996) that identify broad categories (e.g., sexual comments). For instance, sexual harassment (theorem 1) and coercion (theorem 2) are expressed as different linguistic logics:

[1] Within the context of the work environment, sexually harassing interaction = messages that evidence the supervisor's presumed power [multiple meanings (at least one of which is sexualized) + personal relationship attempt by the supervisor] + unwanted by the receiver.

[2] Within the context of the work environment, dysfunctional or coercive interaction = messages that evidence the supervisor's presumed power [multiple meanings + personal relationship attempt] + unwanted by the receiver.

Notice the degree of similarity between the two theorems. Sexually harassing interaction is distinguished from coercive messages only by the presence of sexualized messages that may be embedded in messages that have the capacity to invoke multiple meanings for the receiver based on the supervisor's power.

SPECIFYING THE LANGUAGE FEATURES

A locus of power exists within the *contextualization of the work environment*. The powerful person, in this case, the supervisor and harasser, has the means or *presumed power* to carry out a threat. "Ironically, the greater the power of the issuer to make good on the threat, the more likely the threat is to be expressed indirectly — precisely because the speaker knows that the target will be able to derive the 'I will' from context" (Lakoff, 2000, p. 123). Thus, implied threats are often recognized by subordinates as legitimate.

Multiple meanings (one of which is *sexualized*) drive the ambiguity of a sexually hostile work environment. Compared to direct messages that have literal interpretations ("I want to have sex with you"), indirect messages can be read sexually or not with the intended message extracted from the subordinate's knowledge of the social relationship. This type of indirect sexually harassing message is based on purposeful strategic ambiguity (Eisenberg, 1984). For sexually harassing messages, "the work context creates the guise, or the appearance that the message can be interpreted as professional, effective, or acceptable. However, the message has a level of abstraction that also allows the sender to create space for the sexualized interpretation" (Keyton & Menzie, 2007, p. 96). Such ambiguity is powerful in that many other types of workplace conversations are ambiguous as well (Paul & Strbiak, 1997).

A *personal relationship attempt* expands the work role to include some type of personal relationship. In the case of sexual harassment, the sender is using language to alter the relationship state (Hopper, 2003) into a sexual one. In the case of coercive interaction, the personal relationship attempt alters the supervisor-subordinate relationship from a state of request to demand and alters the tone of the relationship from positive to negative. The *unwanted by receiver* feature reflects the legal requirement of unwelcomeness (Paetzold & O'Leary-Kelly, 1993), or rejection of the overture. In coercive interaction, receivers reject the style of the interaction and the change of the relationship.

Ironically, dysfunctional or coercive interaction is very similar to that of sexual harassment. Sexual coercion is defined as the solicitation of sexual activity by promise of reward or threat of punishment (Stockdale, 1996). Simply removing *sexual* leaves: Coercion is defined as the solicitation of activity by promise of reward or threat of punishment. This definition is very similar to common dictionary definitions that coercion is the use of force to obtain compliance.

While evaluating employee perceptions and interpretations of verbal coercion — both sexual and nonsexual — is important, identifying the characteristics of both types of behaviors may result in more effective individual and organizational remedies. Because of the positioning of hierarchical and status differences, supervisor-subordinate relationships can be difficult to buffer, negotiate, or terminate. Requests made in sexually harassing messages are both instrumental (i.e., goal-directed on the part of the sender) and a type of compliance request (see Tracy, Craig, Smith, & Spisak, 1984). Requests (stated expectations) from supervisors to subordinates to participate in sexual conduct are often followed by punishment appeals, especially threats. Interestingly, coercive messages are also instrumental and intended to create compliance. They, too, may be followed by punishment or threats. Not only are the hierarchical and status differences real in organizational terms, these differences are reflected in linguistic features (Thimm et al., 2003, p. 544). Thus, the research question asks:

To what degree can individuals distinguish between verbal sexually-harassing and verbally coercive remarks?

METHODS

Stimulus

Based on the Keyton and Menzie (2004, 2007) theorems, videos scenes were developed that show a supervisor and subordinate in a work setting. During the development, the scenes were reviewed with human resource directors to gauge authenticity and compared to the language features of professional workplace conversation. Each scene had six turns: three for the supervisor who begins the conversation and three for the

subordinate who ends the conversation. Interaction sequences were selected for the videos based on the assertion that meaning is associated with a collection of sentences rather than derived from the sum of meanings of separate sentences (Becker, Bavelas, & Braden, 1961). For example, in interaction sequences, nouns and verbs can appear in a variety of combinations from which meaning can only be extracted in the whole. Scenarios between supervisor and subordinate were taped in four message conditions (professional friendly, flirting, dysfunctional coercive, and sexually harassing) x two manipulations (sex of harasser); only the dysfunctional coercive and sexually harassing data are reported here. Each scenario lasted about 30 seconds. As is typical of supervisor and subordinate interaction, the supervisor spoke more words than the subordinate in both conditions. In the sexual harassment condition, the supervisor spoke 84 words, and the subordinate spoke 48 words. In the dysfunctional/coercive condition, the supervisor spoke 70 words, and the subordinate spoke 26 words. Taping was done to simulate a generalized, professional office setting. The same actors, who wore business casual attire, appeared in all scenes. As a control, the same scripts were used for both sex manipulations. This choice was based on the literature showing no significant gender differences in communication between men and women (Canary & Dindia, 1998; Canary & Hause, 1993; Wood, 2002), the finding that the relationship between speaker sex and power is weak (Bradac & Mulac, 1984), and the EEOC statistics that demonstrate men are also victims of harassment (EEOC, 2007). Although nonverbals could not be completely controlled in the actors, gross motor movements and vocal qualities were rehearsed and were the same across sex of supervisor conditions (e.g., pointing at self, looking at subordinate, tone, taking pen from subordinate, leaning in chair, shaking head) To avoid order effects, the order of scenes varied across data collection sessions; each session was assigned one of the conditions.

The message content of the videos has been validated (Keyton & Menzie, 2004). To further identify nuances, the author and another coder used politeness constructs from Brown and Levinson (1987) to evaluate the similarities and dissimilarities between the sexually harassing and coercive scenes. From Brown's and Levinson's extensive list of verbal cues, coders found that supervisors in the sexually harassing scenes used more orders, questions, topic changes, hesitation, challenges, informal address, private codes, and presumptive requests more frequently and created greater verbal immediacy than the coercive scene. Alternately, the supervisors in the coercive scene used more hedges and disqualifications, and included more verbally aggressive, direct, and intense language. The two scenes were similar in that supervisors in both scenes used tag questions and similar tonal range. Both scenes lacked intensifiers, metaphors, interruption, nonfluencies, leading questions, formal address, hypercorrect grammar, apologies, empty adjectives, humor, disconfirmation, elaborated language, empathy, and disclaimers.

Participants

Two hundred and thirty-eight college students (50.22% female; *M* age = 22.42) with considerable work experience (52.38% work part time; 44.59% work full time), some who had participated in organizational training about sexual harassment (trained = 30.13%), consented to participate in a two-part study. About half (48.74%) participated in 2 (supervisor-subordinate or colleague-colleague) x 2 (sex of supervisor or initiating colleague) x 4 (professional, flirting, coercive, sexually harassing) x 4 (viewed and heard the dialogue, viewed the scene, heard the dialogue, read the transcript of the scene) experiment. After each scenario, participants were asked to respond to the question, “What is going on in this scene?” For brevity, the data of 66 participants who participated in the supervisor-subordinate condition were analyzed for part one of the study reported here; the data presentation was also limited to the coercive and sexually harassing conditions (data available from author). There were no significant demographic differences between this subset of participants and the larger sample.

Participants’ written responses were descriptive in nature, as if they were describing the scene to someone else. Responses, which ranged from single words to lengthy phrases, were coded for evidence of the language features theorized to be present. That is, participant descriptions of the sexual harassment scene were coded for the presence of supervisor’s presumed power, multiple meanings, sexualized meaning, and personal relationship attempt as well as the subordinate’s indication that the relationship attempt was unwanted. Participant descriptions of the coercive scene were coded for the presence of the supervisor’s presumed power, multiple meanings, and personal relationship attempt, as well as indication that the subordinate rebuked the coercive attempt.

For part two of the study, the other half of the participants (51.26%) did not view or hear the video scenes. They were given the word-for-word transcripts of the scenes and asked to underline any verbal words, phrases, or messages and any nonverbal cues they believed were sexually harassing. The same conditions were present. Again, for brevity, the data of those participants who participated in the supervisor-subordinate condition are reported here; the data presentation (*n* = 38) was also limited to the sexually harassing (male) and coercive (female) conditions; the corresponding data were incomplete. There were no significant demographic differences between this subset of participants and the larger sample.

RESULTS

Part one of this study is based on participants descriptions to the question, “What is going on here?” after they heard and saw the video scenes, heard the audio track of the scenes, saw the video track of the scene, or read the transcripts of the scenes. Table 1

Table 1
Total percentage of participants who provided description of language features

	Sexually harassing		Coercive	
	Male supervisor	Female supervisor	Male supervisor	Female supervisor
Presumed power	66.67% ^b	46.97% ^b	95.45% ^b	96.97% ^b
Multiple meanings	28.79% ^b	25.76% ^b	7.58%	1.5% ^b
Sexualized meaning	45.45%	68.18%	0	0
Relationship extension	1.5%	0	0	0
Unwanted	43.94%	54.55% ^b	57.58% ^a	31.82% ^{ab}

^a = significant z score between male and female supervisor within treatment conditions, $p < .05$

^b = significant z score between sexually harassing and coercive conditions within sex condition, $p < .05$

displays these categories and the percentage of participants who provided description of language features; some participants made multiple mentions in some categories.

To test proportion differences between supervisor sex within message conditions, and again between message conditions within sex conditions, z scores corrected for sample size were computed. No significant differences between proportions were found between male and female supervisors in the sexually harassing message condition. There was one significant sex difference within the coercive message condition. Participants more often identified the male supervisor's relationship attempt as unwanted as compared to the relationship attempt of the female supervisor. Several significant differences between message conditions were uncovered. Participants more often identified presumed power for male and female supervisors in the coercive message condition. Multiple meanings were more often identified for both male and female supervisors in the sexually harassing message condition. For the female supervisor condition, participants more frequently described unwantedness in the sexually harassing message condition.

To further explain participants' identification of the language features, Table 2 displays the percentage of participants who provided description of language features by sex of supervisor and treatment condition (audio video, audio only, video only, transcript). Small cell size does not allow for significant comparisons. Visual inspection, however, draws attention to considerably more variety across percentages within language feature categories in the sexually harassing condition as compared to the coercive condition. Presumed power was more prevalent in the audio video condition than other treatment conditions. Multiple meanings were described more often for the male supervisor in the written condition. The highest percentages for sexualized meaning were found in all treatment conditions except the written condition. Unwantedness was more prevalent in the

Table 2
Percentage of Participants by Condition that Provided Description of Language Features

	Sexually harassing								Coercive							
	Male supervisor				Female supervisor				Male supervisor				Female supervisor			
	AV	A	V	W	AV	A	V	W	AV	A	V	W	AV	A	V	W
Presumed power	88.24	64.71	53.33	58.82	88.23	41.18	33.33	23.53	100.00	94.11	100.00	94.11	100.00	100.00	93.33	88.24
Multiple meanings	5.89	29.41	33.33	47.06	11.76	29.41	33.33	29.41	11.76	5.55	13.33	0	0	5.55	0	0
Sexualized meaning	52.94	58.82	26.67	41.18	76.47	58.82	73.33	64.70	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Relationship extension	0	0	0	5.88	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unwanted	11.76	41.76	80.00	47.06	29.41	58.82	73.33	58.82	16.64	41.18	33.33	35.29	35.29	58.82	73.33	64.70

AV, Audio visual $n = 17$

A, Audio $n = 17$

V, Visual $n = 15$

W, Written $n = 17$

video only condition. This degree of variety is not seen for language features in the coercive condition except in the unwanted category.

Further explication of language features in sexually harassing and coercive conditions are found in participants' descriptions (see Table 3 for examples). Despite variety in reported percentages, participants' descriptions are very similar across sex and treatment conditions.

The second part of the study is based on participants' identification of sexually harassing words, phrases, and nonverbal cues from the written and nonverbally notated transcripts of the scenes. Sixty percent identified the relationship attempt "and me" that followed the male supervisor's statement of "we can discuss the way your new goals will help the department." Many participants also identified the male supervisor's smirk (57.89%) and self-gesture (68.42%) that accompanied that statement. Over 80% identified the male's statement, "if you know what I mean" as sexually harassing as it followed "No, you and I need to meet privately first." For the transcript of the female supervisor coercive scene, the most frequently identified sexually harassing cues were both nonverbals. Participants identified the female supervisor's shouting (18.4%) and disgusted chuckle (21.1%), which accompanied her statement: "Things could have been better. Not meeting your goals hurt the department."

Table 3

Descriptors of Language Features by Condition

	Sexually harassing		Coercive	
	Male supervisor	Female supervisor	Male supervisor	Female supervisor
Presumed power	AV, forceful A, pushy V, supervisor trying to force subordinate W, supervisor is intimidating	AV, doesn't ask reason for not making goal, rude A, supervisor is hinting at more than business V, supervisor was aggressor W, supervisor makes subordinate uneasy	AV, supervisor is confrontational A, supervisor is demanding, angry V, supervisor is angry, assertive W, supervisor is being firm	AV, supervisor raising voice, using force to make subordinate cooperate A, supervisor forceful V, supervisor dominated W, subordinate was harassed, but not sexually firm
Multiple meanings	AV, the way supervisor leans in and made small comments bothered me A, clearly wants to meet with subordinate for something besides talking about work V, supervisor wanted something, subordinate wouldn't give it to him W, supervisor interested in more than simply business matters	AV, supervisor is perhaps too forward A, suggestive V, looks like supervisor is trying to get something from him W, supervisor wants more out of it than work	AV, supervisor and subordinate not on the same page A, supervisor singled subordinate out and talked to her in a degrading manner V, supervisor was criticizing subordinate and she was confused as to why	A, the way the supervisor talked to the subordinate was very un-business-like
Sexualized meaning	AV, insinuation of sexual acts/practices A, sexually demanding V, sexual W, subordinate tried to fend off supervisor advances	AV, sexual acts to stay employed A, seductive and sexy V, it seemed like supervisor was definitely flirting with subordinate, but he seemed uncomfortable W, supervisors sounds like she wants to have sex with subordinate		
Relationship extension	W, subordinate reading too much into it; thinks supervisor is coming on to her			
Unwanted	AV, unwanted attention A, subordinate unwilling to submit to supervisor's request V, looked like supervisor was hitting on her and subordinate didn't want it W, uncomfortable	AV, subordinate seems pressured and tries to get out A, subordinate is respectful but protesting V, Supervisor wants something, she's very into him, he is not into her W, subordinate does not comply	AV, subordinate is not cooperative A, subordinate is unwilling to submit to his request V, subordinate is defensive W, subordinate gets scared and must do what he's told, regrettably	AV, subordinate doesn't react with his voice but insists on a deadline A, subordinate backs down, scared V, subordinate looked scared W, subordinate didn't know there was a problem

AV, Audio visual
A, Audio
V, Visual
W, Written

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to further validate Keyton and Menzie's (2004, 2007) theorems about language features of sexually harassing and coercive interaction, and to help identify distinctions between these two types of dysfunctional workplace conversations. To answer the research question, "To what degree can individuals distinguish between verbal sexually-harassing and verbally coercive remarks?" a two part study was conducted. Overall, the findings revealed that participants clearly made distinctions between the two types of dysfunctional workplace conversations. Across all treatment conditions, participants described the sexually harassing condition as containing sexualized meanings. Alternately, no descriptions of sexualized meanings were found in participants' descriptions about the coercive interactions.

This finding clarifies participants' interpretation of the scenes and is a first step in affirming the theorized difference between the two types of interaction. That is, participants were able to identify sexual content when it occurred and to not project it onto scenes where it did not. Although this seems obvious, our society's casual use of the word *harassment* to mean both sexual and nonsexual harassment can be confusing. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964. Yet *harassment* is also associated with domestic violence and orders of protection (King County, Washington, District Court, n.d.) and bullying of children (National Education Association, n.d.). Moreover, sexual harassment is often presented with other categories of discrimination, especially in organization policies (Johns Hopkins University, 2007). Many times, harassment is not labeled as sexual even though sexual harassment appears to be the primary topic (see enforcement guidelines from the EEOC, 1999).

No differences due to supervisor sex were found in the sexually harassing condition, and only one difference was found in the coercive condition. Thus, the scenes appear to have been effectively portrayed and differences between actors minimized. As expected, participants more frequently identified power in the coercive condition although presumed power was also present at a lower level in the sexually harassing conditions. This, coupled with findings that more multiple meanings were associated with the sexually harassing condition and sexualized meanings were only associated with this condition, suggests that coercion is more direct and explicit than power attempts associated with sexually harassing interaction. As demonstrated in participants' descriptions, sexualized meanings were implied rather than explicit. The sexually harassing scenes do not include explicit sexual language. Rather, as theorized and demonstrated in participants' identification of messages on the transcripts, sexual harassment can result from nuanced use of language in a context that allows the use of power moves and conceals the sender's instrumental and personal goals.

Across both sexually harassing and coercive conditions, participants failed to describe the embedded relationship extensions. Moving from the professional to personal domain is a hallmark of sexually harassing interaction. In coercive interaction, the relationship is made more power dependent and intense. Overall, about half of the participants did describe the subordinate as reacting negatively to supervisors in both sexually harassing and coercive message conditions. This type of interaction rejection was more frequently described for female subordinates in the coercive scene. For a receiver to reject interaction implies that a type of interaction was offered that was not acceptable.

Limitations and Future Research

This two-part study set out to empirically validate Keyton and Menzie's (2004, 2007) theorems about language features of sexually harassing and coercive interaction, and to help identify distinctions between these two types of dysfunctional workplace conversations. Obvious limitations were the small sample size and the use of undergraduate students, albeit those who work, as research participants. Although many researchers use undergraduates in studies of workplace sexual harassment, Keyton and Rhodes (1999) have found that students who work do not identify sexually harassing interaction to the degree of employees who are more vested in their jobs.

The small sample size hindered the analysis of treatment conditions. In developing the conditions, the expectation was that the audio video and written conditions would be the most robust as participants had greater accessibility to the combined set of verbal and nonverbal cues. That no consistent patterns were found among treatment conditions of descriptions of sexually harassing language features suggests that individuals respond to different cues. Some people may be more sensitized to verbal cues or nonverbal cues than others, perhaps based on their experience with sexual harassment. Remland (2006) argued that organizational status is often displayed in immediacy nonverbal behaviors, such as touching, staring, and positioning one's self close to the subordinate, and that such behaviors can be interpreted in multiple ways — as dominance displays of legitimate authority or as sexual interest or sexual harassment. Untangling the role of verbal and nonverbal cues would be particularly useful in sexual harassment research.

Conclusion

As Keyton and Menzie (2007) reported, affirmative action office and human resources personnel complain that victims of sexual harassment can seldom remember what the harasser said. Participants in all message conditions also provided generalized descriptions of the interaction; none identified specifically what messages were sexually harassing. In the sessions in which participants had the opportunity to mark directly on the script, only

two messages were identified as sexually harassing. Is this enough to identify sexual harassment? Given the percentage of participants who described the scenes as sexual (or seductive), it appears that victims make decisions that sexual harassment occurred on very few verbal cues — demonstrating the power of language, the moderating effect of nonverbals, and the way in which sexually harassing messages can be embedded in workplace conversation.

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INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION: REFLECTION AND EXPECTATION

SHUANG XIE

This essay is a critical analysis of the current state of intercultural education, aimed at locating problems and suggesting possible solutions. Based on a comprehensive investigation of the extant intercultural theories and conceptualizations of intercultural competence, I find that intercultural education has been inappropriately reduced to individuals while at the same time ignoring (consciously or unconsciously) the power relations embedded in intercultural communication. Given that there are power differences in intercultural encounters, it is urgent for scholars and educators to acknowledge their existence and to teach intercultural communication in the context of social power. In this sense, intercultural education needs a new direction, and intercultural competence requires reconceptualization. I propose that critical pedagogy can help intercultural education deal with the social power relations in intercultural communication. To the end, I invite scholars to be reflexive in (re)theorizing intercultural communication because theory is an essential source of direction in education and practices.

Keywords: intercultural communication, intercultural education, intercultural competence, power difference, critical pedagogy

Martin and Nakayama (2004) noted that “power is pervasive and plays an enormous, though often hidden, role in intercultural communication interactions” (p. 108). Indeed, a glance at the current state of intercultural communication reveals that as part of globalized

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competition, mass human migration, endless local conflicts and hostilities, and even daily life, intercultural communication never takes place in a power vacuum. In these areas, social injustice, inequalities, and differentiation are the order of the day. In short, power as “control over the distribution of desired resources by virtue of one’s structural given position in a social organization” (Forte, 1998, p. 30) is present at every level of intercultural communication. Power relations, “determined largely by social institutions and roles” (Martin and Nakayama, 2004, p. 108), do exist between cultures. As Martin and Nakayama (2004) stated, power is historically embodied in intercultural encounters: “We are not equal in our intercultural encounter, nor can we ever be equal” (p. 123).

Unfortunately, however, power has been comparatively muted in intercultural communication research, education, and training. As Gudykunst (2002) pointed out, the issue of power has not been incorporated into many theories of intercultural communication constructed to date. To some extent, the academic research, education, training, and practices of intercultural communication are actually reinforcing the dynamic of power instead of diminishing it. In this article, I support my viewpoint with my own experience as a trainee of intercultural communication.

When I received an opportunity to pursue my Master’s degree in the United States, I registered for a course named “Cultivation of Intercultural Competence.” This course was designed for people traveling to English-speaking countries (mainly the United Kingdom and the United States) to study or to work. I studied very hard because my trainer told me that my success in another country would depend enormously on my intercultural competence. In every class, the trainer emphasized the importance of intercultural competence as essential not only to our successful intercultural communication but also to “successful accommodation into the mainstream culture.” I asked what the mainstream culture was. My trainer answered that “mainstream culture” in the United States mainly referred to White, middle-class culture. Thus, I learned about the diverse contexts for and differences within the White, middle-class culture. But knowledge about the mainstream culture would not be sufficient criteria for being interculturally competent. Rather, my trainer said that I also needed to learn how to apply the knowledge to reality by adjusting my communication behaviors and styles to better accommodate and assimilate into this culture.

I believe my story will not surprise intercultural scholars and educators because the course I had is not a unique one. In the 1950s and 1960s, scholars, educators, and trainers of intercultural communication started calling for adaptation, assimilation, and accommodation. Since then, the whole system of intercultural education, training, and advising has emphasized intercultural competence as the key to adaptation, assimilation, and accommodation. For decades, this system has tended to give precedence to knowledge of the target culture, which has been translated into *intercultural competence*. Under this system, individuals’ intercultural competence would determine the success of their

intercultural communication. To reverse this logic, any failed intercultural communication should be attributed to the *intercultural incompetence* of involved individuals. That is, it is individuals' disabilities in language and cultural knowledge that leads to the failed communication.

When talking about cultures based on nation-states, scholars have tended to generalize the culture of one group – in most cases, the culture of the mainstream group – to represent the entire national culture. For instance, in my intercultural communication class, the White, middle-class culture was perceived to be American. Cultures of minority groups such as African-Americans were ignored. For another example, when I taught Chinese culture in a non-Chinese-speaking country, I found that people tended to use the culture of the Han group to represent Chinese culture as a whole. In fact, China is composed of 56 ethnic groups. Han is only one of them, but it is often perceived to be the majority group while other groups are labeled as the minority. Guilherme (2002) suggested that a cause of this tendency may be that a critical attitude is more pronounced when people are dealing with their home culture but is less evident when it concerns the teaching or learning of a foreign culture. These notions of intercultural competence present problems at two levels. First, assuming that the sojourners should adapt themselves to the target culture endangers the integrity of their original cultural identities. Second, it suppresses the cultural diversity within target cultures by ignoring the non-mainstream cultures.

Through reflecting on my lived experience as well as the past and current state of intercultural education, I raise two concerns: (a) Intercultural education has been inappropriately reduced to individuals in that whether the intercultural communication can be successful is believed to depend largely on individual competence, and (b) intercultural education has been ignoring the power relations embedded in intercultural communication. In this paper, I discuss and analyze these two problems, drawing on an analysis of intercultural theories, practices of intercultural education, and definitions of intercultural competence. I suggest that we recognize intercultural communication in the context of social power. Consequently, I propose a critical direction to address what kind of intercultural competence and what kind of intercultural education we need so as not to facilitate social and cultural/intercultural inequality. In this sense, education of intercultural communication should transcend the cultivation of individual competence to reflect on its mission and pay attention to the power relations in the context of intercultural communication.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION THEORIES

Since intercultural theories function as frameworks for education and training, I allot the first part of this discussion to some substantive intercultural theories that aspire to explain or predict intercultural communication education and conceptualizations of intercultural competence.

Gudykunst (2002) summarized 15 theories and divided them into five categories: “theories focusing on effective outcomes, theories focusing on accommodation or adaptation, theories focusing on identity negotiation, theories focusing on communication networks, and theories focusing on acculturation or adjustment” (p. 180). Among these 15 intercultural theories, Orbe’s (1998) co-cultural theory seems to be the only one that addresses the power inequality in intercultural encounters. Gudykunst (2002) admitted that most of the existing theories do not touch upon power factors, especially those theories that function as theoretical foundations for intercultural education. For example, Kim’s (1995, 2001) cross-cultural adaptation theory, Cupach and Imahori’s (1993) identity management theory, and Ting-Toomey’s (2005) identity negotiation theory have overlooked the power issue. These theories have placed much weight on the individual level and while ignoring the two cultures’ difference in power.

Kim’s (1995, 2001) cross-cultural adaptation theory resulted from her 25 years of research on immigrants to the United States. Ting-Toomey’s (2005) identity negotiation theory originated from face-negotiation theory. Kim’s theory attempted to explain and predict immigrants’ process of adapting themselves to the host culture. Ting-Toomey’s theory was aimed at explaining how people negotiate their identities in intercultural interactions. Ting-Toomey assumed that individuals from minority groups need to obtain culture-sensitive knowledge and competent identity-based communication skills. In this way, they can have the feeling of being understood, respected, and being valued when communicating with individuals from majority groups, or as Ting-Toomey phrased it, the *larger culture*. Perhaps these two theories are comparatively scientific for explaining certain processes of intercultural communication; however, I question their assumptions. Both theories assume that individuals who are not from the mainstream or the host culture should adapt themselves to it. In this sense, the culture difference is suppressed, diversity is not adequately respected, and the individuals from the non-mainstream groups are oppressed because they lose their cultural identity in the process of adaptation.

Cupach and Imahori (1993) applied interpersonal competence to intercultural communication and proposed the identity management theory. Under this theory, interpersonal communication competence includes the ability to negotiate mutually acceptable identities in interaction. Cupach and Imahori believed that this applies to the context of intercultural communication as well. However, I argue that intercultural communication cannot be viewed merely as interpersonal communication occurring in an intercultural context. It is a social act in terms of people acting with each other based upon the cultures they represent. In intercultural interactions, people are not only trying to understand each other, but are also acting with and upon each other. They do not act individually, but interactively and then socially. The society in which we live is interdependent; we depend upon one another, we learn from shared experiences, and we learn that existing externally has internal impacts and vice versa. Thus, I argue that

considering intercultural communication as interpersonal communication in an intercultural context is too simplistic.

Gudykunst's (2002) summary of theories of intercultural communication can be considered comprehensive, but it does not cover Casmir's (1999) theory of third-culture building. Third-culture building, according to Casmir, is "the construction of a mutually beneficial interactive environment in which individuals from two different cultures can function in a way beneficial to all involved" (p. 92). It is a dialogical process by which a third culture or a *betweenness* representing mutuality can be understood, supported, and defended. This theory emphasized mutuality that could only be reached by both parties' adjustments. In this sense, this theory is more descriptive and progressive than Ting-Toomey's (2005), Kim's (1995, 2001), and Cupach and Imahori's (1993) theories. However, it is still restricted to the individual level. Thus, I doubt the possibility of this "mutually beneficial, interactive environment." How much can an individual do to facilitate this mutuality when a power difference exists between two cultures? I argue that Casmir's model of third-culture building is an ideal, utopian one that overlooks inequalities existing between cultures.

In summary, most intercultural communication theories to date are still circumscribed to the level of individuals. Arguably, this is one of the reasons why structural issues, such as power, have been absent in intercultural education/training. Gudykunst (2002) pointed out that, so far, all intercultural theories arose in the United States. In other words, these theories were created by scholars located in more powerful and more dominant groups. This could account for the invisibility of power in the construction of theories and educational practices in intercultural communication. I argue that intercultural communication scholars' ignorance of cultural inequality and power in their construction of theories is misleading intercultural education and conceptualizations of intercultural competence.

ANALYSIS OF CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

For decades, the cultivation of intercultural competence has been a primary goal of education and training in intercultural communication. The term *intercultural communication competence* was initially proposed by researchers interested in overseas technological specialists and Peace Corps volunteers in the 1950s and the 1960s (e.g., Gardener, 1962; Hoselitz, 1954). Since then, scholars have conceptualized intercultural competence from a variety of perspectives. Unfortunately, almost all definitions restrict intercultural competence to personal skills and abilities.

Several scholars lay emphasis on appropriateness and effectiveness. This seems to be the main trend in defining intercultural competence. For example, Spitzberg (2000) conceptualized intercultural communication competence as "an impression that behavior is

appropriate and effective in a given context” (p. 375). Martin and Nakayama (2004) defined intercultural communication competence as “the ability to behave effectively and appropriately in interacting across cultures” (p. G-6). For Bennett and Bennett (2004), intercultural communication competence is “the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts” (p. 149).

Other scholars highlighted the individuals’ psychological adjustment. For example, Kim (1991) stated that intercultural communication competence is the “overall internal capacity of an individual to manage key challenging features of intercultural communication: namely, cultural differences and familiarity, intergroup posture, and the accompanying experience of stress” (p. 259). Cupach and Imahori (1993) drew from Ting-Toomey’s (1993) identity negotiation theory to note that communication competence involves successful mutual negotiation of identities in interaction (as cited in Imahori & Cupach, 2005). Chen and Starosta (2004) attempted to give a more encompassing definition:

First, it requires an individual to unfold and expand the personal characteristics, including flexibility, sensitivity, open-mindedness, and motivation to promote creativity, learning, and innovation in the process of communication among cultural diversities. Second, it requires the cognitive ability to map one’s own and other cultures. The acquisition of this cultural knowledge functions to reduce situational ambiguity and uncertainty in dialoguing with people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Finally, it requires a set of behavior skills, including language ability, behavioral flexibility, interaction management, identity maintenance, and relationship cultivation, to adjust oneself to the changes of new patterns of interaction among cultural diversities. (pp. 7-8)

This definition looks more comprehensive because it touches upon individuals’ multiple cognitive, behavioral, and personal abilities. Wiseman (2002) makes a similar attempt to summarize a variety of abilities constituting intercultural competence. He conceptualized intercultural competence in three categories: knowledge, motivation, and skills. Chen and Starosta’s and Wiseman’s conceptualizations seem more complete on the surface, but they did not go further than previous conceptualizations because they still focused on individual abilities. Thus, no matter from what perspective, most conceptualizations propose that intercultural competence equates to certain skills or abilities acquired by individuals. According to Klyukanov (2005), intercultural communication competence enables successful intercultural communication. But merely acquiring composite personal abilities cannot guarantee successful intercultural communication. Intercultural communication may take place between individual persons, but it cannot be considered simply as interpersonal communication between two persons from different cultures. As I stated earlier, intercultural communication is a social act in which people act with and upon each other. They act as individuals but also interact socially. Thus, if

intercultural communication is a social activity, its sequential meaning is also social. Moreover, social activity is bound to power; thus, intercultural communication can never take place in a power vacuum. As Martin and Nakayama (2004) write, “power is ... the remnants of the history that leave cultural groups in particular positions. We are not equal in our intercultural encounter, nor can we ever be equal” (p. 123).

To review definitions of intercultural competence to date, most of them are limited to personal skills/abilities with a lack of awareness of the context of power relations. Because of this narrow view of intercultural communication competence, intercultural training/education inevitably neglects power inequalities. Moreover, many definitions focus on appropriateness and effectiveness. As to how to evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of intercultural communication, I find that the inventories or instruments constructed so far are based mainly on the rules or norms of the host and dominant cultures. In other words, the criteria for appropriateness and effectiveness are set up by groups who hold power over other groups. Thus, the current research on intercultural competence has buttressed structural power, and scholars and educators have broadened the imbalances between the East and West, the North and South, males and females, and the majority and the minority.

AN ATTEMPT AT RECONCEPTUALIZING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

Given these arguments, it is not appropriate or fair to reduce intercultural communication to the individual level and to overlook the power factors. Thus, the extant conceptualizations of intercultural competence need to transcend individualist reductionism. The existence of power factors, which deserve to be addressed in the research and education of intercultural communication. Rather than subvert the current conceptualizations of *intercultural communication competence* completely, I have applied some parts of the present conceptualizations and tried to develop them.

Giroux, in an interview with Guilherme (2006), said intercultural competence must be linked to dynamics of power, which are ways of engaging differences and exclusions formed in a historical process of struggle and negotiation. Based on Giroux’s suggestion and my own analysis, I propose that to be a competent intercultural communicator, one should conflate skills and awareness. Thus, instead of limiting intercultural competence to individual *abilities*, I instead would consider it an epistemology or a philosophy regarding how to view diversity, differences, and (in)equalities in society, and how to perceive intercultural communication as a whole. Besides skills and abilities, intercultural competence also needs to include ethics, courage, and a broader worldview. Intercultural communication competence should involve a hope for justice and equality, courage for transformation, and respect and even desire for diversity. It should also mean a capacity for

critical comprehension and interpretation of cultural differences so as not to make them a facility of domination, exclusion, or alienation. As Giroux suggests, intercultural competence should serve as “modes of critical understanding in which dialogue and interpretation are connected to modes of intervention in which cultural differences can be viewed as an asset rather than a threat to democracy” (p. 173).

In short, intercultural communication competence should incorporate Habermasian *critical awareness*, which is aimed at social transformation. Critical awareness, in itself, is not sufficient to bring change to the unequal power structures between cultures. But it is an essential first step. Thus, it deserves to be a new competency in intercultural communicators. To foster this critical awareness, intercultural scholars and educators need a new vision and direction.

NEW/CRITICAL DIRECTIONS FOR INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

According to Chen and Starosta (2004), the mission of intercultural training and education is to broaden and expand the thinking of the closed-minded by eliminating the filters about other cultures: “Intercultural education/training can equip individuals with a mental ability to scan the environment in a broad perspective and always consciously expect cultural impacts so that personal goals can be achieved in a harmonious way” (p. 9). I agree with Chen and Starosta that *other cultures* should be evident in intercultural communication. However, to my disappointment, Chen and Starosta are also circumscribing the mission of intercultural education to personal abilities. The mission of intercultural education/training should go beyond the individual level to deal with issues of social structure. That is, the mission of intercultural education/training should involve much more than equipping individuals with certain abilities. The purpose of intercultural communication is not simply to achieve *personal goals*. Under the conditions of cultural inequality, it is doubtful that *other cultures* can be represented equitably in intercultural communication, nor can personal goals be achieved in a *harmonious way*.

Some scholars have already realized this defect in intercultural education/training. Pusch (2004) criticized intercultural training for having focused too much on individual competence: “The field [intercultural training] has focused more on individual competence than on systems and their transformation and that these two dimensions await a fuller negotiation” (p. 31). With regard to the future direction of intercultural education, he suggested that scholars place intercultural training in the context of globalization. He argued that in this globalized context, intercultural education should be broadened to prepare people to live in a global, multicultural society. Although Pusch realized where the problem lies, he failed to suggest a distinct direction for intercultural education.

Hill, Dixon, and Goss (2000) went further by arguing that critical cultural issues merit sizable consideration in intercultural classrooms. According to the authors, intercultural

communication is complex. One of the goals of intercultural communication should be to help students understand the complexity of intercultural relations. To achieve this goal, educators need to increase students' cultural awareness because they are cultural participants. Essentially, they are not only individuals acting on the basis of a certain culture, but they are also participating in constructing this culture. Individuals' cultural awareness means they should not only be aware of cultural differences but of power differences as well. Thus, Hill, Dixon, and Goss asserted that "if we privilege one perspective over another, then we are restricting our potential for understanding diversity" (p. 191).

With this in mind, I propose a new, critical direction necessary for intercultural education and underscore the urgency of involving critical pedagogy in intercultural education.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

The widely recognized forefather of critical pedagogy, Freire (1970), stated that teachers cannot be neutral because they are always providing students with their own reading of both the word and the world, and teachers must realize and acknowledge this. Therefore, teachers are not only delivering or imparting knowledge; they actually are constructing knowledge as well. Critical pedagogy is an alternative allowing educators to function as transformative agents, deconstructing and replacing traditional pedagogy with more progressive approaches to teaching and conducting research (Hendrix, Jackson, & Warren, 2003). In addition, critical pedagogy focuses on education as a whole, rather than education as a series of curricula, teacher-student interactions, academic plans of study, or institutional goals. To go further, instead of treating individuals as automatons, critical pedagogy perceives individuals as social actors or cultural participants (Hill, Dixon, & Goss, 2000). People not only perform the culture but are also responsible for constructing the culture in which they live. In this sense, students or trainees of intercultural communication are functioning as creators of the orders or relations of the cultural groups involved.

Giroux proposed two terms: *language of critique* and *language of possibility*. The critical pedagogy aims at blending these two together in education (as cited in Guilherme, 2006). Language of critique involves a deconstructive view of social reality and a challenge to fixed interpretative frames. It calls for teachers and students to construe their cultural identity and realize the Others' identity. Also, language of critique demands that teachers and students question their roles as citizens in society. Language of possibility urges the exploration of alternatives to engage social change. To merge a language of critique and a language of possibility means to investigate the social/cultural power in our society and to explore the potential for improvement. Thus, the goal of critical pedagogy is social

transformation. It ultimately aims at eliminating social inequalities that may have been created in and by history.

INCORPORATING CRITICAL PEDAGOGY INTO INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

In an interview with Guilherme (2006), Giroux discussed the necessity of introducing the critical paradigm into intercultural education. He argued that intercultural education must be linked with dynamics of power. Some scholars (e.g., Deturk, 2001; Guilherme, 2003; Shi-Xu, 2001) agreed with Giroux about the absence of power factors in intercultural education/training. They suggested drawing on critical pedagogy to deal with this deficiency. Guilherme (2002, 2003, 2006) has written voluminously on this issue. Guilherme (2003) stated that intercultural communication is never neutral and, therefore, requires critical pedagogy, which can deal with radical concerns and the abuse of power in intercultural context. The combination of critical pedagogy and intercultural education/training makes it possible to critically perceive an individual's *self* and *other* culture and the intercultural interaction. Some scholars (e.g., Shi-Xu, 2001) also offered the criticism that in the field of intercultural training/education, there is little scholarship addressing it as a whole system.

While these scholars advocated critical pedagogy in intercultural education, several others have questioned this approach. Thus, whether to integrate critical pedagogy with intercultural education is still controversial. Some scholars' doubts are not about the necessity of critical pedagogy but its applicability in intercultural classrooms (e.g., Ball, 2000). Critical pedagogy advocates have already started to address how to admit critical pedagogy into the intercultural classroom (e.g., Deturk, 2001; Marri, 2005; Shi-Xu, 2001). Many scholars touched upon the significance of acknowledgement of social power. This may be the first step toward applying critical pedagogy to intercultural communication. Giroux and McLaren (2001, as cited in Jokikokko, 2005) stated that to acknowledge group difference has been considered essential for educational equality and justice, as it seems that cultural diversity entails unequal educational opportunities and outcomes.

Deturk (2001) suggested that instructors should address oppression and the social power dynamic at individual, group, and societal levels. Students need to be shown that acknowledgement of social power is a prerequisite for realistic intercultural encounters. Shi-Xu (2001) also urged intercultural theorists and educators to cease overlooking the dynamics of power because only in this way can we stop legitimating, consolidating, and perpetuating the existing hegemony in intercultural communication. Shi-Xu specifically suggested a feminist paradigm for intercultural communication. It is also crucial for students to realize that they, as cultural participants or social actors, are partially responsible for construction of power relations between cultural groups.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I explored the current intercultural theories and conceptualizations of intercultural competence because these two areas influence the education and training of intercultural communication. Addressing the oversight of structural power in the field of intercultural communication, I proposed that we need to transcend the individual skills or abilities bias to reconceptualize intercultural competence as an epistemology or philosophy regarding the context of social power; thus, we need to integrate critical awareness. To investigate how to incorporate the critical factors into intercultural education, I suggested the marriage of intercultural communication and critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy can provide guidelines to understanding intercultural communication as politics, and in so doing, to disclose the power differences embedded in it. Also, such an approach would enable educators and scholars to address the intercultural education as a whole system.

I have attempted to reconceptualize intercultural competence. However, I have offered only a rough outline of this direction. Therefore, future scholarship should be more specific about the new definition of intercultural competence. With regard to incorporating critical pedagogy into intercultural education, I stop at the acknowledgement of the existence of power in intercultural encounters. It is urgent for scholars and educators to investigate the possible range of specific approaches. Thus, I invite scholars to reflect on intercultural studies and education from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Rethinking intercultural communication merits priority. Fassett and Warren (2007) noted that research is pedagogy and pedagogy is also research. Thus, to guide intercultural education into a critical paradigm, we need to start (re)theorizing. Recalling that Gudykunst (2002) pointed out the American provenance of intercultural communication theories, scholars from other cultures with other perspectives should endeavor to contribute new theories.

Starosta and Chen (2005) suggested that the field of intercultural communication has faced a critical turn and a paradigm shift. Based on my readings of both intercultural studies and critical studies, I found that critical studies has started to pay attention to intercultural communication, but intercultural communication seems unready to welcome critical studies. Consequently, intercultural scholars must rethink and reflect on the paradigm of their own field.

Many people assert that competent intercultural communication should be a process toward eliminating differences and enhancing mutual understanding. Is it realistic to consider mutual understanding as the goal of intercultural communication? If so, how does one reach this goal with the existence of power differences between cultural groups? How does one reach mutual understanding, yet at the same time, respect diversity and difference? Miller (1992) showed how social structures uphold the privileges and worldview of dominant groups, or those who have the most social power. These groups perpetuate their power in part through daily communication that universalizes their experience. Viewpoints

of minority and subordinate groups are muted in a number of ways. This is exactly what intercultural studies, education, and advising have been doing. As intercultural scholars and educators, we can begin to address these questions and remedy these problems immediately.

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Marginalizing Difference in Personal Relationships: A Dialogic Analysis of How Partners Talk about Their Differences

Leslie A. Baxter, Megan Foley & Matthew Thatcher

Forty-one friendship and romantic pairs engaged in conversations of at least 30 minutes on the topic of their similarities and differences. A dialogic analysis of the transcripts revealed that partners' talk functioned to marginalize difference through four primary communicative practices: the silencing of difference, marking discomfort with difference, negatively valencing difference, and positioning difference as relationally distancing. To the extent that partners were able to frame their differences as positive, they were communicatively positioned as useful in the service of self: allowing self-autonomy, facilitating self-growth, and providing instrumental resources. Overall, findings suggest that interpersonal talk between relationship partners is ideologically steeped in the discourse of both expressive and utilitarian individualism. The implications of marginalizing difference are discussed.

Keywords: difference, similarity, dialogism, individualism, Bakhtin

“Share similarities, celebrate differences” –*Banner in a 5th grade classroom*

The banner that appeared in the elementary classroom of the senior author's daughter was part of a larger wall space devoted to similar posters and banners that centered on the theme

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of “relating to others.” The banner’s two clauses give voice to two different discourses of relating, one which values similarity, and one in which difference is valued. The dominant discursive motif of individualism in contemporary mainstream American culture privileges similarity (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Sampson, 1993). Yet, as this banner illustrates, there is another discourse circulating in mainstream American society in which difference, and Other, are to be celebrated on their own terms. The issue examined in this qualitative study is how the discourse of difference gets communicatively enacted in the relationship talk of young-adult friends and romantic partners.

From a dialogic perspective (Bakhtin, 1981), all of communication is the ongoing interplay of discourses, or systems of meaning. Thus, interpersonal communication, like all discursive forms, is “ideologically freighted” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 333). Yet, relational communication scholars historically have held an internal bias in their research (Baxter, 1998). In particular, they have often presumed that communication between relationship partners is exclusively an internal, psychological matter in which communicative acts reflect each partner’s motivations and goals. Relatively neglected is a view that relationships are embedded in societal and cultural contexts, whose discourses are deployed in the meaning-making between partners. By contrast, a premise of the current dialogic study is that personal relationships swim in social seas. The talk of relationship parties implicates broader discourses that circulate in the culture. This study focuses on how the discourses that value similarity and difference are implicated in the relational communication of friends and romantic partners.

THE DISCOURSES OF SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE

The discourse of similarity is one strand in a more complex system of meaning — the discourse of individualism. In his efforts to understand the “habits of the heart” of early America, Alexis de Tocqueville (1835/1969) first employed the term “individualism,” and several subsequent scholars have elaborated on the concept. Sampson (1993), borrowing from Macpherson (1962), referred to it as possessive individualism, a belief that the person is a self-contained monad, “the owner of one’s own capacities and self” (p. 33). Within the discourse of possessive individualism, the relationship between self and Other is negative; Other is a threat, a risk, to one’s own autonomy of action.

Other-as-threat is the implicit logic that scaffolds much of the current scholarship on interpersonal communication in personal relationships. According to this logic, for example, closeness and intimacy with another require sacrifice of one’s own autonomy and independence. Closeness and autonomy are conceptualized as zero-sum oppositions in which autonomy is thought to undermine closeness and vice versa (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Mashek & Sherman, 2004). Prospective relationship parties appear to proceed toward intimacy with measured incrementalism because of the risks and costs associated with

interdependence with Other (e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973). Within the logic of possessive individualism, selves are pre-formed prior to relationship formation and are merely revealed, not constituted, in interaction with others (Baxter, 2004). Within the logical fold of possessive individualism, relating with Other is guided by a goal of self-protection. This self-protection involves the maintenance of a clear boundary between self and other.

Bellah and colleagues (1985) discussed the discourse of individualism by weaving together its two constituent strands, which they referred to as expressive individualism and utilitarian individualism. Common to both strands is a core cultural belief in “an autonomous self” (p. 65). Expressive individualism centers on exploration and expression of oneself. Expressive individualism idealizes an autonomous self who acts free of constraints and conventions. Bellah et al. viewed similarity as central to the project of expressive individualism. They introduced the notion of the “lifestyle enclave” (p. 71), the bubble of homogeneous others with whom each of us chooses to associate. This network of social relations “celebrates the narcissism of similarity” (p. 72) by bringing together those who are socially, economically, and culturally like oneself.

Paradoxically, the discourse of expressive individualism breeds difference; key to claims of expressive individuality is uniqueness. However, one person’s uniqueness is another’s difference. The discursive adage to “Do your own thing” celebrates individual uniqueness but becomes problematic under conditions of interdependence in which one person’s difference is regarded as a challenge to self.

Utilitarian individualism values the vigorous pursuit of self-interest with a goal of individual self-improvement and achievement (Bellah et al., 1985). Sampson (1993) argued that difference can at best gain a modest foothold in this discourse only through its utilitarian serviceability—what he calls the serviceable Other (p. 5). Other is not celebrated on its own terms but rather understood only in reference to Self. In the context of the epigram with which this essay began, difference is to be celebrated only to the extent that it is useful to Self in fulfilling Self’s needs.

Relatively muted in the mainstream discursive American landscape is a celebration of difference, and Other, on their own terms. Of course, any number of social groups that occupy marginalized positions relative to the dominant white, middle-class, tradition have long argued for the importance of difference on its own terms (e.g., Morrison, 1992). Humanistic traditions, such as those represented by Martin Buber (1958), among others, similarly advance a scholarly argument for the value of respecting “Thou” on its own merits.

THE STUDY OF SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE IN RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION

For over four decades, relational communication scholars have overwhelmingly emphasized the study of partner similarity in personal relationships, to the relative neglect

of partner differences (e.g., Byrne, 1971; McCroskey & McCain, 1974; McCroskey, Richmond, & Daly, 1975). We know that similarity on a variety of features — especially attitudes, values, demographic characteristics, and dispositions — is exceedingly important to relationship parties as they initiate, develop, and sustain personal relationships (for reviews, see Baxter & West, 2003; Yun, 2002). Thus, research findings appear to support the expressive individualistic attachment to similarity.

Scholars know considerably less about the role of differences. Compared to similarity research, difference research is relatively scant. Byrne and Lambert (1971) suggested early on that difference need not be damaging to a relationship, and early research on need complementarity or compatibility (e.g., Schutz, 1960; Winch, 1958) found that complementary differences could be positive for relationship parties. Wood, Dendy, Dordek, Germany, and Varallo (1994) interviewed marital partners about the role of difference in their marriage, finding that they could identify both positive and negative aspects of difference. Felmlee's (1998) research program in fatal attractions suggests that partners may initially be attracted to prospective partners because they are different from oneself, yet those very differences can later come back to haunt the parties and prove fatal to the relationship. Baxter and West (2003) asked relationship partners jointly to reflect on their positive and negative similarities and differences. Although partners were able to identify a few negatively functioning similarities and both positively and negatively functioning differences, the data were dominated by the identification of various bases of similarity that were perceived to function positively. Although less salient than similarities, differences were clearly a source of ambivalence for these participants.

The current study employs the data generated for the Baxter and West (2003) study but with a different focus. Whereas the 2003 study examined the *content* of partner talk in order to identify the bases of positive and negative similarities and differences (e.g., attitudes, interests, dispositions) and their frequencies, the current study focuses qualitatively on *how* partners talked about differences, compared to how they talked about similarities, rather than *what* those differences were. Existing research suggests that, compared to similarity, difference is regarded with greater ambivalence. However, we have no insight into the role of communicative practices in managing differences. Because relationship parties regard their differences as potentially problematic, they doubtless engage in communicative work to manage, contain, or otherwise control them. Thus, the general research question that guided this study is this: In what ways do relationship partners talk about their differences compared to their similarities? The study is framed in Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism, given our theoretical argument that partner talk about their similarities and differences is embedded in larger socio-cultural discourses in which similarity and difference are not equally valued.

THEORETICAL MOORINGS: DIALOGISM

Russian cultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism views communication as the interanimation of different, often competing, discourses or ideologies. Meaning emerges from this interplay of discourses. However, discourses are rarely positioned on an equal playing field. Centripetal discourses, those with authoritative force, are centered through meaning-making. They struggle with centrifugal discourses, those that occupy more peripheral or marginalized discursive locations. In light of the above discussion, the discourse of similarity seems to be positioned as a dominant discourse that interpenetrates with the less dominant discourse of difference.

In his discussion of double-voicedness, Bakhtin (1984) provided some preliminary insights into how centrifugal discourses can be communicatively engaged by speakers. Stated simply, Bakhtin described a loose continuum that extends from complete monologue at one endpoint ("single-voiced discourse," p. 189) to idealized dialogue between equally-positioned discourses, which anchors the other endpoint. Complete monologue is an authoritative discourse so dominant that other competing discourses are virtually absent. Authoritative discourse "demands our unconditional allegiance" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 343); it is fused with tradition and authority that give it taken-for-granted status as truth. In the context of talk about similarities and differences, authoritative discourse would feature an inability of partners to admit to themselves that they are different in any way; difference talk thus would be eliminated in a totalizing homogeneity between partners.

The other end of the continuum captures Bakhtin's idealized state of dialogue, the free-flowing interplay of different discourses, none of which is granted dominant status over the other. In dialogue, equal discourses engage in open and fluid give-and-take, with meanings emergent in the interplay of different value-laden perspectives. In the context of talk about similarities and differences, idealized dialogue would feature a balanced reflexivity by relationship parties in which both similarity and difference would be equally valued. This idealized dialogue probably best captures the spirit of the opening epigram to the study.

The interactions of everyday life are usually somewhere between total monologue and idealized dialogue. They sit in the prosaics of centripetal-centrifugal struggle, described above. Such interactions, positioned in the middle of Bakhtin's (1984) double-voiced continuum, can take diverse forms which vary in their explicitness. Fairclough (2003) usefully summarized three ways in which centripetal discourses reproduce the marginalized status of centrifugal discourses. The first is an accentuation of difference in the form of conflict-laden utterances, in which marginalized discourses are explicitly recognized as worthy of response. This response is a polemic one that functions to defeat all but the centripetal discourse. The second is also explicit in its recognition of a centrifugal discourse; however, utterances function to seek resolution of the discrepancy between competing

discourses, albeit in a manner that still centers the centripetal discourse. For example, utterances which assert that a centrifugal discourse has already been taken into account in the centripetal discourse function to accomplish resolution in favor of the centripetal discourse. The third form of double-voicedness involves a minimalizing of difference, a communicative effort to give it a token nod that functions to trivialize or to contain it. This third form of engaging centrifugal discourses is the most subtle; Bakhtin describes it as the “word with a sideward glance” (p. 208). “Sideward glances” are evident in a variety of communicative practices, according to Bakhtin, including intonations, use of diminutives, the expression of reservations, and interjections, among others. For example, if parties refer to how they are “*a little different but mostly really similar,*” their differences are being minimalized compared to their similarities.

Given the significance of similarity and the ambivalence surrounding difference that have been identified in existing research on similarity and difference, it seems likely that the discourse of similarity will occupy the centripetal site of dominance. Because differences are regarded ambivalently, they are likely to be present, but regulated. Thus, along the Bakhtin (1984) double-voicedness continuum, talk about difference is likely to be characterized in the middle somewhere — centripetal-centrifugal struggle. The fact that differences are regarded as holding some positive value to relationship parties would appear to foreclose the authoritative discourse of similarity. The overwhelmingly positive value of similarity would make idealized dialogue seem unlikely, as well. However, we lack insight into how the dialogic struggle between the discourses of similarity and difference is enacted communicatively.

METHODS

Participants

Forty-one pairs (27 friendships and 14 romantic relationships) were successfully recruited from undergraduate communication courses at a large Midwestern university. In compliance with the institution’s human subjects policy, one member of a couple was given extra credit in exchange for completion of a couple audio-taping session in which the person and one of his or her closest friends or romantic partners participated. The mean age of the 82 participants was 22.2 years (standard deviation of 5.3 years; range of 19-50 years). Eighty-eight percent of the couples were Caucasian; non-Caucasian couples were of mixed ethnicity in which one member was Caucasian and the other member of African-American, Asian-American, or Hispanic. All but one of the romantic relationships was heterosexual in orientation. Friendship pairs were distributed among all-female pairs (66.7%), all-male pairs (22.2%), and cross-sex pairs (11.1%).

Data Collection Procedures

Participants were provided with a cassette tape and were asked to select a private location where they would feel comfortable having a conversation with one another and where the fidelity of the tape recording would not be compromised due to extraneous noise or interruption. Participants were asked to tape record a conversation of at least 30-minutes' duration in which they were asked to discuss how they were similar and different. They were asked to jointly reflect on how similarity and difference posed relationship challenges as well as how they were positive. Partners were told that there were no correct answers, and that what was sought were their genuine perceptions of how similarity and difference functioned in their unique relationship. Thus, if partners said, upon reflection, that they were totally similar (or different) and that this was completely positive (or negative), this was accepted on its face as valid data. The task was designed to create the opportunity for any of several discursive formations to emerge — from authoritative, to idealized dialogue, to centripetal-centrifugal struggle. The tape-recorded conversations were transcribed, resulting in 498 single-spaced pages of textual data for analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

A combination of orthographic and phonological approaches was used to transcribe the audio-taped conversations (Wood & Kroger, 2000). An orthographic approach uses conventional spelling for words and tends to employ verbal descriptions of other signs (e.g., “sighs”). A phonological approach amends standard orthography by presenting words and other signs through a combination of words, quasi-words, and other symbols. In addition to transcribing conventional words, we noted all instances of slang and dysfluencies. Other characteristics were noted using the following symbols: (()) to note inaudible utterance; (text) to note the transcriber's guess about unclear speech; CAPS for emphasis; [] to mark overlapping speech; ... to mark an unfinished utterance with falling intonation; ((transcriber observation)) to note transcriber perception of laughter, noticeable pause, or intonational feature. Our transcription practices mirror the approach employed by other researchers with an interest in ideologically-positioned talk (e.g., Billig et al., 1988; Edley, 2001).

We performed a form of analysis that Bakhtin (1984) labels a “contrapuntal analysis” (p. 221). A contrapuntal analysis is sensitive to the possible centripetal-centrifugal struggle of different discourses. In general terms, all three researchers read the transcripts with a theoretical sensitivity to both explicit instances of value-laden talk (e.g., Bakhtin's polemic form of double-voicedness) and implicit instances of evaluation (e.g., Bakhtin's double-voicedness through the sideward glance). Central to our understanding of implicit value-laden talk—the word of the sideward glance—was sensitivity to adversative discourse markers (Schiffrin, 1996) and epistemic modal forms (Coates, 2003; White, 2003). Adversative

discourse markers are linguistic markers by which the propositional content of two different utterances is contrasted, thereby creating clash and semantic struggle. For example, the adversative discourse markers of “but” and “however” perform a contrastive function that is suggestive of semantic struggle. Epistemic modal forms are elements of discourse that also are suggestive of communicative struggle. For example, phrases such as *sort of*, *maybe*, and *a little*, hint at struggle because they function with vagueness to indicate the possibility of alternative interpretations (White, 2003). Paralinguistic features such as intonation and emphasis also function as epistemic modal forms in which some positions are valued more than others. While we did not limit our attention to these discursive features, we began our analysis with theoretical sensitivity to them.

The three researchers independently read transcripts 10 at a time, searching for emergent coding categories responsive to this general analytic question: “In what value-laden ways do relationship partners talk about their differences compared to their similarities?” We sought to identify communicative practices that, in general, characterized difference talk but not talk about similarities. When a communicative practice was identified, it formed the basis of a coding category. After reading the first ten transcripts, the researchers met to compare their coding categories and to produce a tentative list of coding categories based on our collective interpretations. These emergent categories were then applied to the next 10 transcripts, after which the researchers met to triangulate their analyses and modify the emergent coding categories accordingly. This iterative process continued until all of the transcripts had been analyzed and discussed. Throughout the process, we analyzed our emergent categories of difference talk by comparing them against similarity talk; we sought categories that applied primarily to difference talk and thus could inform our inquiry into the communicative practices of centripetal-centrifugal struggle.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) reminded us that traditional evaluative criteria of reliability and validity are not productive for interpretive research. Instead, they argued for trustworthiness as the relevant criterion, and they enumerated several alternative ways by which this criterion could be demonstrated. This study relies on the triangulation of sources (p. 305) and stepwise replication (p. 317).

Source triangulation was employed in researcher efforts to use subsequent clusters of 10 transcripts as a gauge of the replicability of coding categories. In fact, the data were saturated in the first 10 transcripts; that is, no new coding categories emerged after the first group was analyzed. Subsequent clusters, each containing 10 transcripts, were used as “test cases” for the credibility of our coding categories.

Stepwise replication was also employed in the study’s reliance on independent analyses of the data by the three researchers prior to collective discussion. Discrepancies between the researchers in coding categories were very minor and tended to be at the level of labeling rather than substantive differences in the content of coding categories.

RESULTS

Couples' talk marginalized difference in four primary ways. In addition, pairs relied on serviceability as the mediator of whether difference was positive or negative. In short, the results evidence that couples' talk centers the discourse of individualism in both expressive and utilitarian dimensions. Because no differences were identified by relationship type, we have collapsed our presentation of findings across friendship and romantic pairs.

Muting Difference

Relationship partners used four primary practices to symbolically erase their differences: *silencing*, *relationship distancing*, *negative valencing*, and *marking discomfort*. These practices collectively indicate that differences between partners were treated as problems for the relationship. By comparison, partners tended to vocalize and positively valence their similarities, indicating that partners framed their similarities as beneficial to relationships. Taken together, these communicative devices suggest that partners build relationships insofar as the other resembles, and thereby confirms, their sense of self.

Silencing Difference

Participants used many silencing practices that actively suppressed or refused to acknowledge difference. Often, when one partner brought up a dimension of difference, the other partner would quickly introduce a *topic shift*:

A: As you can see, this difference between the two of us could possibly pose a challenge in our relationship, if it were to go that far [and

B: [But as they say in the famous cliché, we'll cross that bridge when we get there. There's no point in worrying about that now because I have no idea where I'm going to be in a year. So, either way it's not something we need to worry about. Um, now, so let's move on to the next difference that's kind of a challenge. It's kind of stupid, but on the other hand it's really important. I have a passion in life, a love, I mean an orgasmic love .

A: There's a sex word that you didn't have a problem talking about.

B: To me it's skiing.

(Transcript 4: Lines 657-665)

When the first partner began to talk about the potential problems that difference could pose, the second responded with two statements that they should close discussion of the topic. Partner B suggested that they are not "there" and "now" yet, indicating that they should defer discussion of difference for another place and time. Partner B then shifted the topic to another difference — his "orgasmic love" for skiing. Rather than responding to the

content of his statement of passion, partner A redirected the conversation for the second time to focus on a particular word choice.

The example above shows a series of dyadic topic shifts, in which each partner silenced the other's discussion of difference. Participants also silenced themselves when they talked about difference by introducing topic shifts in the middle of a turn at talk:

A: I always felt like, I don't know, different, well because how we said before that we are the same age but we're in different grades. Because I feel that I had to grow up fast just because like I was always younger than everyone else in my class. I really don't know how this fits into this conversation, so. ((laugh))

B: ((laugh))

(25: 353-357)

When the relationship partner began talking about her difference, she made a shift to discuss what fit (and didn't fit) into the conversation, suggesting that her discussion of difference did not "fit into the conversation." She then laughed, closing discussion of the topic, and her partner's reciprocal laughter suggested an acceptance of the shift.

Participants not only silenced difference by changing the topic; they also silenced difference by changing turns at talk. That is, frequent *interruptions* characterize talk about difference:

A: I'm independent. ((laugh)) And you don't think that you are?

B: Ah ((pause))

A: I think you are to a [point

B: [I am. It's just that like I

A:[I think secure people are more apt to be independent.

B: Yeah, yeah. In a way I think that I am independent ah, like uh ((pause)) I wish

I was you know like, well I don't know.

(3: 270-278)

As they talked about their different ways of handling conflict and different levels of dependence on the relationship, these participants vied for the conversational floor. Often, their turns at talk overlapped; partner A vied for the conversational floor, abruptly ending partner B's turns at talk, and quite literally silenced difference by talking over him. In particular, she interrupted him when he stated difference, first asserting that he was independent like her and then implying that people who are not independent are insecure. Ultimately, he did not state his difference: "well I don't know."

In contrast with more subtle form-based practices of interruptions and topic shifts, participants also directly muted the content of their differences through *denial*:

- A: We both like to watch the same TV shows [although
 B: [No, we don't.
 A: You like *Star Trek*.
 B: Okay, we like *Star Trek*.
 (38: 208-211)

When the second partner introduced difference into the conversation, saying that they did not like the same television shows, the second partner responded with an example to illustrate their similarity. Note the change in pronoun from one turn to the next; “you” liking the show individually became “we” liking the show collectively.

While the three practices above—topic shifts interruptions, and denials—communicatively suppress discussion of difference, participants also silenced difference with practices that acknowledged, but transformed, difference. Rather than simply refusing to engage difference, some participants communicatively manipulated the degree of their difference by *minimizing differences*:

- B: And I also think like the way we act around guys, we act somewhat different.
 Do you think that?
 A: Yeah. Um, no yeah we like. I'm like, I don't know. Okay, for example I can't think of the example we were talking about earlier. How like, you know, I kind of wait to see what [happens
 B: [Yeah, you're more like reactive.
 A: Yeah. And you have a little bit more like, well, I'll just ask him out or something.
 (32: 405-410)

These friends minimized their differences using the comparative terms “*somewhat* different” and “a *little bit* more.” They also minimized their differences by using equivocations. For example, in describing her different approach to dating, one friend said: “I'll just ask him out *or something*.” Similarly equivocal, one friend maintained ambiguity by failing to state an example of their difference: “for example I can't think of the example.” Contrast these minimizations of their difference with their discussion of their similarities earlier in the conversation:

- B: So yeah, we agree on a lot of things, like our attitudes about other people, too.
 About like, you know, the way we, you know, we judge the same way.
 A: Yeah.
 B: We finish each other's sentences. ((laugh))
 A: ((laugh)) A lot. (32: 22-26)

When discussing their similarities, these friends repeatedly used the comparative term “a lot,” while they used “a little bit” to describe their differences. Also, their discussion of similarities was much less ambiguous. They gave two examples of similarity: judging people the same way and finishing each other’s sentences. Participants silenced difference by minimizing its degree.

In addition to communicatively transforming the degree of difference, participants communicatively transformed the character of difference. They often *reframed difference as similarity*:

A: We’re both from, like, we’re different you know, geographical areas. We definitely grew up in very different places ... I thought, you, to me, do not represent what I thought Midwesterners were going to be like, and once I actually got to know the typical Midwesterner, you’re probably still not the typical Midwesterner. As you will find, if you ever come out East, I’m not the typical East Coast guy. (14: 290-294)

Although this participant began by talking about how he and his friend grew up in different places, he dissociated himself and his friend from their different origins by asserting that each was atypical. Moreover, he emphasized that they were similar in their atypicality: Notice the parallel construction of “you’re probably still not the typical Midwesterner” and “I’m not the typical East Coast guy.” Through this repetitive formulation, the friends’ putative difference was reframed as a similarity.

Overall, participants silenced difference in five different ways. Three practices functioned to erase difference altogether: topic shifting, interrupting, and denying. Two additional practices functioned to transform the degree or character of the difference: minimizing and reframing. These communicative devices demonstrate that partners eliminated, or at least mitigated, difference when formulating their relationships through talk. Put simply, the message was: “If you’re not like me, I don’t want to talk about it.”

Marking Difference with Discomfort

Not only did participants attempt to silence difference, they exhibited discomfort when they did talk about difference. Participants’ discomfort with difference was marked in three main ways: nervous laughter, dysfluencies, and metatalk about discussing difference.

When partners discussed their differences, their talk was peppered with *nervous laughter*:

A: I probably will understand, I mean about golf and stuff. I thought every once in a while you spend more time with those damn clubs than you do with me. ((nervous laugh)) But, not too often. (23: 164-166)

In this example, the participant talked about her boyfriend's golf habits using the self-silencing practice of minimization discussed above. She said that her frustration is "every once in a while" and "not too often." However, when she directly and explicitly addressed his difference—"those damn clubs"—she expressed discomfort by laughing. The laughter here marked discomfort rather than pleasure because of its juxtaposition with negative feeling expression.

Another marker of discomfort that characterizes talk about difference was verbal *dysfluency*. Both filled and unfilled pauses recurred in discussions of difference:

- A: Um, I think in a way our backgrounds cause problems ... Um, I mean, it did expose me to a different background but sometimes I felt (pause) [OK, here we go.
 B: [Just say it.
 (10: 635-642)

Filled pauses like "um," "I think," and "I mean" and unfilled pauses — breaks in the flow of speech — may indicate that the speaker was hesitant to articulate possible differences between her and her boyfriend. An indication that this hesitance was communicatively detected by her boyfriend may be evidenced in his response, "just say it." However, beyond merely acknowledging her discomfort, this utterance also indicates assent in broaching the sensitive subject. Her resumption of speech "ok, here we go" indicated recognition of her boyfriend's consent and rearticulated her discomfort.

At times, participants addressed the difficulty of talking about difference even more explicitly with *metatalk about discussing differences*. After reading an instruction to reflect upon and discuss any problematic differences, speaker A initiated this joint evaluative reaction:

- A: Wow, they really rake you over the coals.
 B: ((nervous laugh))
 A: My God, ugh!
 B: This is the worst one.
 (3: 325-326)

In addition to nervous laughter, the participants directly stated their discomfort talking about difference. They compared talking about difference with a very painful experience: "rake you over the coals." They swore: "my God." They used a negative superlative: "worst one." Given only the conversation here, it is unclear whether the difficulty was in talking about difference itself or the relationship problems that difference might create. However, consider the statement the first participant made earlier in this conversation, when prompted to talk about the problems of similarity: "I just can't think of like how our similarities could be a challenge or a problem." Problems with similarities and problems with difference were

both difficult to discuss, but for different reasons. While problems with similarity were difficult to imagine, problems with difference were difficult to share with the other. This suggests that the discomfort participants performed through metatalk was specific to discussing problems with difference, not relationship problems in general.

Through nervous laughter, dysfluencies, and metatalk about discussing differences, participants marked the difficulty of talking about difference, a discomfort likely due to their construction of difference as necessarily negative.

Negatively Valencing Difference

Participants constructed their differences as decidedly negative. This negative framing of difference was evident in the justifications participants provided for their differences, pejorative terms used to describe differences, and in metatalk about the valences of difference and similarity.

By providing *justifications for their differences*, participants framed differences as aberrant relationship phenomena that required an account. For example, one participant said:

A: I think that the other reason why I don't enjoy football as much as [conversation partner] is because I don't understand the sport itself. And as many times as I've had it explained to me I just don't understand it.

(4: 353-356)

In this excerpt, the participant addressed the tape recorder and gave reasons why she did not like football as much as her boyfriend. Notably, she framed her difference as a shortcoming: her inability to understand the sport. While their bases of difference required an explanation, she unproblematically presented their bases of similarity at another point in the transcript:

A: Our first similarity is religion. I find this ((pause)) similarity positive for our relationship because you and I are both Jewish, and from the same background and upbringing. We share the SSS, the Sima, share similar views on our ethnicity, and this would help if we were to, if our relationship were to go farther, and were to get married and have children.

(4: 20-25)

Rather than justifying their similarities, she provided a series of examples. She did not explain why they were similar, but merely demonstrated how they were similar. Providing an account for her difference from her boyfriend suggests that difference is unusual and socially unacceptable; providing no account for her similarities suggests that similarity is considered normal and normative for relationships.

Just as participants provided accounts for their differences, they also called each other to account for their differences. One way this function was performed involved the employment of *pejorative terms* to describe the other's difference. For example, one friend teased the other about his hair:

A: You are more clean cut, you know, business looking almost, you know. Short hair, you know, ah, I, I'm more of ah, I got long [hair . . .

B: [long hair. It's big and poofy and it looks kind of like an afro.

A: Yeah. ((laugh))

B: No.

A: And ah.

B: I'm just giving you shit.

(7: 249-255)

In this excerpt, the "clean cut" friend exaggerated the length of his friend's hair. The exaggeration and emphasis of difference was marked as pejorative at the end of the sequence, when he described his comments as "giving you shit."

Participants also used pejorative terms to describe their own differences. For example, one participant said (39: 161-162), "As far as differences go, I'm a little bit more artsy-fartsy. I know you hate that stuff up on the counter." She self-described with the mocking term "artsy-fartsy," and acknowledged that her partner "hates" the artsy-fartsy "stuff" that differentiated them.

In addition to describing differences with pejorative terms, participants explicitly associated similarity with positivity and difference with negativity in *metatalk about the valences of similarities and differences*:

A: But, why is that positive for our relationship?

B: That's a similarity.

A: Well, yeah, but.

B: And friends need to have similar things.

(13: 14-17)

In the terms of the second partner, friendship depended upon similarity, and for that reason, similarity was necessarily positive. The first speaker extended this logic later in the conversation:

A: Describe for each difference, how and why it is positive for your relationship. Well, this is hard for me, I really don't know why, well, well, I do know why because we are so similar.

(13: 315-318)

Because positive similarity characterized relationships, considering how differences might be positive in their relationships was “hard for” the speaker. Similarity was so closely associated with positivity that she could not address the ways in which difference might also be positive. Because participants tended to construct difference as negative and similarity as positive, they often talked about difference as contributing to distance and decline in their relationships.

Distancing with Difference

Participants generally framed difference as creating distance in their relationships. They communicatively performed distance by employing verbal non-immediacy cues when talking about difference. They also metacommunicatively described the distance that difference created for their relationships.

The most common *non-immediacy cue* that participants used was using individual rather than collective pronouns when discussing difference:

A: Um, I think in a way our backgrounds cause problems ...

B: No, I think they have caused problems and I don't, I think for you too, but I shouldn't speak for you so I won't, I'll just speak for me.

(10: 635-642)

Initially, the backgrounds of these friends—different ethnic backgrounds, as explained earlier in the conversation—were referred to collectively with “our.” However, the second speaker quickly moved to the use of individual pronouns: “you” and “me.” Moreover, the speaker set the “you” and “me” in opposition to each other: he could speak for himself, but could not speak for the other. However, this individualization was particular to the discussion of difference. When discussing their similarities, this speaker used the collective pronoun repeatedly (10:35): “But it's true because we both like to read, we both like to write, we both like to watch movies and plays and things.” When discussing difference he refused to speak for his friend, but when describing similarities, he spoke for them as a unit, repeating the phrase “we both.” Participants marked relational closeness with immediacy cues when discussing similarities; they conversely marked relational distance when discussing difference.

In addition to performing relational distance during talk about difference, participants also directly addressed how differences contribute to relational distance in their *metatalk about closeness and difference*. One participant claimed (5:13): “What brought us together, [partner's name], was also common interests.” The participant later explained (5: 604-605): “If we're always challenging our differences obviously we're going to split.” These parallel statements suggest that while similarities contributed to relational closeness, differences contributed to relationship distance and decline. Note in both cases the opposing spatial

metaphors of joining in a unity–”brought us together”– and disjoining a unity–”split.” Note also that the problematic nature of difference is “obvious.”

Another participant similarly expounded on the seemingly natural connection between similarity and relational health (43: 386-388): “Overall, we definitely, I mean obviously you know, similarities are going to make a friendship, you know, strong or whatever.” Again, similarities constitute or “make” relationships, whereas a lack of similarity would damage relationships:

A: ((laugh)) Because obviously if we didn’t like to do the same things, [we ...

B: [Right]

A: ... weren’t laid back then it would cause serious problems in our relationship.

B: Uh huh. And we really wouldn’t want to spend time with each other.

(43: 3-8)

Note again the use of the term “obvious” and the addition of the term “serious,” both emphasizing the connection between difference and relationship decline. The second speaker’s terms of agreement–”right” and “uh huh”– also metacommunicatively reinforced the ostensible connection between relational distance and difference, while performatively demonstrating relational closeness through agreement, another immediacy cue.

Summary. The discourse practices through which difference is muted fit together to form a coherent ideological message. These practices silence difference because it is constructed as a sensitive and uncomfortable topic. Difference is characterized as causing discomfort because it is associated with negativity. In large part, the negative framing of difference poses differences between partners as a problem for relationships. Taken together, these discursive formulations suggest that relationships will be successful only to the extent that relationship partners are similar.

Constructing Difference as Serviceable to Self

Overwhelmingly, relationship partners highlighted their similarities and deemphasized their differences. However, when participant couples did discuss ways in which their differences could be positive, they articulated these benefits through the utilitarian individualistic discourse of the “useful other.” That is, they repositioned the focus of the discourse from relational connection to personal benefits that might come from another’s perceived complementarity to oneself. First, participants explained that differences allowed them to maintain an autonomous sense of self. Second, they discussed how the other’s differences provided an opportunity for their self to grow and develop. Third, participants noted the instrumental support that the other’s different resources and abilities could offer them.

Other's Difference Allows Self's Autonomy

One manner in which participants articulated the discourse of the serviceable other involved concerns that similarity might pose a possible threat to autonomy:

A: Because we are such good friends and we do everything together and we are similar in some of the things that like where we like to go out to eat or what we like to drink or what movies we want to go see or just basically how we do everything together some people assume [that

B: [that we're the same person.]

A: [we're the same person because of this and we're not. So that's really challenging for our relationship when people start thinking [partner's nickname] and I ((laugh)) are one person. That's not, that's wrong because we're not one person. We might have lived together for a long time and we may BE sort of the same person in some ways, but not in all ways. And I think that's the most challenging thing.

(6: 28-38)

The speakers spent the majority of this excerpt expounding their similarities. For example, their overlapping speech "that we're the same person" performed similarity. The first speaker also listed many interests they share, like favorite restaurants, drinks, and movies. The first speaker also stressed "we may BE sort of the same person in some ways" paralinguistically. However, they also explained that completely mirroring the other was problematic because it threatened their abilities to establish autonomous and independent selves. They were the same "in some ways, but not in all ways." The importance of maintaining independence was formulated in their insistence that they were not "the same person" and not "one person." Using "same" and "one" interchangeably suggests that similarity may threaten autonomy. In this formulation, similarity with a partner is good insofar as it supports and confirms the construction of a self, but becomes a problem once it threatens self construction.

Other's Difference Enables Self's Growth

In addition to potential problems with similarity, participants occasionally pointed to potential benefits of difference. The most frequent advantage of difference mentioned was that contact with others enriches the self. Once again, difference is framed as beneficial only in the service of the construction and growth of a self. In particular, participants talked about learning from their partners' differences. Consider the following example:

A: I think this is positive because I've learned a lot. Like with you being Jewish and me being Christian, I think I've learned a lot about um, a different religion, and about different people. I mean, you know that when I first met you I knew nothing about Judaism.

(16: 178-180)

Learning from the partner leads to the development and construction of the self. For example, “when I first met you I knew nothing about Judaism.” If the other’s difference supports the self, it is framed as a relational benefit.

Other’s Difference Provides Instrumental Resources

In participants’ constructions, differences could also benefit the relationship by supporting the self instrumentally and materially. One partner’s difference is considered positive as long as it is useful for the other:

A: And how we’re different because I cook a lot

B: And I don’t

A: And you don’t [but

B: [It works out really good for me because then I get good food to eat instead of mac and cheese every night, I get stuffed mushrooms.

(43: 260-264)

In this excerpt, one partner’s difference, a tendency to cook, was framed as positive. However, it is important to note that this difference is positive only for the partner who benefits, not the partner who is different or the relationship as a whole: “It works out really good *for me*.” Thus, while difference can be positive in this formulation, it is positive because it functions to individuate relationship partners.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Overall, participants failed to engage their relationship partners as others-in-their-own-right. Rather, differences from the partner were evaluated only through the lens of value to self: promoting a sense of self-autonomy, facilitating self-growth, and providing instrumental resources.

A combination of communicative devices contributed to the marginalizing of difference among the relationship partners of our sample, championing the discourse of individualism in two primary ways. In the predominant discourse of expressive individualism, participants’ talk functioned to marginalize difference through four basic communicative practices: silencing difference, marking difference as a site of discomfort, attaching negative valence to difference, and linking difference with relational distancing. In the less common, but nevertheless evident, discourse of utilitarian individualism, participants acknowledged and valued their partners’ differences to the extent that they were useful to the self: by allowing self-autonomy, by facilitating self-growth, and by providing instrumental resources. While utilitarian individualism does begin to engage difference, it still does not engage the other qua other. Instead, this discourse addresses difference only

in terms of the self. Both the expressive and utilitarian individualist approaches champion the self over the other.

Of the 13 specific communicative practices identified in muting difference, the majority (8) could productively be categorized as tactics of the “sideward glance.” These tactics recognized difference but functioned to bracket it off and contain it in some way. Topic shifts, interruptions, and minimizing tactics function to contain difference by silencing it. Nervous laughter and dysfluencies function to bracket difference by marking it as uncomfortable. Justifications and pejorative terms bracket difference by marking it as negative. Last, nonimmediacy cues bracket difference by marking it as distancing to relationship partners.

More polemic in nature are four communicative practices that function to explicitly challenge the legitimacy of difference. Denials, explicit metatalk about the discomfort of difference, explicit metatalk about difference as negative, and explicit metatalk about difference as distancing jointly function to challenge directly the legitimacy of difference in personal relationships.

Least common in partner talk was the communicative practice of resolution. Participant talk in which differences were reframed as similarities in disguise functioned to resolve apparent differences and thereby sustain the dominance of partner similarity. The three tactics by which difference was constructed as serviceable to self — allowing self-autonomy, enhancing self-growth, and providing instrumental resources — are also forms of resolution. That is, the discourse of expressive individualism was dominant, and difference was folded into its ideological fabric.

The salience of the “sideward glance” may be an artifact of the task assigned to participants. In more naturally-occurring talk, partners might feel even less motivated to recognize their differences, moving more directly to single-voiced talk focused exclusively on similarities or more polemic efforts to extinguish differences completely. Such speculation awaits future research.

The failure to identify differences between romantic pairs and friendship pairs may be an artifact of the study’s small sample size. Future research should systematically examine whether difference is marginalized to a comparable extent for these relationship types, in addition to examining possible differences by relationship type in the ways that difference is managed. The absence of differences by relationship type may also be an artifact of reliance on a young-adult sample. It would be productive for scholars to examine relationships of longer duration, for example, long-term marital pairs, to determine how difference is managed. Difference might take on a more positive role in longer-term relationships.

Our relationship partners generally communicated in ways to erase, contain, limit, or otherwise manage their differences. When differences are communicatively constructed as problematic by the manner in which they are discussed, it makes it more difficult for parties

to appreciate their positive potentialities. Differences are instrumental in helping parties to grow as individuals, celebrating individual uniqueness and autonomy (e.g., Aron & Aron, 2000; Wood et al., 1994). Differences can also be important sources of stimulation, functioning as catalysts for relationship adaptability and change (Wood et al., 1994). In communicatively marginalizing their differences, relationship parties may be handicapping their relationship's ability to realize its fullest potential.

In reproducing the centripetal dominance of similarity, relationship parties may perpetuate cultural challenges faced by "mixed relationships" — that is, relationships characterized as interracial, interethnic, or intercultural in nature (e.g., Gaines, 1995). To the extent that relationship partners communicatively position difference as potentially dangerous to the development and maintenance of closeness, the more homogeneity is sustained as an interpersonal logic. Future research could productively replicate this study to examine how partners in interracial, interethnic, and intercultural relationships communicatively position their differences and their similarities.

Similarities and differences are not merely objective states by which researchers can categorize relationship partners; they are elements of meaning-making by which partners construct who they are as a relationship. Our findings provide tentative support for the claim that relationship parties deploy broader cultural discourses in making sense of their similarities and differences. This deployment celebrates similarity and guardedly tolerates difference to the extent that it can be self-serving and contained. Our results support an alternative epigram to the one that opens this article: "Celebrate similarities, regulate differences."

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DEPENDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE POWER, CONFLICT TACTICS AND APPRAISALS IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

NATHAN MICZO

The present investigation examined two forms of relational power (dependence and independence power) as they impact the use of conflict tactics and the conflict appraisals of severity and plans to confront the partner. One hundred and fifty-five undergraduates in romantic relationships reported their perceptions of their own and their partners' levels of commitment and relational alternatives, their own use of conflict tactics (integrative, symbolic aggression), and their appraisals of problem severity and plans to avoid confrontation in response to scenarios of partner problematic behavior. Perceptions of partner's alternatives related negatively to symbolic aggression tactics and plans to avoid confrontation. Partner's commitment was predictive of symbolic aggression. The interaction between the perceptions of partner's commitment and alternatives predicted problem severity. Perceptions of one's own alternatives predicted less integrative tactics. One's own commitment predicted lower problem severity appraisals, and the interaction between one's own commitment and alternatives predicted less symbolic aggression.

Keywords: dependence power, independence power, conflict tactics, conflict appraisals

According to the adage of William Pitt, "power corrupts" (as quoted in Henry, 1945). If, as Hinde (1997) asserted, "the distribution of power is always an issue in close

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relationships” (p. 196), then it is worth examining whether or not the possession of power within such relationships carries with it the temptation to “misuse power advantages” (Solomon & Samp, 1998, p. 191). One line of research that has focused on relational power involves the “chilling effect” (Roloff & Cloven, 1990; Solomon, Knobloch, & Fitzpatrick, 2004; Solomon & Samp, 1998), which Cloven and Roloff (1993) defined as the “tendency for a partner’s power to quell the expression of interpersonal complaints” (p. 200). To date, research on the chilling effect has focused primarily upon the power attributed by a respondent to his/her partner. Consequently, less is known about how power attributed by a respondent to him/herself affects the use of conflict tactics, as well as the appraisal processes influencing responses to a partner’s problematic behavior. The purpose of the present investigation was to shed light on the part that power attributed to the self plays in romantic relationship conflict.

A POWER-DEPENDENCE FRAMEWORK

Social Power

The social exchange perspective, which has guided research examining the chilling effect, assumes that individuals desire to maximize rewards and minimize costs (Molm, 1997). Insofar as many of these rewards can only be obtained from others, social actors enter into mutual relationships of exchange that create interdependencies between them. These exchange relationships are voluntary associations the parties enter into freely, and which either party is free to dissolve at his or her own discretion. A corollary of the primary assumption is that such parties must negotiate the resources and benefits involved in the relationship. Further, the ability to negotiate a favorable outcome, one in which rewards outbalance costs, depends on the power of each party in that relationship. Thus, exchange theories presume an ongoing power struggle between individuals in relationships (Bacharach & Lawler, 1986), though it is not necessary that this struggle be conducted with a full degree of consciousness or intentionality.

Although power is an elusive object of inquiry, decades of social scientific research have led to three insights about social power that were pertinent to the present investigation. First, power is potential; that is, it is the ability or capacity to produce change in another (Berger, 1994; Bierstedt, 1950; Emerson, 1962; Wrong, 1968). Accordingly, power resides primarily in the perceptions individuals have of one another. It is important, then, to study perceptions of both one’s own and one’s partner’s power as they affect relational processes and outcomes (Bacharach & Lawler, 1976; Cloven & Roloff, 1993). Second, power can accrue from different sources (Lawler & Bacharach, 1987; Nesler, Aguinis, Quigley, & Tedeschi, 1993). In the classic typology of French and Raven (1959), for example, power can arise from one’s ability to reward or punish, one’s formal role or expertise, and/or one’s

attractiveness as a model. It follows from this that one way of augmenting power is to maximize the unique potential of different power bases. Third, power is distinct from influence tactics (Bacharach & Lawler, 1986; Bierstedt, 1950; Lawler, 1992). If power is the capacity to produce change, tactics are the means by which this capacity is realized.

Dependence

One of the more salient forms of power in interpersonal relationships revolves around issues of dependence (Rusbult & Arriaga, 1997). Dependence refers to the extent to which one partner needs and relies on the other for relational outcomes (Samp & Solomon, 2001). It is commonly conceptualized as a function of relational commitment and alternatives (Bacharach & Lawler, 1986; Molm, 1997; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Commitment, which involves the intention and desire to continue a relationship into the future (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998; Stanely & Markman, 1992), derives from the perception of the attractiveness of the relationship in terms of rewards or values obtained (Adams & Jones, 1997). Thus, individuals who are committed to their relationships tend to depend on their partners to continue making the relationship attractive. Further, commitment negatively relates to relationship alternatives (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Johnson & Rusbult, 1989), perhaps due to a perceived lack of available partners (Jemmott, Ashby, & Lindenfeld, 1989), and/or the active devaluation of alternatives as a display of commitment (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Lydon, Meana, Sepinwall, Richards, & Mayman, 1999). The net result is that individuals with reduced relationship alternatives are constrained to depend on their partners for relational outcomes.

Dependence Power and the Chilling Effect

Issues of power and dependence lie at the heart of research concerning the chilling effect. Roloff and Cloven (1990), for instance, reported that individuals who perceived their partners as having a greater number of relational alternatives and lower relationship commitment were more likely to withhold the expression of partner-related grievances. In a follow-up study, Cloven and Roloff (1993) linked this combination of conditions to issues of power:

One type of power in interpersonal relationships arises from having alternatives to the association (e.g., Scanzoni, 1978) and/or a relative lack of commitment to the relationship (e.g., Safilios-Rothschild, 1976). The resulting power advantage has been called 'dependence power' because the basis of control is an individual's independence from the relationship relative to a partner's dependence on that particular association (Lawler & Bacharach, 1987). (p. 200)

Additionally, Solomon and Samp (1998) stated that:

‘Dependence power’ is the control that a partner who is less dependent on the relationship accrues in the eyes of the dependent party (Lawler & Bacharach, 1987). Hence, a partner is perceived as having dependence power when a person committed to the association sees that partner as able and willing to exit the relationship (p. 192).

Thus, according to the chilling effect perspective, a partner who has more alternatives and lower commitment has dependence power in the relationship. In other words, A’s dependence power is greater to the extent that A is less committed to the relationship and has more alternatives.

But dependence power, as conceptualized in the chilling effect research, is not entirely consistent with the way this construct has been utilized in the social exchange tradition. Both Cloven and Roloff (1993) and Solomon and Samp (1998) cite Lawler and Bacharach (1987), who defined dependence power as follows: “Power-dependence theory stipulates that the power of A over B is a function of the value B places on the outcomes received in the relationship with A and level of these (or substitutable) outcomes that can be gotten from other actors” (p. 447). Similarly, according to Bacharach and Lawler (1986), “Within the dependence framework, the bargaining power of each party is determined by the OTHER’S dependence on them, not its own dependence on the other” (p. 167). In the social exchange tradition, then, dependence power accrues to a person on the basis of perceptions of the partner’s level of commitment and the availability of relationship alternatives. It is power that is given to one by the partner. More specifically, A’s dependence power is greater to the extent that B is more committed to the relationship and has fewer alternatives.

Comparing the two formulations reveals that the situation described by the chilling effect (i.e., a situation in which “the basis of control is an individual’s independence from the relationship,” Cloven & Roloff, 1993, p. 200) refers to a type of power that is conceptually distinct from the situation in which the basis of control is a partner’s dependence on the relationship. This former type of power is “rendered unto” the partner, on the basis of the person’s perceptions of his or her own commitment and alternatives. When one’s own level of commitment is low and alternatives are high (the “classic” situation of the chilling effect), then, following the characterization of the chilling effect framework, that individual has *independence power* in the relationship. Such individuals have “options they are willing to explore” (Cloven & Roloff, 1993, p. 201). Thus, research on the chilling effect, although purportedly involving dependence power, has empirically explored how B’s perceptions of A’s independence power operate to inhibit B’s expression of complaints and grievances. The corresponding question to be addressed in this investigation concerns how A’s perceptions of his/her own independence power affects his/her own confrontational tendencies.

Summary

In view of the framework developed here, power largely resides in the perceptions that actors have of one another, perceptions that appear to be grounded in “reality” (cf. Drigotas, Rusbult, & Verette, 1999; Roloff & Cloven, 1990). Given that each person in a relationship faces issues of commitment and alternatives, each partner has two sets of perceptions relevant to the issue of dependence. One set concerns alter’s commitment and alternatives and defines self’s perceptions of the extent to which alter is dependent on (or independent of) the relationship. The other set concerns self’s commitment and alternatives and defines self’s perceptions of the extent to which self is dependent on (or independent of) the relationship. Maintaining the conceptual distinction between these two sets of perceptions is important for two reasons. First, they lead to opposite predictions regarding conflict tactics and appraisals. Second, the failure to make the distinction casts dependence power in a negative light. In other words, if dependence power is defined as a situation of a high number of alternatives and low commitment, and then that combination of variables is linked to negative relational effects (such as withholding complaints about the partner), dependence power carries negative connotations. This reinforces a set of beliefs in which allowing a partner to have dependence power appears to be an “irrational” move because it puts one at a disadvantage. In the alternative view presented here, dependence power may actually mitigate the tendency to “misuse power advantages” (Solomon & Samp, 1998, p. 191). By the same token, the unwillingness to risk vulnerability implicit in the cultivation of independence may actually promote such misuse (cf. Boon, 1994).

DEPENDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE POWER

Dependence Power

According to the social exchange perspective, the probability of an individual’s desiring to maintain a voluntary association with a romantic partner increases to the extent that the rewards of the relationship outweigh its costs (Molm, 1997). Research emanating from the investment model (cf. Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994) suggests that individuals who are committed to their relationships are more likely to engage in a variety of relationship-enhancing activities, including: making sacrifices for the good of the relationship, derogating alternatives, accommodating the partner during conflict, and perceiving the relationship as superior to the relationships of others. Building on an emerging body of research relating to the use of relational maintenance strategies, Dainton and Aylor (2002) observed that self-reported commitment was a positive function of both routine and strategic maintenance. Additionally, Stafford and Canary (1991) found that

perceptions of a partner's use of maintenance strategies positively related to one's own relational satisfaction and commitment. Different lines of evidence, then, converge to suggest that committed partners engage in relationship-enhancing behavior that is rewarding (i.e., satisfying) to their partners. Insofar as commitment is a component of dependence, these partners should perceive the possession of dependence power as advantageous, and therefore, should be motivated to preserve it.

Independence Power

With independence power, the situation is different. In this case, individuals are less likely to engage in behavior designed to enhance and maintain their relationships. As a result, they forego any sense of gratification obtained from pleasing the partner, as well as rendering the relationship less rewarding for the partner. Further, Drigotas, Rusbult, and Verette (1999) noted that less committed partners experience more negative emotions, such as guilt, irritation, and anger. In Interdependence Theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) terms, an independent social actor experiences a narrower range of interaction outcomes *for good and for ill*. The independent party may be insulated from the partner's negative behavior, but he/she is also insulated from the partner's positive behavior. Such a situation violates the primary assumption of social exchange and therefore increases the probability of relationship dissolution (Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982).

The question arises regarding the link between this state of independence and power. According to the principle of least interest (Waller & Hill, 1951), the person who has less interest in a relationship can use that position as leverage in influencing the partner. From this perspective, the possession of independence power ought to be an advantageous power position. However, in their earliest study of the chilling effect, Roloff and Cloven (1990) uncovered something unexpected: Individuals who had more alternatives relative to partners, and thus were at a power advantage, withheld more complaints than when power was more nearly equal. The researchers interpreted this finding as evidence that powerful partners "simply don't care enough to fight" (p. 71). It is also possible that powerful parties, like their powerless counterparts, fear potential negative consequences of airing grievances. For example, given norms regarding relationship involvement (cf. Braiker & Kelley, 1979), independent actors who voice complaints may fear being confronted with whether or not they have the right to reproach the more committed partner in the first place (Miczo, 2004). The unexpected finding of Roloff and Cloven (1990) speaks to considering the chilling effect as a relational phenomenon, a feature of a relationship in which one partner is independent relative to the other's dependence. In such a situation, it is the relationship that feels the chill of the independent party's attempts to ward off threats to his/her position in an attempt to maintain the power advantage. To explore this possibility entails two tasks: (a) examining whether or not independence power attributed to the self parallels findings

from the chilling effect regarding the effects of independence power attributed to the partner, and (b) exploring whether or not independence power attributed to the self operates differently from dependence power attributed to the self. Understanding these tasks involved other variables frequently present in prior chilling effect research: conflict tactics and conflict-relevant cognitive appraisals.

Power and Conflict Tactics

Conflict, as a clash resulting from incompatible goals, is normal among interdependent parties, in that the behavior of one affects the experiences of the other (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). If the behavior of the partner interferes with one's own goals, desires, or behaviors, there will likely be conflict. A central tenet of conflict research, however, is that the manner in which partners respond to conflict may be more important than the issue at stake (Canary & Messman, 2000). When an individual responds to conflict by engaging the partner, he/she can do so in a cooperative manner by using integrative tactics, or in a competitive manner, by using distributive tactics (Sillars, Coletti, Parry, & Rogers, 1982).

Sillars, Coletti, Parry, and Rogers (1982) defined integrative tactics as "statements that directly discuss conflicts and promote a positive or neutral affective climate between parties" (p. 84). Such statements include providing and soliciting disclosure, expressing understanding, and initiating problem-solving. Integrative tactics promote positive relational outcomes (e.g., Canary & Spitzberg, 1989). Distributive tactics are antisocial (Rolloff, 1976), and negatively influence relational outcomes (Canary & Cupach, 1988). A widely used framework for examining distributive tactics is Straus's (1979) characterization as "verbal and nonverbal acts which symbolically hurt the other, or the use of threats to hurt the other" (p. 77). Cloven and Rolloff (1993) suggested that power struggles are a principal factor in such aggressive behavior.

Insofar as a cooperative approach to conflict entails consideration of self and partner perspectives, it is likely more effortful. Canary and Spitzberg (1989), who reported that integrative tactics were positively related to perceptions of competence, assessed by measures of effectiveness and appropriateness, provide support for this view. According to Axelrod (1984), one of the principal ways of inducing people to cooperate is to "enlarge the shadow of the future" (p. 126) by ensuring that interactions will be likely in the future and by keeping others away. Conceptually, these strategies are similar to maintaining high commitment and low alternatives, the underpinnings of dependence power. To the extent that the partner gives dependence power, then, the powerful party ought to be more willing to cooperate. Thus, given the premise that individuals with dependence power are motivated to preserve their position in a relationship, they are apt to respond to conflict with

constructive, integrative tactics, and less likely to respond to conflict with destructive, aggressive tactics.

H1a: *Integrative conflict tactics are positively related to dependence power.*

H1b: *Symbolic aggression conflict tactics are negatively related to dependence power.*

Although dependence power ostensibly promotes cooperation in conflict situations, independence power is more likely to evoke a competitive response. Individuals with little interest in the relationship should have less motivation to act for the good of either the partner or the relationship. Rather, they may adopt the approach that they must do whatever is necessary to preserve their independence (i.e., “win”). The discussion of incompatible goals is likely to make those with independence power feel that their freedom, as well as their ability to explore other options, is threatened, which, as Fromm (1973) pointed out, is a central factor in one’s resort to aggression. Thus, individuals with independence power, being less motivated to preserve their position and/or doing so in a defensive way, presumably would be less likely to engage in integrative tactics (H2a) and more likely to engage in aggressive tactics (H2b).

H2a: *Integrative conflict tactics are negatively related to independence power.*

H2b: *Symbolic aggression conflict tactics are positively related to independence power.*

Power and Conflict Appraisals

Examining the relationship between power and tactics implies that one party in a relationship has made the decision to engage the other in some fashion. While engaging the partner seems the most effective way to bring conflict issues into the open and attempt a resolution, engagement also carries risks of negative outcomes and relational damage. Additionally, not every issue requires address to be resolved (Sillars & Weisberg, 1987). The cognitive appraisals behind a decision to confront or avoid confronting are, therefore, consequential for the relationship. Given the stressful nature of relational conflict, the stress and coping framework of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) is germane. At the heart of this approach are subjective appraisals. From this perspective, stress is a result of an individual’s primary appraisal that an event or situation is relevant and threatening to his or her well-being. Subsequently, that individual must engage in secondary appraisal, choosing a course of action to ameliorate the problematic event or situation. Solomon and Samp (1998) have adopted this framework in their focus on severity appraisals and the decision to confront a partner. They reasoned that individuals with powerful partners would avoid the distress of conflict by evaluating problematic situations as less severe. Their findings revealed that attributions of both dependence and punitive power to a partner were associated with diminished severity appraisals. Additionally, the partner’s symbolic aggression and both

partners' commitment levels related to the tendency to avoid confrontation. Power and related tactics apparently influenced the judgments individuals made with respect to relationship conflict.

The possession of dependence power is advantageous. As such, individuals in this situation ought to be motivated to preserve their position. When a partner engages in problematic behavior, such as being insensitive, then the person with dependence power is likely to be concerned. Dependence power, after all, rests on the advantages that accrue from having a partner who engages in pro-relationship behavior. If the partner ceases to do those behaviors, and, thus, threatens the likelihood of rewards, the powerful person may feel a need to take action, if for no other reason than "to convey an image of benevolence that improves the long-term relationship" (Bacharach & Lawler, 1986, p. 173). Within the stress and coping paradigm (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the partner's problematic behavior poses a threat to well-being that, in principle, should prompt a problem-focused solution. Thus, individuals with dependence power would be more likely to perceive a partner's problematic behavior as severe and less likely to plan to avoid confrontation.

H3: *Perceptions of problem severity are positively related to dependence power.*

H4: *Plans to avoid confrontation are negatively related to dependence power.*

For individuals with independence power, the appraisal processes likely differ. Recall that, for one reason or another, individuals with independence power are insulated from the partner's behavior. This includes both the partner's positive behavior, as well as his/her negative behavior. To take action in response to the partner's problematic behavior would convey the message that one has been affected by it, a message contrary to the spirit of independence. The most effective way to maintain independence then, is to appraise a partner's negative behavior as not posing a threat to one's well-being. By extension, there is little need to confront the partner. Thus, individuals with independence power would be less likely to perceive a partner's problematic behavior as severe, and more likely to plan to avoid confrontation.

H5: *Perceptions of problem severity are negatively related to independence power.*

H6: *Plans to avoid confrontation are positively related to independence power.*

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 155 undergraduate students (64 males, 91 females) currently involved in an exclusive dating relationship (i.e., dating only their partner and no one else),

and enrolled in communication courses at a large Southwestern university.¹ They ranged in age from 18 to 37; however, 80% were between the ages of 18 and 23 ($M = 22.40$, $SD = 3.37$). The majority were White/Caucasian (70%), though a number of other ethnic groups were represented (Asian/Pacific Islander 8%, Black/African-American 3%, Hispanic 11%, Other 9%).

Demographic information gathered on partners (89 males, 65 females; one participant failed to indicate the sex of his/her partner) showed a range in age from 18 to 65, with 80% between the ages of 18 and 25 ($M = 23.48$, $SD = 5.73$). The majority of partners were White/Caucasian (72%). Other percentages were: Asian/Pacific Islander, 5%; Black/African-American, 4%; Hispanic, 9%; Native American, 1%; and Other, 10%.

Relationships ranged in length from 1 month to 15 years. Of these, 34% were a year or less, and 66 % were 2 years or less ($M = 24.65$ months, $SD = 23.62$).

Procedures

The participants each completed three questionnaires. All three contained two sets of items, one set worded to reflect participants' self-perceptions, and the other set worded to permit assessment of the participants' perceptions of their partners. Except for the commitment and alternatives measures, only respondents' reports of their own behavior and appraisals were relevant to the present investigation. The order of self and partner items was counterbalanced across questionnaires.

MEASURES

Power

The first questionnaire contained items relating to commitment and alternatives drawn from Solomon and Samp (1998). Dependence power is maximized to the extent that one perceives one's partner as being highly committed and having reduced relational alternatives. Thus, the participant's dependence power was operationalized by coding scores such that higher scores reflect higher perceived partner commitment and reduced partner alternatives. Independence power is maximized to the extent that one perceives oneself as having less commitment and increased relational alternatives. Thus, the participant's independence power was operationalized by coding scores such that higher scores reflect lower perceived self commitment and higher self alternatives.

Dependence Power

Partner commitment was measured by having respondents indicate their agreement on four 6-point Likert-type scales (e.g., “My partner would like this relationship to last a lifetime”). Items were coded so that higher scores indicated greater perceptions of partner commitment to the relationship (Beta = .76, $M = 5.23$, $SD = .85$). Partner alternatives was measured by having respondents indicate their agreement on four 6-point Likert-type scales (e.g., “My partner’s alternatives to our relationship are better than our relationship”). Items were coded so that higher scores indicated perceptions that the partner had fewer alternatives to the relationship (Beta = .72, $M = 2.12$, $SD = .92$).

Independence Power

Self commitment was measured by having respondents indicate their agreement on four 6-point Likert-type scales (e.g., “I would like this relationship to last a lifetime”). Items were coded so that higher scores indicate lower perceptions of one’s own commitment to the relationship (Beta = .78, $M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.05$). Self alternatives was measured by having respondents indicate their agreement on four 6-point Likert-type scales (e.g., “My alternatives to our relationship are better than our relationship”). Items were coded so that higher scores indicate greater perceived alternatives for self (Beta = .84, $M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.11$).

Tactics

The second questionnaire tapped the participants’ perceptions of the likelihood of using integrative and symbolic aggression tactics in response to a conflict in the relationship. In line with Straus’s (1979, 1990) argument, items were ordered from the most integrative to the most aggressive.

Integrative Tactics

Integrative tactics were from Sillars, Coletti, Parry, and Rogers’s (1982) verbal conflict tactics coding scheme, with coding scheme categorizations reworded as self-report items. For self-integrative tactics, respondents indicated the likelihood of response on five 6-point Likert-type scales (e.g., “I would try to get both of us to think about mutual solutions to the problem”; “While acknowledging the problem, I would express understanding, acceptance and/or support of my partner”). Items were coded so that higher scores indicated greater use of these tactics. Cronbach’s alpha for self-integrative tactic use was .82 ($M = 5.25$, $SD = .71$).²

Symbolic Aggression

The measures of symbolic aggression tactics was a set of items from Straus's (1979, 1990) Conflict Tactics Scale. The respondents indicated the likelihood of use on six 6-point Likert-type scales, (e.g. "I would insult or swear at my partner"; "I would sulk and/or refuse to talk"). Items were coded so that higher scores indicated a greater likelihood of use of these tactics. Cronbach's alpha for self symbolic tactics was .83 ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.06$).³

Appraisals

The third questionnaire presented participants with two brief, conflict scenarios (one involving partner insensitivity and the other partner domination) drawn from Solomon and Samp (1997), who argued that these were the two sources of dissatisfaction most closely tied to interpersonal power. The participants considered how they might react if these situations were to occur in their current dating relationships. Following each scenario were questions designed to assess appraisals, with responses aggregated across scenarios.⁴ Items referring to cognitive appraisals were scenario-specific, whereas items referring to conflict tactics reflected more general responses to conflict. The primary reason for this was a concern that responses to the conflict tactics scale would evidence little variability if tied to specific (hypothetical) occurrences.

Problem Severity

For severity, the respondents indicated their agreement on five 7-point Likert-type scales (e.g., "I think this situation is a problem"). Items were coded so that higher scores reflected greater perceived severity. Cronbach's alpha for this variable was .89 ($M = 5.63$, $SD = 1.06$).

Plans to Avoid Confrontation

The measure of avoiding confrontation was one's expression of agreement on six 7-point Likert-type scales (e.g., "I would keep my perceptions to myself"). Items were coded so that a higher score indicated greater plans to avoid confrontation. Cronbach's alpha for this variable was .92 ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 1.00$).

Table I
**Correlations between Dependence Power, Independence Power,
 Use of Conflict Tactics and Conflict Appraisals**

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
<i>Dependence Power</i>							
1. Partner-Commitment	----						
2. Partner-Alternatives	.55**	----					
<i>Independence Power</i>							
3. Self-Commitment	-.70**	-.61**	----				
4. Self-Alternatives	-.46**	-.67**	.73**	----			
<i>Conflict Tactics</i>							
5. Integrative Tactics	.28**	.33**	-.32**	-.40**	----		
6. Symbolic Aggression	-.08	-.37**	.24**	.36**	-.29**	----	
<i>Conflict Appraisals</i>							
7. Severity	.33**	.32**	-.36**	-.25**	.18*	-.10	----
8. Plans to Avoid Confrontation	-.34**	-.49**	.34**	.42**	-.40**	.26**	-.39**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents correlations between all variables. The majority of the associations were significant and in line with the predictions. However, identifying the unique effects of predictors and the possibility of interaction effects required hierarchical regression analyses. To control for the effects of one type of power on the other, the type of power not included in a hypothesis was entered in the first step; the relevant commitment and alternatives variables (for either self or partner) were entered in the second step; the interaction between commitment and alternatives was entered in the third and final step. For example, H1 concerned relationships between perceived partner-commitment and alternatives and conflict tactics. In the regression analyses, perceived self-commitment and alternatives were entered in the first step, perceived partner-commitment and alternatives were entered in the second step, and the interaction between partner-commitment and alternatives was entered in the third step. Power for these analyses was .73.

Hypothesis 1a predicted that dependence power would be positively related to one's own perceived use of integrative conflict tactics. The results of the hierarchical regression

Table 2
Hierarchical Regression Predicting Use of Conflict Tactics from Dependence Power Self

	<i>Self Conflict Tactics</i>	
	Integrative	Symbolic Aggression
Step 1		
R ²	.16**	.13**
Self-Alternatives	-.36**	.40**
Self-Commitment	-.06	-.05
Step 2		
ΔR ²	.01	.06**
Self-Alternatives	-.34**	.21
Self-Commitment	.04	.06
Partner-Alternatives	.06	-.33**
Partner-Commitment	.12	.25*
Step 3		
ΔR ²	.00	.01
Self-Alternatives	-.33**	.19
Self-Commitment	.03	.09
Partner-Alternatives	.06	-.33**
Partner-Commitment	.13	.22
Alternatives x Commitment	.03	-.09

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

analysis appear in Table 2. The inclusion of the dependence power variables at Step 2 did result in a significant model, $F(4, 150) = 7.87, p < .01$. However, neither partner-alternatives (Beta = .06, *ns*) nor partner-commitment (Beta = .12, *ns*) were significant. Thus, H1a is not supported.

Hypothesis 1b, that dependence power would be negatively related to one's own use of symbolic aggression tactics, received partial support. The model at Step 2 was significant, $F(4, 150) = 9.01, p < .01$. Specifically, perceptions of a partner's low levels of alternatives was negatively related to perceived own use of symbolic aggression (Beta = -.33, $p < .01$). However, perceptions of the partner's level of commitment was positively related to perceived own use of symbolic aggression tactics (Beta = .25, $p < .05$), which is contrary to what was hypothesized.

Hypothesis 2a predicted that individuals with independence power would be less likely to use integrative conflict tactics. The results of the pertinent hierarchical regression analysis appear in Table 3. The inclusion of the independence power variables at Step 2 did result in a significant model, $F(4, 150) = 7.87, p < .01$. The perception of having greater

Table 3
Hierarchical Regression Predicting Use of Conflict Tactics from Independence Power

		<i>Self Conflict Tactics</i>	
		Integrative	Symbolic Aggression
Step 1			
	R ²	.12**	.16**
	Partner-Alternatives	.25**	-.48**
	Partner-Commitment	.14	.19*
Step 2			
	ΔR ²	.05**	.03
	Partner-Alternatives	.06	-.33**
	Partner-Commitment	.12	.25*
	Self-Alternatives	-.34**	.21
	Self-Commitment	.04	.06
Step 3			
	ΔR ²	.00	.02
	Partner-Alternatives	.12	-.33**
	Partner-Commitment	-.34**	.25
	Self-Alternatives	-.33**	.20
	Self-Commitment	.06	.18
	Alternatives x Commitment	-.01	-.18*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

alternatives was negatively related to perceptions of one's own use of integrative tactics (Beta = $-.34$, $p < .01$), providing partial support for the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2b predicted that individuals with independence power would be more likely to resort to symbolic aggression tactics. The model at Step 2 was significant, $F(4, 150) = 9.01$, $p < .01$, though neither self-alternatives (Beta = $.21$, *ns*) nor self-commitment (Beta = $.06$, *ns*) made significant contributions. There was, however, a significant interaction between self-commitment and alternatives (Beta = $-.18$, $p < .05$) on Step 3, $F(5, 149) = 8.21$, $p < .01$. This interaction was examined via a procedure outlined by Aiken and West (1991). The procedure involved using a series of hierarchical regression analyses to explore the effects of self-alternatives at low (one standard deviation below the mean), medium (the mean), and high (one standard deviation above the mean) levels of self-commitment. The strongest effect for greater self-alternatives surfaced for high levels of commitment (Beta = $-.29$, $p = .06$); the effects at medium (Beta = $-.18$, $p = .06$) and low (Beta = $-.19$, $p = .06$) levels of commitment were weaker and more similar to one another.

Table 4
Hierarchical Regression Predicting Conflict Appraisals from Dependence Power

		<i>Self Conflict Appraisals</i>	
		Severity	Plans to Avoid Confrontation
Step 1			
R ²		.13**	.18**
Self-Alternatives		.04	.38**
Self-Commitment		-.39**	.06
Step 2			
ΔR ²		.03	.08**
Self-Alternatives		.16	.23
Self-Commitment		-.27*	-.13
Partner-Alternatives		.18	-.36**
Partner-Commitment		.10	-.13
Step 3			
ΔR ²		.04**	.01
Self-Alternatives		.18	.21
Self-Commitment		-.36**	.10
Partner-Alternatives		.20	-.34**
Partner-Commitment		.18	-.16
Alternatives x Commitment		.28**	-.07

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

H2b was not supported; rather, individuals who attributed both greater alternatives and greater commitment to themselves were less likely to resort to symbolic aggression.

Hypothesis 3, that dependence power would correlate positively with perceptions of problem severity when partner was the source of the problem, received mixed support. The results of the hierarchical regression analysis are presented in Table 4. The inclusion of the dependence power variables at Step 2 did result in a significant model, $F(4, 150) = 7.04$, $p < .01$, though neither partner-alternatives (Beta = .18, *ns*) nor partner-commitment (Beta = .10, *ns*) made significant contributions. There was a significant interaction between partner-commitment and alternatives (Beta = .25, $p < .01$) at Step 3, $F(5, 149) = 7.55$, $p < .01$. The strongest effect for partner's alternatives was at low levels of commitment (Beta = .28, $p < .05$); the effects at medium (Beta = .20, $p < .05$) and high (Beta = .21, $p < .05$) levels of commitment were weaker and more similar to one another. Thus, individuals who perceived their partners as having few alternatives and low levels of commitment were more likely to perceive problems as severe. This was not fully consistent with expectations.

Table 5
Hierarchical Regression Predicting Conflict Appraisals from Independence Power

		<i>Self Conflict Appraisals</i>	
		Severity	Plans to Avoid Confrontation
Step 1			
R ²		.14**	.24**
Self-Alternatives		.20*	-.43**
Self-Commitment		.22*	-.10
Step 2			
ΔR ²		.02	.02
Self-Alternatives		.18	-.34**
Self-Commitment		.10	-.13
Partner-Alternatives		.23	.23
Partner-Commitment		-.27*	-.13
Step 3			
ΔR ²		.01	.00
Self-Alternatives		.18	-.34**
Self-Commitment		.09	-.13
Partner-Alternatives		.12	.23
Partner-Commitment		-.34*	-.13
Alternatives x Commitment		.12	.01

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Hypothesis 4, that dependence power would correlate negatively with plans to confront the partner, received partial support, at Step 2, $F(4, 150) = 13.28$, $p < .01$ (See Table 4). Perceptions of partner's low levels of alternatives was a significant negative predictor of plans to avoid confrontation (Beta = $-.36$, $p < .01$), though partner-commitment was not (Beta = $-.13$, *ns*).

Hypothesis 5 predicted that independence power would correlate negatively with perceptions of severity. The results of the related hierarchical regression analysis are presented in Table 5. The inclusion of the independence power variables at Step 2 did result in a significant model, $F(4, 150) = 7.04$, $p < .01$. Perceptions of one's own low levels of commitment was predictive of severity appraisals (Beta = $-.27$, $p < .05$), though self-alternatives was not significant (Beta = $.16$, *ns*). These results provide partial support of H5.

Hypothesis 6 predicted that independence power would correlate positively with plans to avoid confrontation. Although the model at Step 2 was significant, $F(4, 150) = 13.28$, $p < .01$, neither self-commitment (Beta = $-.13$, *ns*) nor self-alternatives (Beta = $.23$, *ns*) proved to be predictive of plans to avoid confrontation (See Table 5). H6 was not supported.

DISCUSSION

Given the assumption that power is largely perceptual, this study examined two sets of perceptions that theoretically affect individuals' assessments of their own relational power. Dependence power is rooted in perceptions of one's partner's level of commitment and alternative relationships he or she sees as possible. By contrast, independence power is a function of perceptions of one's own level of commitment and alternative relationships. The import of this distinction lies in the possibility that these two forms of power might have differential effects in romantic relationships. One area in which these effects might be evident is conflict, particularly in regard to the specific tactics one sees him or herself employing during conflict, and the perceptions associated with conflict episodes. The following discussion considers the effects of dependence power and then the effects of independence power as revealed in the study.

Dependence Power, Conflict Tactics, Conflict Appraisals

Dependence power increases to the extent that one's partner is committed to a relationship and has few perceived quality alternatives to the relationship. In this investigation, perceiving one's partner as having poor alternatives to the current relationship was predictive of decreased use of symbolic aggression tactics and decreased plans to avoid confronting the partner concerning his/her problematic behavior. These findings are in line with the predictions advanced, which were premised on the idea that having a partner who depends on the relationship is an advantageous position and, as such, motivates the powerful person to preserve that position. Contrary to expectations, perceiving one's partner as being more committed to the relationship, however, proved to be predictive of greater self-reported use of symbolic aggression tactics. This result is consistent with previous research indicating that commitment levels are higher among violent couples (Hanley & O'Neill, 1997) and that minor aggression is fairly common in serious relationships (Stets, 1992). Hanley and O'Neill suggest that minor aggression may be a response to the perceived seriousness of the issue, intended or interpreted as a sign of love, or could be attributed to stress. In line with this explanation, Solomon, Knobloch, and Fitzpatrick (2004) found that committed individuals were more likely to express grievances to their spouses, which may result in conflict episodes that include minor aggression. Thus, the presence of symbolic aggression by itself may not necessarily mean that a relationship is in trouble.

The interaction between partner commitment and alternatives was predictive of perceptions of problem severity. Decomposing the interaction revealed that perceptions of severity were greater among those individuals who perceived that their partners had few quality alternatives but were not highly committed to the relationship. Cloven and Roloff (1993) discovered that individuals who had low alternatives and low commitment were less

likely to withhold control-related partner complaints, despite expecting symbolic and physical aggression. Individuals with low commitment presumably do not find their relationships attractive as a source of rewards and, therefore, ought to be little motivated to act constructively in the face of conflict. On the other hand, possessing few attractive alternatives may deter such individuals from exiting a relationship and, thereby, motivate them to utilize more passive strategies in the face of dissatisfaction, characterized by such negative forms of communicative behavior as avoidance, criticism, and hostility (cf. Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991).

Independence Power, Conflict Tactics, Conflict Appraisals

Independence power increases to the extent that one is not committed to the relationship and has high quality relational alternatives. Individuals who possess independence power presumably have little motivation to preserve their position in a relationship, with predictable results. In this investigation, perceived self-alternatives was related to less perceived use of integrative tactics. Additionally, lower levels of self-commitment enhanced the likelihood of one's perceiving partner-initiated problems as less severe. Integrative tactics are generally considered to be more other-oriented (Sillars & Weisberg, 1987) insofar as they serve to balance needs of self and other. Consistent with the reasoning underlying independence power, the more individuals perceived they had alternatives to their relationship, the less likely they were to make the effort required for a mutually satisfying resolution of conflicts.

Related to this, Solomon, Knobloch, and Fitzpatrick (2004) found that, when commitment levels were matched, spouses who perceived their partners had better alternatives were more likely to withhold complaints, perhaps fearing the manner in which their partner would respond. With respect to appraisals, Solomon and Samp (1998) suggest that appraising a partner's problematic behavior as less serious is a means of coping that allows individuals to avoid even having to consider whether or not to confront the person. Although they linked this state of affairs to the powerless person, the present findings suggest it can extend to the powerful party, when the basis for power is independence. That is, individuals who desire to maintain the power advantage that accrues from less interest in the relationship can do so by appraising problematic behavior as less severe than it might appear to be under other circumstances. Future research should consider whether or not the motives of both partners are more similar to or different from each other.

The interaction between self-commitment and perceived alternatives was related negatively to the use of symbolic aggression tactics. Decomposing the interaction revealed that the strongest effect was for individuals with both high levels of commitment and higher alternatives. Cloven and Roloff (1993) noted that individuals exhibiting this combination should desire to repair their relationships, but have the capacity to exit should those efforts

prove unsuccessful. Their research revealed that such people were more likely to withhold dominance-related partner complaints when anticipating symbolic aggression from the partner. The present results were in line with that finding and suggest that under such conditions, individuals are also less likely to resort to symbolic aggression themselves.

Limitations

The results of the current investigation require qualification. First, perceptions were those of only one partner in the relationship. If power is truly a relational attribute, then data for both partners should be acquired. Hanley and O'Neill (1997) reported that violent couples are more unlikely to agree with each other on levels of emotional commitment. It would be interesting to determine whether or not couples agreed about the desirability of each others' alternatives and if discrepancies strongly linked to perceived use of conflict tactics.

Second, the sample consisted almost entirely of dating couples. Although power issues are undoubtedly present in dating relationships, they may be less salient than in marital relationships (Solomon, Knobloch, & Fitzpatrick, 2004). Despite the self-report of high levels of commitment, it is likely that some of the relationships in this study will dissolve once enduring relational problems become evident.

Finally, the participants were reacting to conflict scenarios, rather than their own experiences. Although the scenarios were chosen because of their reported saliency to power issues, there is no guarantee that they were relevant to all the individuals in this sample. Even if relevance could be established, however, what individuals report regarding appraisals of severity and plans to confront might not be what they would do if actually faced with interacting with their partner in regard to some other type of conflict issue.

Implications

Research on dependence power in romantic relationships has consistently produced significant findings, though often less than might be hoped for and sometimes contrary to hypothesized expectations. Intuitively, however, it is difficult to abandon the idea that power plays a role in relational dynamics. Reflecting on the scattering of findings suggests several implications both practical and theoretical.

In discussing a number of "power paradoxes," Bacharach and Lawler (1986) advanced the idea that power is based on giving: "giving benefits' appears to be the most readily available tactic for manipulating the dependence of an opponent" (p. 169). The reason for this is that actors typically have some control over the provisions they give to partners. What this entails from a theoretical standpoint is a shift in focus from what individuals get out of relationships (e.g., benefits received, or even behaviors enacted to maintain the relationship)

to what they give specifically to their partners. Additionally, two more practical implications follow: (1) individuals must be willing to give within their relationships, and this giving may or may not be commensurate with relationship maintenance or investments; (2) individuals must know their partners and understand what their partners value. Individuals who desire to maintain or augment their dependence power must ask themselves, “Do I want to provide these benefits to my partner, perhaps indefinitely?” In the long run, both partners’ answers to this question will impact their mutual dependence, and thus, the context in which decisions about withholding complaints are made.

A second paradox described by Bacharach and Lawler (1986) is that possessing lower power can give one a tactical advantage: “High levels of commitment may also lead a party to expend more tactical effort to manipulate the other and, thereby, acquire the highly valued outcomes” (p. 173). Such tactical effort puts pressure on high power actors to give in on issues where they place lower value on the outcome and allows them to thereby convey an “image of benevolence.” This paradox may also shed further light on the chilling effect. Solomon and Samp (1998) posited two reasons why partners might avoid confrontation with a partner: fear of negative consequences and the perception of a problem as trivial. Within the chilling effect framework, however, this latter reason is really just an extension of the former: “We suggest that minimizing problem severity allows powerless individuals to avoid the cognitive and communicative demands, and the potential for negative consequences created by acknowledging situations as problematic” (pp. 193-194). Individuals who give, but do not receive, dependence power (i.e., powerless individuals) may therefore withhold complaints not because they fear the consequences, but because they are vying for a more strategic power position. Practically, this means that individuals must be willing to give in on some issues. But in order to know when to do that, they must know what they want from the relationship (i.e., what they most value). Future research is necessary to examine the long-term consequences of withholding complaints and grievances with respect to power dynamics.

The first two considerations rest upon dependence power as currently understood. The next one questions the construct itself. Dependence power is typically conceptualized as a function of commitment and alternatives. If one has no other viable alternatives to the relationship then one has to remain. If one enjoys and values the outcomes obtained in the relationship, then one wants to remain. Johnson’s (1999) expansion of the commitment construct problematizes this easy distinction. That is, personal commitment most readily lines up with the idea of wanting to remain in a relationship because one enjoys and values the outcomes obtained from the partner and/or the relationship itself. Structural and moral commitment, then, actually define why one has to stay in the relationship. Similarly, one can have low alternatives because of a lack of opportunity or through derogation of viable candidates. The former reason defines a “has to” component while the latter a “want to” component. Rather than separate commitment and alternatives as the foundations of

dependence, researchers may want to focus the distinction on those things that make one desire to remain in the relationship and those things that impose barriers against dissolution.

Finally, questions may be raised about the nature of relational power itself. Typically, power is defined as “the ability to influence relationship partners” (Solomon & Samp, 1998, p. 192). This definition might be called the *power as influence* model. This ability, however, may rest upon a number of partner-independent factors, such as one’s physical attractiveness, argumentative skill, status, or role. Further, this power is ultimately about getting one’s own way (i.e., influence as a goal-directed activity in which the partner is instrumental in accomplishing one’s own goal). An alternative perspective, which might be termed the *power as initiative* model, is provided by philosopher Hannah Arendt (1998). Utilizing the notion of power as potential, Arendt argued that power arises between people acting together:

Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities (p. 200).

This power, then, is destroyed by force and coercion and diminished to the extent that partners isolate themselves from one another. From this perspective, relational power might be recast as the ability to undertake joint projects together, to chart a jointly constructed course of action, and to remain dedicated to a common goal. Such a form of power would be entirely dependent upon partners’ willingness to be open to the reality of each other. Given the complexity of relationship dynamics, it is likely that both models would need to be integrated to provide a full account of relational life.

CONCLUSIONS

According to research on the chilling effect (Cloven & Roloff, 1993; Roloff & Cloven, 1990; Solomon & Samp, 1998), attributing independence power (as defined in the present investigation) to a partner contributes to withholding more complaints about the partner, withholding more control-related grievances when the partner is expected to respond with aggression, perceiving partner problematic behavior as less severe, and reporting greater plans to avoid confronting the partner over such behavior. The findings of the current investigation enlarge our understanding of the chilling effect in revealing that individuals who attribute independence to themselves are less likely to use integrative tactics in response to conflict, are more likely to perceive partner problematic behavior as less severe, and more likely to plan to avoid confrontation regarding the behavior. Collectively, these findings suggest that the chilling effect is a relational phenomenon affecting both

partners. In other words, when one partner has independence power, that power operates to “quell the expression of interpersonal complaints” (Cloven & Roloff, 1993, p. 200) by both parties.

At the same time, the results of the current investigation support the distinction between dependence power and independence power (and the subsequent linking of the chilling effect with independence power). As might be expected, however, possession of power does not operate in a straightforward way. Under some conditions, dependence power was associated with greater aggression, although the meaning of some kinds of aggression is open to question. By the same token, individuals with a kind of independence power, who have options but desire to remain with their current partner, were less likely to use symbolic aggression tactics. If power can be misused by resorting to negative tactics or by failing to engage potential conflict issues, then the results of this study suggest that the temptation to abuse increases when commitment levels are low and/or alternatives are high. Given that power is a pervasive issue in close relationships (Hinde, 1997), future research should continue to explore how these two variables, and the power bases they give rise to, operate to mitigate or potentiate Pitt’s “corruption of power.”

ENDNOTES

1. The assumption of voluntary association in social exchange renders undergraduate dating relationships well-suited to the purposes of this investigation. See Roloff and Cloven (1990, p. 55, footnote 1) for a discussion of this issue.

2. The item “I would try to downplay the seriousness of the problem,” was dropped from the scale because of its lack of consistency with other scale items. Cronbach’s alpha with item retained was .51.

3. Respondents also completed a measure of self use of physical aggression tactics drawn from Straus (1979, 1990) (e.g., “I would threaten to hit or throw something at my partner;” “I would throw something at my partner”). While the scale was reliable (.82), the mean for the variable was low and scores showed little variability ($M = 1.14$, $SD = .40$); therefore, it was eliminated from further analysis.

4. Independent samples t-tests revealed no significant differences between the two scenarios for appraisals of severity and plans to avoid confrontation. Results of these analyses are available from the author upon request.

APPENDIX A - CONFLICT SCENARIOS*

Partner Domination

Important things have been happening, but your partner won’t seek your input. You’ve been frustrated because your partner has made important decisions without you. In fact, you are irritated because your partner never consults you about big decisions.

Partner Insensitivity

Your partner has been increasingly insensitive to your feelings lately. You've been frustrated because your partner doesn't seem to hold you in very high regard. In fact, you are irritated because your partner treats you like a child.

*Scenarios drawn from Solomon and Samp (1998). Reprinted with permission.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Roger Silverstone. *Media and morality: On the rise of the mediapolis*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007, 224 pp., ISBN 978-0-7456-3503-3, \$59.95 (cloth)

Reviewed by Thomas Hove, University of Georgia

Media critic Roger Silverstone's final book extends the ethical analysis of mass media that he began to develop in his 1999 manifesto, *Why Study the Media?* That earlier book concluded with brief remarks on the media's role in establishing moral relationships between the self and other, across both interpersonal and cultural distances. *Media and Morality* treats that theme at length by exploring a wide variety of the media's ethical and cross-cultural functions. Silverstone grounds his analysis in the acknowledgment that we have increasingly come to rely on the media to regulate our ethical and cultural relations. His approach is heavily influenced by the moral and political philosophies of Isaiah Berlin, Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, and, especially, Hannah Arendt. Transposing Arendt's ideas about public space to the mass media, Silverstone describes a realm of publicity that is global in its scope and multicultural in its character. What emerges from this combination of pluralistic moral philosophy and contemporary mass media theory is the concept of the "mediapolis."

Silverstone explicates this core concept in not only normative but empirical, emotional, and political terms. He uses it to diagnose the interplay between ethical possibilities for cross-cultural communication and the material and symbolic conditions that constrain those possibilities. His forays into empirical social-theoretical description are relatively brief, and there is little here that resembles the macrosocial media theories of Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann, and Jeffrey Alexander. Instead, Silverstone devotes most of his attention to phenomenological considerations — in particular, how "relations between self and other are to be conducted in a global public sphere" (p. 22).

Taking a cue from Levinas, he describes the dynamics of self-other relations in terms of mutual responsibilities. He argues, "Our relation to the other, to the stranger, is the principal determinant of our moral worth and our status as human beings" (p. 101). The mass media are relevant to these moral concerns because they "provide the most pervasive and persuasive perceptual frameworks, in an increasingly global society, for the way in which meanings, representations and relationships to the other are offered and defined" (p. 101). To distinguish his concept of the mediapolis from Habermas' rival concept of the

public sphere, Silverstone highlights the emotional dimensions of living and communicating in a diverse global society: “The issue is not just the rationality of human communication, but a recognition that communication is grounded in a feeling for the world, and in the condition of being in the world among others” (p. 43). Given this emphasis on feelings and emotions, readers who are looking for an alternative to media researchers’ prevailing emphasis on information transmission will find much of interest in this book.

After broadly characterizing the mediapolis as a global public sphere in which cross-cultural and self-other relations take center stage, Silverstone’s middle chapters detail the ethical responsibilities that are most important in a pluralistic mass-mediated society. These responsibilities apply both to the people who produce the media and to all of us who watch and listen to them. To illustrate the mediapolis cosmopolitan character, Silverstone devotes an entire chapter to a critique of the absolutist discourse of evil in American political communication. He intends this sweeping case study to demonstrate the ethical shortcomings of a media discourse that is “not plural but polarized, not open but closed” (p. 79). In contrast to such a “singularizing” media discourse, the discourse of the mediapolis should provide “a space for multiple mediated voices” (p. 80). To sketch out what such a space might look like in empirical terms, Silverstone provides a brief but suggestive diagnosis of the status of minority media in Europe.

After exploring the responsibilities of media producers, Silverstone turns to the responsibilities of media audiences. Silverstone concentrates on audience members’ moral capacities for complicity, collusion, and compassion. He then relates these capacities to the media’s role in establishing proper ethical distances between spectating selves and suffering others. His sense of proper distance refers to “the critical notion that implies and involves a search for enough knowledge and understanding of the other person or the other culture to enable responsibility and care, as well as to enable the kind of action that, informed by that understanding, is in turn enabling” (p. 172). If our mass-mediated moral distance from others is too far, we consider them to be beyond the pale of compassion and solidarity. If our moral distance is too close, we inappropriately treat private experiences as matters for public exposure and consumption. But when the mass media can establish proper distances between self and other, as well as proper boundaries between private and public, they fulfill a key moral function in modern global society. Silverstone concludes this normative discussion of media audiences by suggesting how the ethical values of responsibility, care, and hospitality toward the other could be applied in media practices. He proposes a version of media literacy that would focus on the mass media’s capacity to define our sense of shared humanity in a pluralistic global society.

Like *Why Study the Media?*, *Media and Morality* reads like a manifesto recommending how future normative mass media studies ought to be conducted. Throughout the book, Silverstone’s style tends to be essayistic, speculative, and exploratory. These stylistic features can have the positive effect of revealing the complexity of certain concepts

or ethical problems. But they can also have the negative effect of jumbling too many concepts together at once and blunting the precision of Silverstone's claims. Perhaps because of his phenomenological orientation, the concepts he explicates do not fit into a systematic social or political framework. Nevertheless, they do establish a powerful moral perspective that is relevant to any number of mass-mediated relations between selves and others, intimates and strangers. The most intriguing feature of Silverstone's approach is that he treats the media as a symbolic environment that is permeated with ethical values and relations, and that is just as important as our material environment. This book provides a nuanced and eloquent account of how we might begin to save that unique environment from moral and political pollutions of our own making.

Angel Reyes, *Language, identity, and stereotype among southeast Asian American youth: The other Asian*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006, 192 pp., ISBN 978-0-8058-5539-5, \$73.95 (cloth)

Reviewed by Anastacia Kurylo, Marymount Manhattan College

When you think of Asians in American Popular Culture, who or what comes to mind? If you thought of Ang Lee, anime, Bruce Lee, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, Hideki Matsui, Ichiro Suzuki, karate movies, or Kazuo Matsui, then Reyes' book serves as an important contribution to your understanding of Asian culture. That you thought of Chinese and Japanese people and artifacts suggests that the justification Reyes provides for her text is valid. Reyes suggests that there is an "other Asian" group that is under the radar of American mainstream media and that group is worthy of scholarly attention. It is this group, Southeast Asian Americans, about whom Reyes writes based on four years working on an after-school video-making project sponsored by the Asian Arts Initiative.

As a researcher, Reyes is fastidious. The detail with which she discusses activities in the video-making project used for community building and idea generating allows these activities to be replicated by instructors who share similar goals. She provides her reader with a thorough history and description of the research site, operationalizes most of her definitions throughout the text, and supplies relevant footnotes for supplemental clarification.

Although the content and writing style are accessible to a wide audience, the cost of the text is prohibitive. Reyes shuns the masses for an academic audience. Specifically, scholars interested in an Asian American experience or a discourse analytic approach to culture and students learning qualitative methodology would most benefit from reading this text.

Reyes focuses on the experiences of participants in the video-making project and the way in which they construct community and individual identities despite Asian stereotypes. Unlike Lee (1996) who addresses the specific stereotype of the model minority, Reyes dedicates a considerable portion of her text to a lesser known stereotype of Asians, that of the problem minority.

Reyes takes a linguistic-anthropological perspective. The premise of her work is that "culture exists by virtue of its being invoked in interaction" (p. 117). Therefore, in order to study Southeast Asian American youth, Reyes analyzes "transcripts of talk" (p. 29) to explore "locally achieved meaning" (p. 28). Her use of a microanalytic approach is rare in scholarly research on culture (for an exception see Carbaugh, 2005), which often relies too heavily on Hofstede's intercultural dimensions (Kurylo, 2006). Reyes serves as a model of discourse analytic work on culture. One reason for this is because of her honesty about the difficulty of the research process.

In chapter one, “The Other Asian: Emergence of an Identity,” Reyes attempts to lay out her model logically and introduces her research site and focus: Southeast Asian American youth. She provides a brief history of the Asian American experience that has led to the dominance of certain Asian stereotypes. Prominent in this history is the forever foreigner stereotype which she contextualizes within stereotypes of European and African Americans. Although her initial model may be simplistic, the reader’s perseverance yields a final model that is persuasive precisely because of the detail it encompasses despite its simplicity.

Reyes dissects Asian newcomer stereotypes such as that of the forever foreigner stereotype in her second chapter, “‘No Kiss, No Money’: Constructing Identities With Asian Newcomer Stereotypes.” Here the reader glimpses the methodology Reyes uses throughout the text. Although, Reyes might have examined film representations of the forever foreigner stereotype from a media criticism approach, she instead analyzes participant discussions of these films as they work to produce their own film. The analysis of spontaneous interaction and the fabricated interaction from the “teen-created videos” may be confusing for the reader because these cannot in earnest be compared.

Chapter three explores stereotypes of Asian Americans as a problem minority. As indicated by the chapter title, “‘Aite’ and ‘Na Mean’: Constructing Identities With African American Stereotypes,” Reyes discusses how Asian American youth construct their identities as “other” than a model minority by using African American slang to align themselves simultaneously with and distinguish themselves from others by class and age. Similarly to Hegde (1998) that focused on Asian Indian immigrants, Reyes provides depth to her analysis by drawing on the intersections of stereotypes related to class, age, and race.

Originally, chapters three, four, and five were published independently in scholarly journals. Perhaps as a result, the juxtaposition of chapter three and four in particular seems incongruent. Nonetheless, each chapter contributes to the overall goals of the text. Chapters four and five address stereotypes used in relation to panethnicity. An extended discussion of panethnicity is warranted. Reyes argues that there is a contrast between the view of Asian Americans as a singular race (i.e., only Japanese or Chinese) and the view of Asian Americans as encompassing varied ethnicities. Reyes’ methodology is at its best in these chapters which rely on the interaction that took place at scriptwriting sessions and a conference panel.

In chapter four, “From Storeowners to Minivan Drivers: Building Panethnicity with Asian American Stereotypes,” general Asian and specific Chinese and Japanese stereotypes are invoked by participants. Reyes discusses how these create a community in which an Asian identity is shared such as through stereotypes about Asians as rice eaters. Participants used a brainstorming activity to spark these discussions. Reyes does not address the potential problem inherent in analyzing transcripts from a stereotype generating activity and instead treats them as naturally occurring (p. 100).

In chapter five, “‘Yo, Yo, He Cambo’: Dismantling Panethnicity With Asian American Stereotypes,” ethnicity takes precedence over race in participants’ identity construction. Reyes addresses how some participants used ethnicity to distinguish themselves from others through, for example, “ethnic epithets,” as well as to align participants through, for example, “ethnic pride.”

The final chapter, “Implications for Minority Youth in Alternative Education and Grassroots Video,” is concise. This chapter might have served as an opportunity to consider the implications of the identity construction that was discussed in earlier chapters. For example, Reyes might have taken a critical stance toward the intersections among stereotyping, identity, and language. For example, she discussed the reification of stereotypes through participants’ use of and reaction against identity and language. Instead, the final chapter is reduced to summarizing earlier chapters and promoting the use of “grassroots video making” in educational systems.

To her credit, Reyes operationalizes numerous definitions throughout her text including Asian American (p. 4), accent (p. 36), Mock Asian (p. 38), slang (p. 68), and race and ethnicity (p. 92). In contrast, and although so foundational to her research that it is in the title of her text, Reyes inadequately defines *stereotypes*, allotting only one paragraph to the description (p. 6). However, a much clearer definition appears at the end of her text where she defines stereotypes as “widespread typifications linking attributes to entities” (p. 149). Reyes’ decision to include “widespread” is problematic because, as she admits, “it is not entirely clear to what degree a typification must be shared for it to qualify as a stereotype” (p. 6). Nonetheless, she makes this determination when she classifies stereotypes of Asian Americans in the Philadelphia area as “local typifications” (p. 105) rather than stereotypes.

Reyes does not provide enough background information on stereotypes to facilitate understanding of some of her points. Reyes herself addresses how stereotypes function as tools throughout her text (e.g., pp. 28, 91, 123), a topic discussed extensively in stereotype research. This suggests a more inclusive discussion of stereotypes might have been warranted. Moreover, by ignoring recent research that suggests stereotypes with negative content are more communicable than those with positive content (e.g., Ford, Wentzel, & Lorion, 2001), Reyes missed the opportunity to ground her focus on problem minority stereotypes within the stereotype literature.

These limitations notwithstanding, Reyes’ book achieves its goals and has appeal for its desired audience. The text contributes to an understanding of Asian American identity construction through the use of stereotypes. By the final chapter, Southeast Asian Americans can be viewed as active contributors to their own identities and Asian, Chinese, and Japanese stereotypes take on new meaning. There is little precedent for this type of work, which seems foreign compared to other scholarly literature on culture.

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Robin P. Clair, Stephanie Bell, Kyle J. Hackbarth, Stephanie Mathes, and Megan McConnell, *Why work: The perceptions of a 'real job' and the rhetoric of work through the ages*. Ashland, OH: Purdue University Press, 2008, 230 pp., ISBN9781557534545, \$29.95 (paper)

Reviewed by Caryn E. Medved, Baruch College – City University of New York

Since the 1950s, organizational communication scholars have continuously re-examined central disciplinary issues in relation to broader theoretical developments in the academy. The interpretive turn careened into the linguistic turn. And, as of late, a slight rhetorical segue appears to be transforming into a 'discursive' super highway cutting across a terrain forever reshaped by the post-structural and the post-modern. Yet these paradigmatic meanderings have not — until now — prompted an extensive excavation of the social, political and economic history(ies) of the practice of organizational communication and the rhetoric of *work*. Knowing the myriad of ways language and social interaction have shaped the meaning of work and forms of organizing through the ages is a prerequisite to making sense of its complex practice today.

In a new book, *Why Work: The Perceptions of a 'Real Job' and the Rhetoric of Work through the Ages*, Robin P. Clair and her colleagues offer a glimpse of the multi-layered and multi-vocal rendering of the rhetoric of work and organizing across historical time and space. It is an insightful resource for both scholars' libraries and college classrooms. In this review, I explain the potential value of *Why Work?* to our field by connecting it to my own scholarship and teaching experiences. Next, I outline the various ontologies of work defined in this book. Finally, I close with a brief note about the increasingly complex relationship between the term *organizational* as the 'designated' marker of our disciplinary subfield and the concept of *work*.

In the time since my initial introduction to the field of organizational communication, a few related explorations have been published by communication scholars about how language and social interaction shape the various meanings of *work* and its symbolic connection to forms of organizing (e.g., Lucas & Buzzanell, 2006; Clair, 1996; Clair & Thompson, 1996; Medved & Kirby, 2005; Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, & Shepherd, 2006). Until Clair et al., however, no comprehensive and unique effort had been offered from within our disciplinary boundaries.

While publication constraints certainly limit the depth to which organizational communication textbooks can trudge into the history of organizing, it is safe to say that classical management is the commonly espoused beginning of our field's historical narrative (e.g., Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997; Eisenberg & Goodall, 2003; Miller, 2004; Modaff & Dewine, 2002). Most textbook authors offer but a nod to the history of work prior to the industrial revolution in the United States. I think most scholars of organizational

communication would agree that organizational life today is infused by (and perhaps only explainable through) organizing and work-related discourses and practices dominant prior to Taylor's scientific management.

To understand present-day distinctions between our public, organizational lives and our private lives, one needs to know that work and home most often existed in the same place and space in colonial U.S. Further, while the stories of classical management, human relations, and human resources approaches are essential to richly understanding organizational communication today, the privileging of these narratives silence many voices by their continued selection for textbook inclusion and their use in framing relevant organizational communication issues. When do we read about the philosophies and rhetoric of other activists, practitioners, and scholars not typically cited such as Booker T. Washington, Emma Goldman, Mother Jones, or Mary Follet Parker? In the work of Clair and her colleagues, these voices are added to the on-going disciplinary conversations.

Thus, scholarship and teaching in organizational communication can significantly benefit from the inclusion of a more extensive, historical understanding of the rhetoric of *work* meticulously positioned at the intersection of the social, political, and economic issues. Here is where the work of Clair and her colleagues provides a new and enlightening resource for deepening knowledge about the complexity and fluidity of organizational life. In this volume, the rhetorical roots of the meaning of work are traced from antiquity to contemporary times through the stories of philosophers, scholars, and activists.

Section One of the book begins by offering a way of thinking about the ontology of work and reflecting on how related classroom conversations may emerge or be prompted. The pedagogical experiences Clair recalls present examples of how to connect students' lived experiences with historic and contemporary discursive constructions of work, particular working through the colloquialism a 'real job' (see Clair, 1996). This section offers a broad overview of the ways that work has been organized over the ages. The authors begin in the western hemisphere with the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle and move through a number of its rhetorical roots in Europe and Asia, including monasticism, Confucianism, feudalism, Adam Smith's early capitalism, Weber's bureaucracy as well as Marxist challenges to industrialism. The discussion then moves to the roots of modern understandings of work in early America through the rhetoric of W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington, labor activists Mother Jones and Emma Goldman, as well as the often overlooked work of Mary Parker Follett, and where most organizational communication texts begin, scientific management.

Section Two presents ten chapters detailing each of these influences on the rhetoric of work with the following: (a) a brief biographical sketch of the philosopher, activist or practitioner, (b) a discussion of his/her philosophy and rhetoric of work, and (c) an illustration of how it relates to one example of contemporary organizational communication and/or management scholarship. Although an extensive summary of each of these chapters

is beyond the scope of this review, I will share two of the ways that Clair and her colleagues add to our disciplinary conversations about organizing and communicating.

First, organizational communication scholars have begun to address issues of race, albeit in a limited way (i.e., Allen, 2007; Medved & Kirby, 2005; Parker, 2002; 2003). Clair et al. add to this conversation by explaining how the rhetoric of prominent black Americans such as W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington shaped early discursive intersections among work, freedom, and education still embedded in present-day scholarship, practice, and policy debates. Students accustomed to reading management or organizational communication textbooks that address race only in terms of ‘diversity’ will be enlightened to read about how slavery in the U.S. continued to influence public discourse on identity, work, and social mobility after the abolition of the oppressive practice slavery. In short, this chapter can broaden and deepen our conversation about organizing and race.

Second, akin to the improving but limited discussions of race in organizational communication textbooks, the represented history of the roots of our field remains fairly ‘white collar’ or management-oriented in nature. I found Clair et al.’s discussion of the ‘conversations’ between Adam Smith and Karl Marx as well as the related rhetoric of early labor activists Mother Jones and Emma Goldman not only enriching historical portraits but essential narratives underlying so many current issues of globalization, capitalism, and labor relations. As explained by Clair and her colleagues in the contemporary research example offered in Chapter Eight, modern ‘sweat shops’ exist as ways of organizing that are part and parcel of the discourse and material practices of work in the U.S. and abroad. How can organizational communication scholars ethically claim to teach about organizational life in a global context without educating students on the historical foundations of these contemporary practices?

Section Three then weaves together these age-old yet too-often unnoticed stories of work and organizing into a more complex narrative for organizational communication scholars and in so doing, returns to the question: *Why work?* The answer is both simple and profound, “why people work and how they work are inseparable.” Hence, we close by again noting linguistic interplay between the concepts of *work* and *organizing*. As organizational communication scholars, we must study not only communication within and constitutive of *the organization* but also discourse and related practices *about* work (paid and unpaid) and organizational life. Doing so and doing it well requires broadening the teaching and learning in our field to include the historical and modern-day discursive intersections among forms of work, politics, economics, and social life. Clair and her colleagues help us proceed in this excellent direction.

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Matthew W. Seeger, Timothy L. Sellnow, and Robert R. Ulmer, *Communication and Organizational Crisis*. Westport, CA: Praeger, 2003, 297 pp, ISBN 978-1-56720-534-3 \$71.95 (cloth)

Reviewed by Patric R. Spence, Calvin College

Communication and Organizational Crisis is the first book to synthesize the vast amount of existing literature concerning organizational crisis and crisis communication. Literature from the fields of communication, management, industrial/organizational psychology, emergency management, and risk communication were consolidated to provide a quasi crisis concordance. This is an endeavor that was past due. The authors address several theoretical frameworks throughout the book that promote new ways of thinking about crisis.

The book is written for three broad audiences. First, for the instructor and graduate student of organizational studies, the holistic approach to the issue of crisis allows this book to be an excellent learning tool. The book provides a solid history and evolution of the study of crisis. Second, to the researcher, this book provides not only a beginning point but can in many ways serve as an index of crisis literature. Third, to the organizational member/manager, the book provides relevant and interesting examples of crisis through the use of several brief case studies. Crisis preparation and management is becoming a recognized and needed skill for organizational managers. This book will promote mindful crisis thinking. Through the use of the case studies the authors outline solid examples from which the organizational member/manager can learn and use as a point of evaluation.

The book is divided into five sections. Section One, Introduction and Overview, encompass chapters 1 through 4. After opening with explanations of what a crisis is, the authors move on to an explanation of the characteristics of organizational crisis. This includes an overview of common characteristics of crisis and a general outline of the book. Crisis characteristics such as uncertainty, threat, desire for information, and unpredictability are explained early and supported throughout the book. In chapter two the authors provide explanations of three general organizational theories and their implications for crisis. The theories included sensemaking, chaos theory, and organizational learning theory. This is one of the strongest chapters in the book due to the placement of these theories into a systems perspective and the theories relationship to crisis management. Moreover, the theoretical discussion in this chapter prepares the reader for later chapters in the book where authors blend the use of theory and applied research together well. A criticism of this chapter is the author's statement that "broader theoretical frameworks are necessary to building more complete understandings of crisis events" (pg. 43) although no frameworks are addressed.

The next part of this section acquaints the reader with several crisis classifications, their importance, and the strengths and weaknesses of each. This allows the reader to

understand the novelty of crisis. The authors prepare the reader for the structure of upcoming segments of the book. This structure provides a map so the reader always has an idea of what broad topic is next. Section one concludes by explaining how organizational crisis and communication intersect at many points. The role of crisis communication has expanded in recent years; communication was once only examined as part of public relations used as a post crisis response. However, the role of communication and crisis started to change as researchers began to view it as a continual process and the authors dissect how communication is best used in crisis. The instrumental role of communication in organizational crisis is explored including reduction of uncertainty, sensemaking, coordination, risk, and the need of communication that is appropriate to the crisis.

Section two examines crisis stages and crisis development. Outlined are several models of crisis development, their stages and approaches. The authors justify their choice in using a three-phase model to explain crisis development throughout the book. The next three chapters in this section deal with communication in the pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis stages. The authors continue to provide rich detail in description of each stage. It is at this point the most care needs to be used by the reader. Particular case studies are used in the explanation of multiple stages and aspects of crisis management. If close attention is not given, the reader may overlook the consideration given to the novelty of each event. It is not clear whether the author's intent was to develop a strong explanation of the context alongside of the description of the crisis or if the intent was to allow the reader to follow a case through multiple stages. Although this section of the book requires the greatest care in reading it also provides some of the best examples of applied research which is needed in the study of crisis.

Section Three can be considered a crisis management handbook and although it supports and relates to the previous sections of the book, it could stand on its own. The ways in which an organization can and should plan for a crisis are examined, including issues of motivation to plan and the organizations ability to plan. This section is not broken down into a "crisis planning for dummies" as is a popular trend in many recent books that have a practical emphasis. Much care is needed when reading this section because of the inherent scope and overlap of crisis communication and risk communication. The authors explain how the two forms of communication complement each other, overlap, and diverge. Much like the chapter on theory however, the authors explore the role of science (research) in crisis management. Because crises are novel events, the reader must determine the best way to use science in a crisis situation.

The next part of this section continues to explore crisis management through the discussion of Crisis Management Teams and their organizational roles and responsibilities. This is an informative section, but the authors downplay the role of theory throughout this section. Although several classical theories of group communication and management are used there is less reference and explanation of their role.

In section four the authors again promote the role of communication as central to the management of crisis and the organization. In this section it appears most prominently in the discussion of ethics. As stated the “ethical issues of crisis, as with ethics in other contexts, involve balancing and prioritizing a set of competing values. This requires discussing and debating moral issues in a way that allows for their full exploration” (p. 238). This section continually reminds the reader that this book is communicative in nature.

In this section a return to the integration of theory and applied research is seen, particularly in chapter 13 examining crisis and leadership. The issues of leadership traits, styles and functions are all examined through well-known theory and applied research. Further, the discussion is related back to chapter 2 in the application of chaos theory and leadership and chapter 12 through a discussion on values and virtues. Leadership is framed as critical to the crisis management process and leadership is brought back to its relationship to communication.

The book concludes with a discussion of crisis and its role in society. The reader is reminded that crises are inevitable but that inevitability does not mandate the absence of crisis preparedness. Most striking in this chapter is the examination of crisis as an opportunity and as a dialog. The crisis may allow an organization to frame the event as an opportunity for growth, learning, and renewal. Thus, rather than seeing the crisis as a wholly negative event, admit what happened, discuss what happened, resolve what happened, and return to normalcy with a new outlook. The discussion is reminiscent to the old cliché “that which does not kill me, makes me stronger.” Furthermore, the crisis is an event where the organization communicates with stakeholders and those impacted by the crisis. Allowing this communication to be a dialog promotes the notion that the organization is socially responsible and committed to resolution.

Crisis events are becoming more common and increasingly visible. The effects of crises are no longer limited to a small geographic community. Therefore this book is timely in its release and such a book is essential for both managers and researchers. Understanding the crisis alone is not sufficient, thus the book’s framing of communication as being central in all stages of dealing with the organizational crisis makes the goal of this book worthwhile.

The strengths of this book are obvious; it is a useful synthesis of the existing literature concerning organizational crisis and crisis communication. It is well written to several audiences. The book is particularly strong in the continued integration of theory and applied research, which most of all makes this book a must for the manager. Nonetheless, shortcomings still exist. The novelty of crisis events makes the continued use of particular case studies both advantageous and confusing. The book also addresses the role of information dissemination as a communication role in crises. Although this was done well because much of the literature addressed the needs and desires of individuals to obtain information in a crisis, a chapter dedicated to information-seeking and dissemination might have been warranted.

Despite the discussed limitations, *Communication and Organizational Crisis* offers a valuable synthesis of existing crisis research, timely and interesting examples, and is a beneficial book for the shelf of the crisis researcher, student, and organizational manager.

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