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## Rhetorically navigating Rwandan research review: A fantasy theme analysis

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### Introduction

Research ethics review is foundational to protecting the rights of research participants, particularly vulnerable populations (e.g., members of socially/economically marginalized groups, people who do not speak the dominant language, illiterate/semi-literate people, pregnant women, prisoners). Internationally, the review of human subjects research is influenced by shared ethical codes such as the Belmont Report and the Declaration of Helsinki, but national and institutional contexts also frame research ethics review. Rwanda's in-country human subjects review processes are situated within a context that includes factors such as the historical impacts of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi<sup>1</sup>; rapid urbanization; youth population growth; and a post-genocide political culture emphasizing economic development, security, public image, and human rights reform. Within this complex context—which some have argued is characterized by authoritarianism (Burnet, 2008), increasing government standardization (Van Hoyweghen, 1999), and intense national pride (Melvin, 2012)—researcher-generated documents play an important role in navigating Rwanda's in-country human subjects review.

This article presents an analysis of a research protocol written and submitted by U.S. academic researchers (Walton and Zraly) for human subjects review in Rwanda. This research protocol was the primary application document for a proposed study involving Rwandan youth without caregivers. As such, it presented complicated intersections of ethical obligations and transnational contingencies. On the one hand, we had an ethical imperative to account for the

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<sup>1</sup> Named the “Tutsi genocide” by Rwandan constitutional amendment in 2008 (United States Department of State 2010).

protection of participants' rights and welfare with respect to the laws; customs; language; and social, economic, political, and cultural realities of the contemporary Rwandan context (Association for Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs, 2009). The protocol, and its review, was the vehicle through which we, U.S. researchers, could demonstrate sufficient knowledge of Rwandan ideals and values, the social legacy of the genocide, and locally appropriate ways to handle ethical issues concerning research involving youth without caregivers. On the other hand, in order to make it feasible for the project to be accomplished during one academic summer semester, we had to overcome logistical limitations such as preparing the document in the US before traveling to Rwanda and acquiring approval of the protocol after only one review. This meant that it was compulsory for our protocol to be submitted in error-free compliance with application requirements and received by the Rwandan reviewers as scientifically, ethically, logistically, culturally, politically, and otherwise sound, raising no major red flags that would require a protracted revision process.

The Rwandan regulatory committee, which had a reputation for stringency, quickly and readily approved the protocol after one review and minor revisions (e.g., adding phone numbers, revising the protocol title, assigning co-principal investigator status to a Rwandan research team member). Using fantasy theme analysis, we investigate what made the protocol resonate with reviewers. This investigation identifies effective rhetorical strategies with implications for other scholars who craft persuasive documents in ethically complex cross-cultural environments. These environments intensify the ethical stakes of persuasive communication, making it very important for communication scholars to respect what Johnson (1998) called the powerfulness of language: “[language] can persuade, control, and manipulate...the *power* of language and other technologies is useful, but with that power comes responsibility for, and a respect of, the *powerfulness* [of language which leads to action]” (emphasis in original, pp. 18-19). When that action is securing approval to conduct cross-cultural research with vulnerable populations, the ethical stakes for persuasive language are high indeed—highlighting the need for professional communication research that is intentionally and explicitly responsive to human rights concerns.

## Literature review

This work is framed by literature on text analysis and symbolic convergence theory. Text analysis is a valuable practice for developing a better understanding of people, organizations, and cultures based on their written documents. Within the umbrella of text analysis, symbolic convergence theory and its accompanying method fantasy theme analysis equip researchers to identify motives and values of particular groups.

### The value of text analysis

Analyzing texts can provide insight into professional practices, social and political contexts, and cultures (Faber, 2007; Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2011; Huckin, 1992). Text, defined as “complex linguistic forms larger than the single sentence” (Lê & Lê, 2009, p. 5), is a key subset of the broader concept of discourse,<sup>2</sup> which includes “the vast array of meaning-making resources available to us...encompassing words, pictures, symbols, design, colour, gesture, and so forth” (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 357). As Faber (2007) claimed, text can serve as a vital

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of definitions of “discourse” relating to discourse analysis, see Lê & Lê, 2009, p. 4–6 *Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization* October, 2013, Volume 4, Number 1, 78-102.

bridge between the tangible and the ineffable-but-influential factors at play in professional and social contexts: “Texts are a juncture between regulation and agency, the technical and the social, and the organization and society” (p. 216). Because texts reside at these junctures, they convey both micro- and macro-level information (Faber, 2007). In other words, scholars can examine detailed information such as sentence length and word choice for implications about a particular communicative act (micro) and can also examine broader themes to infer important information about context and culture (macro).

Insight into organizational practices, social and political contexts, and cultures can help communicators to craft rhetorically successful documents that are likely to be accepted by audience members. Because of the contextual insight it can provide, text analysis is a useful tool in enacting rhetoric, defined as “the art of persuasion or the study of the means of persuasion available for a given situation” (Burke, 1969, p. 46). For a message to be persuasive, it must tap into the factual reality of a given situation and the audience’s interpretation of that reality. In fact, scholars such as Bormann (1972) have argued that interpretation, or words, can be more valuable for generating a rhetorically informed understanding of events than factual reality:

When a critic makes a rhetorical analysis he or she should start from the assumption that when there is a discrepancy between the word and the thing, the most important cultural artifact for understanding the events may not be the things or ‘reality’ but the words or symbols. (p. 400–401)

According to this perspective, texts do not reflect reality, they produce it.

This perspective on text analysis is congruent with critical research that emphasizes the rhetor’s imperative to reflexively examine the rhetor’s own ends, the actions that a text is intended to prompt, and probable outcomes of those actions. This reflexive approach is particularly important when crafting persuasive messages in ethically murky contexts. As Johnson (1998) acknowledged, when communicators pursue deceitful ends, they can use rhetoric as a tool to strengthen their ability to deceive: “When the end is deceit or deception, the possibility that rhetoric might be used for unethical purposes presupposes that the rhetor will only use rhetoric toward his or her own gain” (p. 22). In contrast, when communicators accept a moral and ethical responsibility to support the interests of the full range of stakeholders (Johnson, 1998), they can use rhetoric as a way to simultaneously serve the rhetor, the audience, and other players by crafting persuasive messages that prompt actions promoting positive outcomes for the fullest range of people. This inclusive, intentional focus on positive stakeholder outcomes is especially important when designing research involving vulnerable populations and crafting documents to describe that research. Thus, our use of text analysis is driven by a critical rhetorical intent to inclusively serve, not to deceive. This intention is explored in more depth in “Effective Use and Potential Abuse of Fantasy Theme Analysis.”

Driven by this inclusive, service-oriented rhetorical intent, our research fits within the critical discourse analysis research movement. Critical discourse analysis is “a problem-oriented interdisciplinary research movement, subsuming a variety of approaches, each with different theoretical models, [and] research methods” characterized by a broadly emancipatory agenda

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(Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 357). Research within this movement addresses questions such as, “How do existing societies provide people with the possibilities and resources for rich and fulfilling lives, how on the other hand do they deny people these possibilities and resources?” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 202). This type of critical research question is relevant to the framing of our proposed study, which explored factors affecting the well-being of Rwandan youth without caregivers. To most clearly and persuasively frame this study, we needed to not only present the design of a rigorous and valid research study but also tap into relevant values and concerns of the Rwandan reviewers—to convey an understanding of the ways they produce, experience, and interpret their worlds. Critical scholar Deetz (2003) encouraged the use of text analysis to look “through discourse to see the specific ways the world is produced” (p. 425).

We use symbolic convergence theory and its accompanying method, fantasy theme analysis, to uncover how groups of people experience and explain their worlds in general, as well as given situations, events, or issues within their worlds. According to the founder of symbolic convergence theory and fantasy theme analysis, Ernest Bormann (1972), “Individuals in rhetorical transactions create subjective worlds of common expectations and meanings” (p. 400). Thus, when we create persuasive communication, we are creating new worlds of common expectations and meanings, sharing not just ideas but envisioned futures, shared desires, connections. This theory-method complex provides scholars with “a process that can interrelate important features of communication and rhetorical theory” (Bormann, 1972, p. 396) to better understand the motives, values, and culture of groups. Scholars with this understanding are then equipped to generate more effective persuasive messages for these groups by drawing upon relevant fantasy themes (Vasquez, 1993). Fantasy theme analysis is a powerful tool for generating the kind of rigorous text analysis advocated by Deetz (2003) and Faber (2007). These scholars called for analysis that is not just descriptive but generative, that “provide[s] a more fruitful way of thinking and talking about our shared situation and enhance[s] the capacity to act in it” (Deetz, 2003, p. 427). Because symbolic convergence theory and fantasy theme analysis equip scholars to examine communication for groups’ shared motives, values, and ways of thinking about and acting within their worlds, this theory-method complex can enhance scholars’ understanding of audience and capacity to craft messages that will resonate with those audience members.

### **Symbolic convergence theory and fantasy theme analysis**

Symbolic convergence theory is a general communication theory that accounts for shared consciousness, characterized by communal emotions, motives, and meaning, in terms of shared narratives or fantasies (Bormann, 1985). The theory grew out of research on small group communication by Bales, Bormann, and others, in which researchers observed group members responding emotionally—laughing, blushing, talking excitedly—to what researchers characterized as dramatizing messages (Bormann, 1972). Bormann extended that work to include written communication and mass communication and to include groups of people who do not know each other, what he called zero-history groups (1972). Bormann (1985) described groups as coming to a symbolic convergence about a particular aspect of their experience when groups are “caught up in a drama” (p. 130) with an explanatory narrative in which they become invested. These narratives have heroes for whom group members feel sympathy or even empathy and villains who prevent other characters, such as the heroes, from achieving admirable goals.

Emotional investment with characters in the drama leads to intense interest in the story line; groups come to a symbolic convergence of experience.

Symbolic convergence theory's associated method, fantasy theme analysis, provides a way to examine communication to identify relevant aspects of shared fantasies that lead to symbolic convergence (Bormann, 1972, 1985). A fantasy theme is comprised of a "dramatizing message that sparks a chain of reactions and feelings" (Bormann, 1985, p. 131). Bormann (1972) used the following example to illustrate how fantasy themes are formed and how they reflect values and attitudes: if someone conveys a dramatizing message about a politician becoming a laughingstock, and recipients of the message chain out that drama by conveying additional messages in which this political figure is to be laughed at, then the group has created a common character to which they can allude in subsequent conversations. This character is a fantasy theme that not only represents an inside joke but serves as an indication of values and attitudes of the people ascribing to the fantasy theme (p. 398). This example points to a key distinction between fantasy theme analysis specifically and simple thematic analysis more generally. Thematic analysis is a range of approaches to identifying and conveying patterns across data (Braun & Clark, 2006), similar to what Miles and Huberman described as "coding" (1994, p. 55-69). In contrast to general thematic analysis, fantasy theme analysis identifies specific kinds of patterns: this method is precisely targeted to identify characters and themes that emotionally resonate with people and indicate their values, motives, and attitudes.

Fantasy theme analysis provides a valid research method for inferring motive, which underlies action and is useful for interpreting and understanding social experience (Bormann, 1972):

Motives do not exist to be expressed in communication but rather arise in the expression itself and come to be embedded in the drama of the fantasy themes that are generated and serve to sustain them. Motives are thus available for direct interpretation by a community of scholars engaged in rhetorical criticism. (p. 406)

Fantasy theme analysis is conducted by first gathering relevant communication, for example in the form of written documents, video recordings of public speeches or group communication, a researcher's own observations, recollections of interview participants, or other forms (1972). These communications are reviewed for evidence of symbolic convergence, which includes "the recurrence of dramatizing material such as word play, narratives, figures, and analogies...cryptic allusions to symbolic common ground...the inside-joke" (Bormann, 1985, p. 131). This evidence conveys a narrative that has chained out in patterns of characterizations, or fantasy themes. For example, in our fantasy theme analysis (described in detail in "Background and Procedures"), characters emerged from analysis of online news sources and related links about Rwandan youth and development efforts.

This method for identifying patterns of specific characterizations has inspired a significant body of research since the method's inception in the 1970s. For example, Vasquez (1993) identified more than 50 fantasy theme analyses, and Bormann, Cragan, and Shields (2003) claimed that more than 485 scholarly books and articles used the associated theory, symbolic convergence



theory. However, despite a few exceptions,<sup>3</sup> this method is rare in professional communication scholarship. In the broader academic community, symbolic convergence theory has drawn some criticism, much of which has been directly rejoined by Bormann and other scholars, producing a lively debate.<sup>4</sup> We have found the analysis and critique of symbolic convergence theory by Waldeck, Shepard, Teitelbaum, Farrar, and Seibold (2002) to be a useful summary of the theory's strengths and weaknesses. The limitations they identified include the rarity of studies using symbolic convergence theory to (1) predict group behavior (p. 12) and to (2) identify conditions leading to symbolic convergence across group contexts (p. 11). However, the strengths of fantasy theme analysis include its fit for understanding decision making (Bormann 1982; Cragan & Shields, 1992; Stone, 2002) and for explaining what makes persuasive communication strategies effective and ineffective (Kendall, 1993)—both issues of central interest in our text analysis. This analysis focused on a nominally factual account of planned research, which was also a persuasive document, with the goal of garnering approval from a regulatory body.

In concluding this overview of symbolic convergence theory and fantasy theme analysis, we want to emphasize the technical definition of fantasy—a way to envision a desired future or interpret past experience. Bormann used fantasy as a technical term drawn from a Greek root word (*phantaskikos*) that means showing to the mind or making visible (Vasquez, 1993). Rhetorical fantasies are often based on provable historical facts and events, and both discursive logic and creative imagination have a role in fantasies (Bormann, 1972). Bormann gave the example of a sporting event in which one team wins by a single point (1972, p. 405). Both teams may have conflicting rhetorical fantasies that interpret the same historical facts: for example, the winning team may share a fantasy that justice was served and the heroes have won the day due to greater skill, but the losing team may share a fantasy that inept or unfair officials caused an unjust outcome. Both fantasies are based on real, provable events.

The historical context of our research includes the real, provable event of genocide—human rights violation on a grand scale—and we realize the potential danger of associating the word “fantasy” with such a context. Let us be clear: this fantasy theme analysis in *no way* questions the historical facts of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, nor does it make claims to interpret the events of the genocide. Fantasy theme analysis is the established name of a method that we have used to identify themes that have chained out to shape interpretation of topics and relationships relevant to research involving the well-being of Rwandan youth.

### **Research context**

Like most rigorous field research, our proposed study was designed within and for a particular context. We describe this context in terms of relevant social, political, and historical background at the national level (“Rwandan National Context”) and in terms of relevant concerns and factors influencing the research review process (“In-Country Research Review”).

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<sup>3</sup> See Moran's 2002 fantasy theme analysis of a 1584 commercial report and brief citations of Bormann's work in earlier articles such as Allen, 1993 and Blyler, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> For a recent example, see Gunn, 2003 and Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2003.

## **Rwandan national context**

Our research was planned to take place in the context of post-genocide Rwanda. It has been estimated that over one million people were killed during the genocide of the Rwandan Tutsi people in 1994 (Government of the Republic of Rwanda, 2013). In addition to causing exquisite suffering and grave harm, the genocide destroyed the state's infrastructure and profoundly disrupted social institutions, such as the family (Newbury & Baldwin, 2000). For example, due to the loss of adults in the general population from genocide, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and imprisonment for genocide crimes, never-before-seen Rwandan social forms, such as child- and youth-headed households have emerged. Both the impacts of the genocide and the efforts to recover and reconstruct society have shaped the post-genocide Rwandan context.

In the post-genocide period, the reconstruction of social and political life has been defined by remarkably rapid change and complexity. While the post-genocide Rwandan government has established and maintained national security and demonstrated commitment to contributing to regional stability—e.g., providing troops for international peacekeeping missions (Beswick, 2010)—some analysts claim that restrictions on freedom of expression are used to control civil society and political space (Amnesty International, 2011). Similarly, Rwanda's post-genocide economy has reached extraordinary rates of economic growth (Institute of Policy Analysis and Research, 2012) and is held up as a model of economic development (Crisafulli & Redmond, 2012). Yet 45 percent of the population lives in poverty (United Nations Development Program, 2012), and income inequality is extremely high (50.8 Gini Index, per World Bank, 2013). Though the government employs sophisticated public relations campaigns to globally project a positive national image (Racepoint Group, 2013; York 2012), critics still contend that Rwanda is an authoritarian, single-party state where fear is reinforced by government policies (Beswick, 2010; Burnet, 2008). In response, the Rwandan government frames such critiques as perpetuation of long-standing neocolonial patterns of Western interference and double-standards (Kagame, 2012).

Meanwhile, Rwanda has some of the highest rates of youth population growth and urbanization in the world (Sommers & Uvin, 2011). Youth (defined in Rwanda as ages 15-35 years in order to encompass the entire generation of children whose lives were severely disrupted by the genocide) comprise up to 40 percent of the Rwandan population (African Development Bank, 2011). Many youth who move from the countryside to the capital city of Kigali in pursuit of employment reside in illegal, informal settlements where opportunities for upward socio-economic mobility are severely constrained (Sommers & Uvin, 2011). In 2012, the ministries of 'Youth' and 'Information and Communication Technology' were merged in an effort to support youth economic empowerment through self-employment and job creation (Kanyesigye, 2012; MINICYOUTH, 2012). However, to reach this goal, research with Rwandan youth is needed to effectively formulate, translate, and enforce youth-centered policies (African Development Bank, 2011).

## **In-country research review**

Over the last decade, the unprecedented increase in both research activities involving human subjects in Africa and research collaboration between industrialized and developing countries (Nyika et al., 2009) have raised concerns about health-related research (with "health"



encompassing well-being broadly defined) with organizations such as the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS). Recognizing the potential for Western research studies to exploit resource-deprived countries and vulnerable persons, CIOMS, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), revised its international ethical guidelines for biomedical research involving human subjects. The revised document provides general principles of ethics for research involving human subjects that set out to explicitly uphold respect for human rights, including the well-being of the human participant taking precedence over the interests of science and society (CIOMS, 2002). These principles are endorsed by international human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which declares the universal right to the benefits of science (Chapman, 2009).

The WHO, which is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system, strongly recommends that all countries strive to develop ethics committees to ensure research participant protections that uphold human rights principles (WHO, 2000). In Rwanda, the National Commission for Human Rights is the body responsible for reestablishing a culture of respect of human rights after unfathomable human rights violations occurred during the 1994 genocide. It has publicly and explicitly stated its commitment to continue in the struggle of realizing human rights for all Rwandans (Rwanda National Commission for Human Rights, 2009). The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has commended Rwanda's efforts both to shape an inclusive new society that explicitly rejects discrimination and to meet its human rights reporting obligations (OHCHR, 2011). However, cases of extrajudicial killings, torture, disappearances, violence against children, and unlawful detention and discrimination continue to be reported in Rwanda (OHCHR, 2010-2011). These are the conditions under which the Rwanda National Ethics Committee (RNEC), one of 24 National Research Ethics Committees in the African region, operates to review, approve, and oversee research involving human subjects (Kachnowski & Pathak, 2008).

The RNEC was created in 2002 as an Institutional Review Board (IRB), which functions to ensure that basic ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice underlie the conduct of research involving human subjects (United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1979). Therefore, the RNEC is responsible for "protecting human subjects by conducting a risk benefit analysis of proposed research, ensuring that informed consent and confidentiality protocols are applied appropriately, and that the selection of participants is just and equitable" (Milne, 2005, Gatekeepers and the Emergence of Ethical Conundrums section, para. 4). The committee serves under the authority of the Rwanda Ministry of Health (European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership, 2012) and is registered (IORG# 0001100, IRB# 00001497) with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Human Research Protections. The Office for Human Research Protections oversees international IRBs in order "to ensure that human subjects outside of the United States who participate in research projects conducted or funded by DHHS receive the same level of protections as research participants inside the United States" (United States Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). Under this arrangement, the RNEC provides monthly documentation of its activities to the Office for Human Research Protections.

The self-stated mission of the RNEC is “to safeguard the dignity, rights, health and wellbeing of those participating in the biomedical research, to ensure that the informed consent is granted, and to approve protocols and research projects which meet ethics standards” (European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership, 2012b). Biomedical research is implicitly equated with health research in the publication *Guidelines for Researchers Intending to Do Health Research in Rwanda* (Ministry of Health, Republic of Rwanda, 2012), which defines health research as, “Any activity intended to increase the stock of knowledge relating to health that can be generalized and used to draw conclusions, devise new applications, and guide decision-making” (p. 4). These published research guidelines outline the scientific and ethics review processes for research proposals, as well as the criteria for approval and implementation of research. All proposed projects must include some aspect of capacity-building for Rwanda, are subject to monitoring by the Ministry of Health, and must plan to publish data and results in Rwanda. Foreign investigators are requested to have a Rwandan collaborator involved at all stages of a research project to help ensure its relevancy, to facilitate the approval process, and to build national research capacity.

When we set out to prepare our research protocol for submission to the RNEC, we were aware of the committee’s reputation for demanding strict compliance with the rules of the review process. Zraly had previously submitted protocols for review by the RNEC and knew that research protocols had to be submitted at least 15 working days before a scheduled monthly meeting date to make it onto the agenda for review. In addition, contacts in the field advised us that the research clearance process had been recently reorganized and become more complicated. Since these changes, an article in the *African Studies Association News* also described working with the RNEC as “a whole different ballgame,” the process of getting research permission in Rwanda as “tricky,” and the requirement to submit nine copies of the protocol on nine separate CDs each in its own jewelcase as something you “don’t mess around with” (Seay, 2012). The researcher interviewed for the African Studies Association news article, under protection of anonymity, suggested that,

the research proposal needs to be carefully worded... as one will want to make one’s project sound as politically innocuous as possible, at the same time making it sound as though this project will bolster the RPF’s [ruling political party Rwandan Patriot Front] mission of stability and development. (Seay, 2012)

In light of this information and the fact that our project timeline allowed for a one-month window to acquire approval, our application preparations included Zraly’s Rwandan husband traveling to Rwanda two weeks before the submission deadline as a field research coordinator,<sup>5</sup> and our scouring the Rwandan media for material related to our research topics to discern the current framing of those topics by government leaders and other relevant parties.

## **Background and procedures**

In spring 2012, Walton and Zraly wrote a 117-page protocol for a multi-disciplinary research study of factors affecting the well-being of Rwandan youth. This protocol described research

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<sup>5</sup> Jean Pierre Mugengana was consulted on this article and requested to be recognized as presented. The RNEC review suggested giving him co-principal investigator status, and this change was made on the final protocol.

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procedures and plans, presented the expertise of the principal and co-principal investigators, and framed the proposed research in terms of its significance for development efforts focused on Rwandan youth. We submitted the protocol to the RNEC, which not only quickly approved the proposed research but made two important concessions: (1) approving our request to preserve participant anonymity by using an information sheet rather than consent form (i.e., no participant signatures, so no record of participant names) and (2) allowing our research to proceed during the national census, when other research was suspended. We considered this response to be an ideal outcome—for ourselves in terms of allowing the research to go forward and for our participants in terms of preserving anonymity. Because of the importance of documentation in mediating the research review process, we ascribed this outcome largely to the protocol, which, we suspected, resonated with reviewers because it drew upon relevant fantasy themes.

To identify relevant fantasy themes that have chained out across existing communications, Price examined online documents related to the main topics of the protocol: Rwandan youth, well-being, and development. To increase the validity of the findings, Price, who was not involved with the creation of the research protocol and therefore was not biased by the protocol content, conducted this analysis. He reviewed numerous online texts including news articles, scholarly articles, humanitarian organization websites, and government websites (see appendix).

To identify relevant texts, he first conducted a search on Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>) using the search terms “Rwandan youth development efforts.” He read the titles and Google’s brief abstracts for the first fifty results and then read in more depth (e.g., full article abstracts) for the forty-four unique, relevant results. Across the documents linked in the search results, he observed closely related versions of the same fantasy type, or broad narrative. Price then conducted a search on Google (<http://www.google.com>) using the same search terms; each of the first fifty results was unique and relevant to the search terms. Reading the titles and Google’s brief abstracts for the first fifty results, he observed the same fantasy type (or broad narrative) as conveyed in the scholarly search results. Finally, he read online articles from news sources (see appendix) related to Rwandan youth, their well-being, and international development involving Rwandan youth, often following related links at the bottom of the webpage to similar articles, humanitarian organization websites, and government websites. In the news sources and related links, the previously observed narrative was consistent. This extensive search of online documents yielded a broad narrative that he distilled into two fantasy themes: paradoxical youth and dualistic outsider. Price independently wrote a description of these characters, characters which Walton and Zraly recognized from documents we referenced when creating the protocol. Walton reviewed the protocol for the two fantasy theme characters, which were present in several sections of the protocol, with findings verified by Zraly.

## **Fantasy themes**

Two characters emerged with consistent roles and characteristics. These characters, described in detail below, appeared in the online documents as well as in our research protocol.

### **Fantasy theme: Paradoxical Youth**

The first fantasy theme character is the paradoxical youth: simultaneously helpless and powerful. This character is an abstract personification of Rwanda’s youth as a monolithic whole; i.e., Rwandan youth is described as an individual being. Others define the motives, emotions, and

goals of this character; the character does not define itself. The character is a paradox because, on one hand, the youth is a helpless, orphaned child who is unable to care for itself in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide. On the other hand, the youth is Rwanda's leader, the one who will shape the future, Rwanda's most powerful character.

A 2011 evaluation report (identified in the search of online documents) provides an example of this character in each of its paradoxical forms (Williamson, Donahue, & Cripe). The helpless youth is portrayed in the quote, "The aftermath of war, chronic poverty, and the increase of HIV/AIDS infections all contribute to the growing numbers of children who spend significant portions of their time on the street" (Williamson et al., 2011, p. 3). These children are the helpless victims of forces beyond their control. This recurring characterization of Rwanda's youth as the victim of outside forces strengthens persuasive appeals for official sanction and support, appeals from those whose work involves the development of Rwandan youth. At the same time, the Rwandan youth character has powerful potential. The same report presents the following plan for improving youth well-being, "The first phase of the program is bringing together youth leaders to design action plans to promote sports and culture" (Williamson et al., 2011, p. x). Tellingly, the plan is not to save helpless youth by teaching them sports and culture but to bring together youth to design their own plans to promote sports and culture. The program hinges upon the Rwandan youth character accessing and wielding its own formidable power.

The paradoxical youth also appears in our research protocol, particularly in sections that frame and introduce the need for research such as the Problem Statement and Background sections. In fact, this character sets the tone for the entire protocol, first appearing on page iii in the first paragraph of the first narrative section of the proposal. The text quotes a *New Times of Rwanda* newspaper article calling Rwandan youth "the ultimate drivers of Rwanda's development agenda" (2012). This powerful character is a huge force affecting the future of the nation; its influence and importance is "ultimate." And yet this youth needs help. The next paragraph points out that, "job creation is now crucial for Rwandan youth, since 42 percent of youth are unemployed or underemployed." It is not the helpless youth who is to blame for Rwanda's weak economy and bleak job prospects; the youth is a victim of these conditions. Another reference to the paradoxical youth appears in the Background section on page 8: "Rwandan youth lacking adult caregivers are often responsible for their own well-being, yet face barriers to economic and social inclusion." In this sentence, we see youth, on the one hand, taking care of themselves and, on the other hand, facing barriers they did not create and are helpless to overcome alone. Yet the text continues by pointing out that many of these youth "have a wide range of useful skills, strategies, tactics, and practices to meet their needs and take care of themselves." The paradox continues. The Rwandan youth is powerful, savvy, resourceful; it is the ultimate driver of the future of the nation if only this youth were positioned to access its power. But the Rwandan youth is currently a victim of circumstances, helpless to overcome the challenges it faces without intervention. This is where the second fantasy theme character—the dualistic outsider—comes in.

#### Fantasy Theme: Dualistic Outsider

The dualistic outsider is characterized according to a general pattern: it first recognizes the paradoxical youth's helplessness, and then it responds to that dilemma in a way that is unique to the outsider's skills or knowledge but consistently promotes the youth's ability to access or

amplify its power. The dualistic outsider is usually the author of the dramatizing message and as such is not an abstract personification like the paradoxical youth. This character can be anyone—Rwandan or otherwise—who is not the paradoxical youth. Each outsider’s characterization of itself is unique to its own agenda. The outsider is dualistic because it serves two distinct-but-related purposes: (1) to amplify the ability of the paradoxical youth to access or wield its power and (2) to enhance its professional status in the act of positively affecting the paradoxical youth. Similar to the paradoxical youth’s seemingly contradictory characteristics, there is an underlying tension in the dualistic outsider’s motivations: altruism and self-interest.

World Vision’s summary of its work in Rwanda (identified in the search of online documents) provides a clear example of the dualistic outsider character (Habimana, 2009). As a dualistic outsider, World Vision first recognizes the paradoxical youth’s helplessness, describing the plight of orphans exposed to neglect and isolation due to the genocide-induced breakdown of traditional social structures (Habimana, 2009). In response, the dualistic outsider then facilitates the paradoxical youth in wielding its own power. The online article describes this work as follows:

One World Vision program is called Promotion of Reconciliation Among Youth (PRAY), which has trained 500 youth on peace and reconciliation, and more than 10,000 youths have been involved in creative art to deliver messages of tolerance, forgiveness, and reconciliation among themselves and their communities. (Habimana, 2009)

This example presents the expertise of the dualistic outsider as a peace and reconciliation trainer, a trainer which has successfully scaffolded the paradoxical youth in wielding its significant power in the community. Thanks to the expertise of the dualistic outsider, youth deliver powerful messages to impact other youth and community members. Below this dramatizing message about the altruistic intervention of the dualistic outsider is a text box with the title “Two ways you can help.” This box describes how donors can support the dualistic outsider’s work in amplifying the paradoxical youth’s power.

Although Walton and Zraly were not proposing an intervention like that of a development organization, our framing of ourselves in our research protocol is congruent with the dualistic outsider fantasy theme. A key aspect of inhabiting this character is our recognition of the paradoxical youth as a powerful victim in the research protocol (described at length above). In the Background section, following a statement that the scope of the study has expanded, we clearly state our commitment to positive effects on the paradoxical youth:

We expect more positive broadening as we work with communities, individuals and partners to discover new ways to affirm the being and becoming of Rwandan youth and to learn how to transform any negativity or violences affecting youth into positive strengths to support their endurance.

Should the research protocol be approved, this commitment would be expressed by employing our expertise as community researchers who work with local stakeholders to jointly achieve positive effects on well-being, i.e., development. Throughout the research protocol, further

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references are made to (1) the dualistic outsiders' expert knowledge (e.g., by noting our graduate degrees immediately after our names on the cover letter, title page, and summary sections; by including our CVs in the appendix; and by referring to our previous research in the text of the protocol) and to (2) the potential value of the proposed research (e.g., by alluding to the plight and potential of paradoxical youth and by aligning ourselves with similar commitments to the paradoxical youth among other dualistic outsiders such as the Rwanda National Police and MINIYOUTH). Our dual motive was clear: we wanted to contribute positively to youth well-being (altruism), and we wanted to be approved to conduct the research that forms our professional work (self-interest).

In order to be approved to conduct the research that could potentially make a positive contribution and advance our careers, we, as dualistic outsiders, had to ensure that our representations of paradoxical youth and the protections of their rights and welfare in our protocol resonated with the RNEC members. This meant that we had to interpret how paradoxical youth and dualistic outsiders fit into the larger worldview of Rwandan officials responsible for safeguarding the dignity, rights, health, and well-being of youth without caregivers participating in research within an ethically complex post-genocide environment. Then, we had to convey through writing how our research project made sense according to the logic and values of this worldview. By doing so, we hoped that the protocol would communicate to the reviewers our recognition of our professional responsibility as dualistic outsider researchers to protect the rights and welfare of youth with respect to the laws; customs; language; and social, economic, political and cultural realities of post-genocide Rwanda. We wanted to convey this message to enable the RNEC reviewers to focus on the content of the protocol, the protections that would be implemented, without raising any red flags about our competence to operate ethically in the local context. In this way, the nature of the duality of the dualistic outsider character that we inhabited is not duplicitous, but adept in ways that meet local expectations of competent professionals working in an international setting.

### **Effective use and potential abuse of fantasy theme analysis**

Dualistic outsiders do not seek to evade ethical assessment (and would likely be unsuccessful if they did) but seek instead to pass through this assessment with flying colors so that the value and merit of their work will stand on solid ethical ground. The RNEC performing this ethical assessment is comprised of scholars who regularly conduct and review research. Considering their professional expertise and the mission of the RNEC, we infer that these scholars are likely to be influenced primarily by logos (logical or fact-based appeals) and ethos (credibility-based appeals): e.g., descriptions of well-designed research studies with clear research questions, methods appropriate for addressing those questions, and evidence that researchers are capable of carrying out the proposed work. We do not believe that effective use of pathos (emotion-based persuasive appeals, in this case informed by fantasy theme analysis) alone would be sufficient to secure research approval.

If we consider the hypothetical case of a researcher attempting to apply fantasy theme analysis to emotionally manipulate reviewers into approving an unethical study, we can envision two potential scenarios. In the first scenario, the researcher produces a protocol that clearly lacks a factual and credibility-based foundation for ethical research but conveys incredibly persuasive



pathetic appeals based on fantasy themes that emotionally resonate with reviewers. Even in the unlikely event that reviewers were swayed by emotion and were persuaded that the unethical research should be approved, they would be thwarted from awarding approval by international IRB rules and reporting mechanisms. In the second scenario, the researcher may employ effective emotion-based appeals drawing upon relevant fantasy themes, just like the first scenario, but combine them with fact- and credibility-based appeals rooted in outright lies: e.g., describing locally appropriate recruiting procedures, protections for participants, and intent to contribute to national research capacity. Although these lies may be even more persuasive if coupled with pathetic appeals informed by fantasy theme analysis, committing this blatant breach of ethics is in no way contingent upon using fantasy theme analysis. Moreover, in this example, the researcher would not inhabit the character of the dualistic outsider because by failing to protect the paradoxical youth from human rights violations, the researcher does not promote the youth's ability to access or amplify its power.

Therefore, we argue that fantasy theme analysis provides optimal value when a foundation of logos and ethos is in place. This value involves equipping scholars with an approach for determining how to craft secondary persuasive appeals based on emotion. In addition, the ability to craft documents that emotionally resonate with the audience also strengthens scholars' ethos. In other words, crafting these effective appeals allows researchers to demonstrate cultural awareness and familiarity with local contexts and values, which are also matters of concern to reviewers of cross-cultural research such as the RNEC. Fantasy theme analysis is one tool that researchers can use to convey respect for cultural values and an understanding of stakeholders' worldviews.

### **Conclusions and implications for professional communication**

Technical and professional communication scholars work in increasingly cross-cultural environments in which we must communicate, collaborate, and build trust with a range of stakeholders (Starke-Meyerring, Duin, & Palvetzian, 2007). These stakeholders may include, for example, grant proposal reviewers, who fund research; IRB reviewers, who evaluate the ethics of research; potential partner organizations, who facilitate research by providing access to target populations or domain expertise; and local community members, who may benefit from and contribute to research (Walton, 2013). To better understand the perspectives and expectations of key stakeholders, many scholars advocate a "boots on the ground" approach. For example, in their genre field analysis of the National Science Foundation's grant proposal process, Moeller and Christensen (2009) recommended meeting in person with program officers as a key strategy for generating a successful, persuasive research description (i.e., a proposal). Indeed, in-person communication can be ideal for trust building and establishing a foundation for collaboration (Baskerville & Nandhakumar, 2007; Olson & Olson, 2000). But face-to-face communication is not always possible. In those circumstances, rigorous text analysis can provide valuable insights into people's values, motivations, and expectations that may not otherwise be accessible. Fantasy theme analysis is a promising method for using existing communication to both (1) infer a group's motivations and values and (2) distill those inferences into manageable but meaningful themes. This method can equip scholars to incorporate into their messages relevant information and familiar fantasy themes—characters who resonate with audience members and trigger associated meanings and values.

Based on our experience, we believe that professional communication scholars can use this theory-method complex to strengthen the pathos of persuasive documents that cross cultures. Professional communication has long focused on audience, purpose, and context to structure the development of effective communication. We professional communication scholars use a range of research methods, tools, theories, and models to help us consider document stakeholders and their varying needs and perspectives. Fantasy theme analysis is one such tool that thus far has been rarely employed by scholars in our field. However, without the use of fantasy theme analysis, there is a risk of crafting appeals that mismatch audience expectations (i.e., relevant fantasy themes) and therefore offend or alienate readers. Consider, for example, if we had presented our research participants, Rwandan youth, as solely helpless, vulnerable young people and had proposed to use our own expertise to “sweep in and save the day.” By conveying a message discordant with relevant fantasy themes, we may have offended reviewers who conceive of those youth as one of the most powerful forces for the future of the nation and who may be seeking dualistic outsiders who will support those youth in accessing and wielding their own power. Worse yet, if our portrayal of Rwandan youth or ourselves inadvertently contradicted local politically acceptable representations, we may have made it unnecessarily risky for reviewers to grant approval.

Beyond exhibiting respect for culturally rooted meanings and values, technical and professional communication scholars must develop skills to assess the intersections of their work with human rights more broadly. Taking a cue from the health and human rights approach to global health (Mann et al., 1994), a human rights approach to professional communication would at minimum require that professional communication activities (1) should uphold and not violate human rights and (2) should promote the realization of human rights. This paper takes a step toward building a skill set for such an approach by situating the analysis of a research protocol in a particular human rights context. We argue that fantasy themes helped to create a match between U.S. researchers’ and RNEC members’ conceptions of both Rwandan youth without adult caregivers and U.S. researchers, a match which in turn facilitated an effective review of our research protocol to ensure that it upheld respect for human rights for vulnerable persons in a resource-deprived, post-genocide country. This facilitation also opened a new possibility for actualizing the right to the benefits of science among youth without caregivers in Rwanda. This paper also documents that it is possible for researchers who are citizens of a state that has been recently criticized as potentially violating human rights—e.g., the US targeting American citizens for assassination or indefinite detention and killing innocent non-U.S. citizens through drone attacks (Carter, 2012)—to conduct human rights-responsive research in another state also recently criticized as potentially violating human rights and recovering from genocide. Such documentation is important at this historical juncture, when knowledge of how to promote a global culture of respect for human rights through research and communication is needed. Clearly, by acknowledging its links to human rights, identifying effective rhetorical strategies, and enhancing trust across state and cultural borders, the field of technical and professional communication has the potential to significantly contribute toward the promotion of human rights in ethically complex environments.

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## Appendix: Online Search Results

Unique results from the search for “Rwandan youth development efforts” on Google Scholar (scholar.google.com) in the order they appeared:

1. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2989/16085906.2002.9626540>
2. <http://www.efiko.org/material/Fearing%20Africa%E2%80%99s%20Young%20Men-%20The%20Case%20of%20Rwanda%20Marc%20Sommers.pdf>
3. <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=tRKIWSzYOPMC&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Rwandan+youth+development+efforts&ots=o2NCwn55Wd&sig=fhovYPKe86H9exuMbg6r6gdJxpl>
4. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/713677617>
5. [http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=3hdQA2t14ZcC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=Rwandan+youth+development+efforts&ots=5W4FdT5cN3&sig=pS0TtdXSSciXqRd7muHIM3tPZ\\_Y#v=onepage&q=Rwandan%20youth%20development%20efforts&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=3hdQA2t14ZcC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=Rwandan+youth+development+efforts&ots=5W4FdT5cN3&sig=pS0TtdXSSciXqRd7muHIM3tPZ_Y#v=onepage&q=Rwandan%20youth%20development%20efforts&f=false)
6. <http://sfaa.metapress.com/content/b26340825r742256/>
7. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09614521003710047>
8. [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pnacn141.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnacn141.pdf) [Note: Link may have to be pasted into browser window.]
9. <http://pdj.sagepub.com/content/8/2/183.short>
10. <http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/publications/Promoting%20Development%20in%20Areas%20of%20Actual%20or%20Potential%20Violent%20Conflict.pdf>
11. [http://realityofaid.org/userfiles/roareports/roareport\\_1c71f65c25.pdf](http://realityofaid.org/userfiles/roareports/roareport_1c71f65c25.pdf) [Note: Report has since been removed from the Reality of Aid website RoA Reports section.]
12. <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract.jsessionid=8904525C7E3C2B30AF174E0F0840CD76.journals?fromPage=online&aid=7945394>
13. [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pnadt380.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadt380.pdf) [Note: Link may have to be pasted into browser window.]
14. <http://www.springerlink.com/content/r606702247704x71/>
15. <http://pdj.sagepub.com/content/11/3/243.short>
16. <http://eprints.campuace.org/33/>
17. <http://www.afrimap.org/english/images/documents/file42e771dff2d6e.pdf>
18. [http://www.internationalalert.org/sites/default/files/publications/LEO\\_Sri\\_Lanka.pdf](http://www.internationalalert.org/sites/default/files/publications/LEO_Sri_Lanka.pdf)
19. <http://ijcv.org/index.php/ijcv/article/viewArticle/145>
20. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1475-4959.2006.00183.x/full>
21. <http://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/dspace/handle/1808/10333>
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2. <http://www.irex.org/news/irex-welcomes-usaid%E2%80%99s-new-policy-youth-development>
3. <http://www.irex.org/news/rwandan-youth-engage-genocide-perpetrators-path-reconciliation>
4. <http://rwanda2010.wordpress.com/>
5. <http://www.minict.gov.rw/>
6. <http://www.author-me.com/nonfiction/childrights.htm>
7. <http://akazikanoze.edc.org/partners/rwandan-partners>
8. <http://www.efiko.org/material/Fearing%20Africa%E2%80%99s%20Young%20Men-%20The%20Case%20of%20Rwanda%20Marc%20Sommers.pdf>
9. <http://sunnnytayomba.wordpress.com/2011/06/25/youth-development-in-sports-is-rwanda%E2%80%99s-only-hope/>

10. <http://rwandabasket.com/index.php/using-joomla/extensions/components/content-component/article-categories/108-rwanda-basketball-programs-to-support-youth-development> [Note: Website now offline; no longer available.]
11. [http://eprints.campuce.org/33/4/RWANDAN\\_YOUTH\\_IN\\_THE\\_DEVELOPMENT\\_OF\\_MUSIC\\_INDUSTRY.pdf](http://eprints.campuce.org/33/4/RWANDAN_YOUTH_IN_THE_DEVELOPMENT_OF_MUSIC_INDUSTRY.pdf)
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